# 1

# INTRODUCTION



In the preface to his novel about Helena, the mother of Constantine, Evelyn Waugh proclaimed that 'the Age of Constantine is strangely obscure' and that 'most of the dates and hard facts, confidently given in the encyclopedias, soften and dissolve on examination.' Similarly, Michael Grant began the preface to his book on Constantine by observing that 'the problem of finding out about Constantine is an acute one', then quoted these words of Evelyn Waugh before characterizing his own work as 'another endeavor to walk over the same treacherous quicksands' (Grant 1998: xi). In their assessment of the ancient evidence for Constantine, which Grant pronounced 'wholly inadequate' (Grant 1998: 13), both Waugh and Grant showed far superior judgement to professional historians of the Later Roman Empire who have recently written about the emperor and his place in history.

One such historian goes so far as to make the palpably false claim that 'Constantine is one of the best documented of the Roman emperors, and a political narrative of his life and reign is straightforward enough' (Van Dam 2007: 15), while another asserts that, if Constantine remains a problematical figure, it is not 'because the events of his reign are obscured by a lack of relevant material' (Lenski 2006b: 2). But the last period of Constantine's reign from the surrender of the defeated Licinius on 19 September 324 to his own death on 22 May 337 is a truly dark period, in which the course of events is often obscure, except for the emperor's movements, which can be reconstructed in detail (Barnes 1982: 76–80), and certain aspects of ecclesiastical politics, for which many original documents are preserved (Barnes 1981: 208–244, 1993a: 1–33). For the last third of Constantine's reign, therefore, it is simply impossible to construct any sort of detailed military or political narrative. Nevertheless, it is possible to write a coherent and connected political and military narrative of the first third of Constantine's reign (Chapters 4 and 5). Moreover, even if we know far less about Constantine than we do about other

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periods of Roman history such as the last decades of the Roman Republic, we can understand the basic outlines of his life and career before he became emperor, his political and military achievements as emperor, and his religious policies and attitudes – provided that we allow ourselves to be guided by the ancient evidence and do not seek to impose our own antecedent assumptions on its interpretation.

## OFFICIAL LIES AND THE 'CONSTANTINIAN QUESTION'

Constantine himself is in no small way responsible for creating many of the uncertainties about his religious convictions and religious policies which have been the subject of scholarly controversy since the sixteenth century. He was a highly skilful politician who, like all others of his breed, appreciated the necessity of using deceit in achieving his aims, and he had no compunction about eliminating those who obstructed his dynastic plans (Chapter 5). Moreover, he consistently employed propaganda in order to perpetrate deliberate falsehoods about both himself and important political and dynastic matters. Constantine's subjects perforce accepted official falsehoods and reiterated them in public – and many no doubt genuinely believed them, as so often happens even in our modern world. Gross falsehoods put out by what may aptly be described as Constantine's propaganda machine for contemporary consumption have also deceived many recent historians of Constantine and the Later Roman Empire – even those who prided themselves most on their critical acumen.

The prime (and most important) example of modern willingness to acquiesce in Constantine's misrepresentation of basic facts without proper critical scrutiny is what ought to be the uncontroversial matter of his date of birth. Without exception, ancient authors who offer a figure state that Constantine was in his early sixties when he died: according to Eusebius, for example, Constantine began to reign at the age when Alexander the Great died, lived twice as long as Alexander lived and twice as long as he himself reigned (*VC* 1.8, 4.53).[1] The explicit ancient evidence, therefore, unanimously and unambiguously places Constantine's birth in the early 270s (Barnes 1982: 39–40), and the indirect evidence indicates that he was in fact born on 27 February 273 (Chapter 2). Otto Seeck, however, rejected this early date and contended that 288 was almost certainly ('ziemlich sicher') the year of Constantine's birth (1895: 407; 1922: 435–436), adducing five specific items of evidence, namely (i) the mosaic in the palace of Aquileia invoked in the Gallic panegyric of 307 (*Pan. Lat.* 7[6].6.2i5); (ii) Eusebius' report that he saw Constantine accompanying Diocletian in 301 or 302 when he was an adolescent (*VC* 1.19, cf. Chapter 3); (iii) Constantine's own statement that he was a mere boy in 303 (Eusebius, *VC* 2.51); and retrospective statements that the emperor was young when he came to power in 306, especially those of (iv) Nazarius in 321 (*Pan. Lat.* 4[10].16.4: *adhuc aevi immaturus sed iam maturus imperio*) and (v) Firmicus Maternus in 337 (*Mathesis* 1.10.16). But the mosaic at Aquileia (i) probably depicted

Constantine as a young man in 293, which is perfectly compatible with his being twenty at the time (Chapter 3), while Nazarius (iv), Firmicus Maternus (v) and Eusebius (ii) are merely repeating Constantine's own deliberate misrepresentation for political reasons of how old he was in 303 and 306. In other words, it cannot be denied that contemporary writers presented Constantine in the last two decades of his life as being younger than he really was. Why? It is naive and simple-minded in the extreme to argue that 'his precise age was apparently unknown,' then to deduce from what Eusebius says that Constantine was 'about thirteen or fourteen' in 296 or 297 (Jones in Jones & Skeat 1954: 196–197, slavishly repeated by Winkelmann 1962b: 203). That is not only to date the occasion when Eusebius saw Constantine at the side of Diocletian five years too early (Chapter 3), but to allow undue credence to an official untruth. Constantine himself deliberately lied about his age for political reasons.

Writing to 'the provincials of the East' shortly after his defeat of Licinius in 324, Constantine subtly combined two lies about his situation when Diocletian consulted the oracles of Apollo immediately before launching the 'Great Persecution.' He claimed that 'I heard <about it> as a mere youth[2] at the time' (*VC* 2.51.1: ἠκροώμην τότε κομιδῆ παῖς ἔτι ὑπάρχων). That is doubly false: in the winter of 302–303 Constantine was a mature adult at the court of Diocletian waiting for promotion into the imperial college (Chapter 3). Constantine undoubtedly knew how old he was. His claim that he was a mere boy or youth in 303 is not a simple and straightforward statement of fact from an impartial witness. He was in Nicomedia when the 'Great Persecution' started in that city, as he told a different audience at Easter 325 (Chapter 6 at nn. 13–15) and he stayed silent in order not to compromise his position as a crown prince or damage his prospects of being co-opted into the imperial college. More than twenty years later and over a decade after his very public conversion to Christianity, Constantine reminded his new subjects in the East that in 303 his father had protected the Christians of his territories at a time when his three imperial colleagues were not only savage persecutors intent exclusively on their own advantage, but also mentally deranged (*VC* 2.29). Political animal as he was, the Constantine of 324 avoided the embarrassing question of why he had failed to protest when his Christian friends were being hauled off to execution for their religious beliefs (Vogt 1943a: 194). He simply claimed that, so far from being a grown man of thirty with a prominent position at court in 303, he was in fact in 303 'still just a boy.' For what could a mere boy have done to stop the persecution?

Historians who wrote about Constantine in the nineteenth century or most of the twentieth found it hard to believe that Constantine lied about his age and hence either allowed themselves to be taken in like Seeck or, like Jones, invented an excuse to palliate the misrepresentation. I write as one whose political awareness began in October 1956 with the invasion of Egypt by British, French and Israeli troops acting in concert at the same time as Russian tanks attacked Hungarian civilians on the streets of Budapest. Hence I have long been familiar with official

stories designed to deceive. Indeed in 2003 I watched both the American Secretary of State and the British Prime Minister on television as they misled the Security Council of the United Nations and the House of Commons in Westminster about the necessity of invading a small country which they falsely claimed to possess 'weapons of mass destruction' ready to be deployed.

When I began to write about Constantine in the early 1970s, I immediately became aware that propaganda had played a role in shaping the surviving evidence for his reign (Barnes 1973: 41–43, cf. 1981: 37, 45, 47, 68, 268–269), but I underestimated quite how great that role really was until I read and reflected on Charles Pietri's analysis of what the four documents which Eusebius quotes in the second book of his *Life of Constantine* (*VC* 2.24–42, 46, 48–60, 64–72) reveal about imperial propaganda and the emperor's theology, self-presentation and self-promotion in and after 324 (1983: 73–90). It will be apposite, therefore, to draw together some other clear examples (besides his age) of the emperor's use of deliberate falsehood and his misrepresentation of facts and recent events which will be discussed in the following chapters.

