

**The Religion of Constantine I: An Analysis of the Modern
Scholarly Hypotheses and Interpretations of the Contemporary
Evidence**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the hypotheses that modern historians have developed about the religion of the emperor Constantine I. Its aim is to elucidate the different methodologies historians have employed to interpret the contemporary evidence, which has often led to the development of conflicting hypotheses. The first chapter will discuss interpretations of the contemporary evidence that has led Barnes, Drake, and Bardill to hypothesize that Constantine converted to Christianity after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. This chapter will primarily discuss possible familial and political influences and the narratives of Eusebius and Lactantius in order to elucidate the circumstances surrounding Constantine's conversion. Then Constantine's military insignia and his possible sacrifice after battle will be discussed in order to demonstrate any alterations in his religious mentality. The second chapter will examine the different interpretations of Constantine's religious policy and legislation in order to clarify why Barnes proposes that Constantine became intolerant of religious diversity after his conversion, while Drake, Potter, and Bardill believe that he had remained as tolerant as he had been as a pagan. The third chapter will present the interpretations of the contemporary evidence that has led Burckhardt and Kee to assert that Constantine never converted to Christianity. This thesis will demonstrate that the vague and sometimes contradictory contemporary evidence supports multiple and even competing hypotheses. For this reason, there can be no "correct" answer about the religion of Constantine.

General Introduction

The religion of Constantine I (r. 306-337) has garnered much attention from scholars over the past century because he was the first emperor to actively promote the Christian religion and Church to a position equal to traditional paganism. I am particularly interested in the nature and extent of Constantine's religious beliefs, and originally I wanted to explore these beliefs in this thesis. However, as I soon found out, the convoluted nature of the evidence makes it difficult for a student, and indeed for many scholars, to arrive at a definitive conclusion on this complex topic. Furthermore, each small piece of evidence could also be a thesis in itself. So I adjusted the focus to provide a historiography of the modern hypotheses about Constantine's religion in order to demonstrate not only how scholars with the same training can develop different interpretations of the evidence but also how this makes it difficult to arrive at any conclusive hypothesis.

Before I set forth the outline of this thesis, three topics must be discussed in order to establish a basic understanding of the religious terminology, Constantine's reign, and the contemporary sources. First, I will provide definitions for the terms "pagan", "Christian", and "conversion". Second, Constantine's rise to power and his unconventional religious policy will be placed in historical and political context. Third, I will give a brief background on the main contemporary Christian and pagan sources for Constantine's reign in order to establish their historical value.

It is important to define what it means to be a pagan, a Christian, and a convert because these ideas are central to the study of Constantine's religion. Furthermore, the definitions for these words sometimes vary from epoch to epoch and person to person. For instance, the term "pagan" gained three main connotations in the past two millennia. Initially, the Latin noun *paganus* meant either "country-dweller" or "civilian". A non-Judeo-Christian Roman would never have used this word to identify his religion. However, Christian apologists and polemicists began to use the word in the second-half of the fourth century to describe any persons who did not adhere to either the Jewish or the Christian faiths. Various nouns like *paganitas* and *paganismus* ("paganism"), then, came to describe a myriad of non-Judeo-Christian religions.¹ While these definitions are used in modern society to describe "pagan" and "paganism", both terms gained a pejorative and negative

¹ Cameron 2011: 15, 24, 26.

connotation as Christianity became the dominant religion. The etymology of the word has led Garth Fowden to propose that the term “polytheist” should be used instead because it is neutral and an accurate description of Greco-Roman religions.² However, Alan Cameron maintains that “pagan” is an acceptable term because Christians originally may not have intended it to hold any negative connotation. Furthermore, Cameron does not find the Christian origins of the term objectionable because he argues that the advent of this religion did create the concept of paganism.³ Since I subscribe to Cameron’s position, I will use the terms “pagan” and “paganism” to denote all non-Judeo-Christian persons and their religion, respectively.

Although scholars often discuss the meaning of the two aforementioned words, they rarely ever define what it means to be a Christian. This is probably due to the fact that there is a relatively strict definition for “Christian” in modern society as anyone who professes a belief in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Originally, a Christian was considered to be a Jew who believed that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecy and would offer salvation to mankind. They accepted his teachings as philosophical and religious truths. However, he or she could either identify Jesus as a divinely inspired man (Arianism) or worship him as a divinity (Catholicism). An individual’s perception of the nature of Jesus could certainly be designated as heresy, but it did not undermine the fact that they considered themselves and others perceived them to be a Christian. Therefore, I believe that the modern definition for “Christian” is applicable to the basic idea of ancient Christianity.

On the other hand, the definition of conversion has received much attention from scholars over the past century. William James, Arthur Darby Nock, and Ramsay MacMullen have provided the most notable works on the topic.⁴ James and Nock propose that a conversion is the sudden or gradual process through which an individual accepts that his old beliefs about life and the nature of the divine are wrong and a new understanding is the truth. They maintain that converts will experience an unsettling emotional crisis as they consciously alter their religious allegiance and, thereafter, will be committed body and soul to their new belief system.⁵ However, Nock points out that this definition is not applicable to

² Fowden 1991: 119 n. *

³ Cameron 2011: 24-27. See Cameron’s first chapter for an in-depth analysis of the etymology of “pagan”.

⁴ This section is indebted to a review of these authors by Crook 2004: 22-28.

⁵ Nock 1998: 7-8, 14; James 2008: 145, 164.

the pagan religious experience for two reasons: paganism did not teach a profound doctrine on life, so cults rarely contradicted one another, and it did not require exclusive worship of a specific divinity, which allowed individuals to worship multiple gods at once. Therefore, he proposes that in pagan society the term “adhesion” best defines when a pagan adopted the cause of a new divinity, while “conversion” describes the adoption of a new philosophy.⁶ More recently, MacMullen has simplified the definition of a Christian conversion to “[a] change of belief by which a person accepted the reality and supreme power of God and determined to obey Him. Whether actual, entire, and doctrinally centrist obedience resulted would depend on cases.”⁷ He arrives at this looser definition because a study of the ancient sources reveals that Christians had relatively low standards for what they considered a conversion and the criteria could even differ from priest to priest.⁸ Since the term conversion was subjective in the ancient world, I have decided to use MacMullen’s definition throughout this thesis. Now that the fundamental terminology has been explained, we can address the topic at hand: the religion of Constantine.

Constantine was the son of the western emperor Constantius I (r. 293-306), who had ruled Britain and Gaul as a caesar between 293 and 305, and Helena (d. circa 328), a woman of humble origin.⁹ When Diocletian (r. 284-305) and Maximian (r. 286-305) resigned their positions as augusti on 1 May 305, Constantius became the new western augustus and the senior member of the new Tetrarchy who held authority over the other emperors.¹⁰ The ascension rules of the Tetrarchy demanded that a caesar would only become augustus upon the death or resignation of the previous augustus. Moreover, Diocletian had moved away from dynastic succession to succession based on merit in order to ensure the stability of imperial rule. When Constantius died unexpectedly on 25 July 306, his caesar Severus (r. 305-308) rose to the position of western augustus and the eastern augustus Galerius (r. 293-311) became the senior member of the Tetrarchy.¹¹ Since Constantine did not have an

⁶ Nock 1998: 6-7.

⁷ MacMullen 1984: 5.

⁸ MacMullen 1984: 52.

⁹ Eutr., *Breviarium* 10.2; Ambrose, *De. obit. Theo.* 42; *Orig. Const.* 2.2.

¹⁰ *PLRE* 1, C. Aur. Val. Diocletianus 2; M. Aur. Val. Maximianus 8, pp. 254, 574. The Tetrarchy from 293-305: Diocletian held the position as the senior member and eastern augustus with Galerius as his caesar. Maximian held the position as the western augustus with Constantius as his caesar. The Tetrarchy from 305-306: Constantius became the senior member and western augustus with Severus as his caesar. Galerius became the eastern augustus with Maximianus as his caesar.

¹¹ *PLRE* 1, Fl. Val. Constantinus 4, p. 223.

official position in the imperial college, he began his imperial career as a usurper when he was proclaimed augustus by his father's troops and he then moved to consolidate his new position in Britain and Gaul. Fortunately for Constantine, Galerius eventually recognized him as the new western caesar who was subject to the authority of Severus.¹² The commencement of Constantine's imperial career coincided with the Great Persecution (303-313). Although Galerius and his caesar Maximinus (r. 305-313) vigorously enforced this policy, Constantine not only granted toleration to Christians in his realm but also promised to restore to them the property that had been seized as part of the persecutions. His policy towards Christians became more progressive after he defeated the usurper Maxentius (r. 306-312) at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312:¹³ he began to bestow fiscal endowments on churches and privileges traditionally preserved for pagan priests upon the clergy. Since Constantine's actions broke with imperial precedent and helped the Christian Church rise to a position of prominence, historians have attempted to determine what led Constantine to promote Christianity in the way that he did.

The plethora of literary evidence from the fourth-century onwards has depicted Constantine's reign as the story of the rise of Christianity and the fall of paganism. The church historians Lactantius (240-c. 320) and Eusebius (260-339) claim that Constantine's sudden policy change in 312 was the result of his conversion to Christianity after the battle in October. Lactantius had initially been a rhetor in Nicomedia, but moved to the western provinces around 305 after losing his position at the beginning of the Great Persecution.¹⁴ Around 314-315, he wrote *De mortibus persecutorum* wherein he details the demise of the persecuting emperors and the change in the fortune of Christians with the advent of Constantine.¹⁵ In 317 Constantine employed Lactantius as the tutor to his son Crispus (d. 326).¹⁶ Although neither the extent of Lactantius' acquaintance with Constantine before or after 317 nor its impact on the historicity of Lactantius' narrative can be determined, J. L. Creed maintains that this does not undermine the general historicity of Lactantius' work.¹⁷ On the other hand, the extent of the contact between Constantine and Eusebius, the bishop of

¹² Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 24.9-25; For more on Constantine's official position in the Tetrarchy between 305 and 310, see Barnes 2011: 89.

¹³ For the date of the battle, see Barnes 1982: 71.

¹⁴ Creed 1984: xxvi.

¹⁵ Creed 1984: xxxiii-xxxv.

¹⁶ Creed 1984: xxvii.

¹⁷ Creed 1984: xlii-xliii, xlv.

Caesarea, is much clearer because he records his correspondence and meetings with the emperor in the *Vita Constantini*: he met Constantine on four occasions beginning in 325 and periodically received letters from him on church matters.¹⁸ Eusebius might only have had an acquaintance with the emperor rather than a close relationship, but this also does not diminish the historicity of his accounts. He first detailed Constantine's rise to power in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, written between 314 and 316, and provided a more comprehensive view of his reign in the *Vita Constantini* composed around 337.¹⁹ Since both Lactantius and Eusebius employ rhetoric in their works to defend the position of the Christians, modern scholars have questioned the accuracy of their accounts because they have a tendency to embellish events, to add dramatic flare or to conform their interpretations to their Christian agenda. Nonetheless, historians generally concede that both Lactantius and Eusebius provide historically accurate accounts buried underneath rhetoric and embellishment.

Since pagan sources from Constantine's reign are not abundant, modern historians have been forced to rely primarily on the Christian authors. However, the pagan authors Palladas (c. 259 – c. 330) and Zosimus (early sixth century) provide evidence that aids in clarifying whether or not Constantine had ever adopted the Christian faith. The grammarian Palladas wrote epigrams preserved in the *Epigrammatum Anthologia Palatina*, which bemoan the decay of pagan religion during his lifetime. Historians initially believed that Palladas was commenting on the state of affairs after Theodosius I (r. 379-395) had outlawed pagan practices in 392 and as a result they had dated the grammarian to between 360 and 420.²⁰ After much deliberation and the discovery of new evidence, many historians now tend to believe that Palladas wrote his epigrams during the first four decades of the fourth century, though this conclusion is still rather new and has not been widely tested or argued.²¹ Therefore, Palladas' description of the downfall of paganism may help to support Lactantius' and Eusebius' claims that Constantine made significant alterations to Roman religion.

Although there is little known about the historian Zosimus, he wrote the *Historia nova* between 498 and 518 wherein he details Roman history from the reign of Augustus

¹⁸ Barnes 1981: 266-267.

¹⁹ Cameron and Hall 1999: 9-12; Maier 2007: 16.

²⁰ Franke 1899: 38-39; Stella 1949: 379-383.

²¹ Wilkinson 2009: 41-51; cf. Bowra 1959: 255-267; Cameron 1964: 54-62; Cameron 1965: 17-30.

until the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410.²² Zosimus claims that Constantine converted to Christianity in 326, fourteen years after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge.²³ Although he provides a different date for the conversion compared to Lactantius and Eusebius, his concession that Constantine did convert adds additional support to the historicity of the claims of the Christian historians.

The aforementioned Christian and pagan authors agree that Constantine made alterations to Roman religion because he had become a Christian, but they disagree on the exact circumstances of his conversion. Therefore, modern historians have analyzed these authors alongside panegyric, numismatic, and epigraphic evidence in order to elucidate the factors that would have led Constantine to adopt Christianity, when he would have converted, and how this change in religious allegiance would have affected his plans for existing Roman religion and society.

