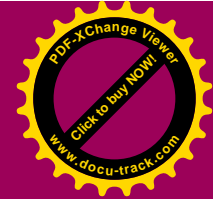
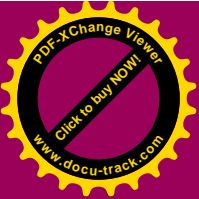


CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AND THE EDICT OF MILAN 313.

THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN PROVINCES ON THE SOIL OF SERBIA





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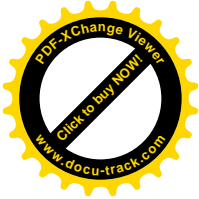
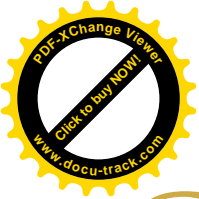
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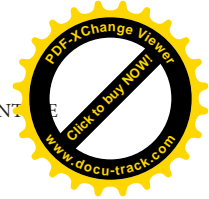
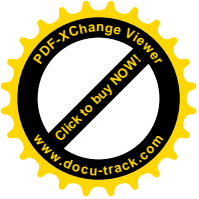
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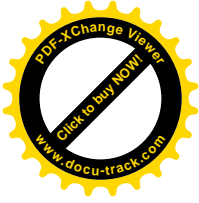
THE ICONOGRAPHY OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT'S COINAGE

Bojana BORIĆ-BREŠKOVIĆ
Mirjana VOJVODA

THE PERIOD BETWEEN Diocletian's accession to power in 284 and the death of Constantine the Great in 337 was marked by a series of fundamental reforms in all areas of social life, on which these two emperors left a major imprint. The tetrarchic system of government, established by Diocletian in 293, inaugurated a new ideological-religious concept of supreme authority, which promoted the idea of an omnipotent ruler¹ rooted in the myth of the *domus divina* and the rulers of divine origins, whose titular deities were Jupiter and Hercules. This new agenda, which implied the total equality of the tetrarchs, their concord (*concordia*) and ideal similarity (*similitudo*), brought about radical changes in the portraiture of this period. The Augusti and Caesars were portrayed as if they were of the same age and had identical facial features and a uniform expression concentrated on specific parts of the face. Their eyes, wide open, under accentuated eyebrows and wrinkled forehead, expressed commanding earnestness, sternness and resolve. The basic features of the new iconography can be observed on coinage as a traditionally powerful propaganda medium, which conveys a message about a charismatic ruler through a combination of imperial portraits, inscriptions and imagery.² The idea of the ideal ruler

¹ Walden 1990: 221–222.

² Strong 1980: 264.



and his divine nature is clearly presented through a college of concordant and loyal members in the portraits of the four tetrarchs on the gold multiple of 10 aurei found in the famous treasure of Beaurains-Arras, Gaul, and minted at Trier in 294 to mark the establishment of the first tetrarchy.³ Similar messages are conveyed by the aurei and multiples struck in the same mint: COMITATVS AVGG, with the images of two emperors on horseback, each with his right hand raised; and FELICITAS TEMPORVM, depicting two emperors wearing togas and pouring libations on an altar, with Felicitas or TEMPORVM FELICITAS behind the two emperors, each with a nimbus surrounding his head, as they pour their libations outside a tetrastyle temple, with a sacrificial bull's anterior half next to the altar.⁴ In addition to his own coinage, each of the tetrarchs, whether Augustus or Caesar, minted coinage bearing the name and image of his co-ruler. The main features on the coinage were the depictions of the imperial protector-gods, Jupiter and Hercules, which linked the portraits of the tetrarchs with their divine patrons.⁵ There are also representations of the Genius of the Roman people, as well as of other, conventional types, limited to a few standardised personifications (military Concord, military Virtue, etc.) rarely associated with real historical events.

The tetrarchy, however, was short-lived. The death of Constantius Chlorus on 25 July 306 marked the beginning of severe internal conflicts and power struggles that would lead to its dissolution in 313 and continued until 324, when Constantine the Great became the sole ruler of the Empire. This period of Constantine's rise to power and ultimate triumph is reflected on coinage and medallions as instruments of the official policy. Evident in their iconography are several stages of development correspondent to the historical circumstances that shaped them. The first stage began after Chlorus' death in 306, when Constantine was acclaimed Augustus by his troops at York, Britannia, and lasted until the meeting at *Carnuntum* in 308, when, due to the restoration of the tetrarchy, he was reaffirmed as Caesar. The second stage lasted until the collapse of the tetrarchy in 313, followed by the diarchy, formed by Constantine and Licinius I, which lasted until his victory over Licinius in 324. The last stage encompassed the period of his independent reign (324–337).

From Constantine's elevation as Augustus at York to the meeting at *Carnuntum* (25 July 306 – November 308)

Minor differences may be observed before and after the late summer or autumn of 307, when Maximian (at Trier?) raised Constantine to the rank of Augustus, with this title being recognised in the parts of the Empire governed by these two rulers. Minting intensified before the summer/autumn of 307 because it was the beginning of Constantine's reign. Throughout this period, the predominant images on the reverse of the coinage were those of Mars, the Genius of the Roman people, the familial and *vota* types, depictions of Roma, the emperor in military dress, and diverse personifications. There were infrequent motifs of Hercules and Jupiter, even though their cults were still the official tetrarchy cults, with that of Hercules having slight precedence. Also few in number were representations of the emperor in civilian dress and of Sol and Virtus, which started being used after the summer/autumn of 307.

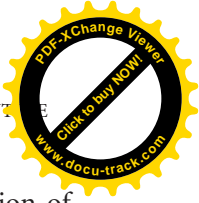
From the restoration to the dissolution of the tetrarchy (November 308 – May 313)

Two stages are evident in the years between the restoration and the collapse of the tetrarchy: the one before and after Constantine's elevation as Augustus in the whole Empire, i.e. before and after 1 May (?) 310, with the latter stage seeing more intense minting. There was a sharp increase in the number of depictions of the Genius of the Roman people, Sol, Mars, and Jupiter, especially after May of 310. The most prominent were familial types and representations of the emperor in military dress, still far more common than those of him in civilian dress. Even

³ Obverse: busts of Diocletian and Galerius; reverse: busts of Maximian Herculius and Constantius Chlorus, cf. *RIC* VI: 163, No. 2; Bastien, Metzger 1977: 88, No. 197.

⁴ *RIC* VI: 164, Nos. 6–8 (aurei); 166, No. 27 (multiple); 168, No. 35 (aureus).

⁵ *RIC* VI: 165, Nos. 15–23 – Jupiter was the protector of Diocletian (IOVI CONSERVATORI, IOVI FVLGERATORI, IOVI TVTAT AVGG); 164, Nos. 9–14 – Hercules was the protector of Maximian (HERCVLI DEBELLAT, HERCVLI VICTORI).



though Virtus was the favourite personification and the depictions of Hercules were again rare, both of these motifs are absent from the coinage of the end of this period.

The Diarchy of Constantine I and Licinius I (May 313 – September 324)

During the diarchy of Constantine and Licinius, the relations within the repertory of reverse representations saw a fundamental change. The most common now were *vota* types, followed by depictions of the emperor, with a greater emphasis placed on his military role than on his civic one. Especially favoured were the deities Sol and Jupiter, followed by Mars, regardless of the fact that it was absent between 318 and 321. Towards the end of this period, all three of these deities totally disappeared from coinage – Sol after 319, Jupiter after 324, and Mars after 323.

Constantine's independent reign (September 324 – May 327)

The changeover in the propaganda policy that characterised Constantine's independent reign was also accompanied by changes in the reverse iconography. The most common depictions were those of the *Gloria exercitus*, which started being used in 327. City gates with turrets were a motif that was sporadically popular between 324 and 330. These were followed by Victory and *vota* types, and the motifs of the emperor wearing either military or civilian dress, the former being more common. In addition to the solitary appearance of the Genius of the Roman people in 326, there were also a few instances of the use of the motif of two winged Genii holding a garland.⁶ Roma and personifications of cities were less common, while the number of familial types saw a drastic decline.