1 The *Origo Constantini Imperatoris* and Lactantius have differing versions of an invented story that Galerius attempted to get Constantine killed either in battle or on the parade ground (Chapter 3).
2 In his tract *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (*De Mortibus Persecutorum*), which he wrote c. 315 after he had returned to Bithynia, Lactantius repeats an embroidered version of the death of Maximian (Chapter 4). In 310 Maximian committed suicide under compulsion when his attempt to seize power from Constantine failed; a year or more after his death, a story was invented that he was pardoned by Constantine, but repaid his clemency by attempting to assassinate him as he lay asleep in the palace at Arles; this story was in circulation at the court of Constantine in 311 and 312 when Lactantius heard it (Appendix A) and later repeated it in 314/315 (*Mort. Pers.* 30), even though by this time Constantine was rehabilitating the memory of Maximian. After his death Constantine first vilified Maximian and abolished his memory by ordering statues and images of him to be pulled down and destroyed (Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 42.1: *senis Maximiani statuae Constantini iussu revellebantur et imagines ubicumque pictus esset detrahabantur*). After the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312, however, Constantine decided to rehabilitate his memory, and the Roman Senate consecrated his memory so that in 318 coins from Constantinian mints honored him as a *divus* together with Constantine's father and Claudius, his purported third-century imperial ancestor as (I transpose the obverse legend from the dative to the nominative case and expand the abbreviations) *divus Maximianus senior fortissimus* (or *optimus*) *imperator* (*RIC* 7.180, Trier: nos. 200–207; 252, Arles: nos. 173–178; 310–312, Rome: nos. 104–128; 395, Aquileia: nos. 21–26; 429–430, Siscia: nos. 41–46; 503, Thessalonica: nos. 24–26).
3 Maxentius granted the Christians of Italy and Africa the right to practice their religion freely very soon after he came to power in October 306, though

he did not allow Christians to recover confiscated property until some years later (Chapter 4). But he exiled Marcellus and Eusebius, successive bishops of Rome, and the latter's rival Heraclius because Christian factions were fighting one another in the streets of Rome (*Chr. min.* 1.76; Damasus, *Epigrammata* 48, 18 = *ILCV* 962, 963, cf. Barnes 1981: 38, 304 n.106). The see of Rome then remained vacant for almost three years until Miltiades was consecrated bishop on 2 July 311 when war loomed with the pro-Christian Constantine (*Chr. min.* 1.76). These necessary police actions helped to provide a basis for claiming that after a good start Maxentius turned against the Christians and after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge Constantinian propaganda rapidly transformed Maxentius into a textbook tyrant who massacred his subjects, raped the wives of senators and examined the entrails of pregnant women, infants and lions for magical purposes (Eusebius, *HE* 8.14.1–5, cf. Grünewald 1990: 64–71; Barnes 1996a).

4 Constantinian propaganda conflated the two wars against Licinius of 316–317 and 323–324 into one. While many sources correctly distinguish between the two wars, which were separated by an interval of several years (*Origo* 18–28; Victor, *Caes.* 41.6–9; Eutropius' *Brev.* 10.5–6.1), they are conflated in Praxagoras' history of Constantine, which was probably completed in or by 330 (Appendix F), in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* (1.47–2.18), by Libanius in his double panegyric of Constantius and Constans, which he probably delivered in 344 (*Orat.* 59.21, cf. Barnes 1993a: 315–316 n.49) and by the *Epitome de Caesaribus* (41.4–8).[3]

5 After the execution of Crispus in 326, Constantine abolished his memory, even though he had been a member of the imperial college for more than nine years. Hence the historical Crispus 'was not only dead, he was abolished, an *unperson*' – like George Orwell's original *unperson*, who bore the significant name of Syme.[4] Eusebius duly conformed to the new official truth. In a minor revision of the final edition of his *Ecclesiastical History*, which survives only in Syriac translation, he expunged the name of Crispus and excised the two laudatory references to his role in the campaign of 324 (*HE* 10.9.4, 6). The *Life of Constantine*, which Eusebius composed or at least revised after Constantinus, Constantius and Constans had been proclaimed Augusti on 9 September 337, predictably presents Constantine as only ever having had three sons, and it makes not the slightest allusion to the existence of the Caesar Dalmatius, whose existence Eusebius had naturally acknowledged when he saluted Constantine as a charioteer driving a four-horse team of Caesars in Constantinople on 26 July 336 (*Panegyric of Constantine* 3.4). Eusebius was writing before Constantinus invaded the territory of Constans in 340, when he was killed, suffered *abolitio memoriae* and officially became, like Crispus, an unperson for a decade or more. Praising Constantius and Constans as joint emperors after 340 (*Orat.* 59, cf. Barnes 1993: 315–316 n.49), Libanius carefully avoids any hint that Constantine might ever have had more than two sons.

An anti-Christian version of the history of the reign of Constantine was adumbrated by Julian the Apostate during his brief period as sole emperor (from November 361 to June 363) and elaborated by others after he was killed in combat in Mesopotamia. But neither Julian nor writers like the Antiochene rhetor Libanius, the rabidly pagan historian Eunapius of Sardis and Ammianus Marcellinus, who adopted a deceptive posture of impartiality in matters of religion (Barnes 1998a: 79–94; G. Kelly 2003), took any pains to discover and reveal truths about Constantine which had been hidden by his Christian admirers. They were more intent on fixing blame for all the disasters of the intervening decades on the first Christian emperor and his adopted religion. Julian blamed Christianity for the dynastic murders of his close relatives in the purge of imperial rivals to the sons of Constantine in the summer of 337, while both Libanius and Eunapius came out with deliberate falsehoods about Constantine's religious beliefs and policies. In particular, when Libanius addressed a plea for the protection of pagan temples to Theodosius in 386, he made the palpably false claim that Constantine 'made absolutely no change in the traditional forms of worship' (*Orat*. 30.6). Not only is the claim false, but Libanius knew that it was false, since his *Autobiography* alludes to Constantine's prohibition of sacrifice: as a student in Athens in the 330s Libanius formed a close friendship with Crispinus of Heraclea whose uncle risked death by his ostentatious paganism and 'mocked that evil law and its impious enactor' (*Orat*. 1.27), who can only be Constantine (Barnes 1989a: 329–330). Unfortunately, Libanius' barefaced lie that Constantine 'made absolutely no change in the traditional forms of worship' (sometimes modified in quotation by modern scholars in order to mitigate its absurdity) has been treated as essentially true by modern historians who have written about Constantine from Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth century and Jacob Burckhardt in the nineteenth to Paul Stephenson in the twenty-first (2009: 56). Indeed, it has often served as the cornerstone of modern interpretations of the emperor's religious policies.

## THE PROGRESS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

It has recently been asserted that 'the rediscovery of the historical Constantine had to await the arrival of critical scholarship in the Renaissance' (Lieu 2006: 317). That is untrue. It had to wait much longer. For neither Johannes Leunclavius (Löwenklau), who defended Zosimus as an accurate historian in the introduction to his Latin translation of the historian, published at Basle in 1576, nor Cardinal Baronius (1538–1607), whose *Annales Ecclesiastici* was the greatest intellectual achievement of the Counter-Reformation, nor Henri de Valois (1603–1676), the distinguished seventeenth-century editor of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and *Life of Constantine*, had any knowledge at all of the most important historical source for the 'Great Persecution' initiated by Diocletian in 313 and the political history of the decade 303–313. The historical Constantine only began to emerge from the mists of the emperor's own propaganda, of fourth-century polemic, of distortion by ecclesiastical

historians and of sheer myth-making when Étienne Baluze (1630–1718) published the *editio princeps* of Lactantius' *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* in 1679. But Lactantius' authorship and the authenticity of the work were often denied, as by Edward Gibbon, until the beginning of the twentieth century when René Pichon finally put its authenticity and authorship work beyond all possible doubt (Pichon 1901, cf. Moreau 1954: 22–33). Yet Lactantius' trustworthiness as a witness continued to be denied or doubted by many for most of the twentieth century.

A true understanding of Constantine only began to become possible in the 1950s. Quite independently of each other, Jacques Moreau's classic commentary demonstrated Lactantius' accuracy on matters of fact (Moreau 1954: 187–473) while the researches into the coinage of Constantine by the Finnish numismatist Patrick Bruun rescued Lactantius' credit as a historical witness. For almost three centuries from Godefroy's edition of the Theodosian Code (Lyon, 1665), the Battle of Cibalae, the first battle of the first war between Constantine and Licinius, had universally been dated to 8 October 314, which is the date stated in the *Descriptio consulum* (otherwise known as the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*), from which it followed that Lactantius, who cannot have completed *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* before October 314, had deliberately and dishonestly misrepresented the relations between the two emperors by suppressing any mention of the War of Cibalae. In 1953, however, Bruun re-dated the war from 314 to 316/317 (Bruun 1953; 17–19; 1961: 10–22; 1966: 65–67), and, when other numismatists demurred, Christian Habicht weighed in to decisive effect by showing that all the relevant ancient evidence with the sole exception of the *Descriptio consulum* confirmed Bruun's re-dating of the war (Habicht 1958). Hence, when Lactantius wrote *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* in 314/315, the first war between Constantine and Licinius still lay in the future.