Historians have developed three main hypotheses about Constantine's religion and his plans for Roman society. In *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the renowned historian Edward Gibbon supports the traditional hypothesis that Constantine had converted to Christianity in 312 and afterwards sought to christianize the empire. However, Jacob Burckhardt offers a counter-proposal in *The Age of Constantine the Great*: Constantine only promoted the Christian Church because he realized they could provide political support against his imperial colleagues, Maximinus and Licinius (r. 308-324), but remained pagan. Burckhardt's controversial hypothesis has been credited with re-igniting interest in Constantinian studies because historians soon began to re-analyze the contemporary evidence in order to determine which scenario was the most plausible. Although André Piganiol and Alistair Kee have subscribed to Burckhardt's hypothesis that Constantine did not convert from paganism to Christianity, they assert that he worshipped the Christian god from a pagan perspective as the *summa diuinitas*, or "highest divinity." However, many twentieth-century historians have reverted to Gibbon's hypothesis that Constantine did sincerely convert to Christianity, but they debate the exact nature of Christian devotion. Andreas Alföldi and Timothy Barnes argue that only sincere religious devotion would have led Constantine to promote the Church because Christians otherwise

²² Paschoud 2000: x-xvi.

²³ Zos., *Hist. nov.* 2.29.

would have had no power or access to influence imperial politics. They propose that Constantine sought to eradicate paganism and establish Christianity as the official state religion. Alternatively, Harold Drake and David Potter hypothesize that the socio-religious and political circumstances prior to the Battle of the Milvian Bridge would have made a conversion politically expedient for Constantine. They believe that he sincerely converted to Christianity, but that his religious policy only sought to create religious equality between the pagan and Christian religions in order to achieve civil tranquility.

This thesis will analyze the scholarly interpretations of the contemporary evidence that have led to the development of diametrically opposed hypotheses about Constantine's religious beliefs. Since the hypothesis that Constantine converted to Christianity is predominant in modern scholarship, the first two chapters will focus on the circumstances surrounding Constantine's conversion and how it influenced his plans for Roman society. The first chapter will discuss the various factors that could have facilitated Constantine's acceptance of the Christian faith and also the possible motivations for a conversion. This chapter will begin with an analysis of the religions of Constantine's parents in order to determine whether or not they provided an example of monotheism or tolerance towards religious diversity for their son. Then the socio-religious and political circumstances at the beginning of the fourth century will be discussed in order to determine whether or not Constantine could have converted for political expediency. Once these external factors have been discussed, scholarly interpretations of Lactantius' and Eusebius' narratives about Constantine's dream and/or vision will be presented in order to elucidate possible religious motivations. Finally, the cipher of Christ that Constantine adopted as his military insignia before engaging in battle with Maxentius and his reluctance to sacrifice during his victory procession through Rome will be discussed in order to clarify the evidence for any altered religious sentiments on Constantine's part.

The second chapter will demonstrate how scholarly perceptions of the circumstances surrounding Constantine's conversion have influenced individual interpretations of his promotion of Christianity. The first section will discuss the sudden replacement of overt pagan terminology and imagery in imperial and court compositions with ambiguous religious terms, a change that historians believe best reveals Constantine's new religious mentality. The next two sections will discuss the possible motivations behind the fiscal endowments

and priestly privileges that Constantine awarded to the Christian Church and his penal, moral, and marriage legislation in order to determine whether or not Constantine aimed to christianize Roman society. The last two sections will discuss Constantine's treatment of pagan rituals and temples in order to determine whether or not his actions reflected a desire to abolish paganism. The different interpretations of the evidence discussed in this chapter will explain how historians have developed the conflicting hypotheses that claim that Constantine was either an intolerant or tolerant Christian.

The third chapter will discuss the hypotheses that Constantine never converted to Christianity. This chapter will begin with a presentation of Burckhardt and Kee's individual perceptions of the socio-religious and political circumstances prior to the Battle of the Milvian Bridge that has led them to assert that Constantine did not need to convert to Christianity to gain the support of their constituency. The next two sections will analyze their arguments that the narratives of Lactantius and Eusebius, Constantine's military insignia, and his patronage of the Christian Church do not prove that Constantine altered his religious allegiance. Then Burckhardt and Kee's perception of the reformatory legislation will be discussed in order to clarify why they dismiss the majority of these edicts as evidence for Constantine's religion. Thereafter, Constantine's actions throughout his reign will be discussed in order to elucidate Burckhardt's assertion that he continued to exhibit pagan sympathies. Finally, Kee's analysis of the literary evidence will be presented in order to clarify his assertions that Constantine worshipped the Christian god as his patron deity, but was not a Christian because he did not revere Christ. This chapter will also clarify the objections that various scholars, such as Drake, have presented to counter the hypothesis that Constantine never converted to Christianity.

The religion of Constantine has fascinated scholars over the past two centuries because he set a precedent of patronizing the Christian Church that all subsequent emperors would follow, with the exception of Julian (r. 355-363). This policy would eventually endow the Christian Church with religious and moral authority over Roman emperors and later European rulers, which significantly influenced the development of the western world. These three chapters will present alternative interpretations of the contemporary evidence in order to clarify how modern historians have arrived at their hypotheses about Constantine's religion and his subsequent intentions for Roman society. Although the preponderance of

modern historians assert that Constantine converted to Christianity, this thesis will demonstrate that the malleability of the evidence makes it difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion about the religious beliefs of Constantine.

Chapter 1: The Evidence for Constantine's Christianity

Introduction

The hypothesis that Constantine sincerely converted to Christianity has dominated modern Constantinian studies over the past century. This chapter will discuss the diverse, if not conflicting, scholarly interpretations of the evidence that indicates that Constantine experienced a conversion after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. The first section will address the factors that historians propose would have influenced or facilitated Constantine's adoption of Christianity in order to discern the emperor's religious and political consciousness preceding the battle. Then Eusebius' and Lactantius' narratives will be examined in order to elucidate the various impetuses that historians believe may have inspired Constantine to convert. Finally, Constantine's actions upon his entrance into Rome, after his victory over Maxentius, will be analyzed in order to clarify historians' assertions that he exhibited his Christianity when he entered the city. This chapter aims to elucidate the different, if not conflicting, hypotheses that historians have developed about Constantine's conversion to Christianity.

Constantius I and Helena

Certain historians have reasoned that as Constantine's parents, Constantius and Helena, could have provided a religious example that facilitated Constantine's conversion. Therefore, they have attempted to illuminate the individual beliefs of his parents in order to determine any monotheistic tendencies that they may have imparted to their son.

The majority of Constantinian scholars assert that Constantius was a devotee of Sol Invictus. This hypothesis has found popularity among historians who believe that Constantine converted to Christianity as well as those who believe that Constantine was never a Christian. The former believe that Constantius' monotheistic worship of Sol facilitated Constantine's acceptance of Christianity's core belief in the existence of a single god. Unfortunately, historians who believe that Constantius worshipped Sol often designate his religion without delving too deeply into the supporting evidence, before moving on to his influence on Constantine. The case André Piganiol presents for this hypothesis exhibits the

brevity with which historians have treated this topic. Piganiol argues that Constantius' Illyrian origins alone gave rise to this emperor's religious allegiance:

Le culte du Soleil est en grand honneur chez les Illyriens, qui souvent décorent du disque solaire leurs stèles funéraires. Constance a retrouvé ce culte en Gaule... [donc] le nom de *caelicole* est sans nul doute celui qui lui conviendrait le mieux (Piganiol 1932: 35-36).

To my knowledge, historians have often chosen small pieces of evidence to support this hypothesis, which means that there are few comprehensive analyses of the topic. However, Jonathan Bardill presents a more substantial review of the evidence that has led historians to believe that Constantius was a monotheistic sun-worshipper.

Bardill notes that together *Panegyrics* 8 and 7, from 297/8 and 307, contain a significant amount of solar imagery with reference to Constantius. *Panegyric* 8 was delivered shortly after Constantius quelled the usurpation of Allectus (r. 293-297) in Britain. Therein the orator declares that the day Constantius was born “[shone] with a more majestic clarity of light than when it gave life at the creation of the world... [and the sun] struggled not to seem less brilliant than [him]” (*Pan. Lat.* 8.2.2-3; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 111). The orator then describes the beneficence of Constantius and his colleagues with solar vocabulary:

Sed neque Sol ipse neque cuncta sidera humanas res tam perpetuo lumine intuentur quam uos tuemini, qui sine ullo fere discrimine dierum ac noctium inlustratis orbem, salutique gentium non his modo quibus immortales uultus uestri uigent sed multo magis illis diuinarum mentium uestrarum oculis prouidetis, nec solum qua dies oritur et praeterit et conditur sed etiam ex illa septentrionali plaga salutari beatis luce prouincias (*Pan. Lat.* 8.4.3).

But neither the Sun itself nor all the stars watch over human affairs with such unremitting light as you, who illuminate the world with scarcely any discrimination of night and day and provide for the well-being of nations not only with these eyes which animate your immortal countenances, but much more with those eyes of your divine minds, and bless with your healing light not only the provinces where the day rises, passes by and disappears from view, but also those in the northern belt (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 114).

The orator also claims that Constantius' victory over Allectus had restored “the true light of empire” to Britain (*Pan. Lat.* 8.19.2-3; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 140). A year after Constantius' death, *Panegyric* 7 commemorated the marriage alliance between Constantine

and Maximian. The orator describes the ascension of Constantius into the heavens upon his death: “the sun himself took [Constantius] up on a chariot almost visible, to carry [him] to heaven” (*Pan. Lat.* 7.14.3; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 209). The amount of solar imagery in connection to Constantius may have led historians to believe that the orators were faithfully portraying Constantius’ personal devotion to Sol.

Bardill notes that solar imagery also appears in various forms on Constantius’ coinage. The medallion of Arras, minted in 297 to commemorate Constantius’ victory over Allectus, is perhaps the most notable example. The imagery of the medallion corresponds to the representation of the emperor in *Panegyric* 8: Constantius is depicted nimbate, approaching London on horseback with the legend reading: *Redditor Lucis Aeternae*.²⁴ While this medallion alone convinced Norman Baynes of the emperor’s “heliolatry”, historians have sought further confirmation of this hypothesis within imperial coinage.²⁵ The appearance of Sol on five coin issues of Constantius instead of Jupiter or Hercules, which will be discussed at length below, has often been viewed as an indication of his personal devotion to the deity.²⁶ Patrick Bruun proposes that the depiction of Constantius nimbate on *aurei* minted at Trier in 305 was intended to reference the emperor’s affiliation with Sol.²⁷ Traditionally, historians have perceived the nimbus as simply a sign of divinity or sovereignty unassociated with solar deities, but Bruun argues that Octavian established this connection three centuries prior.²⁸ Velleius Paterculus records that as Octavian entered Rome in 44 BC after the assassination of Julius Caesar, the well-known Apollo-worshipper experienced a solar phenomenon:

Cui aduentanti Romam inmanis amicorum occurrit frequentia, et cum intraret urbem, solis orbis super caput eius curuatis aequaliter rotundatusque in colorem arcus uelut coronam tanti mox uiri capiti imponens conspectus est (Vell. Pat., *Hist. Rom.* 2.59.6).

As he approached Rome an enormous crowd of his friends went out to meet him, and at the moment of his entering the city, men saw above his head the orb of the sun with a circle about it, coloured like the rainbow, seeming thereby to place a crown upon the head of one destined soon to greatness (Shipley 1961: 179).

²⁴ *RIC* 6, Trier 34, p. 167.

²⁵ Baynes 1972: 97 n. 1.

²⁶ Smith 1997a: 204; Bardill 2012: 89-90.

²⁷ *RIC* 6, Trier 35, p. 168; Bruun 1992: 220-226.

²⁸ Bruun 1992: 223; cf. Ahlqvist 2001: 215-222.

Since the orator of *Panegyric* 10, from 289, describes Maximian as having “that light which surround[ed] [his] divine head with a shining orb”, Bruun argues that the nimbus continued to hold solar significance into the fourth century (*Pan. Lat.* 10.3.2; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 58).²⁹ Even if Constantius did use the nimbus to imply a “close affinity with the sun-god,” Bardill points out that “it does not necessarily mean that Constantius was devoted primarily to Sol.”³⁰ Moreover, the appearance of both Constantius and Galerius nimbate on the *aurei* from Trier undermines the premise that Constantius alone had a special connection to Sol.

Many historians have relied on Eusebius’ description of Constantius in the *Vita Constantini* in order to elucidate the nature of Constantius’ solar worship. According to Eusebius, Constantius “recognize[d] only the God over all and condemn[ed] the polytheism of the godless” (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.17.2; Cameron and Hall 1999: 76). Eusebius also preserves a letter wherein Constantine describes his father as a man who “with wonderful reverence call[ed] upon the Saviour God in all his actions” (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.49.1; Cameron and Hall 1999: 112).³¹ Baynes contends that this account, in conjunction with the medallion of Arras, confirms that Constantius worshipped Sol as a monotheistic deity: he was the supreme divinity who had created all the lesser deities to maintain the control of the universe.³² In theory, Constantius’ monotheism would have facilitated Constantine’s acceptance of the Christian doctrine that ascribed to the same theology. Alternatively, Bardill hesitates to accept the historicity of Eusebius’ account. He cautiously concludes that Eusebius’ account may indicate that Constantius was a henotheist who identified Sol as his Supreme Divinity, but did not deny the existence nor neglect the worship of other gods.³³ However, Mark Smith has presented numismatic evidence, discussed below, that has led Bardill to conclude that it is uncertain “whether [Constantius] equated the Supreme God with Sol.”³⁴ Therefore, he reasons that, although the level of Constantius’ devotion to Sol is uncertain, his use of solar imagery would have influenced Constantine to adopt a

²⁹ Bruun 1992: 224. For more instances of the nimbus as a solar attribute during the Tetrarchy, see Bardill 2012: 97-98.

³⁰ Bardill 2012: 89.

³¹ For the hypothesis that Constantius had been a Christian, see Elliot 1987: 420-438.