Similar stages of development are also evident in the imperial obverse iconography. Depictions of a bust with a laurel wreath, the primary regalia of Roman emperors, draped or in armour, were common between 306 and 324 and sporadic until 335. Changes are obvious from 310, then from 313, and finally from 324, coinciding with Constantine's elevation as Augustus of the whole Empire in May 310 and the deposition of Maximian Herculeus in July (?) of the same year, Constantine's victory at the Milvian

Bridge on 28 October 312, and the termination of the diarchy following Constantine's victory over Licinius in the autumn of 324.⁷ The portrait heads that appeared between 306 and 309 were executed in the tetrarchic fashion, reflecting Constantine's intention to become actively involved in this system of government due to the circumstances surrounding his accession to the throne and his virtual usurpation of power. From 310 to early 313, he was most commonly depicted as wearing a helmet and armour, with a spear over his shoulder and holding a shield, all of which emphasised the military character of his reign. Though less conspicuous, the same trappings were also depicted after his victory over Maxentius. Fundamental iconographic changes occurred in 324, in line with the emperor's new agenda, when, following the model of Hellenistic monarchs, he started being depicted with his head thrown back, wearing a diadem, and his eyes raised heavenward.

* * *

The changes in Constantine's monetary iconography were a direct reflection of his policies of government and his understanding of power. When he entered the political scene after Chlorus' death, he spent the subsequent 18 years fighting various rivals in order to achieve absolute control over the state through a series of complicated and skilful political moves and military campaigns. Right until May 310 and his elevation as Augustus in the whole Empire, his coinage predominantly bore images of Mars,⁸ which were closely linked with the ideology of the tetrarchy and aimed at highlighting the legitimacy of his power. However, in the tetrarchic system of gov-

⁶ RIC VII: 564, note 3.

⁷ Kienast 2010: 299–300.

⁸ Mars as a reverse motif on Constantine's coinage featured continuously from 306 to 317 and later in 322/323 on coins struck in the mint at Sirmium. The depictions of this deity are accompanied by the legends: VIRTUS AVGG ET CAESS NN, MARS VICTOR, MARTI PACIE, MARTI PATRI CONSERVATORI/PROPVGNATORI, PERPETVA VIRTUS, MARTI PATR SEMP VICTORI, cf. RIC VI. For the iconography of Mars on 4th-century coinage, cf. Bacuñ 2003 c: 151–176.

ernment, Mars was reserved for the Caesars from the Jovian dynasty. As Diocletian's Caesar, Galerius joined this divine family, becoming a son of Jupiter, the second Mars,⁹ whilst Constantius Chlorus, as Maximian's Caesar, was equated with Sol.¹⁰ Therefore, Sol could be expected to have been Constantine's protector from the very beginning. Sol began to be used as a reverse motif as late as the summer/autumn (?) of 307, but until May 310 much less frequently than Mars,¹¹ whose images would continue being used to a certain extent even during Sol's domination.

In all likelihood, Mars was directly linked with the manner in which Constantine entered the political scene. His elevation as Augustus by acclamation was at odds with the tetrarchic system of government and contrary to Galerius' views, because Galerius accepted Constantine solely as Caesar under Flavius Severus, the new Augustus of the West.¹² Constantine included the god Mars in his propagandist policy in order to appease Galerius. In the attempt to win his trust, he presented himself as a member of Galerius' divine family and guardian of the prevailing system of government. This ideological concept is reflected in the VIRTVS AVGG ET CAESS NN coins minted at Ticinum from the autumn of 306 until January 307. In addition to a helmeted Mars with a spear and a trophy in his hands, the coins bear depictions of Constantine on horseback, holding a shield and spearing a fallen enemy, with another enemy lying prostrate under his horse.¹³ The motif of the mounted emperor, which, bearing the same legend, appeared concurrently on the coinage of Flavius Severus, his subordinate Augustus, is yet another example of Constantine expressing his submission to the incumbent hierarchy.¹⁴

Appearing at the same time, even though few in number, were depictions of Hercules with a legend describing him as the companion of the ruling Augusti and Caesars: HERCVLI COMITI AVGG ET CAESS NN.¹⁵ In 306–308, his representations were accompanied by two more legends,¹⁶ and then there was a gap of several years coinciding with Constantine's conflict with Maximian (whose Herculean dynasty Constantine had joined by marrying his daughter Fausta) and Maximian's subsequent death in July (?) 310.

Initially, Constantine had to accept the tetrarchic principles, at least formally, and his image on the



Fig. 119. Constantine caesar, AV multiple of 2 aurei, Roma, 307, obverse (http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/constantine/_rome_RIC_VI_0142.jpg)

Fig. 120. Constantine caesar, AV aureus, Treveri, 306, obverse (Wright 1987: fig. 7)

coinage minted at Rome in 306–307 did not differ from the depictions of the other tetrarchs: a square-shaped head, a strong, muscular neck, a stubbly, short beard, close-cropped hair, and a wrinkled brow (**fig. 119**).¹⁷ A hint of his tendency towards individualisation and the abandonment of the rigid tetrarchic style can be observed as early as his depictions designed in the mint at Trier (Treveri), a mint that was under

⁹ Јовановић 2006: 151.

¹⁰ Јовановић 2006: 143.

¹¹ Sol featured on Constantine's coinage from the autumn of 307 to 319. At first, the depictions of Sol were less frequent, but gradually became the predominant reverse motif until 319.

¹² Barnes 1981: 28–29; Odahl 2004: 79–80; Rees 2004: 160; Lenski 2006: 62.

¹³ *RIC* VI: 291, Nos. 70b, 71, 72; 292, Nos. 75–77, 78, 79.

¹⁴ *RIC* VI: 293, No. 81. Flavius Severus also chose Mars as his protector.

¹⁵ *RIC* VI: 368, No. 139 – Constantine's aureus from the mint in Rome. During Maxentius' usurpation and his conflict with Severus and Galerius, Constantine did not engage in any military activity that could be damaging to Galerius. Other than his pragmatic alliance with Maximian and his marriage to Fausta, he remained neutral in this dispute. Only after Galerius' death in May of 311 did he decide to clash with his political rivals.

¹⁶ In addition to the legend HERCVLI COMITI AVGG ET CAESS NN, there are also the legends: HERCVLI CONSERVAT CAES, VIRTVS PERPETVA AVG (306–308), *RIC* VI: 275, 277, 289n., 293, No. 87; 295 No. 99 (Ticinum).

¹⁷ *RIC* VI: 368, No. 141 (Rome), aureus, late 306–early spring of 307; *ibid.*, No. 142, Pl. WildWinds.com., 2 aurei multiplim, 307.

his direct control. There he minted rare gold coinage depicting him as having a youthful, often beardless face, with close-cropped hair, and without any wrinkles on his brow (fig. 120), a depiction modelled on those of young 3rd-century Caesars.¹⁸ Also struck there were the rare argentei depicting him as a more heroic figure modelled on the Augustan type of portrait head.¹⁹ After Maximian's defeat in 310 and the reorganisation of his ideological foundations, this portrait assumed a definite shape and Constantine is depicted as having a youthful face of fine features, beardless, and with hints of a new hairstyle: with hair combed forward over the brow (fig. 121).²⁰ From the outset, an aquiline nose was a recognisable feature of Constantine's images, defying tetrarchic norms. This particularly sharp profile, a prominent feature of Constantius Chlorus, his father and founder of the Second Flavian Dynasty, which became a badge of Constantine's own dynasty, has been interpreted as one of the early indicators of his dynastic ambitions.²¹

The agreement at Carnuntum in November of 308, when Constantine was pardoned for his renegade activities of the previous year²² and readmitted among the tetrarchs, admittedly only as Licinius' Caesar,²³ was the last attempt at the restoration of the already depleted idea of tetrarchy. The fatal blow to the tetrarchy came when Maximinius Daia was declared Augustus on 1 May (?) 310, which was immediately followed by Constantine's inauguration to the same dignity.²⁴ Constantine then undertook to seek out a new ideological foundation. In 310, he adopted his legitimate descent from Claudius Gothicus²⁵ and embraced the cult of *Sol Invictus*. The emperor's new propagandist agenda was also marked by a vision through which Apollo Grannus prophesied to him that he would become the ruler of the whole world.²⁶ This change of tack and his adoption of Sol/Apollo as the patron of his dynasty represented a reversion to Aurelian's model of the emperor-deity relationship,²⁷ demonstrating Constantine's pragmatic intention to achieve his political and military ambitions with the help of Apollo or Sol. The message that was symbolically expressed on coinage was essentially related to the ideology of absolute victory, with the majority of the representations on it, both at that time and throughout his reign, being of the same nature. The predominant depictions were those of Sol, Mars,



Fig. 121. Constantine I, AV solidus, Treveri, 310–313, National Museum in Belgrade

¹⁸ RIC VI: 204, No. 627 (Trier), aureus; Wright 1987: 494–496, figs. 6–7.