A parallel controversy long impugned the reliability of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* until a magisterial survey of 'the problem of the authenticity of the *Life*' brought it to a sudden end in 1962.[5] In a lengthy and incisive article of more than fifty pages, Friedhelm Winkelmann carefully untangled three separate questions which those who rejected the evidence of the *Life of Constantine* had too often combined and confused (1962b: 187–243). (i) Were the documents quoted in the *Life* authentic? The often bitter controversies over this question were stilled in 1954 when it was shown that a contemporary papyrus preserves part of the long letter of Constantine (*VC* 2.24–42), whose authenticity had been most confidently denied (Jones & Skeat 1954). (ii) Is the *Life* the work of Eusebius of Caesarea or a later hand or has Eusebius' original text been heavily interpolated after his death? (iii) Is the *Life of Constantine* a reliable historical source? Those who have denied Eusebius' authorship too often argue that he could not have written particular passages in the *Life* because they contain errors which a contemporary could not have made (Grégoire 1938a: 562–563, 569–577, 582; 1953: 473–478). Winkelmann showed that most of these supposed errors either reflect Constantinian propaganda or result from modern misunderstanding (1962b: 218–243). Moreover, Winkelmann pointed out that not only had Giorgio Pasquali proved in 1910 that the *Life of Constantine* as we have it is a

conflation of two stylistically heterogeneous drafts which someone else put into circulation after Eusebius' death, but also that all who had written about Constantine in the next fifty years, including Grégoire and Norman Baynes had misstated Pasquali's very clear conclusion, apparently at second hand (Winkelmann 1962b: 208–218, cf. Pasquali 1910: 386). Since 1962 the reliability and historical value of the *Life of Constantine* have been enhanced in several ways. In particular, not only has it been established that Constantine's *Speech to the Assembly of the Saints* is authentic (Chapter 6) and that Eusebius does indeed report accurately what Constantine told him about what he and his army saw in the sky (Weiss 1993, 2003 cf. Chapter 4), but Kevin Wilkinson's proof that the epigrammatist Palladas was writing under Constantine has confirmed Eusebius' account of Constantine's aggressively Christian policies in the East after 324 and his often doubted assertion that Constantine founded Constantinople as a Christian city (Wilkinson 2009; 2010a; 2010b).

## CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON CONSTANTINE

Literary texts survive which were written at different times during the reign of Constantine by authors from widely varying points of view. Four Latin panegyrics delivered in the presence of Constantine in Gaul between 307 and 313 and another delivered in Rome in 321, though not in his presence (Appendix B) reflect a change in the religious atmosphere in 312; an exchange of letters between Constantine and a Roman aristocrat and poet reveals the emperor as an educated man and a patron of Latin literature (Chapter 4); the summary of a panegyrical history of the reign of Constantine down to 324 written by a young Athenian aristocrat shows pagan acquiescence in his achievements (Appendix F); a fragmentary panegyric from Egypt praises Constantine for not despoiling pagan temples (Appendix G); and a handbook on astrology includes largely conventional praises of the emperor written in the last weeks of his life (Chapter 7). But it will be clear from the preceding pages that three writers are of central importance the Latin rhetor and Christian apologist Lactantius, without whose polemical pamphlet *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* we could not write a satisfactory account of the first forty years of Constantine's life; Eusebius, who was metropolitan bishop of Palestine from c. 313 to 338 or 339 and composed, in the last three books of his *Life of Constantine*, an account of the emperor's religious policies after 324 which quotes many documents in full; and the Egyptian poet Palladas who wrote anti-Christian epigrams, some of them in the newly founded city of Constantinople, which confirm Eusebius' veracity in all essentials.

### *Lactantius*

Lactantius came to Nicomedia at the invitation of Diocletian who appointed him to the city's official chair of Latin rhetoric (Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 80). In this capacity (like Augustine in Milan in the 380s), Lactantius will have delivered praises

of the emperor – with Constantine not only present, but at the emperor's side as a candidate for the imperial purple. Since Lactantius probably arrived in Nicomedia no later than the mid-290s, he had the opportunity to meet and converse with both Constantine and his mother on less formal occasions. A careful study of Lactantius' philosophical and theological assumptions appears to have established that he was converted to Christianity in the East rather than in his native Africa (Wlosok 1960: 191–192 n.28; 1961: 247). In 303, under the provisions of the first persecuting edict of 24 February, Lactantius was compelled to choose between making a symbolic act of sacrifice in order to retain possession of his official chair of Latin rhetoric or resigning in order to avoid the obligation to sacrifice (Barnes 1981: 13, 22–23). It can hardly be doubted that he chose the latter course of action. But he remained in Bithynia at least until 1 May 305 when Galerius gained control of Asia Minor (*Div. Inst*. 5.2.2, 11.15, cf. Barnes 2006: 15). His movements in the years following 305 are not properly documented, but it seems that he left the East not long after 1 May 305 and was at the court of Constantine in Trier, where he was tutor to Crispus, the son of Constantine, before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (Appendix A). He probably returned to the East in 313 to resume possession of his chair of rhetoric in Nicomedia: he wrote his tract *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* in Nicomedia and remained there until he died, probably in the summer of 324 (Barnes 1981: 13–14, 290–292 nn.93–100).

On this reconstruction of his career (tabulated in Appendix A), Lactantius was in Nicomedia from the mid-290s until at least May 305, at the court of Constantine in Trier in 311/312 and in Nicomedia again from 313 onwards. Hence he wrote *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, whose composition is firmly dated to 314/315, in Nicomedia as a subject of Licinius, not of Constantine (Barnes 1973: 39–41). This tract or pamphlet, though a political satire and often grossly tendentious, scores very highly for factual accuracy in what it explicitly states[6] – though its deliberate omissions and silences can be extremely misleading (Barnes 1999a; 2010a: 114–118).

## *Eusebius of Caesarea*

Eusebius of Caesarea, who was born shortly after 260, was primarily a biblical scholar in the tradition of Origen, though far more interested in history than philosophy than Origen ever was, and a Christian apologist and theologian who preferred to use primarily biblical and historical arguments in the defense of his religion (Barnes 1981: 94–188). Eusebius was bishop of Caesarea in Palestine from c. 313 until his death and he wrote in a wide variety of genres (Barnes 2010b). Only two of these are works of contemporary history. The final two books of his *Ecclesiastical History* include the rise of Constantine to sole rule, and his *Life of Constantine* is our most voluminous and informative single source for the first Christian Roman emperor. Eusebius saw the young prince as he traveled through Palestine at the side of the emperor Diocletian as an heir presumptive to the imperial

purple in 301 or 302 (*Life* 1.19, cf. Chapter 3) and he died almost forty years later, leaving the *Life* unfinished. It was published by an editor, probably Acacius, his successor as bishop of Caesarea, who added a few brief passages to sew the two disparate drafts together (Pasquali 1910: 386; Winkelmann 1975: xlix–lvii; Barnes 1989b: 98–107; 1994c). But Eusebius only became a subject of Constantine when he was aged more than sixty, and his relationship to Constantine was universally misunderstood until thirty years ago. For Eusebius' presentation of himself as close to the emperor in his *Life of Constantine* was accepted uncritically, even by those who expressed extreme skepticism about his account of the emperor. Hence it was widely, indeed almost universally, assumed that in his later years Eusebius frequented the court of Constantine, that he was 'an adviser of the emperor Constantine,' and an 'elder statesman' (Brown 1971: 82, 90). In fact, Eusebius met Constantine on no more than four occasions, always in the company of other bishops (Barnes 1981: 261–275).[7]

Modern understanding of both Eusebius and Constantine was, for more than a century, derailed by Jacob Burckhardt, whose *Die Zeit Constantin's des Grossen* was first published in 1853 and issued in a revised edition in 1880, in which Burckhardt introduced the concept of a *Reichskirche*, absent from the first edition, under the impact of the unification of Germany in 1871 and its consequences for Christian churches in the united Germany of Otto Bismarck (Barnes 1993a: 168, 292–293 nn.11–15). The introduction to a recent coffee-table reprint of Moses Hadas' English translation of this classic praises Burckhardt for 'his mastery of the ancient sources' (Lenski 2007: xiv). That is an utterly perverse and grossly misleading verdict. For Amadeo Crivellucci pointed out long ago that Burckhardt, no less than Cardinal Baronius in the sixteenth century, evaluated the testimony of Eusebius, not by comparing him with other evidence, but in accordance with his own antecedent preconceptions (Crivellucci 1888: 6–7, quoted by Winkelmann 1962b: 195–196) – a procedure which is entirely appropriate for a historical novelist like Sir Walter Scott, but improper for one who claims to be a serious historian.

Burckhardt set aside the clear and explicit evidence of Lactantius and Eusebius that Constantine gave Christians his political support from the start and began to declare himself a convert to Christianity before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312. Burckhardt, who was echoed in the twentieth century by Henri Grégoire (1930–31: 270), depicted Constantine as a fourth-century Napoleon, not only a skilful politician (as he indeed was), but essentially irreligious and amoral. His anachronistic interpretation of Constantine owed far more to the modern German philosopher Friedrich Hegel than to the ancient evidence. Hence, in order to sustain his perverse interpretation of Constantine, Burckhardt was obliged to discredit the two main surviving contemporary literary sources by fair means or foul. He denounced Eusebius as 'the most objectionable of all eulogists' and 'the first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity,' on the grounds that Eusebius must have known the truth about Constantine, as discovered in the nineteenth century, but deliberately misrepresented it. According to Burckhardt, Eusebius praised

Constantine insincerely, falsified history and indulged in 'contemptible inventions' (Burckhardt 1949: 260, 283, 299).[8] This condemnation also relied on the false assumption that the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine was somehow a habitué of the imperial court who displayed the manners of a courtier and flattered his royal master, often with conscious dishonesty.