³² Baynes 1972: 97.

³³ Whereas ancient monotheists only accepted the existence of a single god whom they worshipped, henotheists worshipped a single god whom they deemed the most powerful, while accepting the existence of other gods. For more on the concept of henotheism, see Versnel 1990: 35-36.

³⁴ Bardill 2012: 89-90.

similar tradition.³⁵ Bardill does not elaborate on how Constantius' henotheism could have affected Constantine, but it is plausible that the henotheistic concept of a Supreme Deity could also have helped Constantine eventually acclimate to the concept of monotheism.

Smith presents counter-interpretations of the evidence used to support the hypothesis that Constantius was either a monotheist or a henotheist. He contends that the apologetic nature of the *Vita Constantini* weakens Eusebius' claim that Constantius was a monotheist. Smith notes that throughout the work Eusebius primarily refers to the Christian god as ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων θεός or "the god over all". This term occurs predominantly in pagan polemics and Christian apologies as part of a shared vocabulary used to facilitate discourse about the divine.³⁶ He argues that this phrase exhibits the apologetic nature of the *Vita Constantini*, which was intended to defend the rise of Christianity to pagan detractors. Smith notes that Eusebius also employed within his *apologiae* a broad definition of Christianity as a monotheistic religion that worshipped only the god over all in order to facilitate pagan monotheists' social and personal acceptance of Christianity.³⁷ In the *Vita Constantini* Eusebius notably applies the phrase ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων θεός to describe the god worshipped by Constantius, not only stating that Constantius was a monotheist but also implying that he was a Christian.³⁸ Since there is no contemporary evidence to suggest that Constantius was a Christian, Smith argues that Eusebius used his broad definition of Christianity to include the emperor within the faith either as propaganda or because he genuinely believed that Constantius was a Christian.³⁹ If Eusebius did consider Constantius a Christian, then this would support the hypothesis that the emperor was a solar monotheist. However, Smith asserts that the apologetic and likely propagandistic nature of the *Vita Constantini* devalues the historicity of Eusebius' account of Constantius' religion.⁴⁰

Smith also presents an analysis of the numismatic and panegyric evidence to refute the hypothesis that Constantius was especially devoted to Sol. He asserts that the solar imagery within the medallion of Arras and *Panegyric 8* refers to the metaphorical light of

³⁵ Bardill 2012: 91-92.

³⁶ Smith 1997b: 135.

³⁷ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 1.4.7; Smith 1997a: 199-200; Smith 1997b: 140. Since ancient Christians worshipped a single god who had generated minor deities to manage the universe, Eusebius' definition of Christianity as worship of a "god over all" is an accurate, not broad, description of Christian belief. This will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 2.

³⁸ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.17.3.

³⁹ Smith 1997b: 140.

⁴⁰ Smith 1997a: 199-200.

Roman authority rather than the light of Sol. First, Smith reasons that if Constantius restored the eternal light of Sol to Britain, this would imply that Allectus had banned or neglected the worship of Sol. However, he argues that numismatic evidence excludes this possibility because Allectus circulated the image of Sol on his own coinage.⁴¹ Second, *Panegyric 8* explicitly states that Constantius had freed the Romans in Britain by restoring the “*uera imperii lux*/true light of empire” (*Pan. Lat.* 8.19.2; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 140).⁴² Therefore, Smith concludes that the orator of this panegyric and the imagery upon the medallion were conveying Constantius’ connection to the metaphorical light of Roman authority rather than Sol.

Furthermore, Smith contends that *Panegyrics 7* and *6*, the latter delivered in 310 to commemorate Constantine and his vision of Apollo, demonstrate that solar imagery was neither exclusively nor consistently employed for the emperor Constantius. Smith points out that the orator of *Panegyric 7* portrayed both Constantius and Maximian as having a relationship with Sol.⁴³ As we have seen, the orator depicts Sol charioting Constantius to the heavens, but Maximian is also praised by the orator for driving the god’s chariot without erring:

Solus hoc, ut dicitur, potuit deus ille, cuius dona sunt quod uiuimus et uidemus, ut habenas male creditas et currum deuio rectore turbatum reciperet rursumque dirigeret. Cuius simile tu, imperator, etiam facile fecisti (*Pan. Lat.* 7.12.3-4).

They say that only that god, by whose gifts we live and see, was capable of taking up the reins which had been unwisely entrusted and steering the chariot again when it had been thrown off course by its errant driver. You, Emperor, accomplished a similar feat, and even did it with ease (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 207).

Smith argues that since both emperors are connected to Sol, it is difficult to deduce that either Constantius or Maximian held him in reverence above any other deity. Smith also asserts that a comparison of Constantius’ ascension narrative found in *Panegyrics 7* and *6* demonstrates that the attribution of a specific deity to Constantius only reflects the rhetorical style of each individual orator.⁴⁴ Whereas the orator of *Panegyric 7* declares that Constantius

⁴¹ *RIC* 5B, Londinium 4, 26; Camulodunum 84, pp. 558, 560, 566; Smith 1997a: 195.

⁴² For more equations of Roman authority to light, see *Pan. Lat.* 8.10.1 and 9.18.3.

⁴³ Smith 1997a: 192-193.

⁴⁴ Smith 1997a: 193-194.

was taken to the heavens by Sol, the orator of *Panegyric 6* claims that it was “Jupiter himself [who] extended his right hand to [the emperor]” (*Pan. Lat.* 6.7.3; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 227). Smith maintains that the inconsistency within these panegyrics demonstrates that there was not any established tradition as to which god accompanied Constantius to heaven. Therefore, he concludes that the choice of deity was left to the discretion of the orator and cannot be used to decipher Constantius’ religion.

Finally, Smith turns his attention to a grand scale analysis of the numismatic evidence within the Tetrarchy between 284 and 306 in order to determine the frequency with which Sol appeared on each emperor’s coinage. Smith begins with a categorization of the imperial coinage from this period tetrarch by tetrarch. He then sub-categorizes these coins based upon the featured deities. As mentioned briefly above, this categorization demonstrates that Constantius produced five issues depicting Sol throughout his reign. However, Hercules and Jupiter not only appear on the majority of his coinage but are also heralded as his *conseruator*, a title that Sol never received from Constantius.⁴⁵ If the argument is made that Constantius had a special connection to Sol because he appeared on the emperor’s coins outside of the dynastic deities, then the appearance of Sol must be taken into account on the coins of his imperial colleagues. Smith found that Diocletian minted a total of eleven issues depicting Sol, while Galerius minted fifteen.⁴⁶ Following this argument the entire Tetrarchy had a special connection to Sol. Although Constantius and Galerius might only have had limited control over the deities appearing on their coinage during their tenure as caesares, Smith notes that Constantius did not mint any coins depicting Sol when he became an augustus.⁴⁷ The numismatic evidence has led Smith to conclude that there is yet again no indication that Constantius worshipped Sol as a monotheist.⁴⁸ Smith asserts that his research indicates that Constantius was a polytheist who worshipped all the gods as equal divinities. However, the most his analysis demonstrates is that we cannot completely trust Eusebius’ references to Constantius’ personal beliefs and there is no evidence for such beliefs in the official imagery presented in panegyrics and the coinage.

⁴⁵ Smith 1997a: 204-205.

⁴⁶ Smith 1997a: 204. For a complete list of coins depicting Sol, Jupiter, and Hercules on the coins of Constantius, see Smith 1997a: 204 n. 53.

⁴⁷ Smith 1997a: 205.

⁴⁸ Smith 1997a: 207-208.

Since scholarly analyses of the literary and numismatic evidence cannot prove whether or not Constantius held monotheist beliefs, historians have employed Constantius' mild treatment of Christians during the Great Persecution to support their hypothesis. There is near scholarly consensus that Constantius refused to fully implement the terms of the persecution edicts within his realms of Britain and Gaul because both Eusebius and Lactantius agree on this point. The first persecution edict, promulgated on 24 February 303, ordered the destruction of churches, scriptures and liturgical books; reduced the status of affluent Christians to *humiliores* so they could be tortured; and threatened enslavement to imperial freedmen who refused to sacrifice.⁴⁹ According to Lactantius, Constantius only "allowed the churches... to be destroyed" in his territories of Gaul and Britain in order to appear as though he complied with the orders of his superiors, but did not harm any Christians (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 15.7; Creed 1984: 23). Eusebius corroborates Lactantius' account, but provides a slightly altered version of events: he claims in both the *Vita Constantini* and the *Historia ecclesiastica* that Constantius did not enforce any terms of the edicts at all.⁵⁰ Gibbon proposes that this discrepancy is due to Lactantius' describing the events of Constantius' term as caesar from 303 to 305 and Eusebius describing the events from the emperor's term as augustus between May 305 until July 306.⁵¹ This would appear to be the case since Eusebius vaguely mentions in the *De martyribus Palaestinae* that the first two years of the persecutions, 303 to 305, affected the region of Gaul, which implies that Constantius must have complied with Diocletian's edict to some extent.⁵² Historians who maintain that Constantius was a devotee of Sol have proposed that Constantius refused to persecute the Christians because, as a monotheist, he sympathized with their plight. However, the only explicit mention of Constantius' monotheism comes from Eusebius who, as we have seen, may not be the most reliable source on the matter. Even if Constantius was not motivated by his own monotheistic beliefs to abstain from persecuting the Christians, it is still plausible that his aversion to the policy of persecution may have taught Constantine to be open-minded towards Christianity.

⁴⁹ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 8.2.4; Euseb., *Mart. Pal.* 1.1; Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 12.1, 13.1-2, 15.5; Clarke 2005: 650-651.

⁵⁰ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 8.13.12-13; Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.13. However, Eusebius may have claimed this in *Vit. Const.* in order to avoid contradicting his implication that Constantius was a Christian.

⁵¹ Gibbon 1776: 674 n. 164.

⁵² Euseb., *Mart. Pal.* 13.12.

Constantius' position as a Roman emperor has provided historians with numerous resources to develop hypotheses on how his religious beliefs may have influenced his son's religious attitude, but there is comparatively little evidence to aid historians in determining the religion of Helena prior to 312. Eusebius and Eustathius for the most part focus on Helena's life and religion after her son had won the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. According to Eusebius, Helena was a pious Christian who oversaw the construction of shrines in Jerusalem shortly before her death, around the year 328.⁵³ Athanasius only briefly mentions Helena in a passage discussing Eustathius, bishop of Antioch, wherein the author implies that she had sympathies for the Arian doctrine.⁵⁴ According to Athanasius, Eustathius "hated the Arian heresy and would not receive those who adopted its tenets... [he was] falsely accused before the Emperor Constantine, and a charge invented against him, that he had insulted his mother" (Athanasius, *Hist. arian.* 4.1; Schaff et. al. 1892: 271). As for Helena's religion prior to 312, Eusebius provides one small clue in the *Vita Constantini* in the portion dedicated to eulogizing her. Eusebius mentions that Constantine had converted his mother to Christianity:

ὄν πρὸς τοῖς ἅπασιν καὶ τῆς εἰς τὴν γειναμένην ὀσίας μακαρίζειν ἄξιον, οὕτω μὲν αὐτὴν θεοσεβῆ καταστήσαντα οὐκ οὔσαν πρότερον, ὡς αὐτῷ δοκεῖν ἐκ πρώτης τῷ κοινῷ σωτῆρι μεμαθητεῦσθαι... (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.47.2)

He deserves to be blessed, all else apart, for his piety to the one who bore him. So far had he made her Godfearing, though she had not been such before, that she seemed to him to have been a disciple of the common Saviour from the first... (Cameron and Hall 1999: 139).

Even Eusebius who has a tendency to christianize his subjects does not attempt to claim Helena was a Christian in her early life. This passage, and the lack of supplementary contemporary evidence, has led Hans Drijvers to conclude that Helena was a pagan before she converted. However, determining which cult, or cults, she adhered to is impossible. Drijvers also asserts that since Constantine converted his mother, Helena's conversion has a *terminus post quem* of 312 because after this point he had become actively involved in the Church, though whether or not as a convert himself at this point is still uncertain.⁵⁵ This

⁵³ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.41-43.

⁵⁴ Drijvers 1992: 38.

⁵⁵ Drijvers 1992: 35-36.

apparently definitive statement has not stopped historians from developing alternative theories for Helena's religion.

Joseph Vogt hypothesizes that Helena was Jewish before she converted to Christianity. He contends that the fifth-century legend from the *Actus Silvestri* about Helena's being Jewish may contain historical value.⁵⁶ Therein the author claims that Helena had disapproved of Constantine's conversion to Christianity because she had hoped that he would adopt the Jewish faith. Nonetheless, she also decided to convert after witnessing a miracle performed by Pope Sylvester.⁵⁷ Vogt proposes that the oration *De obitu Theodosii*, which the bishop Ambrose delivered on the death of Theodosius I in 395, provides evidence to support the claim about Helena's religion in the *Actus Silvestri*. Although Ambrose neither explicitly states nor implies that Helena was originally Jewish, he does claim that she uncovered Christ's cross during her sojourn in Jerusalem in 326.⁵⁸ Since Christians blamed Jews for the death of Christ, Vogt argues that Helena aimed to uncover the cross in order to assuage her guilt over her people's involvement in the death of the Saviour.⁵⁹ Therefore, he concludes that the literary evidence suggests that Helena had originally been Jewish. However, Drijvers dismisses this hypothesis because Vogt uses sources that are historically suspect. First, Ambrose provides the first extant narrative of Helena's finding of the cross nearly seventy years after her death, which decreases the historicity of his account.⁶⁰ Second, Christian literature began to assert the moral superiority of Christians over Jews beginning in the mid-fourth century. Since Constantine's court is Jewish instead of pagan in the *Actus Silvestri*, the author probably made Helena Jewish in order to conform to this literary motif.⁶¹

While Helena's originally being Jewish is certainly an attractive hypothesis because it would easily explain Constantine's transition to Christianity, it does not correspond with the admittedly small amount of contemporary literature we have on the topic. The most we can confidently conclude about Helena's religion is that she was not a Christian prior to 312 because even Eusebius does not claim that she was originally a Christian. Otherwise, though

⁵⁶ Vogt 1976: 216-217.