¹⁹ RIC VI: 205, No. 636 (Trier), argenteus; Wright 1987: 495–496, 505, fig. 8.

²⁰ RIC VI: 222, No. 816 (Trier) = Васић 2008 a: 147, Cat. 6; RIC VII: 166, No. 30 (Trier); For a study of the portrait of Constantine, cf. Wright 1987: 493–507.

²¹ Wright 1987: 495; Bardill 2012: 11, notes 1–3, 7–8.

²² In the late summer (?) of 307, thanks to Maximian, with whom he sided in his conflict with Galerius, and his marriage with his daughter Fausta, Constantine was promoted to the rank of Augustus, cf. Lenski 2006: 62–63.

²³ Barnes 1981: 32, notes 31–33.

²⁴ Kienast 2010: 299. The promotion of Daia and Constantine to Augusti definitely undermined Diocletian's model of succession to the throne, cf. Barnes 1981: 33.

²⁵ At a time when four pretenders were fighting for power, the discovery of a long lost imperial predecessor aided by imperial propaganda, regardless of the fact that scholars have rejected this relationship, was supposed to strengthen Constantine's position, cf. Barnes 1981: 35, notes 61, 62; Lenski 2006: 66.

²⁶ Lenski 2006: 66–67, note 41; САH XII: 560; Поповић 2010 c: 147; Olariu 2010: 167.

²⁷ In 274, Aurelian erected a temple to the Invincible Sol – *Deus Sol Invictus* at the foot of the Quirinal Hill (Hist. Aug. Aur., XXVI, 39). His institutionalisation of the cult of *Sol Invictus* was the first step towards establishing a new imperial religion of monotheistic orientation (Halsberghe 1972: 148–162; САH XII: 171). He was represented on coins as a god (*deus*) on earth and supreme lord (*dominus*); he was a descendant of the god Sol by birth (*natus*) and this was emphasised by depictions of Sol with the following legends: PACATOR ORBIS, SOLI INVICTO, SOL DOMINVS IMPERI ROMANI (RIC V.1: 265, No. 6; Gneccchi II: 113, No. 2; Gneccchi III: 64, Nos. 5–8), and especially in the issues of the Serdica mint with the following obverse legends: IMP C L DOM AVRELIANVS P F AVG, IMP C AVRELIANVS INVICTVS P AVG, IMP DEO ET DOMINO AVRELIANO AVG (RIC V.1: 296, No. 280; 299, Nos. 300–303, 305–306). One of Sol's attributes, the radial crown (*corona radiata*), became the insigne with which emperors were depicted on coinage.

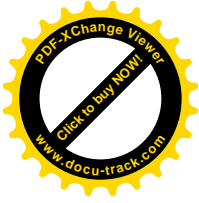


Fig. 122. Constantine I – Sol standing, raising right hand, globe in left;

at feet, kneeling barbarian, AV solidus, Thessalonica, 317, National Museum in Belgrade

Fig. 123. Constantine I and Sol – FELIX ADVENTVS, AV medallion of 9 solidi, Ticinum, 313
(Donati, Gentili 2005: cat. 54)

Virtus and Roma, followed by Victory and the emperor in military dress. In 311, Constantine introduced Jupiter (until 324), then Hercules, whom, after an interlude of several years, in a novel though last appearance in 312–313, with the inscription HERCVLI VICTORI was directly linked with victory.²⁸

The reverse of the coinage had *Sol Invictus*, the Invincible Sun, as Constantine's companion and protector, who was most commonly depicted as holding a whip or a globe and described by the legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI. The same motif was sometimes also accompanied by the legend COMITI AVGG NN.²⁹ In the East, Sol was depicted as holding the head of Serapis in his hand and accompanied by the legend SOLI INVICTO,³⁰ whereas the coinage struck at Ticinum had the legend SOLI INVICTO AETerno AVG and a depiction of Sol, driving a quadriga and accompanied by Victory.³¹ From May 313, nearly all mints issued the SOLI INVICTO COMITI type, depicting Sol reaching out with one hand and holding a globe in the other.³² The same representation on coinage from 317 and 318 was accompanied by the legend CLARITAS REIPUBLICAE, whereas Thessalonica issues, in addition to this inscription, also had the figure of a barbarian kneeling before Sol (fig. 122).³³ Depicted on coinage from 319, with the legend VIRT EXERC, was a plan of a Roman camp, with Sol holding a globe in the centre.³⁴

With the adoption of the Milan edict of religious toleration in February 313,³⁵ pro-Christian ideas won their first official victory on their way to becoming the state religion. However, since they had no artistic tra-

dition of their own, they had to resort to the already existing devices in order to express the new ideology.

Constantine's attitude to *Sol Invictus*, with whom he identified himself, is clearly illustrated by the inscription and depiction on the obverse of the gold multiple struck in the mint at Ticinum in 313 to mark the emperor's meeting with Licinius at Milan, whose outcome was the official recognition of the new ideological matrix. In the foreground is a portrait bust of Constantine, with a portrait bust of Sol, wearing a radiant crown, behind it. The emperor is wearing armour and a paludamentum, and holds a shield in his left hand and a spear over his right shoulder. The shield bears a depiction of Sol driving a quadriga, personifications of the Earth and the Ocean, stars and a new moon. The emperor's companion is *Sol*

²⁸ Cyzicus (312), Roma, Ostia (late 312–May 313).

²⁹ RIC VI: 132, Nos. 113–115 (Londinium); see also: Ticinum, Aquileia, Roma, Ostia; RIC VI: 131, Nos. 101–102, etc. (Londinium).

³⁰ RIC VI: 566, No. 73c (Nicomedia), see also: Antioch, Cyzicus.

³¹ RIC VI: 297, No. 113.

³² RIC VII: 361, Nos. 1–3, etc. (Ticinum), see also: Londinium, Arelate, Roma, Siscia, Trier, Aquileia, Thessalonica, Lugdunum, Serdica.

³³ RIC VII: 103, No. 101 (Londinium), see also: Roma, Siscia; 500, No. 8 (Thessalonica) = Vasić 2008 a: 227, Cat. 240.

³⁴ RIC VII: 507, No. 66.

³⁵ Lenski 2006: 72; CAH XII: 92.