Burckhardt's depiction of Constantine inspired two ultimately futile scholarly controversies, whose course Winkelmann surveyed in magisterial fashion: one concerned the authenticity of the Constantinian documents in the *Life of Constantine* (Winkelmann 1962b: 197–202); the other whether Eusebius of Caesarea really was the author of the *Life* in its present form (Winkelmann 1962b: 213–226). The first controversy was suddenly and completely extinguished in the early 1950s when A. H. M. Jones, following up a suggestion by the Oxford Roman historian C. E. Stevens (who owned a copy of the Benedictine edition of Athanasius), showed that part of the text of what critics had assailed as the most obviously inauthentic of all the documents in the *Life* (2.24–42) was preserved on a contemporary papyrus from Egypt (*P. Lond.* 878 verso, edited with supplements from *VC* 2.26–29 by Skeat in Jones & Skeat 1954: 198–199),[9] while the second effectively ended in 1962 when Winkelmann examined and disproved all the arguments ever brought against Eusebius' authorship.

One important observation by Winkelmann requires special emphasis. He pointed out that, although Giorgio Pasquali had solved the literary problem of the *Life* in 1910 (Pasquali 1910), his solution had been almost immediately misreported by Jules Maurice (1913) and that Maurice's misrepresentation had remained unchallenged for almost fifty years. In his classic and influential paper on 'Constantine the Great and the Christian Church,' Norman Baynes not only appeared to repeat Maurice's *canard* that Pasquali had argued that the *Life* contains interpolations added after Eusebius' death, which is the exact opposite of the thesis that Pasquali actually maintained, but then repeated his conclusion as if in opposition to him (Baynes 1931: 42–45, 49, cf. Winkelmann 1962b: 208–213).[10] Unfortunately, when the learned Henry Chadwick supplied a preface to a second edition of Baynes's classic essay in 1972 (Chadwick 1972: iii–viii), he omitted to warn readers not to be misled by Baynes on the central matter of the literary nature of the *Life of Constantine* which Pasquali had proved to be an unfinished work with traces of two separate drafts which a posthumous editor had published together as a unitary work without changing what Eusebius had written (1910: 386) – though he seems to have added some short bridging passages (Barnes 1994c).

The final three books of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* contain an account of the 'Great Persecution' from 303 to 313 (Books VIII and IX) and the new situation of the church after 313 (Book X), with a postscript on the persecution of Licinius (321–324) and his defeat by Constantine (10.8–9). The manuscripts provide clear evidence that Eusebius published at least two editions of the *Ecclesiastical History*, while the allusions to Roman emperors in the text necessitate the postulate of at least three successive editions (Barnes 1980: 191–192, 196–201; 1981: 148–163).

In the present context there is fortunately no need to review the various modern attempts to sort out and date the successive editions; it will suffice to note that Eusebius composed his account of the early years of Constantine's reign (*HE* 8.13.14–15; 9.9.1–12) no later than c. 315.

The *Life of Constantine*, which combines a number of different ancient literary genres (Averil Cameron 1997: 145–179; Bleckmann 2007b: 27–38), had its first origins in Eusebius' unfulfilled intention of continuing his history of the church beyond the end of persecution into the new Christian Empire of Constantine (Barnes 1989b: 111–114, cf. Winkelmann 1962a: 57–66). The work neither is nor claims to be a biography in the normal sense of the word. It comprises three disparate elements:

1 the *Life* itself in four books;
2 the Greek translation of a speech of Constantine addressed *To the Assembly of the Saints*, which several manuscripts present as a fifth book of the *Life*; and
3 two speeches delivered by Eusebius himself on different occasions.

Constantine delivered the speech (2), whose authenticity has often been needlessly doubted, in Nicomedia at Easter 325 and in it he stated that his mission in life was to Christianize the Roman Empire (Chapter 6). Although the manuscripts indicate a break between Chapters Ten and Eleven (p. 223.22 app.), Ivar Heikel printed (3) as a single speech with the title 'Εἰς Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν βασιλέα τριακονταετηρικός,' which he rendered into German as 'Trikennatsrede,' in his unsatisfactory but still unsuperseded edition of 1902 (*GCS* 7: 193–259). The first ten chapters are a *Panegyric of Constantine* which Eusebius delivered in Constantinople as part of the celebration of the emperor's *tricennalia* on 25 July 336 (p. 195–p. 223.22, cf. Drake 1975). The last eight chapters are an earlier and entirely independent *Speech on the Holy Sepulchre* (11–18, p. 223.23–p. 259), which Eusebius delivered in Jerusalem as part of the ceremonial dedication of that church in September 335 (Barnes 1977). Since I shall have little or nothing to say about either of these speeches, I need to warn readers here that the thesis that the *Panegyric* shows that Constantine was still uncommitted to Christianity in 336 (Drake 1976: 3–79) is completely mistaken, since the speech is thoroughly and deeply Christian in its inspiration, although Eusebius deliberately uses arguments and rhetoric designed to appeal to the pagans in his audience as well as Christians (Barnes 1981: 253–255; Averil Cameron 1983a: 78–82). Equally mistaken, therefore, are the corollaries drawn from that interpretation by its propounder, that 'through his reticence in the *Panegyric*, Eusebius has himself undermined the credibility of his witness in the *Life of Constantine*' and that 'we must therefore abandon interpretations of Constantine's religious policy based on that witness' (Drake 1976: 60).

Eusebius intended the three elements (the *Life* proper, Constantine's speech and his own two speeches) to be read together in order to establish that he was the authoritative interpreter of the Christian emperor Constantine and that emperor

and bishop agreed on fundamental theological issues. In the *Speech* Constantine asserts the existence of a first and a second God, two substances (*ousiai*) with one perfection (*Oratio* 9.3), just as Eusebius himself had used the phrase 'second *hypostasis*' of Christ (*Ecl. Proph*. 4.25 [*PG* 22.1240B]). Moreover, although the text of the *Life of Constantine* never names Arius, who died in 336 in embarrassing circumstances, it praises the bishops who readmitted to communion those who had been excluded for heresy or schism, but later showed genuine repentance (*VC* 3.66). It can hardly be an accident that when Eusebius commends those who were readmitted for 'acknowledging their mother the church' (*VC* 3.66.3: τὴν μητέρα, τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἐπεγίνωσκον), he echoes words which Arius and Euzoius had used when they submitted a petition to Constantine requesting him to facilitate their reunion with 'our mother, that is the church' (Opitz, *Urkunde* 30.5 = *Dokument* 34.5: τῇ μητρὶ ἡμῶν, τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ δηλαδή).

Of Eusebius' other works only one needs to be noted in the present context. It is the treatise *On Easter / De sollemnitate paschali*, which Angelo Mai published in 1847 (it is translated in Appendix D). Eusebius' main purpose appears to be to explain and justify the decision of the Council of Nicaea which changed the basis on which the date of Easter was to be computed in the future in Palestine, but what he says also lends weight to the suggestion that it was Constantine who introduced the originally western custom of Lent into the East in 325 (Chapter 6).

### *The epigrammatist Palladas*

Palladas was a poet from Egypt who until recently has been known only through the more than 150 of his poems and epigrams included in the *Greek Anthology*. Three lemmata in the Byzantine manuscripts appear to date Palladas long after the death of Constantine. One declares that an epigram ascribed to Palladas is about 'a certain philosopher who became urban prefect during the reigns of Valentinian and Valens' (on 11.292), and Maximus Planudes identified him as Themistius, a philosopher who became prefect of the city of Constantinople, though in 384 in the reign of Theodosius, not under Valentinian and Valens (on 11.292).[11] Another lemma describes three lines of hexameters as being about the 'house of Marina' (on 9.528), which can hardly be any building other than the palace of Marina, the youngest daughter of Arcadius, who was born on 10 February 403 and died on 3 August 449 and who, therefore, did not have a separate palace or residence of her own in Constantinople before the 420s (*PLRE* 2.723, Marina 1), while a third lemma identifies the subject of another epigram as the philosopher Hypatia, who was brutally murdered in 415 (9.400, cf. *PLRE* 2.575–576, Hypatia 1). Accordingly, the poetic activity of Palladas was traditionally dated between 380 and 450.