⁵⁷ Mombritius 1910: 508-531.

⁵⁸ Ambrose, *De obit. Theo.* 43-46.

⁵⁹ Vogt 1976: 219-222.

⁶⁰ Drijvers 1992: 35-36; cf. Drake 1976: 77; Drake 2000: 275-276.

⁶¹ Drijvers 1992: 37-38.

we cannot discern any influence Helena had over Constantine's decision to convert to Christianity, we can see the influence Constantine had over his mother's conversion.

This section has analyzed the religion of Constantine's parents prior to 312 in order to discern how their religious beliefs may have influenced his decision to convert to Christianity. As we have seen, there is a significant amount of literary and numismatic evidence connecting Constantius to Sol, but it is difficult to determine from the surviving evidence whether he worshipped the sun-god as a monotheist, henotheist, or polytheist, if at all. Moreover, Constantius' reluctance to harm Christians during the Great Persecution does not definitively prove that his sympathy for their plight came from his own monotheistic beliefs. Whether or not Constantius was a monotheist, it is plausible that his refusal to harm his subjects based on their religious beliefs would have led Constantine to become open-minded towards the Christian religion. Finally, the literary evidence provides little information about Helena's religion prior to 312, but it appears as though she was originally pagan and converted after Constantine became actively involved in the Church. Therefore, she does not appear to have had an influence on her son's religion.

Political Influences

We will discuss below how Alföldi, Jones, and Barnes maintain that the importance of the looming battle against Maxentius in defining the future of Constantine's career would have been sufficient motivation to lead Constantine to change his allegiance to the deity that he believed would be the most powerful, in this case the Christian god. At present let us discuss Drake's proposal that the religio-political climate in the empire preceding this battle provided additional motivation for Constantine: primarily, the struggle for imperial legitimacy during civil war and the simultaneous issue of the "Christian question" faced by the imperial contenders.⁶² Drake provides an analysis on how the different religious policies within the empire between 306 and 312 increased the political influence of the Christian constituency, which eventually led Constantine to adopt their god as his patron in a scheme for religious legitimization.

⁶² Modern historians, such as Drake, Potter, and Leithart, have used this phrase, or "the Christian problem," to describe the dilemma a Roman emperor faced when deciding how to approach a religion that challenged the polytheism and religious rituals of the state religion in a manner that would ensure social stability and the security of the empire.

Drake hypothesizes that when Constantine came to power in 306 as a usurper, he implemented a policy of religious tolerance and restitution of property towards the Christian constituency in order to expand his power-base outside the traditional source of legitimization, the pagan constituency.⁶³ Constantine's religious policy, also implemented in Italy and Africa in 306 by the usurper Maxentius, opposed the policy of persecution enforced by Galerius and Maximinus in the eastern provinces.⁶⁴ Drake proposes that these diametrically opposed religious policies created a political imbalance within in the empire between 306 and 312 that empowered Christians, because they had the opportunity to ally themselves with the emperor who would offer them a better quality of life. Moreover, he contends that the policies in the West made it more difficult than before the Great Persecution to resolve the "Christian question" throughout the empire.⁶⁵ Drake maintains that Galerius agitated the existing socio-political imbalance when he issued an edict of toleration on 30 April 311, which only conceded the failure of the persecutions and granted tolerance of Christian worship, because Christians knew they could receive better treatment.⁶⁶ Drake argues that Constantine's progressive policy placed him at the forefront of the imperial contenders because he gained the newly empowered Christian constituency to his side as the persecuting emperors alienated themselves by granting toleration only grudgingly. Moreover, Maximinus alienated himself further from the Christian constituency by resuming the persecutions on 26 November 311 and they lasted until his death in late August or early September of 313.⁶⁷

Drake proposes that Constantine only adopted the Christian god as his patron deity when he perceived it to be the most politically expedient option. After Constantine had been acclaimed emperor by his father's troops on 25 July 306, he quickly sought legitimization for his power from Galerius. A year later Constantine accepted Maximian's offer to marry him to his daughter, Fausta, in order to secure an alliance that would legitimize Constantine's position in the Tetrarchy as part of the Herculean dynasty.⁶⁸ This claim to legitimacy ultimately disintegrated in 310 when Maximian seized power over Constantine's troops,

⁶³ Drake 2000: 167, 171-172.

⁶⁴ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 24.9; Optatus, *De schism. don.* 1.18.

⁶⁵ Drake 2000: 165, 184.

⁶⁶ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 35.4.

⁶⁷ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.6-7, 9.6.2; Barnes 1981: 159. For the year of Maximinus' death, see *PLRE* 1, Galerius Valerius Maximinus Daia 12, p. 579. See Creed 1984: 123 n. 49.2 for a more precise time frame.

⁶⁸ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 25.1-5, 27.1-2.

claiming that he had died during his campaign against the Franks.⁶⁹ As the strength of Constantine's legitimacy dwindled in the wake of Maximian's military *coup*, Drake argues that he set aside any legitimization from the Tetrarchy and began to rely on a religious justification. Drake asserts that *Panegyric* 6 exhibits the religiosity that Constantine adopted into his politics after the *coup*.⁷⁰

Vere enim profecto illi superum templa patuerunt, receptusque est consessu caelitem Ioue ipso dexteram porrigente. Quin immo statim sententiam rogatus cui imperium decerneret, dixit ut decebat Constantium Pium: manifeste enim sententia patris electus es, imperator... cum omnium deorum fuerit illa sententia... iam tunc enim caelestibus suffragiis ad salutem rei publicae uocabaris, cum ad tempus ipsum quo pater in Britanniam transfretabat... Vidisti enim, credo, Constantine, Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria coronas tibi laureas offerentem, quae tricenum singulae ferunt omen annorum... uidisti teque in illius specie recognouisti, cui totius mundi regna deberi uatum carmina diuina cecinerunt (*Pan. Lat.* 6. 7.3-5, 6.21.4-6).

For in truth immediately the temples of the gods were opened for [Constantius], and he was received by the divine conclave, and Jupiter himself extended his right hand to him. What is more, he was immediately asked his opinion as to whom he would decree the command, and he spoke as befitted Constantius Pius: for manifestly you were chosen, O Emperor, by your father's vote... since that was the opinion of all the gods... For you were summoned even then to the rescue of the State by the votes of the Immortals at the very time when your father was crossing the sea to Britain... For [later] you saw, I believe, O Constantine, your Apollo, accompanied by Victory, offering you laurel wreaths, each one of which carries a portent of thirty years... you saw, and recognized yourself in the likeness of him to whom the divine songs of the bards had prophesied that rule over the whole world was due (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 227-228, 248-250).

This panegyric exhibits a noticeable shift from *Panegyric* 7 that emphasizes Constantine's claim to power through Constantius and the Herculean dynasty.⁷¹ Here, Constantine relies on legitimization from Constantius and his albeit fictional ancestry to Claudius Gothicus reinforced by the approval of the gods.⁷² However, this approach only appealed to the religious conscience of pagans. If Constantine wanted to gain religious legitimacy from the Christians, he would have to develop a progressive approach with regard to a constituency that would only recognize the power of and render homage to their own god. Drake argues

⁶⁹ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 29.3-8.

⁷⁰ Drake 2000: 175-176, 185-186.

⁷¹ *Pan Lat.* 7.1.2-5, 7.8.1-2; Drake 2000: 169-170.

⁷² *Pan Lat.* 6.2.2-4.

that before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge Constantine felt the pressure of an uncertain outcome combined with his own unstable claim to legitimacy.⁷³ He contends that Constantine adopted the Christian god in order to “reconcile the imperial need for religious justification with the refusal of Christians to pay divine honors to any other deity.”⁷⁴ However, Drake maintains that Constantine’s decision was not purely political as he was seeking both “a god in whom to believe” and “a policy that he could adopt” in order to unify the empire.⁷⁵ In his view Constantine’s Christianity began as a political strategy that turned into genuine religious devotion.

A. H. M. Jones, on the other hand, refutes the hypothesis that Constantine would have appealed to the Christian constituency in order to strengthen his political or religious power-base. Jones does not perceive an effect upon the social standing of Christians caused by the different religious policies. He argues that Christians remained politically insignificant because of their low social standing and minority status during this period. Jones notes that the majority of the Christian population consisted of the lower to middle classes, who would have held little to no influence within their own communities, let alone upon imperial policy. Since the ruling class remained predominantly pagan, Jones asserts that if Constantine sought to gain the support of a politically relevant religious constituency, then he would have appealed to the pagans.⁷⁶ The social demographics within the empire during this period leads Jones to assert that any positive policies Constantine implemented towards the Christians arose from personal preference and not political acumen. Moreover, he maintains that Constantine’s policy of tolerance and restitution implemented in 306 was nothing more than the continuation of his father’s policy and not an attempt to expand his power-base.⁷⁷ Jones suggests that the impuissance of the Christian constituency would have even made it receptive to a Constantinian religious policy fashioned after Galerius’ policy, which was intended to return the empire to the *status quo ante*.⁷⁸ Since, in his view, Christians remained socially and politically irrelevant, political factors could not have influenced Constantine’s decision to convert.

⁷³ Drake 2000: 178, 191.

⁷⁴ Drake 2000: 191.

⁷⁵ Drake 2000: 191.

⁷⁶ Jones 1948: 79-80.

⁷⁷ Jones 1948: 66, 80.

⁷⁸ Jones 1948: 80.

Furthermore, he claims that it is highly unlikely that Constantine would even have employed religion as a political tool because sincere religious devotion penetrated all spheres of Roman society at the beginning of the fourth century. He contends that the economic and military instability of the third century crisis (235-284) altered Romans' perception of religion and with it their psychology.⁷⁹ Since the inception of the Roman state, Romans had believed that following the correct ritualistic formulas would ensure the goodwill of the gods and preserve the *pax deorum*.⁸⁰ Sincere religious belief was never perceived as a factor that made these religious rituals either more or less potent. Jones maintains that the problems of the third century led Romans to believe that the gods were punishing them for their indifference, which led to sincere religious belief and measures to rectify the situation.⁸¹ The emperor Decius (r. 249-251) ordered an empire-wide sacrifice in order to appease the gods. In Jones' view, Diocletian's command in 298 that all public servants and soldiers must either offer sacrifices or be dismissed, combined with the beginning of the Great Persecution in 303, demonstrates that the ruling class continued to genuinely revere the gods.⁸² The sincere religious devotion that Jones attributes to Constantine has led him to believe that it would have been uncharacteristic of the emperor to employ the gods to manipulate the populace for his political advantage. Moreover, Jones maintains that in the instance that Constantine had been a politically astute "free-thinker," he would never have chosen Christianity to advance his political position.⁸³ Jones' interpretation of the socio-political and religious factors at the beginning of the fourth century has led him to conclude that Constantine converted because he believed solely in the power of the Christian god rather than in the power of the Christian constituency.⁸⁴

However, Jones' argument is problematic because his perception of the psychological character of the third- and fourth-century elite hinges upon the concept that the third century crisis was so catastrophic that it altered Roman perceptions of religion. Since the 1980s historians have scrutinized the impact of the economic and military instability of the third

⁷⁹ Jones 1948: 45.

⁸⁰ Watson 1992: 5-6.

⁸¹ Jones 1948: 43.

⁸² Jones 1948: 46-47.

⁸³ Jones 1948: 79-80.

⁸⁴ Jones 1948: 102.

century upon Roman society. Many have deduced that these turbulences did not have a catastrophic or even drastic affect upon third-century society as a whole.⁸⁵

Christian Witschel contends that monetary inflation in the third century did not place overwhelming economic pressure on all spheres of Roman society as was once claimed. Inflation certainly increased over the course of this century because of the continual debasement of the precious metals in coinage, which ultimately led to a rapid price increase around the 270s. However, Witschel notes that this problem was handled by the economic reforms of both Aurelian and Diocletian with moderate success. Moreover, he argues that modern inflation theories developed for our modern capitalist economy do not accurately portray the affects of inflation on Rome's agrarian society.⁸⁶ He contends that it was mainly those who earned wages, particularly the military, who were primarily affected by this inflation. Diocletian's words in the preface to his Price Edict of 303 supports this notion. Therein, the emperor expresses his ire at the continual price increases plundering the income of soldiers.⁸⁷ Witschel contends that inflation during the third century did not seriously affect the agricultural sector, which made up most of the Roman economy.

Despite this economic situation many provinces in the West were able to maintain relative levels of prosperity. Witschel asserts that throughout this period Africa Proconsularis and Numidia continued to prosper as Rome's primary grain and olive producers. He argues that this is due to the large numbers of "North Africans [who] achieved the status of equestrians or senators."⁸⁸ Witschel maintains that the northern provinces—North Gaul, Germany, and Raetia—began to moderately profit from producing their own food rather than importing from the south. Although the Spanish economy suffered partially from "[the decreased] interest in Spanish export-goods" on the part of the government, the province continued to export and consume goods internally.⁸⁹ Italy experienced perhaps the most marked transformation over the third century with a sharp decrease in exports, which resulted in farmers largely focusing on local agriculture rather than large-scale production of

⁸⁵ Strobel 1993; Witschel 1999; Witschel 2004: 251-281; cf. Liebeschuetz 2002: 11-20; De Blois 2002: 204-217.