Fig. 124. Constantine I and Sol, AV solidus, Ticinum, 315, National Museum in Belgrade

Fig. 125. Constantine I nimbate – four small boys personifying the four seasons, AV solidus, Ticinum, 316 (Hartley et al. 2006: Cat. 90)

Invictus, with whom Constantine identified himself, attested, in addition to the legend *INVICTVS CONSTANTINVS MAX AVG*, by the overall composition depicting him as the ruler of the sky, earth and sea. The reverse bears the inscription *FELIX ADVENTVS AVGG NN*, which alludes to the meeting at Milan, and depicts Constantine riding a horse led by Victory and followed by Virtus (?) (fig. 123).³⁶

The solidi from the same mint bearing the legend *COMIS CONSTANTINI AVG*, issued to mark Constantine's fourth consulship and the celebration of his *decennalia* in 315 and 316, respectively, followed the same ideological concept. Constantine's closeness with Sol and the idea of the emperor as Sol is expressed by the inscription which defines Sol as the emperor's friend and companion, and by the respective portrait busts of Constantine in the foreground and Sol with a radiant crown in the background. The scene is visually complemented by Constantine's hand reaching out, which is characteristic of Sol (fig. 124), and the emperor holds a globe in his other hand.³⁷

The notion of Constantine as Sol and of his divine nature is communicated through a nimbus on the obverses of the multiples and solidi struck between 315 and 317 in the respective mints at Ticinum and Siscia to mark the emperor's *decennalia*.³⁸ Constantine's portrait bust is depicted facing forward, with his head surrounded by a nimbus, a luminous aureole corresponding to Sol's radiant crown, which was later to become a common feature of the iconography of Christ and the saints (fig. 125).³⁹ The legends and themes on the reverse refer to the emperor's victo-

ries,⁴⁰ the benefits springing from the victories,⁴¹ or to Sol himself, the emperor's unconquerable protector.⁴²

³⁶ *RIC* VI: 277–278, 296, No. 111; Gneccchi I: 16, No. 16; Toynbee 1944: 108–109, Pl. XVII.11; Поповић 2010 c: 149–150.

³⁷ *RIC* VII: 363, No. 32 = Vasić 2008 a: 176, Cat. 90 – the reverse has the legend *RESTITVTORI LIBERTATIS* and figural depictions of the emperor in military dress, holding a short sceptre in one hand and receiving a globe from enthroned Roma with the other; *RIC* VII: 368, No. 53 – the reverse has the legend *LIBERALITAS XI IMP IIII COS P P P* and the motif of Liberalitas with a *cornucopia* and *abacus*.

³⁸ For the commemorative character of the multiples and solidi related to the celebration of the *decennalia*, cf. *RIC* VII: 369, note 59.

³⁹ The emperor's portrait bust with a nimbus appears on the coinage in three variants: draped and cuirassed; draped, cuirassed, with the right hand reaching out, and with a globe in the left hand; and draped, cuirassed, and with Victory on a globe in the right hand and a *mappa* in the left, cf. *RIC* VII: 88–91.

⁴⁰ *GAVDIVM ROMANORVM*, in the exergue – *FRANC ET ALAM*, trophy and captives; *VICTORIOSO SEMPER*, the emperor in a tunic stands opposite a figure of a woman wearing a crown of city walls, who offers him a wreath; behind him is Victory, who crowns the emperor with a wreath, cf. *RIC* VII: 365, No. 37 solidus from 315; *ibid.*, 369, No. 59 – solidus from 316 (Ticinum); for “turreted women,” cf. *ibid.*, 363, note 29.

⁴¹ *FELICIA*, in the exergue – *TEMPORA*, four children personifying the four seasons; *P M TRIB P COS IIII P P PROCOS*, the emperor wearing a toga, with a globe and a sceptre in his hands, sitting on a curule seat, cf. *RIC* VII: 366, No. 41 – solidus from 316; *ibid.*, 365, No. 38 – solidus from 315 (Ticinum).

⁴² *SOLI INVICTO COMITI*, Sol is standing, holding a globe and a whip, with a captive at his feet, cf. *RIC* VII: 427, No. 25 – multiple from 317.



Fig. 126. Constantine I helmeted, a Christogram on the crest of the helmet, AR medallion, Ticinum, 315 (www.constantinethegreatcoins.com)

The message conveyed clearly indicated that the emperor, whose divine nature was equal to that of Sol, had won victories that brought order and prosperity to the Roman people. The *nimbus purus*, which surrounded the ruler's head, was one of the forms of Sol's radiant crown and symbolised power.⁴³ The nimbus, which appeared as an obverse symbol at the time of Constantine's *decennalia*, was not uncommon in Roman iconography. Pagan gods had been depicted as wearing a nimbus since the 2nd century.⁴⁴ It is also present on the reverse of the gold multiple of Caesar Constantius Chlorus, minted at Trier from 295–305 and depicting two emperors offering a sacrifice, both with a nimbus.⁴⁵ The first depiction of an emperor with a nimbus around his head was found on the reverse of an Antoninus Pius' sestertius, dated to 145–161.⁴⁶

Concurrently with the representations that equated Constantine's divine nature to Sol's, the *decennalia* silver medallions SALVS REI PVBLICAE (fig. 126), minted at Ticinum in 315, further developed the notion of Constantine as Sol which merged solar and Christian symbols in the depictions of the emperor.⁴⁷ The obverse bears a three-quarter profile of Constantine, with a cuirassed bust, holding horse reins in his right hand, like Sol, and a shield depicting a she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus in his left hand. The attribute depicted over the emperor's left shoulder was initially interpreted as a cross-shaped sceptre with a globe at the top and later as a spear, whilst the globe was identified as a pommel-shaped end of the spear shaft.⁴⁸ The emperor wears a high-crested calotte helmet adorned with rosettes. At the

base of the crest, at the front, there is a Christogram, alluding to the vision emperor saw on the eve of the battle at the Milvian Bridge. The rosettes on the helmet are reminiscent of Venus, under whose temple at Golgotha Helena had unearthed the True Cross and made a helmet for her son Constantine from the nails, witnesses of Christ's passion, which she had found there.⁴⁹ Constantine adopted the Christogram as the sign of the victory he had won⁵⁰ and, according to Eusebius, he was wont to display on his helmet this monogram consisting of the letters chi and rho (X and P), the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ.⁵¹ The reverse of the medallion depicts Constantine on a platform, in military dress, with his right hand reaching out and with a trophy over his left shoulder. Behind him is Victory, crowning him, and there are nine soldiers around the platform, four of whom are holding horses and the rest holding shields, with two of them at the top holding standards. The legend SALVS REI PVBLICAE clearly highlights the emperor's role as the saviour of the state, who achieved this goal by defeating the enemy, a fact attested by the trophy and Victory, who crowns him with a victor's wreath in the presence of soldiers. The hand reaching out, the "leading hand" of world domination, has a parallel in most depictions of Sol on coins.

⁴³ Поповић 2010 c: 150–151, notes 13–16.

⁴⁴ Henig 2006 b: 65.

⁴⁵ RIC VI: 168, No. 35 (Trier), cf. *supra*, note 4. The emperor or his family members with a nimbus around their heads appears again only on the reverses (RIC VII: 43), such as those of the gold multiples bearing a depiction of Fausta minted at Trier (RIC VII: 203, Nos. 443–445), or of the multiple of nine solidi minted at Nicomedia and bearing a depiction of Constantine (RIC VII: 631, No. 173).

⁴⁶ RIC III: 124, No. 765.

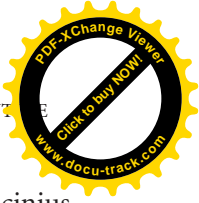
⁴⁷ RIC VII: 364, No. 36, Pl. IX, 36 (Ticinum); Gnecci I: 59, No. 18.

⁴⁸ Toynbee 1944: 211; RIC VII, Introduction: 63, notes 4–5.

⁴⁹ Јовановић 2006: 279; Socrates Schol. Eccl. Hist. I.17; Theod. Eccl. Hist. XVII.

⁵⁰ For the meaning of the monogram, cf. RIC VII, Introduction: 62–63; Bruun 1962: 10–18.

⁵¹ Euseb. Vita Const. I.31.3.