This traditional dating of Palladas suddenly collapsed in 1958 and 1959. First, A. S. P. Gow, who had embarked on the monumental task of editing and commenting on the *Greek Anthology*, not as it survives in Byzantine manuscripts, but by reconstituting the earlier collections incorporated in it, such as the *Garlands* of

Meleager and Philip from the first centuries BC and AD respectively, showed that the information in the lemmata to individual poems in the Anthology was frequently false, being normally no more than a guess based on the text of the poem and hence of no independent historical value (Gow 1958: 17–22). In the same year, Georg Luck showed that the poem alleged to praise Hypatia (*Anth. Pal.* 9.400) is an *ekphrasis* on a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the word *hypatia* in it being not the name of the female philosopher murdered in Alexandria in 415, but a title of the Mother of God, so that the ascription of poem to the pagan Palladas must be erroneous (Luck 1958: 462–466, cf. Alan Cameron 1993: 322–325). A year later Maurice Bowra identified the man 'whom God loves' in several poems of Palladas (*Anth. Pal.* 9.90, 91, 175) as Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria from 385 to 412 (Bowra 1959, cf. 1960), after which Alan Cameron soon buttressed Bowra's chronology with new arguments and established it as the new orthodoxy (Cameron 1964; 1965a; 1965b). From the mid-1960s, therefore, it has been very widely accepted that Palladas was writing in the 380s and died in the early 390s.[12]

It has now, however, been proved beyond all reasonable doubt that Palladas was writing in the first half of the fourth century (Wilkinson 2009). The impetus to this re-dating of Palladas came from Kevin Wilkinson's preparation of an edition of a fragmentary papyrus codex now in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University (*P.CtYBR* 4000, cf. Wilkinson 2009: 42). This papyrus manuscript, which was written in the first half of the fourth century, contains a series of Greek epigrams, almost all extremely fragmentary, apparently by a single author, whose name is not preserved in the surviving fragments. But two sequences of four lines in the papyrus codex are also found in the *Greek Anthology* with only very minor verbal variants and while one is anonymous, the other is explicitly ascribed to Palladas. In view of the importance of the latter, I print here (1) what is legible on the papyrus including letters which Wilkinson dots as uncertain ignoring supplements derived from the *Greek Anthology*; (2) the four lines as they are transmitted in the *Greek Anthology*; and (3) Wilkinson's translation in the draft of his forthcoming commentary.

(1)
Φασὶ παροιμι[ακῶς
ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐχ οὕτ[ω
ἀλλά· 'δάκοι κἄν οἷς[13] [
τοὺς δὲ κακοὺς [(page 21.5–8)

(2)
ΠΑΛΛΑΔΑ
Φασὶ παροιμιακῶς· "κἄν οἷς δάκοι ἄνδρα πονηρόν."
ἀλλὰ τόδ' οὐχ οὕτω, φημί, προσῆκε λέγειν,
ἀλλά· "δάκοι κἄν οἷς ἀγαθοὺς καὶ ἀπράγμονας ἄνδρας."
τὸν δὲ κακὸν δεδιὼς δήξεται οὐδὲ δράκων. (*Anth. Pal.* 9.379)

> (3)
> The old saying goes, "Even a sheep would bite a wicked man." But in my opinion one should not say that. Rather, "Even a sheep would bite good men who are minding their own business. But not even a snake would be bold enough to bite bad men."

It is an almost ineluctable inference that all the poems in this short collection of little more than twenty lacunose pages are the work of Palladas, and at least one poem is datable to the first decade or so of the fourth century since it refers to an emperor ascending the Nile valley and alludes to the imperial victory title *Sarmaticus maximus quater*, which Diocletian took in 299 or 300 and Galerius in 306 or 307 – but which no other emperor took before or after them (page 11.27–35, with Wilkinson's commentary).

Alan Cameron's researches into the genesis and evolution of the *Greek Anthology* provided Wilkinson with an almost equally powerful argument. Cameron showed that a precursor of the *Anthology*, which in its transmitted forms is a product of the middle and late Byzantine periods, existed in the fourth century and was used by Ausonius and authors of poems in the so-called *Epigrammata Bobiensia* when they produced Latin translations of a number of epigrams preserved in the *Greek Anthology*, including some by Palladas (Alan Cameron 1993: 78–96). While the Bobbio collection was assembled c. 400 (and could thus theoretically accommodate a Theodosian date for Palladas, if only with difficulty), the only datable epigrams of Ausonius belong early in his literary career, perhaps as early as the 340s. When a recent commentary argues that Ausonius' epigrams 'span most or all of his literary activity,' the only positive reason stated for dating any of them later than the 360s is the fact that Ausonius translated Palladas (Kay 2001: 13–24). The fourth-century anthology whose existence Cameron detected should not be dated on the assumption that Palladas was writing under Theodosius. Rather, given the fact that the *Greek Anthology* contains more than 150 poems by Palladas, it is reasonable to identify the fourth-century editor as Palladas himself and to date it to the first half of the fourth century (Wilkinson 2009: 41–42, 51–52).

Other arguments too, in which Wilkinson analyzed familiar evidence afresh, situate Palladas' poems either in the first half of the fourth century or, more specifically, in the reign of Constantine. The strongest is derived from the poem in which Palladas laments that he cannot escape from his quarrelsome wife 'because a piece of paper and Roman law prevent me' (*Anth. Pal.* 11.378). Enough is known about the Roman law of divorce to prove that this poem was written between 331 and 362. In 331 Constantine issued an innovatory law which for the first time, at least since the first century AD, placed significant restrictions on unilateral divorce, by allowing a man to divorce his wife against her wishes only for adultery, witchcraft and procuring (*CTh* 3.16.1). Julian rescinded the law (Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones de vetere et novo testamento* 115.12 [*CSEL* 50.322]) and Constantine's law was not revived until 421, and then only in the West (*CTh* 3.16.2, cf. Arjava 1988: 9–13; Evans Grubbs 1995: 228–232; 2002: 177–183). No less persuasive is Wilkinson's identification of the man 'whom

God loves' as the emperor Constantine (Wilkinson 2009: 43–48): he shows how Palladas not only echoes Constantine's representation of himself in the 320s, but also presents the enemy of the man 'whom God loves' in a fashion which has close parallels in Eusebius' depiction of Licinius (*VC* 2.17–18).

The importance of Wilkinson's re-dating of Palladas cannot be overstated. In 1981 and subsequently I argued at length that after he conquered the East in 324 Constantine pursued aggressively Christian policies which amounted to a religious reformation or even revolution (Barnes 1981: 208–212, 245–250; 1986; 1989a; 1992b). This depiction of a *Constantinus Christianus* failed to overturn the prevailing *communis opinio* that Constantine never deviated from the policy of religious toleration which he had espoused early in his reign (see, e.g., Drake 1982; Averil Cameron 1983b: 187–188; Gaudemet 1990: 451–455). And assertions continue to be made that after 324 Constantine pursued 'a policy of concord, in which forbearance towards the temple cults was intended as a means of achieving ultimate religious unity,' that 'Constantine's own edicts show little evidence that he attempted to suppress the practice of traditional cult' (Digeser 2000: 125), that his religious policies after 324 were 'inclusive,' that the emperor 'preached religious toleration' to the end of his reign (Van Dam 2007: 177) and even that 'Constantine managed simultaneously to project the image of the devout Christian and that of the crypto-pagan down to his dying days' (Lenski 2006a: 276).

The central objection to the interpretation of Constantine set out in 1981 has always been that it relied exclusively upon the partisan and tendentious evidence of Christian writers, especially on Eusebius in his *Life of Constantine*, a 'suspect' source that ought not to be regarded as a trustworthy witness for the religious policies of the emperor. Wilkinson has now proved that it is not Eusebius alone, as Averil Cameron confidently asserted in 1983, who makes the claim that paganism was 'seriously attacked' after 324 (1983b: 189). For the pagan Palladas provides proof, from the other end of the religious spectrum, that Constantine's religious policies after 324 were such that a contemporary believer in the old gods could utter a lament in the that traditional Hellenic religion had already perished:

> We Greeks are men reduced to ashes,
> holding to our buried hopes in the dead;
> for everything has now been turned on its head.
> (*Anth. Pal.* 10.90.4–6, trans. Wilkinson)

## COINS, INSCRIPTIONS AND MONUMENTS

The central arguments of the following chapters and my interpretation of Constantine rest primarily on the careful evaluation of primary documents, including the extracts from imperial legislation which survive in the Theodosian Code; and on literary evidence, especially that of Lactantius, Eusebius of Caesarea and Palladas. It thus

differs in both scope and documentation from those modern studies of Constantine which devote much space to Constantinian coins, inscriptions and monuments, sometimes resting their interpretation of Constantine's personal beliefs on such inarticulate evidence. I need, therefore, to explain why the coinage of Constantine and inscriptions and monuments honoring Constantine play a secondary role in the development of my interpretation of the emperor. In essence, it is because I regard the inferences often made from coin-legends and from inscriptions whose wording was not dictated by Constantine to the mind and religious beliefs of the emperor as extremely insecure, since on close inspection such inferences usually turn out to be logically dependent on mistaken assumptions about the value of the surviving literary evidence. Accordingly I shall conclude this introductory chapter by discussing five items of non-literary evidence: (i) the supposed manifestation of Constantine's devotion to Sol, the sun god, on his coinage after 312; (ii) the dedicatory inscription on the Arch of Constantine in Rome; (iii) the dossier relating to the granting of city status to Orcistus in Phrygia; (iv) Constantine's rescript to the city of Hispellum in Umbria; and (v) the porphyry column in the city of Constantinople which is claimed to have depicted Constantine as the sun god Apollo.