⁸⁶ Witschel 2004: 258.

⁸⁷ Allan et al. 2003: 236.

⁸⁸ Witschel 2004: 267.

⁸⁹ Witschel 2004: 265-266.

luxury items.⁹⁰ During the third century there was certainly a shift in the regions wherein certain goods were produced, but this was not detrimental to Roman communities. From Witschel's analysis we may deduce that the agricultural economy of the empire was simply evolving. Moreover, the evidence of relative prosperity in certain regions excludes the concept that third-century Romans as a whole were in a desperate economic, and psychological, position.

Finally, the pressures from internal disruptions and tribal invasions did not affect Roman communities to the degree historians previously believed. Witschel arrives at this conclusion by examining the degree to which attacks influenced habitation trends. He asserts that Spanish communities tended to move from small cities to large country villas. In Witschel's view, this change occurred because of indiscernible internal factors rather than the one-time attacks of the Mauri in the 170s and the Franks in the 260s.⁹¹ North African communities certainly experienced military unrest with the revolts in Mauretania, but Witschel claims that these largely occurred in the hinterlands. He contends that the decrease in epigraphic evidence in African communities during this period does not point to dislocation but rather the reluctance of citizens to invest in large-scale projects.⁹² He concedes that communities in the northern provinces were often permanently displaced because of the Germanic invasions of the 260s and 270s, but does not believe this altered their societal foundations.⁹³

Witschel's analysis demonstrates that the economic and military problems in the third century certainly ushered in a transformation of Roman communities, but these changes were neither catastrophic nor cohesive enough to alter the foundation of Roman society as a whole. Jones' hypothesis that the crisis of the third century was such a shock to Roman society that it altered long-held notions of religious belief does not stand up to scrutiny. Therefore, his argument that Constantine could only have maintained sincere religious belief is untenable. It is still plausible that Constantine converted to Christianity because of sincere religious devotion, but the effects of the third century crisis cannot be used to prove this point. Moreover, this analysis of the third century allows Drake's proposal — that

⁹⁰ Witschel 2004: 262-265.

⁹¹ Witschel 2004: 266.

⁹² Witschel 2004: 257, 268.

⁹³ Witschel 2004: 269-272.

Constantine initially sought to advance his political goals through the Christian god — to be an entirely likely scenario.

The Dream and the Vision of Constantine

Despite scholarly disagreement as to possible political motivations, many historians assert that a religious epiphany before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge played an integral role in Constantine's conversion to one degree or another, with the exception of skeptics like Bardill. The contemporary writings of Lactantius and Eusebius have preserved contrasting versions of this epiphany. Whereas Lactantius asserts that Constantine only experienced a dream before battle instructing him to fight in the name of Christ, Eusebius claims that Constantine witnessed a daytime vision that was sometime later followed by an instructive dream. Historians like Barnes and Alföldi, who present the two predominant hypotheses that are held today, have analyzed these accounts in order to elucidate the nature of the impetus that led to Constantine's conversion. Often historians hold contrasting interpretations of the contemporary evidence, but, more often than not, they arrive at the conclusion that this epiphany altered Constantine's religious allegiance.

Barnes contends that Eusebius provides a historically accurate account of the vision that incited Constantine to turn to the Christian god. More than two decades after the battle, Eusebius records what he claims to be the account told to him by the emperor:

ἀμφὶ μεσημβρινὰς ἡλίου ὥρας, ἤδη τῆς ἡμέρας ἀποκλινούσης, αὐτοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν ἔφη ἐν αὐτῷ οὐρανῷ ὑπερκείμενον τοῦ ἡλίου σταυροῦ τρόπαιον ἐκ φωτὸς συνιστάμενον, γραφὴν τε αὐτῷ συνῆφθαι λέγουσαν τούτῳ νικά... καὶ δὴ διαπορεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἔλεγε, τί ποτε εἶη τὸ φάσμα... ἔνθα δὴ ὑπνοῦντι αὐτῷ τὸν Χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σὺν τῷ φανέντι κατ' οὐρανὸν σημεῖον ὀφθῆναί τε καὶ παρακελεύεσθαι, μίμημα ποιησάμενον τοῦ κατ' οὐρανὸν ὀφθέντος σημείου τούτῳ πρὸς τὰς τῶν πολεμίων συμβολὰς ἀλεξήματι χρῆσθαι (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.28.2, 29).

About the time of the midday sun, when day was just turning, he said he saw with his own eyes, up in the sky and resting over the sun, a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, 'By this conquer.'... He was, he said, wondering to himself what the manifestation might mean... Thereupon, as he slept, the Christ of God appeared to him with the sign which appeared in the sky, and urged him to make himself a copy of the sign which had appeared in the sky, and to use this protection against the attacks of the enemy (Cameron and Hall 1999: 81).

Barnes notes the description of Constantine's vision corresponds to the scientific phenomenon called a solar halo: a circular rainbow that surrounds the sun "when ice crystals in the atmosphere refract sunlight", and the sun "often radiates beams in a cross or asterisk shape."⁹⁴ This similarity has led Barnes to hypothesize that Eusebius has not created a fantastical tale but rather preserved Constantine's experience of a scientific phenomenon, which the emperor interpreted as a heavenly sign.⁹⁵ Following a hypothesis proposed by Peter Weiss, Barnes suggests that Constantine actually witnessed this phenomenon in 310, initially attributing it to Apollo. This is why a pagan version of Constantine's vision can be found in *Panegyric* 6. Barnes maintains that Constantine later re-interpreted the vision and emblem as a sign from the Christian god, leading to the creation of Eusebius' version.⁹⁶ Barnes concludes that this scientific phenomenon easily explains evidence that otherwise would be difficult to comprehend.

Conversely, Barnes hypothesizes that the dream about Christ was a work of fiction created by Lactantius to give Constantine a "conventional religious explanation" for his campaign against Maxentius.⁹⁷ The first account of the dream is recorded in Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum*:

Commonitus est in quiete Constantinus, ut caeleste signum dei notaret in scutis atque proelium committeret (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 44.5).

Constantine was advised in a dream to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers and then engage in battle (Creed 1984: 63).

Barnes recognizes the similarity between the divine dream of Constantine and Judas Maccabeus.⁹⁸ Judas dreamed of the prophet Jeremiah who offered him a gold sword "saying, 'Take this holy sword as a gift from God, and with it you will destroy your enemies'" the night before he engaged in battle with the Seleucid general Nicanor.⁹⁹ The storyline is strikingly similar: the protagonist experiences a bout of pre-battle anxiety followed by an

⁹⁴ Leithart 2010: 78.

⁹⁵ Barnes 1998: 287-289. Edward Neville Da Costa Andrade initially proposed this hypothesis to A. H. M. Jones for his 1948 work *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*. It has been adopted more recently by Weiss and Barnes.

⁹⁶ Weiss 2003: 237-259; Barnes 2011: 75-76; For the development of the symbol from 310 into a christogram or staurogram, see Lenski 2006: 66-67, 70-71.

⁹⁷ Barnes 1981: 43.

⁹⁸ Barnes 1981: 306 n. 147.

⁹⁹ 2 Maccabees 15:15-16 (CEB).

inspirational dream that leaves him with a token that wins the battle. Based on this parallel, Barnes hypothesizes that Lactantius recorded the dream as Constantine's inspiration to legitimize his actions from a Christian perspective.¹⁰⁰ In his view, Eusebius only recorded the dream in the *Vita Constantini* to reconcile his own account with Lactantius', but the dream contains no historical veracity.

However, Andreas Alföldi hypothesizes that it is Lactantius who provides the historically accurate version of events. He contends that Eusebius often provides fantastical accounts of the events in Constantine's life.¹⁰¹ The story of Constantine's flight from Galerius' court to his father in Gaul is a prime example of the author's tendency to embellish. According to Eusebius, Constantine urgently rode to his sick father, laming horses at rest stops to prevent imperial guards from following him. Constantius clung onto life just long enough after his son's arrival to confer upon him the title of augustus.¹⁰² However, both the *Origo Constantini imperatoris* and *Panegyric 6* record that Constantius died only after a season of campaigning with his son against the Picts in Britain.¹⁰³ Alföldi believes that Eusebius buried historical fact underneath layers of drama. Therefore, he argues that Constantine did experience a religious epiphany, but it was a more mundane revelation that led him to the Christian god.

He proposes that Lactantius' dream is the historically accurate account of what transpired before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Alföldi argues that even the most learned men in the empire, pagan philosophers and Christian scholars alike, accepted the influence of the divine in human affairs. The experience of acting upon divine instruction received through a dream was commonplace. Alföldi notes that many votive offerings record such occurrences.¹⁰⁴ In his view, Constantine would have been psychologically predisposed to accept the importance of a dream from the divine. Thus, he concludes that the dream was a genuinely "overwhelming experience" and not an invention to legitimize Constantine to the populace. He maintains that the uncontrollable zeal with which Constantine would later

¹⁰⁰ Barnes 1981: 43.

¹⁰¹ Alföldi 1948: 17-18.

¹⁰² Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.20.

¹⁰³ Bardill 2012: 5, 10; *Orig. Const.* 1.2.7; *Pan. Lat.* 6.7.5.

¹⁰⁴ Alföldi 1948: 19. For more on dreams and visions in the ancient world, see Harris 2009.

campaign for the Christian cause is proof that Constantine experienced a dream telling him to conquer “by this sign.”¹⁰⁵

While Jan Bremmer agrees with Alföldi that Constantine probably experienced a dream rather than a vision prior to battle in 312, he arrived at a slightly different conclusion based on an alternative methodology.¹⁰⁶ Bremmer decided to analyze the five contemporary accounts of Constantine’s divine instruction in order to elucidate the earliest form of the tale and its evolution over time.¹⁰⁷ He notes that in the very first account from *Panegyric 12*, delivered in 313 and discussed at length below, the orator only ever mentions that Constantine had help from a divinity; the identity of and the instructions from this divinity are never mentioned.¹⁰⁸ In the following years, however, Eusebius and Lactantius added further detail about this event in the *Historia ecclesiastica* and *De mortibus persecutorum*, respectively. Eusebius claims that Constantine had adopted a sign of Christ before battle, to which the emperor attributed his victory, and Lactantius states that he had been instructed in a dream to use this sign on the shields of his soldiers.¹⁰⁹ *Panegyric 4*, delivered at Rome in 321 in honour of an absent Constantine, appears to corroborate these last two accounts:

In ore denique est omnium Galliarum exercitus uisos, qui se diuinitus missos prae se ferebant... Flagrabant uerendum nescio quid umbones corusci et caelestium armorum lux terribilis ardebat; tales enim uenerant, ut tui crederentur. Haec ipsorum sermocinatio, hoc inter audientes serebant: ‘Constantinum petimus, Constantino imus auxilio’ (*Pan. Lat.* 4.14. 1-5.).

Finally, it is the talk of all the Gauls that armies were seen which let it be known that they had been divinely sent... Their flashing shields were aflame with something dreadful; their celestial weaponry was ablaze with a terrible glow; for they had come in such a form that they were believed to be yours. This was their discourse, this was the speech they composed in the midst of their hearers: “We seek Constantine, we go to help Constantine” (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 357-358).

Since none of the sources claim that Constantine had a vision until the composition of the *Vita Constantini* in 337, Bremmer reasons that the following was the most common story circulating among the populace in the years after the battle: the Christian god had instructed

¹⁰⁵ Alföldi 1948: 18-19.

¹⁰⁶ I say “probably” because Bremmer himself repeatedly mentions the incertitude of the evidence on this topic throughout his article.

¹⁰⁷ Bremmer 2006: 3-7.

¹⁰⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 12.2.5.

¹⁰⁹ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.10-11; Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 44.5.

Constantine to place a Christian sign on his shields in order to achieve a victory over Maxentius. Furthermore, Bremmer maintains that Lactantius probably provides the more accurate account because he records that Licinius also had a divine dream prior to his battle against Maximinus in 313. In his view, Licinius would not have reported experiencing divine instruction in a way that was any less miraculous than his imperial colleague.¹¹⁰

On the other hand, Bremmer hypothesizes that Constantine actually fabricated the story of the combined vision and dream found in the *Vita Constantini* to make himself seem divinely inspired to his army, the bishops, and pagans.¹¹¹ He arrives at this conclusion because he found five characteristics in this version that undermine its historicity. First, Eusebius appears to never have heard of the vision and dream when Constantine told it to him around 335 because Constantine swore oaths to confirm the veracity of his account, which suggests that Eusebius must have expressed some doubts. He finds it unbelievable that Constantine could have had a vision twenty-three years prior and that Eusebius, “one of the most erudite scholars of his time”, had never heard of it. Second, he notes that neither Constantine nor Eusebius commit the event to any specific place or time but rather during “a campaign he was conducting somewhere” (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.28.2; Cameron and Hall 1999: 81). In his view, this vagueness undermines the authenticity of this version. Third, Bremmer points out that tales of ancient battles often include a critical moment wherein divine intervention led to a victory, but here there is no clear moment of crisis.¹¹² Fourth, people in the ancient world commonly attributed their inspiration to either a dream or a vision, as we have seen, but they do not often, if ever, attribute it to both. Fifth, Eusebius claims that Constantine had employed the christogram (☩) as his military insignia since the moment of his inspiration in 312. However, when Eusebius describes this specific emblem, he confesses that it actually came “somewhat later” (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.32.1; Cameron and Hall 1999: 82).¹¹³ These idiosyncrasies have led Bremmer to conclude that Constantine mixed fact with fiction to create his version.