The syncretism of solar and Christian symbols on this medallion demonstrates that, following his victory over Maxentius in the autumn of 312 and the passing of the *Edict of Milan* in February 313, Constantine adopted the Christogram as a new symbol of victory but that he still showed his loyalty to solar monotheism by his intimacy with the sun god – *Sol Invictus*.⁵²

Eusebius attributes the mystical experience that preceded Constantine's victory to the protection of the Christian God and the mystical vision of a cross of light bearing the inscription "In this sign thou shalt conquer," after which the emperor had a labarum made from gold and precious stones, with a wreath on the top containing a Christogram.⁵³ Even though the Christian apologist Lactantius presents a slightly different testimony, according to which the emperor was admonished in another vision to draw a Christogram (Christ's monogram) on the shields of his soldiers,⁵⁴ both sources agree that the Christogram was a salutary sign that gave Constantine victory outside the gates of Rome in 312.⁵⁵

The Christogram engraved below the top of the crest, at the central point of the helmet worn by Constantine on the silver medallions from 315, is the first known depiction of this symbol. The first depiction of the Christogram on his standard (labarum) appeared in the period following his ultimate victory over Licinius and, as we shall see later, on the rare SPES PVBLIC nummi, minted in 327 and 327/328. However, the Christogram was infrequently depicted on Constantine's coinage, as it was limited to a few sporadic issues. It appears as an application on the side of a helmet on the equally rare nummi minted at Siscia in 319⁵⁶ and on those bearing the mintmarks of some other mints, even though its role as an official Christian symbol in this context is disputed.⁵⁷ Despite the fact that its meaning was unclear, or at least ambiguous, at the time of its creation, the Christogram, as a powerful sign from heaven, independent of Constantine's personal religious beliefs, promulgated a symbolism of victory and assumed a strictly Christian character much later, after a long process of development.⁵⁸

It was not uncommon for Roman emperors to seek assistance from a higher power, but for Constantine this power embodied pro-Christian ideas. The essence of Constantine's propaganda during his con-

flict with Maxentius and subsequently with Licinius was to depict these two as tyrants from whom the people and the state had to be saved.⁵⁹ A similar kind of propaganda, based on religious conflict, the struggle between good and evil, was employed by Licinius, the other signatory to the *Edict of Milan*, before his campaign against Maximinus Daia, an ardent anti-Christian. Even though he later proved to be an anti-Christian himself, he pragmatically utilised a vision he saw on the eve of battle, when an angel of God appeared to him, advising him to pray to the highest God and that he would thus win a victory.⁶⁰ Licinius minted coinage bearing symbols similar to those used by Constantine, attested on the rare aurei, struck in

⁵² Even though it had an unquestionably official character, its restricted use as *donativa* intended for military officers was a limiting factor in the dissemination of this propaganda message, cf. *RIC* VII: 364, note 36.

⁵³ Euseb. *Vita Const.* I.28–31; *Hist. Eccl.* IX.9–10.

⁵⁴ Lact. *De mort. pers.*: XLIV.5–6.

⁵⁵ Lenski 2006: 71; *CAH* XII: 92.

⁵⁶ *RIC* VII: 433, No. 61, note 61; at the same off. B, a star appears in the same place, cf. *ibid.*, note 61.

⁵⁷ Mints: Ticinum (319/320), Aquileia, Siscia, Thessalonica (320) and Arelate (336–337), cf. *RIC* VII: 62; Поповић 2010 c: 152–153.

⁵⁸ *RIC* VII: 61–64; For an opinion to the contrary, cf. Grigg 1977: 14–22, with a bibliography.

⁵⁹ Eusebius states that after Constantine's victory over Maxentius, a statue was erected in Rome of the emperor holding a sign of salvation – a cross in his hand and an inscription attesting to its victorious character, owing to which he had preserved and liberated the city from the yoke of tyranny and restored freedom to the Roman Senate and the people and their earlier distinction and splendour, cf. Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* IX.10–11; *Vita Const.* I.40. Divine assistance is highlighted on Constantine's arch by the inscription *instinctu divinitatis, mentis magnitudine* (*ILS*: 156–157, No. 694), where the ambivalent choice of words expresses gratitude to an unnamed supernatural intervention, whether from the Christian God or pagan deities (Anastos 1967: 40).

⁶⁰ Lact. *De mort. pers.*: XLVI–XLVII; Barnes 1981: 63. This was merely propaganda for the purpose of which it was useful at the time that Licinius, as an opponent of the ardent anti-Christian Daia, should be involved. That Licinius was by no means a true follower of the new religion is attested by Eusebius, who states in his account on the signing of the *Edict of Milan*: "And after this both, Constantine himself and with him the emperor Licinius, who had not yet been seized by that madness into which he later fell..." (Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* IX.12).

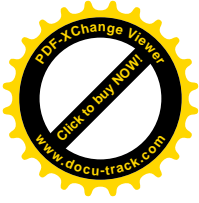
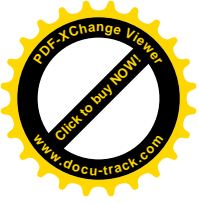


Fig. 127. Constantine I – Emperor holding a vexillum decorated with a sign like the Christogram, and a spear, AV multiple of 2 solidi, Siscia, 326–327, reverse, National Museum in Belgrade

Fig. 128. Constantine I – Christogram at the top of a labarum, AE nummus, Constantinople, 327, reverse (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:As-Constantine-XR_RIC_vII_019.jpg)

the mint at Siscia.⁶¹ In addition to attesting to good relations between Licinius and Constantine, the equally rare aureus *SECVRITAS AVGG*, struck in the same mint and showing Licinius driving a quadriga while holding a branch in his upraised hand, identifies both of them as the actual protectors of the Empire.⁶²

The visual style of and inscriptions on coinage as a document of the official state policy clearly indicate that the emperor, whether out of ambivalent religious beliefs or for pragmatic political reasons, had remained loyal to the pagan gods and solar monotheism, thus avoiding a clash with the old customs and the traditional Roman religious system. At the same time, Christians must have been equally familiar with the notion of an omnipotent sun god, as it was paving the way for a visualisation of their Saviour. A representation of Christ as *Sol Iustitiae* could be seen on the family tomb of the Julii in Rome as early as Constantine's time.⁶³ The promotion of Sol as the supreme deity played a decisive role in bringing pagans closer to a henotic attitude towards Christianity, whereas, owing to Sol's adaptability, the new faith was not forcibly imposed as the religion of the state and people.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the Christian stance on the demonic nature of pagan deities could not be changed, not even in the case of *Sol Invictus*, who ceased to be the official propaganda symbol. However, his disappearance from coins after 319⁶⁵ does not necessarily imply a total rejection of the

concept of solar monotheism, but rather some kind of avoidance of expressions of visual and verbal affinity for this deity.⁶⁶ It is therefore rather indicative that, after his victory over Licinius in 324 and in order to demonstrate that an invincible emperor had overcome the ultimate enemy, Constantine introduced into the official nomenclature of titles the religiously neutral epithet *victor* in place of *invictus*, the latter being closely related to the solar deity. After his successes on the borders of the Empire, in order to further strengthen this idea, he assumed the title *victor et triumphator*, which was to remain in the inventory of titles of later emperors.⁶⁷ Also disappearing from coinage at that time were other pagan deities, even though the emperor retained the title *pontifex maximus* until his death.⁶⁸ They were replaced by religiously neutral motifs, such as *Gloria exercitus*, camp gates, Victory, *vota* types, and trophies.

To mark his ultimate victory over Licinius, which he celebrated at Nicomedia (where he also elevated Constantius to the rank of Caesar and awarded the title of Augusta to his mother, Helena, and his wife, Fausta, respectively),⁶⁹ he minted at Siscia in 326–327 *GLORIA SECVLI* (*sic!*), a gold multiple of two solidi. He is depicted on the reverse as wearing military dress, with a spear and a vexillum in his hands. The symbol on the vexillum has been variously interpreted as

⁶¹ *PROFECTIO AVGG* with Licinius on horseback, holding a spear; *ORIENS AVGVSTORVM* with a depiction of Sol with one hand reaching out and a globe and a whip in the other, cf. *RIC* VI: 453, 482, Nos. 217, 218.

⁶² *RIC* VI: 453, 482, No. 218A.

⁶³ Straub 1967: 43, notes 31–33.

⁶⁴ Lee 2006: 174; *CAH* XII: 560.