(i) Coins are an extremely important source of information about the reign of Constantine, since they provide a firm chronological framework for political, dynastic and military events, often add significant details missing from our literary sources, and disclose much about Constantinian propaganda. Coins have, therefore, played an important role in modern research into Constantine. Most conspicuously, as I noted above, it was his analysis of the Constantinian coinage of Arles that first led Patrick Bruun to re-date the War of Cibalae from 314 (a date which no-one had challenged since 1665) to the autumn and winter of 316–317, which permitted a reevaluation of Lactantius' account of the period of the 'Great Persecution' (Bruun 1953, cf. Barnes 1973: 36–41, 43–46). Richard Burgess has now brought numismatic evidence to illuminate the political crisis and dynastic murders that followed the death of Constantine.

The events of 337 will be discussed later (Chapter 7). In the present context, I merely note the important historical conclusions that Burgess derives entirely from the Roman imperial coinage. First, the coinage between late 335 and the death of Constantine consistently presents the two older Caesars, Constantinus and Constantius, Caesars since 317 and 324 respectively, as equals but superior to the two younger Caesars, Constans and Dalmatius, who were proclaimed Caesars on 25 December 333 and 18 September 335 respectively (Burgess 2008: 43–45). Second, between late 335 and the autumn of 337, six mints regularly struck coinage in gold and seven in silver in the names of the emperors, but three of these mints did not strike coins in either precious metal in the name of Dalmatius – Trier, the residence of Constantinus; Rome, the major mint of Constans, who probably resided in Milan, which had no mint; and Antioch, the city where Constantius resided (Burgess 2008: 21). The absence of Dalmatius amounted to an implicit denial of his legitimacy as an emperor, and Burgess deduces that the three sons of Constantine not only regarded

Dalmatius as an interloper in the imperial college, but had agreed among themselves to advertise their disapproval of him to the army officers and civil servants for the payment of whom gold and silver coins were primarily minted (Burgess 2008: 22). Third, technical analysis of the bronze coinage struck in the names of Constantine, his four Caesars and Helena and Theodora, Constantine's mother and step-mother (now posthumously invested with the title of Augusta), establishes (a) that the Caesar Dalmatius died very soon after Constantine, probably in early June 337, (b) that at Trier coins began to be struck in the names of Helena and Theodora almost immediately after the disappearance of Constantine and Dalmatius coinage, and (c) that coins proclaiming *Virtus Augusti* and *Securitas Reipub(licae)* began to be struck in Rome at the same time (Burgess 2008: 33–35, 45–49).

What of the coinage depicting the Unconquered Sun (*Sol invictus*) as the patron and special protector, the *comes* of Constantine, into which great significance has sometimes been read? There are problems on two levels. One is interpretative and was perhaps most pithily put by Andreas Alföldi, when he opined that it was Constantine's 'outbreaks of passion' in angry letters rather than coin types that represented 'his real emotions' (1948: 7, n.2). The other is chronological. When did Sol first appear on the coinage of Constantine, and when did it disappear? Sol appeared suddenly on the coinage of the Constantinian mints of London, Trier and Lyons in the year 310: the date makes it clear that this reflects Constantine's vision of Apollo during his march south to suppress Maximian's attempt to seize power (Sutherland 1967: 32, 42, 72, 108, 111, 120). It must, therefore, also be connected with Constantine's new emphasis that he ruled as the son of his father Constantius and with the invention of a fictitious descent from the emperor Claudius, who had ruled from 268 to 270: a series of statue bases from Thamugadi dedicated by Valerius Florus, the governor of Numidia in 303, imply that Sol had been the patron deity of Constantius (*ILS* 631–633, cf. Castritius 1969: 25–30). The disappearance of Sol from the coinage of Constantine began shortly after the conclusion of the first war with Licinius: the latest issues with the legend *Sol invicto comiti* or solar imagery cease by the end of 319 at all of the Constantinian mints except Arles where it continued until 323 (Bruun 1958: 28–37, cf. 1966: 48, 61). Moreover, in the East, Licinius' coinage exclusively featured Jupiter Conservator as the tutelary deity of all the emperors for several years before 324 (*RIC* 7, 547–548: Heraclea 50–55; 605–608: Nicomedia nos. 37–50; 644–646: Cyzicus 8–19; 676–682: Antioch 7–36; 703–708: Alexandria 6–33). The Roman imperial coinage thus provides no support whatever for the modern view that Constantine was a solar monotheist to the end of his life. On the contrary, Sol offered some sort of bridge between paganism and Christians: adherents of the old religions could see Sol as one of their gods, while Christians could identify Sol as Christ, the sun of righteousness (Baynes 1931: 95–103; Alföldi 1948: 55–59) – and Constantine himself had progressed from acknowledging Apollo or the sun as his divine protector to belief in Christ as the redeemer of the human race.

(ii) The Arch of Constantine in Rome was not erected by the emperor, but by the city of Rome (at this date, in effect the Roman Senate). It honored the emperor on the

occasion of his *decennalia*, which he celebrated in Rome on 26 July 315, but it is reasonable to assume that the Roman Senate voted to erect the arch while he was in Rome in the weeks following the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312. The arch was dedicated in 315 and the inscriptions on it read (*CIL* 6.1139 = *ILS* 694):

1 On large central rectangular plaques at the top of the arch on both north and south faces

Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) Fl(avio) Constantino maximo
p(io) f(elici) Augusto S(enatus) p(opulus) q(ue) R(omanus)
quod instinctu divinitatis, mentis
4 magnitudine, cum exercitu suo
tam de tyranno quam de omni eius
factione uno tempore iustis
rempublicam ultus est armis
8 arcum triumphis insignem dicavit

2 Above the friezes depicting the capture of Verona and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge inside the central arch

liberatori urbis fundatori quietis

3 Above the pairs of reused and remodeled tondi on the southern and northern façades

sic X sic XX votis X votis XX

Lines 1–2 and 5–8 of the dedication and the brief inscriptions seem straightforward: the Senate and People honored Constantine as 'liberator of the city' and 'founder of peace and civil order' on the tenth anniversary of his reign and they dedicated 'an arch resplendent with his triumphs because he had avenged the state by force of just arms on both the tyrant and the whole of his faction.' But by 315 the adjective *iustus* had acquired a specific connotation in addition to its traditional and obvious meaning of 'just': both oracles of Apollo and Lactantius in his *Divine Institutes* had used *iustus* as a virtual synonym of 'Christian' (Chapter IV n.9). Lines 3–4, however, contain a deliberately ambiguous phrase. When Constantine liberated Rome 'together with his army' (*cum exercitu suo*), he did so *instinctu divinitatis, mentis magnitudine*. Analysis of the phrase *instinctu divino* and of instrumental ablative *instinctu* followed by either *deorum* or the name of a god in the genitive case establishes that *instinctu divinitatis* must mean 'through inspiration from (or: at the urging of) a supreme deity' (L. J. Hall 1998: 668–670). It may be inferred that the still predominantly non-Christian Senate modified a recognizably traditional phrase to accord with Constantine's recently proclaimed Christianity. What of *mentis magnitudine*? The inscription does not explicitly state whose mind it is, and Glen Bowersock has argued that the mind in the phrase *mentis magnitudine* 'may be interpreted more plausibly as the *divina mens* than as the *mens* of Constantine himself' (1986: 302–303). But the 'greatness of mind' should surely be that of the emperor, as Baynes forcefully

contended (1931: 10, 66–68): the two phrases on the arch are 'contrasted, not parallel' and they juxtapose two almost identical phrases which the panegyrist of 313 had used of the emperor (*Pan. Lat.* 12[9].11.4: *cum tu divino monitus instinctu … iussisti*; 21.5: *tua, imperator, magnitudo animi*). In other words, the inscription on the arch needs to be understood on the basis of literary sources, not the other way round.

(iii) Raymond Van Dam makes the epigraphical dossier relating to the granting of city status to Orcistus in Phrygia and the rescript to Hispellum central to his recent attempt to define what he calls 'the Roman Revolution of Constantine:' he removes Lactantius and Eusebius from their traditional place as the main witnesses to Constantine and bases his interpretation of the emperor's religious policies after 324 primarily on these two well-known inscriptions (Van Dam 2007: 19–220). The first of the three main sections of his book, 'A Roman Empire without Rome,' begins with the latter (*ILS* 705 = Van Dam 2007: 366–367), while the second has the title 'A Greek Roman Empire' and begins with 'Constantine's Dialogue with Orcistus' (*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* 7.69–72 no. 305 = Van Dam 2007: 370–371).