Alternatively, Jonathan Bardill hypothesizes that neither of these accounts actually describe what influenced Constantine’s decision to turn to the Christian god. He contends

¹¹⁰ Bremmer 2006: 7-8.

¹¹¹ For a detailed explanation of why the later version would have appealed to all these groups, see Bremmer 2006: 16-18.

¹¹² Bremmer 2006: 10.

¹¹³ Bremmer 2006: 10-11.

that both the dream and the vision were each individual fictional constructions of Lactantius and Eusebius in an attempt to endow Constantine with religious legitimization. Bardill argues that the dream Lactantius ascribed to Constantine in 312 is suspiciously similar to the one he records as Licinius experiencing a year later. The night before Licinius engaged in battle with Maximinus “an angel of God stood over him, telling him to arise quickly and pray to the supreme God with all his army; the victory would be his if he did this” (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 46.3-4; Creed 1984: 67).¹¹⁴ Following an argument made by Henri Grégoire, Bardill contends that “Lactantius was writing when the political and military situation was still in flux, when neither Constantine nor Licinius had an anti-Christian policy.”¹¹⁵ Thus, Lactantius ascribed religious sanction to both emperors who had developed reputations for tolerance in order to justify their actions against their fellow emperors.

Bardill contends that the vision described by Eusebius served the same purpose, but he chose to fashion Constantine’s religious epiphany after the more famous conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul experienced a vision “about noon... as [he] was on the road, [he] saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around [him] and [his] companions. [They] all fell to the ground, and [he] heard a voice saying to [him] in Aramaic, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”¹¹⁶ The tale of Judas Maccabeus from the Old Testament is not the only biblical precedent for divine inspiration from dreams. In the New Testament, Joseph also received divine instruction from three separate dreams that guided him to marry Mary, despite her pregnancy, and to protect the child Jesus from King Herod.¹¹⁷ Therefore, there is a strong Christian precedent for the divine inspiration experienced by Constantine. Bardill does not conclude that this is irrefutable evidence that Eusebius’ account is completely fictional, but he does believe that it places it under strong suspicion. Bardill hypothesizes that “either Eusebius or Constantine adjusted the details of what really happened (if anything happened at all) to imply a Biblical parallel.”¹¹⁸

Historians have employed different methodologies in order to determine what sort of epiphany led Constantine to adopt the Christian god as his patron before the battle of the

¹¹⁴ Alföldi 1948: 19, who contends that Licinius created his dream in order to gain the same renown as Constantine; Bardill 2012: 169.

¹¹⁵ Grégoire 1939: 346; Bardill 2012: 169.



¹¹⁶ Acts 26:13-14 (NIV).

¹¹⁷ Matthew 1:20-21, 2:13, 2:19-20 (NIV).

¹¹⁸ Bardill 2012: 160.

Milvian Bridge. Since the literary evidence records that Constantine experienced two daytime visions, Barnes proposes that Constantine had witnessed a solar halo in 310 that he initially attributed the vision to Apollo, but later reinterpreted as a sign from the Christian god. However, Alföldi maintains that Constantine only had an instructive dream because Greco-Romans were psychologically predisposed to expect divine instruction in this way. While Bremmer agrees with Alföldi that Lactantius provides the most probable account, he arrived at this conclusion based on a chronological analysis of the contemporary sources. He also proposes that it was Constantine, not Eusebius, who created the fantastical tale of the vision at the end of his reign. Alternatively, Bardill suggests that Lactantius and Eusebius either exaggerated the events or simply created these narratives in order to give Constantine religious legitimization for his actions because of the strong literary precedent for dreams and visions in the Old and New Testament. This section has demonstrated the difficulty in determining the exact circumstances of Constantine's religious epiphany, or if there actually was one. In either case, these narratives demonstrate that the populace began to believe that Constantine had placed his faith in the Christian god and adopted a cipher of Christ as his military insignia before battle.

Constantine's Saving Sign

Many historians assert that Constantine demonstrated his new allegiance to the Christian god when he placed a cipher of Christ on his military standards prior to the battle with Maxentius.¹¹⁹ Historians agree that Constantine adopted a new military insignia at this time because the numismatic evidence beginning in 315 corroborates Lactantius' and Eusebius' accounts. Lactantius claims that Constantine placed "a slanted letter X with the top of its head bent round" on top of his military standard (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 44.5; Creed 1984: 63). His description would suggest that Constantine adopted a staurogram (), the Christian *nomen sacrum* for the Greek noun σταυρός ("cross") and verb σταυρόω ("to crucify").¹²⁰ Alternatively, Eusebius implies that Constantine adopted a christogram (), the *nomen sacrum* for the noun Χριστός ("Christ"), because he describes the emblem as formed from "[a] rho being intersected in the middle by chi" (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.31.1; Cameron

¹¹⁹ Jacob Burckhardt is the exception. His hypothesis will be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹²⁰ Grigg 1977: 21; cf. Drake 2000: 201-204.

and Hall 1999: 81).¹²¹ This disparity in the description of the emblem has prompted some debate among historians about which emblem Constantine chose to fight under in 312.¹²² Nonetheless, historians agree that Constantine settled on the christogram because it appeared on his helmet on certain silver medallions minted at Ticinum in 315 and on small bronze coins minted in Constantinople between 327 and 328.¹²³ The Christian overtones of both of these symbols have led historians to believe that Constantine had allied himself with the Christian god.

Bardill hypothesizes that Constantine chose either the staurogram or the christogram as his military insignia because both held pagan and Christian significance. He notes that the staurogram could have been interpreted as the Egyptian *ankh* (☩) that symbolizes life.¹²⁴ The intertwined chi-rho lettering of the christogram also held an ambiguous meaning within Greco-Roman society and therefore could be endowed with multiple meanings. Pagans would have been familiar with this symbol in a secular context long before it gained religious significance within the Christian community. Numerous Greek manuscripts demonstrate that pagan authors often used the symbol as short-hand for any word where the main consonants were chi and rho. For instance, the author or reader of the first-century manuscript papyrus *BM Pap. 2055* inserted this symbol to represent the Greek adjective *χρηστός* (“useful”) to indicate the utility of the adjoining passage.¹²⁵ The symbol also appears within the text of *BM Pap. 131* to abbreviate the noun *χρόνος* (“time”).¹²⁶ Bardill suggests that Constantine chose an emblem to represent his faith that was ambiguous enough to also appeal to pagans because he would have had difficulty uniting his primarily pagan troops underneath an explicitly Christian sign.¹²⁷

Historians believe that Constantine’s victory over Maxentius underneath a Christian *nomen sacrum* solidified his devotion to the Christian god. They argue that Constantine’s pagan *do ut des* — “I give so that you may give” — concept of religious piety required him to render homage to the deity who had ensured his victory in battle. According to Eusebius,

¹²¹ Not to be confused with the chrismon (✱) that combined the first letters from Ἰησοῦς and Χριστός to denote the name “Jesus Christ.” This *nomen sacrum* was not as popular among Christian authors before the fourth century as the christogram. See Oikonomides 1986: 73,112.

¹²² Bardill 2012: 168; cf. Odahl 2010: 322 n. 14.

¹²³ *RIC* 7, Ticinum 36; Constantinople 19, 26, pp. 364, 572, 573.

¹²⁴ Bardill 2012: 166-168.

¹²⁵ Turner 1971: 98; Bardill 2012: 306, n. 18.

¹²⁶ Turner 1971: 102; Bardill 2012: 306, n. 18.

¹²⁷ Bardill 2012: 220.

because Constantine believed that this emblem was responsible for his victory, he had a colossal statue erected of himself holding a standard with what might have been a christogram upon a base with the following inscription:¹²⁸

Τούτῳ τῷ σωτηριώδει σημείῳ, τῷ ἀληθεῖ ἐλέγχῳ τῆς ἀνδρείας τὴν πόλιν ὑμῶν ἀπὸ ζυγοῦ τοῦ τυράννου διασωθεῖσαν ἠλευθέρωσα, ἔτι μὴν καὶ τὴν σύγκλητον καὶ τὸν δῆμον Ῥωμαίων τῇ ἀρχαίᾳ ἐπιφανείᾳ καὶ λαμπρότητι ἐλευθερώσας ἀποκατέστησα (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.11).

By this saving sign, the true proof of valor, I saved your city from the yoke of the tyrant and liberated her. I also freed the senate and the people of Rome and restored their ancient fame and splendor (Maier 2007: 296).

Since the christogram belonged to the Christian religion, most historians assert that Constantine devoted himself to the patronage of the Christian Church in gratitude to their god and in order to ensure his benevolence in the future. While historians like Jones and Barnes maintain that the religious epiphany and the Christian emblem prove that Constantine had converted to Christianity immediately after battle, it is uncertain whether or not Constantine considered himself converted at this point in time.¹²⁹

This section has aimed to elucidate scholarly assertions that the christogram demonstrates that Constantine either allied himself with or converted to Christianity after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Many historians maintain that Constantine adopted a cipher of Christ — whether the staurogram or the christogram — as his military insignia prior to battle. Since Constantine originated from a family with a pagan concept of piety, historians assert that he would have been obligated to render homage to the god who had ensured his victory in battle. Therefore, they maintain that the christogram at least exhibits Constantine's new allegiance to the Christian god.

Sacrifice on the Capitoline

François Paschoud and Barnes believe that when Constantine entered Rome he may have given some indication of his new religious allegiance. They have focused on whether or not he kept with pagan tradition by offering sacrifices to Jupiter on the Capitoline in

¹²⁸ It should be noted that Eusebius is the only contemporary source that provides a description of the statue, which makes his Christian interpretation of the symbol suspect.

¹²⁹ For the difficulty pinpointing the moment of Constantine's conversion, see Bremmer 2006.

gratitude for his victory. Historians have carefully analyzed *Panegyric 12*, delivered in 313 to commemorate Constantine's victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, and Zosimus' *Historia nova* in order to discern the emperor's course of action. These sources are useful for elucidating the situation because the panegyric describes Constantine's procession through Rome and Zosimus records that at some point in Constantine's career he refused to participate in pagan sacrifices. Barnes and Paschoud have developed conflicting interpretations of the evidence based on fundamentally different perceptions of Constantine's religious mentality and the political implications of sacrificing after his victory.

Barnes initially hypothesizes that Constantine demonstrated his devotion to Christianity by refusing to offer sacrifices to Jupiter after he entered the city. He arrives at this conclusion after analyzing *Panegyric 12*, which commemorated Constantine's victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Barnes notes that this panegyric excludes any kind of sacrifice to the pagan gods in the section describing Constantine's victory procession through the city.¹³⁰ Barnes contends that the author would not have omitted that scene on the grounds of Christian bias because he was a pagan.¹³¹ However, the orator does mention that the crowd censured Constantine for entering the palace too quickly.¹³² Barnes proposes that this omission demonstrates that Constantine did not sacrifice to any deity after his victory, thereby flouting pagan tradition. In his view, Constantine's refusal to sacrifice in 312 is corroborated by Zosimus in the *Historia nova*:

τῆς δὲ πατρίου καταλαβούσης ἑορτῆς, καθ' ἣν ἀνάγκη τὸ στρατόπεδον ἦν εἰς τὸ Καπιτώλιον ἀνιέναι καὶ τὰ νενομισμένα πληροῦν, δεδιὼς τοὺς στρατιώτας ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ἐκοινώνησε τῆς ἑορτῆς. ἐπιπέμψαντος δὲ αὐτῷ φάσμα τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου τὴν εἰς τὸ Καπιτώλιον ἄνοδον ὄνειδίζον ἀνέδην, τῆς ἱερᾶς ἀγιστείας ἀποστατήσας, εἰς μῖσος τὴν γερούσιαν καὶ τὸν δῆμον ἀνέστησεν (Zos., *Hist. nov.* 2.29.5).

Lorsqu'arriva la fête traditionnelle au cours de laquelle il fallait que l'armée monte au Capitole et accomplisse les rites coutumiers, Constantin craignit les soldats et participa à la fête; mais l'Égyptien lui ayant envoyé une apparition blâmant sans réserve cette montée au Capitole, il se tint éloigné de la sainte cérémonie et excita la haine du Sénat et du peuple (Paschoud 2000: 101).

¹³⁰ *Pan. Lat.* 12.19.

¹³¹ Barnes 1981: 46. However, Nixon (1995: 288-289) states that little is known about the orator other than his old age and predilection for an unconventional panegyric style.

¹³² *Pan. Lat.* 12.19.3-4.

Barnes suggests that the ire Constantine prompted from his refusal to participate in the sacrifices correlates to the complaints he received from the crowd, described in the panegyric. He concludes that Constantine refused to sacrifice upon his entrance into Rome because doing so would contradict the tenets of his newfound devotion to Christianity.¹³³

Upon a reappraisal of the evidence, Barnes later proposed that Constantine did not perform a sacrifice to Jupiter because doing so would have resulted in negative political ramifications. He contends that if Constantine had sacrificed after his procession through Rome, then it would appear as though he had carried out a triumph over a fellow citizen. Since Barnes does not explain why this would have been offensive, let us turn to an explanation provided by Mary Beard: Romans had long been opposed to the idea of celebrating triumphs in cases of civil war because “[they were intended to be] a celebration of victory over external enemies only... a triumph in civil war, with Roman citizens dragged along where the exotic barbarian foe should be, [would be] a contradiction in terms.”¹³⁴ Barnes points out that this tradition did not allow Octavian to celebrate a triumph over Marcus Antonius in 29 BC after the Battle of Actium in 31. Instead, he was only permitted to celebrate his simultaneous victory over the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra and his victory over the Dalmatae.¹³⁵ Similarly, Vespasian and Titus could not celebrate their victory over Vitellius in the year 69, but held a triumph a year after quelling the Great Jewish Revolt in 70.¹³⁶ Barnes postulates that Constantine would have alienated Roman senators if he had sacrificed after his procession to the Capitol. Therefore, Barnes concludes that Constantine’s need to maintain the support of the Roman senate primarily dissuaded him from performing a sacrifice.¹³⁷

However, the evidence that Barnes presents to demonstrate that Constantine could not have celebrated a triumph over Maxentius ignores the fact that victories over foreigners could simply be used as a pretext to celebrate a defeat of a political opponent. Sulla and Julius Caesar are perhaps the best examples of Roman generals using military triumphs to celebrate victories in civil war. Sulla was granted a triumph and annual games in 80 BC to commemorate his victory over the Samnites at the Battle of the Colline Gate. However, the

¹³³ Barnes 1981: 44, 46.