⁶⁵ Sol disappeared from the coinage struck in all Constantine's mints in 319. Bruun incorrectly dated the last issues of coins from Arles depicting Sol to 322 (Bruun 1958: 34–37), even though it may have been minted during a rather short period after 319 (*RIC* VII: 48, note 5).

⁶⁶ Bardill disagrees with Alföldi's deduction that the emperor degraded Sol and distanced himself from that god (Bardill 2012: 331).

⁶⁷ Lenski 2006: 18.

⁶⁸ Barnes 1981: 245.

⁶⁹ *RIC* VII: 69; *CAH* XII: 94; Kienast 2010: 304–305, 314.



Fig. 129. Constantine I as Alexander the Great or *orans*, AV multiple of 1,5 solidi, Siscia, 326–327, obverse, National Museum in Belgrade

Fig. 130. Constantian II looking upwards, AR siliqua, Constantinople, 336, obverse, National Museum in Belgrade

a wreath, star, or Christogram (fig. 127).⁷⁰ Much later (336–337), the mints at Rome and Trier issued silver coins of similar iconography, with the obverse inscription CONSTANTINVS MAX AVG and the reverse legend CONSTANTINVS AVG, also with an ambiguous symbol on the standard.⁷¹

The Christogram undoubtedly features on the top of Constantine's standard (*labarum*), which is piercing a serpent (or a dragon), a symbolic representation of the emperor's enemy Licinius,⁷² on the exceptionally rare SPES PVBLIC nummi, minted in 327 and 327/328 in the new capital city, Constantinople (fig. 128).⁷³ It is more a personal sign of victory than a Christian symbol. The same is true of Constantine's other signs of victory, such as the helmet with a Christogram and an aureole surrounding the emperor's head, which would be understood and accepted as strictly Christian symbols only after a long process of development.⁷⁴

The first depiction of the Christogram on a standard coincides with the time when Constantine, having defeated Licinius, inaugurated a new ideological agenda, represented on coinage and medallions with a new obverse iconography. By introducing the diadem as a lasting imperial insigne and status symbol,⁷⁵ he sent a visual message about the end of the tetrarchic system of government and about himself as the new, undisputed ruler of the Empire. The diadem, however, must have had a deeper meaning than that of merely signifying the break with the tetrarchic past,

as it was not a common attribute of Constantine's predecessors. Alexander the Great adopted the diadem of cloth in imitation of the kings of Persia and, since such a fillet was traditionally awarded to successful athletes, this may be indicative of how it came to be assumed as a symbol of military victory.⁷⁶ Along with the diadem, originally just a simple, unadorned ribbon (*taenia*) that over time assumed ever more complex and luxurious forms rather removed from its Hellenistic models,⁷⁷ Constantine also adopted the traditional pose from the portraits of Alexander the Great. He was depicted as wearing a diadem and with his head thrown back, his chin projecting and his

⁷⁰ RIC VII: 56, note 6, 451, No. 207 and note 207, stating that probably depicted on the standard is a star or a wreath rather than a Christogram; Vasić 2008 a: 210, Cat. 188 (*labarum*).

⁷¹ RIC VII: 56, notes 7–8. Coins with the legend CONSTANTINVS AVG were issued from mints in Rome (RIC VII: 345, No. 399) and Treveri (RIC VII: 222, No. 579, note 579). For a possible depiction of a Christogram on the vexillum on a damaged coin published by Gnechchi, cf. Gnechchi I, 57, No. 1; RIC VII: 222, note 579.

⁷² RIC VII: 64, 567, note 2; Bruun 1962: 21–23.

⁷³ RIC VII: 572, No. 19; 573, No. 26; the three discs on the standard may represent Constantine and his sons, Constantine II and Constantian.

⁷⁴ RIC VII: 61–64. Depictions of a military standard with a Christogram, which are more common after Constantine's death, are also related to imperial victories, as attested by the HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS series minted by Constantine II in 350. The legend on this coinage and the depiction of the emperor with a *labarum* and wreathed with laurel by Victory are directly evocative of Constantine's vision on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 (RIC VIII: 369: Nos. 272, 275, 278–279, 282–283, 286–288, 291–292).

⁷⁵ RIC VII: 43, note 11. Obverse portraits reflected the status and level of imperial dignity, cf. RIC VII: 44–45; Bardill 2012: 12–13, note 10. The diadem is predominant on the obverse portraits of Constantine during his independent rule, which was not the case with the portraits of his sons, where it seems to have been reserved for special occasions. A similar difference is seen in the portraits of Helena and Fausta, who both received the title of Augusta at that time. Helena is depicted with a diadem, which evolved from simple forms to more complex ones, whereas Fausta is regularly bareheaded, with the exception of a bronze medallion from the mint in Rome (RIC VII: 323, No. 251).

⁷⁶ Bardill 2012: 15–18.

⁷⁷ Поповић 2005 a: 103–110 with Bibliography.



Fig. 131. Constantius II – the Hand of God crowning Constantine the Great standing between Constantine II and Constans, AV medallion of 30 solidi, Constantinople, 330 (Gnecchi I, Tav. 12. 1)

eyes turned heavenward.⁷⁸ In addition to the symbolism of imperial authority based on personal charisma and triumph, the new style was filled with the symbolism of a ruler invested with divine powers,⁷⁹ without, however, giving a clear indication of the nature of the supreme deity to whom Constantine raised his eyes. Whether it was to a pagan or Christian god, the heavenward gaze was supposed to symbolise the ideal ruler who, filled with divine enthusiasm, strives for divine perfection.⁸⁰ Although Eusebius' claim that Constantine is depicted as *orans*, in a posture of prayer to God,⁸¹ is unacceptable for most scholars, while for Christians it is an expression of his inspiration with the Christian God,⁸² the introduction of this new type of Constantine's image may have represented a deliberate move conditioned by the course of his political career.⁸³ Reflecting the idea of sovereign earthly and divine authority, as well as the spiritual connection between the emperor and the divine powers⁸⁴ (fig. 129), may have been based on the premise that this was a modification of what had already been established, in order to take advantage of the evocative aspects of a generally recognisable iconography. This iconographic pattern, which occasionally and in limited series, also appeared on the coins minted by Constantine's sons (fig. 130),⁸⁵ is predominant on the coinage and medallions struck between 324 and 327, the period that saw Constantine's ultimate victory over Licinius (324), his official declaration of his pro-Christian ideas at the council

of Nicaea (325), and his preparations for the respective celebrations of his vicennalia at Nicomedia (325) and Rome (326).⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Toynbee 1947: 148.

⁷⁹ Portraits suggestive of ecstatic inspiration with divine power were adopted in Late Antiquity, cf. Bardill 2012: 19–23, fig. 10–14.

⁸⁰ Bardill 2012: 24.

⁸¹ Eus. Vita Const. IV.15. For modern day authors advocating a Christian interpretation, cf. Odahl 2004 with Bibliography, especially p. 323, note 14, who avers that by 330 there was not a single pagan in the Empire who did not know which god the emperor was praying to.

⁸² L'Orange 1947: 94; for older interpretations, including the one that Sol-Constantine is gazing heavenward towards the goddess Luna, cf. *ibid.*, 34.

⁸³ Wright 1987: 506.

⁸⁴ RIC VII: 33; Поповић 2010 c: 154.

⁸⁵ RIC VII: 587, No. 127; Add. 719 (add. 588, No. 135); Vasić 2008 a: 246–247, Cat. 287, 288, 290; RIC VIII: 448, No. 19; 485, No. 2; 514, No. 36, etc.; Vasić 2008 a: 248, Cat. 293; 306, Cat. 443; 310–311, Cat. 457–458. Its withdrawal from use is one of the facts supporting the claim that the iconography reflected the emperor's personal reasons and beliefs, which were actually behind its creation.

⁸⁶ Поповић 2010 c: 154. He celebrated his *vicennalia* in Nicomedia on 25 July 325 and then also the following year, on 25 July 326, in Rome (Kienast 2010: 300), while the church council at Nicaea was held between 20 May and 19 June 325 (Kienast 2010: 300).