The Orcistus dossier has many other fascinating aspects which Van Dam duly explores (2007: 150–162). It makes a significant, if small, contribution to our understanding of the importance of Constantine's Christian beliefs in even routine administrative decisions. When he accorded the village of Orcistus in Phrygia the status of a city, he stated as the crowning justification for his decision that all its inhabitants were said to be 'supporters of the most holy religion' (Document 2.41–42: *sectatores sanctissimae religionis*). Van Dam argues that the people of Orcistus 'wanted to take advantage of Constantine's good will' when they applied this 'perhaps intentionally cryptic' description to themselves shortly after 324 (2007: 176). That analysis paradoxically concedes that the people of Orcistus believed that their new emperor was indeed a Christian.

(iv) The rescript to Hispellum was paraded by Burckhardt as one of the 'very plain indications of un-Christian, even of directly pagan, sympathies' shown by Constantine at the end of his reign (1949: 301–302). Van Dam adopts a much subtler and more sophisticated interpretation, correctly setting the rescript in the context of administrative changes in central Italy and the rivalry between cities for prestige (2007: 23–34). Yet he fails to see the central point of the city's petition or to realize that the emperor who granted it was not Constantine, as everyone since Burckhardt until now has believed, including the present writer (Barnes 1981: 212), but his youngest son Constans.

Hispellum was the principal city of Umbria, which formed part of the province of Tuscia et Umbria, one of the regional provinces into which Italy had been divided, probably by Diocletian (Barnes 1982: 162, 218–219). A *corrector Tusciae et Umbriae* is attested c. 310 (*ILS* 1217 [Atina], cf. Barnes 1982: 100–101). The capital of the double province created some time before c. 310 was the ancient Etruscan city of Volsinii, and the petition from Hispellum arises from one of the consequences of this fact. The inscription calls itself a copy of an imperial rescript (*e(xemplum) s(acri) r(escripti)*), whose text falls naturally into three sections. First

comes a conventional proclamation of general imperial beneficence to all cities (lines 8–15), but the bulk of the text comprises a paraphrase or summary of the petition, presumably made by an imperial secretary (lines 15–36), and the imperial reply to the petition (lines 37–59). In order to avoid prevalent misunderstandings, it is necessary to translate in full both the second and third sections of the text.[14] First the report of the petition:

> You assert that you are combined with Tuscia in such a way that according to the tradition of ancient custom priests[15] are selected by both you and the aforementioned in alternate years (*per singulos* [sic] *annorum vices*) and that these <priests> present theatrical shows and gladiatorial games at Volsinii, a city belonging to Tuscia. Because of the hardships of the mountains and the forests on the journey[16] you urgently request that a remedy be granted and that it not be necessary for your priest to travel to Volsinii in order to celebrate the games. Hence <you request> that we give to the city, which now has the name Hispellum and which you recall is adjacent to the Via Flaminia and stretches along it, a name <that is derived> from our cognomen (*ut de nostro cognomine nomen daremus*). In this city <you ask> that a temple of the Gens Flavia be erected in a magnificent construction matching the grandeur of its title, and that in the same place the priest whom Umbria has <in the past> provided in alternate years (*anniversaria vice*) should present the spectacle of both theatrical shows and gladiatorial games, but with the custom remaining that in Tuscia the priest appointed from there should officiate at the festivals of the aforementioned shows, as has been customary at Volsinii.

In other words, the city of Hispellum has requested permission to build a temple of the Gens Flavia, that the annual games associated with the imperial cult of the combined province of Tuscia et Umbria, previously held every year in Volsinii, should in future be held in Volsinii and Hispellum in alternate years, and that the change be marked by conferral on the city of a new name in honor of the imperial house. The requests were granted, but with significant qualifications:

> Our approval has readily been accorded to your prayer and desire. We grant to the city of Hispellum an eternal title and a venerable name <derived> from our own appellation, so that in future the aforementioned city shall be called Flavia Constans. In the heart of this city, we wish, as you desire, a house (*aedem*) of the Flavian, that is, of our family, be built with magnificent construction, <but> with the restriction spelled out that a house dedicated to our name not be polluted by the deceits of any contagious superstition. Hence we also give you permission to put on games (*editionum*) in the aforementioned city, with the proviso that, as has been said, the celebration of games not depart from Volsinii in alternate years (*per vices temporis*), when the festival which you mention is to be celebrated by priests appointed from Tuscia. In this way not very much will be judged to have been derogated from old customs (*institutis*), and you who have appeared before us as petitioners on account of the aforementioned causes will rejoice that those things for which you urgently asked have been obtained.

Between them the petition and imperial response state clearly which member of the imperial college replied to the city of Hispellum. The petitioners asked for a new name derived from the cognomen of the emperor. The new name given by the emperor who received the petition was Flavia Constans, and not Flavia Constantina or Flavia Constantia, even though other cities had been renamed Constantina and Constantia during the reign of Constantine,[17] the emperor who gave Hispellum its new name derived from his cognomen was surely the Caesar Flavius Constans. This deduction, which is inexorable in logic, is confirmed by the fact that the petitioners approached the emperor in person (*nobis supplices extitistis*): Constans resided in Milan from 335 to 337, while after 330 Constantine never ventured further west than Singidunum, Viminacium or Naissus (Barnes 1982: 78–79).[18]

The date of the rescript can now be considered. The heading reads

> Imp(erator) Caes(ar) Fl(avius) Constantinus max(imus) Germ(anicus) Sarm(aticus) Got(hicus) victor triump(hator) et Fl(avius) Constantinus et Fl(avius) Iul(ius) Constantius et Fl(avius) Constans.

At first sight, the imperial college is that of the period between between 25 December 333, when Constantine invested Constans as Caesar, and 18 September 335, when he appointed Dalmatius Caesar. But why are the three sons of Constantine not styled *nobbb. Caesss.*, that is, *nobilissimi Caesares*? The natural assumption, made by Hermann Dessau in his annotation to the inscription (*ILS* 705), used to be that the title was accidentally omitted by the stonecutter. As long ago as 1964, however, an Italian deduced the correct date from the absence of the title: the heading lists the imperial college as it officially existed for about three months after the elimination of the Caesar Dalmatius, which followed closely on the death of Constantine (Andreotti 1964: 254–255, cf. Gascou 1967: 617–623). Van Dam brusquely dismisses the correct date as requiring 'too much special pleading' (2007: 364). But since the text of the rescript indicates that it was issued by Constans, while the heading does not give him the title of Augustus, the rescript must belong to the period between the death of Constantine on 22 May 337 and the joint proclamation of Constantinus, Constantius and Constans as Augusti on 9 September, when there was an official pretence that the dead Constantine still reigned (Eusebius, *VC* 4.67.3). Hence the request for a temple of the Gens Flavia and Constans' emphasis on the eternity of the nomen Flavia in the city's new name of Flavia Constans: the petition protests the loyalty of Hispellum to the sons of Constantine during a period of political uncertainty, while Constans' reply reflects the determination of the sons of Constantine not to share their imperial power with any interloper.

It is wrong, therefore, to use the rescript to Hispellum as direct evidence for Constantine himself. Nevertheless, Constans respects and continues his father's policies. The imperial cult was not suppressed after 324, but retained in a modified form as a vehicle for the display of loyalty to the reigning dynasty: in Africa, for example, laws of 415 and 429 mention assemblies of the provincial council in

Carthage (*CTh* 16.10.20; 12.1.186) and the imperial cult appears to have persisted into the period of Vandal rule, with Vandal kings replacing Roman emperors as the focus of loyalty (Clover 1982). But Constans requires that any ceremonies at Hispellum be purged of 'the deceits of contagious superstition,' that is, of sacrifice and other traditional religious rites. Moreover, although imperial funds for building churches had been freely available on request from subordinate officials since 312 in the West and 325 in the East, Constans did not offer to subsidize the building of the new temple of the Gens Flavia, as the petitioners doubtless expected. Further, Constans implicitly discountenances gladiatorial games: the petitioners requested that the provincial high priest of Tuscia et Umbria put on both theatrical shows and gladiatorial games (*spectaculum tam scenicorum ludorum quam gladiatorii muneris*); in reply Constans granted permission for *editiones* – which could be construed tacitly to exclude gladiatorial shows.

(v) Confident assertions about Constantine's religious beliefs have sometimes been made on the basis of inference from purely iconographic evidence. For example, Martin Wallraff deduced from the fact that the Arch of Constantine 'is full of solar symbols' that in 315 there can be no doubt that 'Sol invictus was at least as important to Constantine as Jesus Christ' (2001: 256). Modern historians who have persuaded themselves that Constantine remained an adherent of solar monotheism even after 324 have always appealed to the bronze statue which for nearly eight centuries stood atop a porphyry column in the forum of the city of Constantinople until it was blown down at the beginning of the twelfth century.[19] Thus Wallraff both identified the statue as without any doubt Helios and argued more generally that 'the profile of the new capital on the Bosporus … showed a new and intensified interest in solar symbols' (2001: 261–265).