¹³⁴ Beard 2007: 123.

¹³⁵ Barnes 2011: 83.

¹³⁶ Barnes 2011: 83.

¹³⁷ Barnes 2011: 83.

participation of the Samnites in this battle alongside the supporters of Marius and Cinna only provided a pretext for Sulla to celebrate the defeat of his political opponents.¹³⁸ Similarly, Julius Caesar was permitted to hold triumphs in 46 BC to celebrate his victories over the Gauls and Africans, but at the close of the triumphal ceremonies he presented to the crowd the portraits of Romans who had been slain in conflicts with him. In the *Bellum civile*, Appian claims that Caesar only avoided showing a portrait of the recently deceased Pompey because of the grief Romans felt at his loss.¹³⁹ It is true that when Caesar blatantly celebrated his final defeat over the Pompeian faction at the Battle of Munda he prompted the ire of citizens, but this may only have taught his successors to be more cautious.¹⁴⁰ It is plausible that the triumphs of Augustus and Vespasian and Titus offered the emperors an opportunity to celebrate their victory over their political opponents, but they would not have made the public aware of their intentions. Therefore, if Constantine had developed a pretext to celebrate his victory over Maxentius then it would not have been inappropriate for him to sacrifice to Jupiter Capitolinus. Moreover, the description in *Panegyric 12* of Constantine progressing through the streets of Rome surrounded by a cheering crowd and the dedication of a triumphal arch in 315 in honour of his victory over Maxentius would suggest that some sort of triumph took place. The question then remains whether or not Constantine would have offered a sacrifice at the end of this procession.

Before delving into Paschoud's position on the political impact of a sacrifice after the defeat of a fellow citizen, his interpretation of Zosimus' account must be taken into consideration. Paschoud argues that simple philological errors in the *Historia nova* may have led to a misinterpretation of the text and therefore the event at hand. As we have seen, Zosimus claims in section 2.29.5 that Constantine participated in ritual sacrifice and then he declined to participate. Some historians, like Barnes, interpret this as one event wherein Constantine was prepared to ascend the Capitoline, but quickly changed his mind. However, Paschoud argues that the clarity of the passage was lost either by Zosimus' hasty copying of his source, Eunapius, or by pre-existing errors present in either Eunapius or in his sources. Paschoud suggests that simply placing the adverb ὕστερον ("afterwards") into the sentence

¹³⁸ App., *B. Civ.* 1.93; Vell. Pat., *Hist. Rom.* 2.27.

¹³⁹ App., *B. Civ.* 2.101.

¹⁴⁰ Plut., *Vit. Caes.* 56.

after ἐπιπέμψαντος δὲ (“but having sent”) would clarify that the following sentence took place at a later date, suggesting that Constantine had sacrificed in 312.¹⁴¹

Paschoud supports this hypothesis with an analysis of Constantine’s relationship with the Roman senate in 312 compared to 315. Although Paschoud does not discuss why it would or would not have been appropriate for Constantine to hold a triumph, he implies that he did so. He argues that if Constantine refused to sacrifice during this procession as imperial tradition dictated, then he would have aroused political tension with pagan traditionalists who made up the majority of the senatorial class. However, shortly after his victory the senate conferred upon him the title of *maximus augustus* placing him at the top of the tetrachic hierarchy. Paschoud contends that such an endowment of power indicates that Constantine and the senate were on excellent terms with no hint of tension.¹⁴² Conversely, Paschoud proposes that Ossius, the bishop of Cordoba who is referred to as “the Egyptian” in Zosimus, dissuaded Constantine from sacrificing on his second visit to Rome in 315, creating a rift between the emperor and the senate.¹⁴³ He argues that this tension is reflected in the eleven-year interval between Constantine’s next sojourn in Rome in 326 and the brevity of this final visit: whereas Constantine had stayed in Rome for around two months in both 312 and 315, he only stayed in the city for two weeks in 326 and never returned.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Paschoud concludes that Constantine sacrificed upon his entrance into Rome in 312, but not in 315.

Although Paschoud asserts that Constantine did sacrifice to Jupiter Capitolinus after his victory over Maxentius in 312, he does not believe that it undermines the sincerity of his conversion to Christianity. As we have seen Paschoud believes that Constantine’s desire to cultivate positive relations with the pagan senate of Rome motivated him to participate in the ritual. He also argues that the literary sources demonstrate the emperor’s reluctance to perform a sacrifice.¹⁴⁵ As we have seen, Zosimus claims that Constantine only ascended the Capitoline because he feared his soldiers. Paschoud proposes that Zosimus’ account actually records a perceptible moment of reluctance when Constantine realized that he was about to

¹⁴¹ Paschoud 1971: 350.

¹⁴² Paschoud 2000: 239 n. 39.

¹⁴³ Paschoud 1971: 342-343. Zosimus places this date in 326, but Paschoud argues that it is unlikely that a bishop in such proximity to an emperor who had a predilection for Christianity would have waited over a decade to dissuade him from contravening its religious tenets.

¹⁴⁴ Paschoud 1971: 352-353; Barnes 1982: 71-72, 77.

¹⁴⁵ Zos., *Hist. nov.* 2.29.5.

make contravene a central Christian tenet. Many Christians during the Great Persecution had certainly chosen to be executed rather than sacrifice, but Athanasius records that some Christians did participate in pagan rituals in order to spare their lives.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, it is plausible that Constantine sacrificed at this time in order to spare his political career. Furthermore, Paschoud maintains that Constantine's reluctance to sacrifice explains the omission of the ritual from the procession scene in *Panegyric 12*: the orator omitted the sacrifice in order to appease Constantine because he was aware that the emperor had only participated reluctantly.¹⁴⁷ Thus, Paschoud concludes that the literary evidence demonstrates that Constantine did not want to sacrifice because of his new religious allegiance, but did so in order to gain the good-will of the pagan constituency when his position in the imperial college was still uncertain.

Historians have attempted to discern whether or not Constantine sacrificed at Rome in 312 in order to determine changes in his religious mentality after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Barnes asserts that the omission of a sacrificial scene during Constantine's victory procession in *Panegyric 12* demonstrates that no such event occurred. Initially, he argued that the resentment of the Roman people expressed in both *Panegyric 12* and the *Historia nova* demonstrates that they had expected Constantine to perform a sacrifice. He concludes that Constantine did not conform to this precedent in order to avoid contravening the tenets of Christianity. After a re-evaluation of the material Barnes now proposes that Constantine did not sacrifice because the celebration of a complete triumph over a fellow citizen would have offended the Roman senate. Therefore, Barnes concludes that politics, not religion, led Constantine to avoid a sacrifice in 312. However, Roman generals often used foreign victories as a pretext to celebrate triumphs over their political rivals. This fact has led Paschoud to assert that the Roman senate would have expected Constantine to perform a sacrifice. He proposes that the literary evidence demonstrates that Constantine participated in the ritual only to ensure the good-will of the pagan senate, but that he was reluctant to do so. Despite the fact that Barnes and Paschoud arrive at different conclusions, they both agree that Constantine's precarious political position would have influenced his decision to sacrifice because he could not risk alienating the pagan constituency. Therefore, it is entirely

¹⁴⁶ Athanasius, *Apol. secun.* 59.1; Athanasius, *Or. Arian.* 2.24; Athanasius, *De synod.* 20.

¹⁴⁷ Paschoud 1971: 351-352.

plausible that Constantine could have sacrificed in 312 without undermining the hypothesis that he now worshipped the Christian god.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to elucidate the conflicting interpretations of the contemporary evidence that have led historians to assert that Constantine converted to Christianity sometime after the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. Since some historians in the first-half of the twentieth century did not perceive any political benefit in converting to the minority religion, they believed that Constantine could only have converted because of personal religious sentiments. Therefore, they developed an interpretation of the solar-imagery from Constantius' reign in a way that provided Constantine with a paternal monotheistic influence. In their view, the monotheism of Constantius facilitated Constantine's acceptance of the Christian god as his patron when he experienced a religious epiphany instructing him to fight Maxentius under a cipher of Christ. This hypothesis remained predominant in scholarship until historians in the second half of the twentieth century began to re-analyze the evidence. Since some of these historians found that the evidence does not necessarily support the hypothesis that Constantius was a solar-monotheist, they sought alternative factors that would have influenced an emperor of a predominantly pagan empire to convert to the minority religion. After an analysis of the socio-religious and political circumstances, they determined that a conversion to Christianity would have been beneficial to imperial contenders who sought to extend their religious legitimization. Therefore, they reason that the religious epiphany that Constantine experienced was the moment wherein he realized he could use Christianity to his political advantage. Since politics and religion were intertwined in Roman society, they believe that Constantine adopted the Christian god as his patron for political advantage and then experienced a gradual, sincere conversion. Despite the disparity in scholarly hypotheses regarding the conversion, many historians agree that Constantine's adoption of a cipher of Christ as his military insignia may have heralded a change in Constantine's religious allegiance. Moreover, they agree that even if Constantine sacrificed during his victory procession in Rome, then it would not undermine this hypothesis, because his need for

political legitimacy required him to appeal to the concerns of the predominantly pagan senate.

Chapter 2: The Evidence for Constantine's Attitude towards Religious Diversity

Introduction

Historians who believe that Constantine sincerely converted to Christianity at some point have developed two predominant hypotheses concerning the emperor's attitude towards religious diversity after his conversion. In the early twentieth century, Baynes and Alföldi proposed that upon his conversion Constantine became intolerant towards pagan society, but only publicly displayed his distain for paganism once it was politically prudent. Proponents of this hypothesis believe Constantine only tolerated the continued existence of paganism in order to persuade rather than to coerce pagans into a sincere belief in Christianity. Barnes has defended this hypothesis into the twenty-first century. He hypothesizes that Constantine demonstrated his religious intolerance when he implemented a religious dialogue that avoided all mentions of pagan deities after 312 and measures against pagan rituals and temples. Barnes also maintains that Constantine not only patronized the Christian Church so that it could eventually replace paganism but also instituted penal, moral, and marriage reforms in order to christianize Roman society. However, Barnes' interpretation of the evidence has been met with resistance by a number of historians. For instance, Drake argues that Constantine enforced an ambiguous religious dialogue in order to create a religiously neutral public sphere and to promote the commonalities between the Christian and pagan constituencies in the aftermath of the Great Persecution. Bardill agrees that even if Constantine took measures against pagan rituals and temples, he did so primarily in order to ensure civil tranquility. Paul Veyne asserts that Constantine patronized the Christian Church after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge as part of traditional imperial euergetism and to create equality between the Church and pagan religion. David Potter and Judith Evans Grubbs both propose that Constantine instituted social reforms in order to update the penal, moral, and marriage codes primarily so that they would reflect the sentiments of fourth-century Roman society. Together these historians hypothesize that Constantine not only remained as tolerant of religious diversity as he had been as a pagan but also instituted reforms in order to promote religious and civil harmony rather than impose his Christian beliefs upon Roman society.

This chapter will discuss the conflicting interpretations of the evidence about Constantine's approach to religious diversity after the battle of the Milvian Bridge. The first section will discuss the diverse factors that historians believe led him to adopt ambiguous terminology about the divine in order to reveal the emperor's religious and political consciousness after the Christian god became a part of his religion. Then the fiscal endowments and priestly privileges awarded to Christian churches by Constantine will be examined in order to clarify scholarly assertions that the emperor sought to establish Christianity as either a rival of or an equal to paganism. The next section will discuss the various influences that historians believe led Constantine to institute reforms in his penal, morality, and marriage legislation in order to determine whether or not his Christianity influenced his social agenda. Finally, the literary sources will be analyzed in order to elucidate what may have led the emperor to restrict pagan rituals and demolish specific temples.

The conflicting scholarly interpretations of Constantine's religious policies have led historians to develop drastically different perceptions of his religion. Historians who believe that Constantine implemented aggressive religious reforms that stopped short of persecuting pagans have proposed that he became intolerant towards religious diversity as his sincere devotion to the Christian faith augmented. Conversely, historians who interpret Constantine's religious reforms as rationally implemented progressive policies, which aimed to establish religious harmony, have concluded that his preference for Christianity did not affect his tolerant religious attitude. Therefore, this chapter aims to elucidate the conflicting interpretations of the evidence that either depicts Constantine as an intolerant or tolerant Christian.

Summa Diuinitas

Historians propose that imperial and court documents composed after 312 demonstrate Constantine's new allegiance to the Christian god because an indefinite divinity now appears in places where the pagan gods would have traditionally been mentioned. They generally agree that Constantine and Licinius employed this ambiguous divine terminology in the so-called "edict of Milan" from 313 in order to reconcile pagan and Christian beliefs in the eyes of the public. This divine ambiguity also occurs in two presumably pagan

compositions: *Panegyric* 12 and the inscription on the Arch of Constantine. While historians agree that this change in religious dialogue demonstrates that the court was aware of Constantine's altered allegiance, they have attempted to determine why the individual authors of the panegyric and the inscription on the arch believed that Constantine in no way wanted to be associated with traditional paganism. Historians believe that an analysis of these compositions may help elucidate Constantine's religio-political consciousness after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge.