Fig. 132. Constantine I – Constantine nimbate sitting on high-backed throne between two caesars, AV multiple of 9 solidi, Constantinople, 330 (*RIC VII*, Pl. 18.44)

Fig. 133. Constantine I – Tyche of Constantinople sitting on throne, AR multiple of 5 siliquae, Constantinople, 330 (*RIC VII*, Pl. 18.53)

The same period (starting in 326) also saw the appearance of a new type of portrait, one that would become the paradigm for imperial portraits in the next few centuries. Constantine reverted to the Augustan model, but retained the diadem and created an image that underlined his imperial greatness. This new trend, predominant from the year 330, was evident in the iconography of Constantine and his sons commemorating the foundation of Constantinople, the new capital city, dedicated on 11 May 330. On the reverse, the emperor and his heirs were glorified and delighted in the victory that had brought salvation. A typical example of the propaganda of the time was the large *GAVDIVM ROMANORVM* medallion of 30 solidi minted by Constantius II. Depicted on the reverse was Constantine between Constantine II and Constans. The iconography emphasised the victorious character of the depicted characters and thereby the legitimacy of their dynasty. Constantine is being crowned with a wreath by the divine hand, Victory is crowning Constantine II, whilst Virtus places a wreath on little Constans' head. The obverse has a portrait bust of Constantius II, wearing a laurel wreath, armour and cloak and holding a spear and a shield depicting the emperor on a galloping horse led by Victory and followed by a soldier. Under their feet is a multitude of fallen enemies (**fig. 131**).⁸⁷ The gold multiples *SALVS ET SPES REIPVBLICAE* of four and nine solidi depicting Constantine's cuirassed bust on the obverse, with a diadem or a rosette diadem on his head, with or without Victory on the globe held in one hand, convey a similar message. On the reverse of one of these is Constantine enthroned, in military

dress, being crowned with a wreath by Victory and receiving Victory on a globe from the city of Byzantium,⁸⁸ whilst on another one is the emperor wearing liturgical vestments, with a nimbus surrounding his head, holding a sceptre and a *mappa* in his hands, and sitting enthroned like a divine being between two Caesars (**fig. 132**).⁸⁹ Constantine's silver *D N CONSTANTINVS MAX TRIVMF AVG* medallion, dated to 330, depicts the emperor wearing a rosette diadem on the obverse, whilst the reverse bears the motif of the Tyche of Constantinople on the throne, with a cornucopia in one hand and with one foot on the bow of a ship (**fig. 133**).⁹⁰

With special series of coinage, struck from 330 in nearly all the mints, the emperor celebrated the new and reaffirmed the old capital city. The most common *CONSTANTINOPOLIS* type of coin depicts a personification of Constantinople wearing a laurel wreath and helmet on the head and holding a spear in one hand, with always the same reverse depiction of Victory on the bow of a ship, which, with its naval

⁸⁷ *RIC VII*: 54, 576, No. 42; Gneccchi I: 30, No. 10, T. 12, 1; Toynbee 1944: 198.

⁸⁸ *RIC VII*: 55, 576, No. 43; Gneccchi I: 19, No. 47; Toynbee 1944: 187.

⁸⁹ *RIC VII*: 55, 577, No. 44, Pl. 18, 44; Gneccchi I: 19, No. 46; Toynbee dates the latter three coins to a slightly earlier period (326) and links them with the celebration of the *vicennalia*, cf. Toynbee 1944: 198; *RIC VII*: 564, note 1.

⁹⁰ *RIC VII*: 55, 578, No. 53, Pl. 18, 53; Gneccchi I: 58, No. 11; Toynbee 1944: 168.

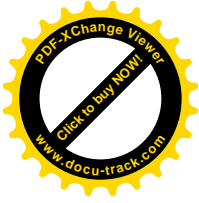


Fig. 134. *Divus Constantinus* veiled – the Hand of God descends on Constantine in a quadriga, AE nummus, Antioch, 337–340 (http://archive.world-historia.com/ancient-coins_topic12867.html)

victory theme, is evocative of the conquest of Byzantium. Their counterparts are the VRBS ROMA series, with personifications of Rome on the obverse and a she-wolf, modelled on the famous *Lupa Capitolina*, on the reverse.⁹¹

All of the reverse iconography after 324 reflected the new tendencies with its mainly religiously neutral themes and highlighting the motifs of victory. Of the deities, Roma was represented, linked with the idea of victory by the legends GLORIA ROMANORVM and VICTORIA GOTHICA,⁹² of the personifications, Securitas in the sense of SECVRITAS REIPVBLICE⁹³ and the Tyche of Constantinople,⁹⁴ as a city personification. The predominant depictions include those of the emperor, *vota* types, motifs of Victory, and, starting in 327, depictions of soldiers with the legends GLORIA EXERCITVS and VIRTVS EXERCITVS.

Ambiguity, common on Constantine's coinage, was also present in the posthumous series,⁹⁵ with the emperor traditionally depicted as veiled and designated with the pagan epithet DIVO or DIVVS.⁹⁶ The associated reverse motifs include the emperor in military dress with a globe or sphere,⁹⁷ the emperor veiled,⁹⁸ Aequitas holding scales and a sceptre⁹⁹ or only scales.¹⁰⁰ The most delicate of these is the depiction of Constantine, his head veiled, ascending in Sol's quadriga as the hand of God (*manus dei*) reaches down to take hold of the emperor's raised right hand, on the DIVVS CONSTANTINVS AVG PATER AVGG (ustorum) solidi, minted at Constantinople between 337 and 340, as well as on the bronze coins struck in this and several other mints (fig. 134).¹⁰¹ This controversial composition could have been perceived by the

inhabitants of the Empire in two ways, depending on whether they saw in it Christian or solar symbolism.¹⁰² From the perspective of a Christian observer, the metaphorical solar link with the Christian God and Christ had already been firmly established and the solar chariot and raised hand could signify the emperor's intimacy with their God.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the ascent of the quadriga, a traditional feature in the iconography of consecration, would not have had Christian connotations for a pagan observer.¹⁰⁴ The real meaning of Constantine's ascent is ambiguous,

⁹¹ E.g. *Lugdunum*, RIC VII: 138, No. 241 (*Constantinopolis* type); No. 242 (*Urbs Roma* type), etc.

⁹² E.g. RIC VII: 616, No. 101 (Nicomedia); RIC VII: 333, No. 306 (Rome).

⁹³ E.g. RIC VII: 554, No. 95 (Heraclea).

⁹⁴ E.g. RIC VII: 340, No. 357 (Rome).

⁹⁵ Bruun 1954: 19–31; Koep 1958: 94–104; Kötzsche-Breitenbruch 1982: 215–224; Wallraf 1999: 256–269.

⁹⁶ The following legends appear on the consecration coinage: DIVO CONSTANTINO P, DIVO CONSTANTINO AVG, DIV CONSTANTINVS PT AVGG, DIVVS CONSTANTINVS AVG PATER AVGG.

⁹⁷ E.g. RIC VIII: 143, No. 37 (Trier) – legend AETERNA PIETAS.

⁹⁸ E.g. RIC VIII: 541, No. 32 (Alexandria) – legend VN MR.

⁹⁹ E.g. RIC VIII: 540, No. 28 (Alexandria) – legend IVST VENER MEMOR.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. RIC VIII: 474, No. 45 (Nicomedia) – legend IVS VEN MEM.

¹⁰¹ RIC VIII: 446, No. 1 (Constantinopolis) – solidus, 337–340, but also on billon and bronze coins, cf. RIC VIII: 143, No. 44 (Trier), 178, Nos. 12, 17 (Lyons), 206, No. 42 (Arles), 431, No. 14 (Heraclea), 449, Nos. 37, 39, 52 (Constantinopolis), 471, Nos. 4, 18 (Nicomedia), 490–491, Nos. 4, 19, 25, 30 (Cizycus), 515, Nos. 37, 39 (Antioch), 539, Nos. 4, 12, 22 (Alexandria).