Both the identity of the lost statue and its attributes have been in dispute. Although some late Byzantine writers state that it was a statue of Apollo or Helios, that is, the sun god, brought from elsewhere and superficially modified to depict Constantine (e. g., Pseudo-Codinus, *Patria Cpl* 2.45 [Preger 1907: 174]; Zonaras 13.3), both John Malalas in the sixth century (13.7 [320 Bonn = 245–246.79–82 Thurn) and Nicephorus Callistus in the fourteenth identify the statue as that of Constantine (*HE* 7.49 [*PL* 145.1325]). More important, so too do the earliest surviving writers who refer to it. Two ecclesiastical historians writing in or shortly after 440 are explicit. According to Socrates, Helena sent a fragment of the True Cross to her son who 'enclosed it in his own statue which stands on a large column of porphyry in Constantine's forum in Constantinople' (*HE* 1.17.8). Philostorgius, at least as reported by Photius, is equally explicit, though he draws a distinction between the original statue and ceremonies at its foot which were added later:

> Οὗτος ὁ θεομάχος καὶ τὴν Κωνσταντίνου εἰκόνα, τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ πορφυροῦ κίονος ἱσταμένην, θυσίαις τε ἱλάσκεσθαι καὶ λυχνοκαΐαις καὶ θυμιάμασι τιμᾶν, καὶ εὐχὰς προσάγειν ὡς θεῷ καὶ ἀποτροπαίους ἱκετηρίας τῶν δεινῶν ἐπιτελεῖν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς κατηγορεῖ.

> This God-hater also accuses Christians of propitiating the statue of Constantine standing on the porphyry column with sacrifices, honoring it with the lighting of candles and the burning of incense, offering prayers to it as to a god, and performing supplications to ward off evils. (Philostorgius, *HE* 2.17).

Similarly, Hesychius, writing in the reign of Justinian, records the erection of 'the conspicuous porphyry column on which we see Constantine giving dawn[20] light to the citizens like the sun (*Patria Cpl* 41 [Preger 1901b: 17]).

The statue, which Eusebius does not mention, faced east and depicted a standing male figure holding a spear in its left hand and a globe in its right. Although Anna Comnena states that the statue held a scepter in its right hand and an orb in its left (*Alexiad* 12.4.5, p. 66 Leib, cf. Mango 1993b: 3), she was writing many years after it fell down from the top of the column. The *Tabula Peutingeriana*, which is a twelfth- or thirteenth-century copy of a schematic map of the Roman Empire, places the orb in the right hand and a lance or spear in the left.[21] Since the lost original of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* appears to have been a much earlier map of the Roman Empire which was brought up to date in the later fourth century (Kubitschek 1919: 2127–2128, 2139), sound method surely obliges the historian to prefer the visual testimony of a cartographer who drew the statue before it was repaired (the spear fell down in 554 and the globe was dislodged by earthquakes in 477 and again in 869). Cyril Mango, who followed Anna Comnena in placing the spear in the right hand of the statue, opined that before 477 the original globe may have been surmounted by a miniature Victory (Mango 1993b: 2–3). But the *Tabula Peutingeriana* shows the globe in the statue's right hand without any object surmounting it.

The *Tabula Peutingeriana* depicts a naked male with an apparently bare head. Nevertheless, Mango assumed that the figure was clad in military garb, observing that both gods and emperors were often depicted thus (Mango 1993b: 3, with appeal to Kantorowicz 1961: 368–391), and, like most other modern writers both before and after him, he assumed that the original statue wore on its head a radiate crown with the canonical number of seven rays (Mango 1993b: 3, cf., e.g., Fowden 1991: 125–130; Leeb 1992: 12–15; Berrens 2004: 168). But the earliest extant references to the radiate crown come from the chronicle of John Malalas (13.7 [320 Bonn = 245–246.81–81 Thurn]) and the *Paschal* Chronicle (528, 573 Bonn = pp. 16, 65 Whitby & Whitby), who both wrote long after the original globe fell in 477. As it is the only witness to the attributes of the statue before 477, and the radiate crown could have been added when the original globe was replaced after it fell, the testimony of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* surely ought to be preferred on this point too.[22]

In her recent discussion of the statue, Sarah Bassett adduces a classic study of Hellenistic portraits of rulers which observed that the type of the naked statue of a male holding a spear or scepter was characteristic of and specific to kings and rulers (Bassett 2004: 201–204, citing Smith 1988: 33). The bronze statue set atop the porphyry column in the lifetime of Constantine lacked a radiate crown and depicted the emperor, either with or without a diadem, in the traditional guise of a Hellenistic

king or Roman emperor. Hence the reason why Eusebius 'fails to mention it' is not because the statue portrayed Helios (Preger 1901a; Wallraff 2001: 267) or because it could not 'be read in a Christian sense' (Mango 1993b: 6), but because it portrayed Constantine as a traditional Roman emperor – which was neither noteworthy nor problematical for Christians.[23]

The persistence of traditional titles and imperial attributes with pagan connotations ought not to seem surprising to the modern enquirer. All the kings and queens of England since Henry VIII have sported the title 'Defender of the Faith' (*Fidei Defensor*), even though Pope Leo X bestowed it on Henry in 1521 for writing a tract attacking Martin Luther and defending a version of Christianity which British monarchs have by law been forbidden to embrace since 1689. Similarly, no Late Roman or Byzantine emperor for centuries – not Constantine, as is well known, and neither Gratian nor Theodosius, as has often been supposed – ever abjured the title of *pontifex maximus*, even though this title, which had been an exclusive imperial prerogative since Augustus became *pontifex maximus* in 12 BC, indicated that its holder was head of the college of *pontifices* which had guarded Roman religious traditions since Rome was no more than a small city beside the River Tiber (Alan Cameron 2007). The only change that occurred is that the adjective *inclitus*, which had previously been used only by authors with literary pretensions, replaced *maximus* in the imperial titulature, probably while the very Christian Magnus Maximus was emperor in the 380s (Alan Cameron 2007: 362–365, 374–376). Both *pontifex inclitus* and victory titles such as *Germanicus inclitus* are attested in the imperial titulature of the emperors Marcian in 452 and Anastasius in 516 (*ACO* 2.3.2.87–88 = 2.3 346–347; *Collectio Avellana* 113 (*CSEL* 35.610.15–16).

The testimony of archaeology and art history can also be invoked to show that there were more wealthy and high-class Christians in Rome and the western provinces than is often believed. Wealthy Christians in the West began to commission sarcophagi with distinctively Christian iconography to receive their bodies after death in surprisingly large numbers after 312: Alan Cameron has drawn attention to a study of sculptured sarcophagi found in or near Rome which are datable on stylistic grounds between 270 and 400 (2011: 183). The percentage of sarcophagi with identifiably Christian themes rises from 8.2% in the three decades 270–300 (71 out of a total of 859) to 59.36% in the three decades 300–330 (463 out of 780) and 96.4% during the rest of the fourth century (325 out of 337) when elaborately carved sarcophagi were passing out of fashion (Dresken-Weiland 2003: 64–65, cf. Sapelli 2005). These are startling figures, but they accord well with the fact that between 317 and 337 there were more Christian aristocrats appointed to the prefecture of the city of Rome than known pagans (Barnes 1995: 143, 144, 146).

Equally significant is the abandonment by one of the oldest religious confraternities in Rome of their sanctuary, which had been in continuous use since at least the middle of the third century BC, within a very few years of the death of Constantine (Scheid 1990: 680, 739–740). Excavations conducted under extremely difficult conditions from 1975 to 1988 at La Magliana, on the right bank of the

Tiber downstream from Rome close to the fifth milestone along the Via Campana (Scheid 1990: 73, Fig. 1), have added immensely to our knowledge of the sacred grove of the *dea Dia*, where the Arval Brethren met and performed their rituals, and of its buildings. The first volume of the final excavation report documented the history of the bath-house of the Arval Brethren, which was built in the first quarter of the third century AD, apparently (given its size) for their use alone and went out of use shortly after 334/335 (Broise & Scheid 1987: 172–173, 244–245, 275–277). Although the names of many individual *Arvales* survive, the religious activities of the Arval Brethren as a confraternity are known only from epigraphy and archaeology. The latest fragment preserved of the *commentarii* in which they regularly recorded their meetings and sacrifices belongs to 241, and it is not clear how long after 241 they continued to inscribe their *acta* regularly (Barnes 1993b: 86). For the existence of a *magister bis* of the college in 304 (*Notizie degli scavi*[6] 16 [1919], 105, cf. Scheid 1992) may indicate not continuity of practice, but an aspect of the restoration of ancient cults by Diocletian and his colleagues, which Aurelius Victor later noted (*Caes*. 39.45: *veterrimae religiones castissime curatae*, cf. Scheid 1990: 738–739). The closure of the baths, dated archaeologically shortly after 334/335 reflects the profound religious changes under Constantine: within a few years of the abandonment of the bath-house, the sacred grove of *dea Dia* was overlooked by a Christian cemetery, and some decades later the stones on which the Arval Brethren had recorded their acts of piety were used in building a Christian oratory.