¹⁰² Similarly, on the large gold GAVDIVM ROMANORVM medallion of Constantius II the hand of God crowning Constantine with a wreath (cf. *supra*, note 87).

¹⁰³ In the 5th century, the hand of God – *manus dei* was not uncommon on obverse portraits of women from imperial families, where it placed a wreath or diadem on their heads (RIC X: 64; E.g. Eudoxia – RIC X: 241, Nos. 10–14; Placidia – RIC X: 257, Nos. 230–231, etc.), indicating that they were chosen by God (cf. RIC X: 52, 64). A panel on the wooden door of the basilica of Saint Sabina in Rome, dated to 430–432, depicts a chariot with the prophet Elijah in it, ascending to heaven as an angel reaches down from the cloud to facilitate his ascent (Bardill 2012: 378).



and bearing in mind the fact that this is posthumous coinage, the relationship between the emperor and the unnamed deity, whose hand is receiving him cannot be positively established.¹⁰⁵

This ambivalent relationship also marked Constantine's death, as well as the preparations he had made while still alive, such as his desire to be baptised in the River Jordan¹⁰⁶ or the idea of building the Church of the Holy Apostles as a family mausoleum with the imperial sarcophagus placed amidst 12 holy sarcophagi symbolising the apostles,¹⁰⁷ thus equating himself to Christ.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, his burial, despite featuring a number of new elements, clearly contained features of earlier imperial burials. The church historian Eusebius observes pagan rituals involved in the funerary ceremony.¹⁰⁹ Constantine's death represented not only the demise of a victorious ruler, reformer and the first Christian emperor,¹¹⁰ but the ruler who, as *Victor Constantinus, Maximus Augustus*,¹¹¹ continued, in the after-life, to control universal dominion, securing the sovereignty of the Roman world.¹¹² The notion of rule after death was new to the Roman imperial ideology and was based on the political circumstances after May 337, which were related to the issues of succession to the throne and the interregnum that lasted until early September, when Constantine's sons were appointed Augusti.¹¹³

The period of the Tetrarchy and the subsequent reign of Constantine was a time of radical changes in the Roman Empire that brought the realisation that Diocletian's project, despite having brought temporary respite and stability, could not last long. Through a series of successful political decisions, accompanied by his military victories, Constantine succeeded in securing for himself the position of sole ruler of the Empire. The reign of this great reformer, builder and founder of a new capital city, as well as a follower of ambiguous signs and perplexing symbols, was full of turnabouts. It is likewise reflected on his coinage, the medium for expressing official political stands and revealing much detail about political, dynastic and military events and Constantine's imperial propaganda. Their iconographic themes, with their occasionally enigmatic and ambiguous messages, may be explained by politically motivated decisions, or as being reflections of personal religious beliefs, even though some of them are still veiled in mystery. It is

possible that Constantine failed to see any contradictions where we see them now, that he regarded himself a Christian, but understood Christianity differently from contemporaneous theologians, who were unable to explain the special form of Christianity that he had chosen for himself.¹¹⁴ His ideological agenda reflects a religious compromise between his closeness to the official religion and dynastic cults of

¹⁰⁴ Earlier pagan examples could be listed here, such as the tombstone in the village of Igel, near Trier (200–250); the scene of Hercules' apotheosis in which Hercules is depicted as driving a quadriga as Athena emerges from the clouds and reaches down to lift him to heaven (Toynbee 1996: 164–165, Pl. 57; Bardill 2012: 379–380); the reliefs depicting the apotheosis of Sabina or Antoninus Pius and Faustina (Bardill 2012: 380); or the panegyric to Constantine's father, stating that Constantius Chlorus was deified, with "love ipso dexteram porrigente" (Wallraff 2001: 264).

¹⁰⁵ Bardill 2012: 380, notes 315, 316.

¹⁰⁶ After Easter 337, he wanted to be baptised in the River Jordan, but because of his ill health, he embraced Christianity before his death at Anchryona, near Nicomedia, cf. Euseb. Vita Const. IV.62.

¹⁰⁷ Euseb. Vita Const. IV.60; Wallraff 2001: 264, ref. 38; Arce 2000: 122, note 22; Johnson 2006: 295.

¹⁰⁸ This danger, contrary to Christian beliefs, was later redressed, probably by Constantius, who relocated the imperial sarcophagus and altered the architectural scheme of the church. Constantine was no longer equated with Christ, but the way was paved for him to be venerated as a saint, cf. Mango 1990: 51–62; Wallraff 2001: 264, note 39; Elsner 2006: 268, note 64; CAH XII: 101; Bardill 2012: 380–382, 400.

¹⁰⁹ In his description of the burial, Eusebius makes a clear-cut distinction between the pagan and Christian elements in the ceremony performed in the Church of the Holy Apostles, cf. Euseb. Vita Const. IV.71; Arce 2000: 122.

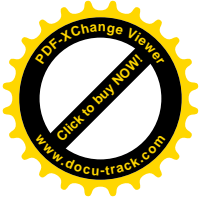
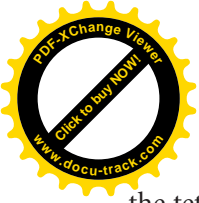
¹¹⁰ Euseb. Vita Const. IV.64.

¹¹¹ He assumed the title *maximus augustus* in 312, after his victory over Maxentius (Kienast 2010: 299), and that of *victor* after his defeat of Licinius in 324 and his triumphal entrance into Nicomedia in 325 (Lenski 2006: 18; cf. *supra*, note 67).

¹¹² Euseb. Vita Const. IV.71.2; Arce 2000: 123–124; Bardill 2012: 400.

¹¹³ They were elevated as Augusti on 9 September 337: Constantine II as ruler of the West, with dominion over Constans (?), Constans as ruler of Italy, Africa, Illyricum, Macedonia, and Achaëa, and Constantius as ruler of the East and Egypt, including Thrace, cf. Kienast 2010: 310, 312, 314.

¹¹⁴ Wallraff 2001: 267–268.



the tetrarchy – those of Hercules, Jupiter, Mars, and Sol – and his attachment to Christianity. The iconography and symbolism that warrant special attention are those found in the obverse portraits of the tetrarchic style from the year 306 and in his contemporaneous boyish portraits on the coinage minted at Trier, modelled on the portraits of the young 3rd-century Caesars, as well as in his youthful portraits reviving the archetypal images of Augustus in the political context of Constantine's victory over Maxentius in 310 and the celebration of his quinquennalia in 311. At the same time, starting from a new ideological foundation and embracing the dynastic cult of Sol/Apollo, Constantine promoted *Sol Invictus*, who, from 310, became the emperor's companion and protector with whom he then identified. Just as the aureole surrounding the emperor's head on the solidi minted between 315 and 317 does not possess explicit Christian symbolism, neither do Constantine's signs of victory – the Christogram on his helmet on the silver medallion from 315, the nummus from 319, and the first standard (labarum) with this symbol on the coinage from 327. Only after a long process of development would they come to be understood and embraced as strictly Christian symbols.

This shift of ideology was marked by the disappearance of Sol after 319, followed by that of the other pagan deities. In line with this new tendency, which became particularly evident after 324 and Constantine's victory over Licinius, portraits of him were produced modelled on those of Alexander the Great, most of them between 324 and 327. With a diadem around his head and gazing heavenward, he demonstrated his sovereign earthly and divine power, albeit without manifesting the nature of the supreme divine being toward whom he was raising his eyes. Concurrently, from 326, and especially from 330, he returned to a slightly modified Augustan model, but retained the diadem. The posthumous messages of Constantine's consecration coinage, minted between 337 and 340, are imbued with the pagan tradition of apotheosis, and fail to provide the real ideological meaning of his ascension. In his quest for a new, albeit authoritarian, cosmopolitanism, Constantine found justification for his actions and intentions in his religious beliefs. This line of thinking was a reflection of the prevailing view at the time that divine assistance was crucial for the salvation and prosperity of the state and that the emperor was responsible for the success and preservation of its order and well-being.