Constantine's ambiguous divinity first appears in the "edict of Milan," a letter issued to the eastern provinces outlining his and Licinius' religious policy: religious freedom would be upheld and Christians in the East would also receive restitution for property seized during the Great Persecution.¹⁴⁸ Throughout the letter, the emperors stress that allowing Christian and pagan worship to continue unhindered would ensure the beneficence of the supreme god towards the Roman state and its citizens.¹⁴⁹ These statements reflect the common belief that divine favour was required for the Roman Empire to thrive and succeed; and that the emperors were responsible for securing this favour. Diocletian had began the Great Persecution to ensure the support of the gods by returning Christians to the religions of their ancestors, just as Galerius ended it so he could enlist the help of the Christian god towards the state.¹⁵⁰ This has led historians like Drake to assert that imperial duty led Constantine and Licinius to form the policy found in the "edict of Milan" and to ensure that the Christian Church properly venerated their god.¹⁵¹

Despite the heavily religious dialogue of the letter, the emperors refrain from mentioning any god more specific than the *summa diuinitas*, or "highest divinity":

Cum feliciter tam ego [quam] Constantinus Augustus quam etiam ego Licinius Augustus apud Mediolanum conuenissemus atque uniuersa quae ad comoda et securitatem publicam pertinerent, in tractatu haberemus, haec inter cetera quae uidebamus pluribus hominibus profutura, uel in primis ordinanda esse credidimus, quibus diuinitatis reuerentia continebatur, ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem quam quisque uoluisset, quo quicquid <est> diuinitatis in sede caelesti, nobis atque omnibus qui sub potestate nostra sunt constituti, placatum ac propitium possit existere. Itaque hoc consilium salubri ac

¹⁴⁸ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48.2-12. For the Greek version, see Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 10.5.2-14.

¹⁴⁹ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48.2-3, 48.11.

¹⁵⁰ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 34; Drake 2006: 122.

¹⁵¹ Drake 2006: 123.

rectissima ratione ineundum esse credidimus, ut nulli omnino facultatem abnegandam putaremus, qui uel obseruationi Christianorum uel ei religioni mentem suam dederet, quam ipse sibi aptissimam esse sentiret, ut possit nobis summa diuinitas, cuius religioni liberis mentibus obsequimur, in omnibus solitum fauorem suum beniuolentiamque praestare (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48.2-4).

When I, Constantine Augustus, and I, Licinius Augustus, happily met at Milan and had under consideration all matters which concerned the public advantage and safety, we thought that, among all the other things that we saw would benefit the majority of men, the arrangements which above all needed to be made were those which ensured reverence for the Divinity, so that we might grant both to Christians and to all men freedom to follow whatever religion each one wished, in order that whatever divinity there is in the seat of heaven may be appeased and made propitious towards us and towards all who have been set under our power. We thought therefore that in accordance with salutary and most correct reasoning we ought to follow the policy of regarding this opportunity as one not to be denied to anyone at all, whether he wished to give his mind to the observances of the Christians or to that religion which he felt was most fitting to himself, so that the supreme Divinity, whose religion we obey with free minds, may be able to show in all matters His accustomed favour and benevolence towards us (Creed 1984: 71).

Constantine and Licinius agreed to the general contents of the letter during their meeting at Milan in 313.¹⁵² Many historians assert that the emperors decided to employ an ambiguous monotheistic dialogue centered on the *summa diuinitas* in order to appeal to the religious consciousness of both the Christian and pagan constituencies.¹⁵³ Bardill notes that pagans had long been accustomed to the concept of a supreme divinity through their various religious doctrines. Since Homer portrays Zeus as the head of the council of the gods who made the final decisions in the *Iliad*, traditional polytheists could view Zeus, and his Roman counterpart Jupiter, as the supreme divinity.¹⁵⁴ Pagan henotheists varied slightly from their polytheist counterparts in that they accepted and worshipped a pantheon of deities, but they devoted themselves to a single deity whom they perceived, personally, to be the most powerful of them all.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, Christian, Jewish, and pagan monotheism asserted the existence of a singular all-powerful god.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, historians conclude that Constantine and Licinius employed this ambiguous divine terminology not only to appeal to the common

¹⁵² Barnes 2011: 95-97.

¹⁵³ Bardill 2012: 134.

¹⁵⁴ Hom., *Il.* 8.1-30; Bardill: 2012: 134.

¹⁵⁵ Versnel 1990: 35.

¹⁵⁶ Drake 2000: 136-139.

belief in the existence of a *summa diuinitas* but also to promote religious harmony by suggesting that all religions essentially worshipped the same divinity under different names. This policy would not have been unfamiliar to the populace because Greco-Romans had long reconciled aspects of foreign religions with their own when commonalities were present, a practice called syncretism.¹⁵⁷

Despite the historical consensus regarding the ambiguous language within the “edict of Milan”, historians have debated the reason why the presumably pagan authors of *Panegyric 12* and the inscription on the Arch of Constantine not only refrain from mentioning any specific god but also carefully disassociate Constantine from any mentions of polytheism when they occur. The different methodologies that historians have employed have allowed them to arrive at completely opposing explanations for this sudden change in imperial religious dialogue and what it can tell us about Constantine’s religion.

Jones and Barnes hypothesize that Constantine’s recent conversion to Christianity meant that he would be fundamentally opposed to being associated with pagan deities. Although this hypothesis is the foundation for their interpretation of the contemporary compositions, they do not thoroughly discuss the supporting theological evidence. Jones exhibits the usual brevity with which historians have treated this premise when he discusses the origin of the term *instinctu diuinitatis* on Constantine’s triumphal arch:¹⁵⁸

The vague allusion to a nameless Divinity indicates that the Senators believed that any mention of the immortal gods would be offensive to the Emperor. In other words, they must have believed him to be a Christian, for no other sect or creed was intolerant of the gods (Jones, 1948: 91).

This hypothesis likely derives from two theological doctrines that forbade Christians from worshipping or associating with pagan gods. First, Christianity was an exclusively monotheistic religion that maintained the existence of a celestial hierarchy wherein the

¹⁵⁷ For instance, Athenians adopted the goddess Cybele from Asia Minor into the Hellenic pantheon in the fifth century BC because she embodied the same characteristics as Demeter and Rhea. For a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see Versnel 1990: 105-113.

¹⁵⁸ The Arch of Constantine reads: *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) Fl(avio) Constantino Maximo P(io) F(elici) Augusto S(enatus) P(opulus)q(ue) R(omanus) quod instinctu diuinitatis mentis magnitudine cum exercitu suo tam de tyranno quam de omni eius factione uno tempore iustis rempublicam ultus est armis arcum triumphis insignem dicauit*, or “To the Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine the great, dutiful, and fortunate Augustus, the Senate and the People of Rome — because, with inspiration of divinity and greatness of mind, with his army, by just arms he avenged the state both from the tyrant and from all his faction at the same time — dedicated this arch as a symbol of triumphs” (Bardill 2012: 223).

infinite Creator God had generated minor divinities, or angels, to help manage the order of the universe.¹⁵⁹ Since these minor divinities had finite existences, having been created like humans, only the Creator God was to be worshipped. Second, Jones notes that Christians identified pagan deities as angels who had succumbed to their vices and fallen to earth.¹⁶⁰ According to the second-century Christian apologist Athenagoras, they possessed humans in order to obtain burnt offerings and blood sacrifices; in return they gave their followers divine visions.¹⁶¹ Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage from 248 to 258, forewarned Christians of establishing associations with pagan deities because these lesser divinities tricked humans into sharing their eternal punishment by making them denounce the Creator God.¹⁶² These tenets of Christianity may have led Jones and Barnes to believe that Constantine refused to be associated with pagan deities after what they perceive to be his conversion.

Barnes contends that the ambiguous language in *Panegyric* 12 and the inscription on the arch further demonstrates this point.¹⁶³ As seen in Chapter 1, the panegyrics used explicitly pagan language to endow an emperor with the attributes of a specific god in order to emphasize his connection to the divine. After Constantine adopted Apollo as his patron in 310, the orator of *Panegyric* 6 claimed that the emperor had had a vision wherein the god appeared to him in his own likeness.¹⁶⁴ However, the orator of *Panegyric* 12 abruptly breaks with tradition not only referring to indefinite divinities throughout the speech but also attempting to describe the nature of Constantine's god in vague philosophical terms:

Habes profecto aliquod cum illa mente diuina, Constantine, secretum, quae delegata nostri diis minoribus cura uni se tibi dignatur ostendere... deus ille mundi creator et dominus... cuius tot nomina sunt quot gentium linguas esse uoluisti (quem enim te ipse dici uelis, scire non possumus), siue tute quaedam uis mensque diuina es, quae tot infusa mundo omnibus miscearis elementis, et sine ullo extrinsecus accedente uigoribus impulsu per te ipse mouearis, siue aliqua supra omne caelum potestas es quae hoc opus tuum ex altiore Naturae arce despicias... (*Pan Lat.* 12.2.5, 12.13.2, 12.26.1).

You must share some secret with that divine mind, Constantine, which has delegated care of us to lesser gods and deigns to reveal itself to you alone... that

¹⁵⁹ Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 10.

¹⁶⁰ Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 10, 24-25; Jones 1986: 958.

¹⁶¹ Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 26-27; cf. Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 13.

¹⁶² Cyprian, *De idol. vanit.* 4.

¹⁶³ Barnes 1981: 46.

¹⁶⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 6.21.4-6.

god, creator and master of the world... whose names you wished to be as many as the tongues of the nations (for what you yourself wish to be called we cannot know), whether you are some kind of force and divine mind spread over the whole world and mingled with all elements and move of your own accord without the influence of any outside force acting upon you, or whether you are some power above all heaven which look down upon this work of yours from a higher pinnacle of Nature... (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 296, 313, 332-333).

Barnes proposes that the orator refrained from naming pagan deities in order to avoid offending the Christian emperor, but retained vague mentions of polytheism, disassociated from Constantine, in order to appeal to the pagan court.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, he asserts that the orator describes Constantine's god in terms of Platonic philosophy, as an unidentifiable all-powerful force, in order to demonstrate to pagans that the Christian god could also be perceived as the *summa diuinitas*. Moreover, the inscription on the Arch of Constantine, the construction of which the pagan senate oversaw, used similarly ambiguous language. The inscription declared that Constantine triumphed over Maxentius *instinctu diuinitatis*. Although the extent of Constantine's involvement in the project cannot be determined, the senate would not have composed an inscription that would have been thought to displease the emperor.¹⁶⁶ This literary and epigraphic evidence has led Barnes to assert that after Constantine's conversion Romans in the government sphere were aware that any association with pagan deities would have offended the emperor.

Barnes maintains that the continued production of imperial coinage depicting Sol, Mars, and Jupiter between 312 and 323 does not diminish this assessment of Constantine's religious consciousness. He proposes that Constantine did not change imperial iconography on coinage during this decade because of its dynastic implications. The image of Sol reminded the public of Constantine's legitimacy through his father and the vision Constantine had experienced in 310 heralding a long reign. Similarly, the appearance of Jupiter on coinage of the Licinii reminded the public of their legitimacy through the Tetrarchy. Therefore, Barnes asserts that the continued appearance of Sol and Mars as Constantine's *comes* and *conseruator*, respectively, on imperial coinage reflects his political strategy rather than his religious consciousness. Moreover, Constantinian mints stopped producing coins with explicitly pagan imagery in 320, with the exception of Arles, which

¹⁶⁵ Barnes 1981: 46.

¹⁶⁶ Barnes 2011: 19.

continued to mint coinage with Sol until 323.¹⁶⁷ Barnes also suggests that the decade long appearance of Sol acted as a “bridge between paganism and Christianity” for Constantine and his subjects: although Sol was a pagan god, Christians often portrayed Christ with attributes of Sol.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Barnes dismisses the appearance of pagan deities on the arch of Constantine and the solar attributes on a bronze statue of Constantine in the forum of Constantinople.¹⁶⁹ He argues that Constantine did not always tamper with traditional imperial attributes, which is supported by his retention of the title *pontifex maximus*.¹⁷⁰ In Barnes’ view, Constantine only made changes when there would be no negative political ramifications.¹⁷¹

Although Drake agrees with Barnes that Constantine continued to employ a shared iconography on imperial coinage in order to promote commonalities between pagans and Christians, he argues that there is no evidence that Constantine exhibited any personal intolerance towards pagan deities after 312. Drake hypothesizes that the appearance of religious ambiguity within imperial and court compositions was a matter of religious politics rather than personal devotion. As discussed in Chapter 1, Drake asserts that political motivations influenced Constantine to convert in order to expand his religious legitimacy to the Christian constituency. He contends that Constantine had to reform the traditionally polytheistic dialogue of the state because it excluded the integration of the Christian god. As long as state religion recognized polytheism, it would be incompatible with Christianity, which required exclusive worship of the Creator God.¹⁷² Since polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism all asserted the existence of a single supreme divinity to different extents, Drake contends that Constantine developed a monotheistic dialogue centered on an indefinite supreme divinity in order to incorporate the Christian god. However, Constantine also recognized religious plurality in order to create a religiously neutral public sphere.¹⁷³ Drake contends that Constantine and Licinius exhibited this new religious policy when they declared in the “edict of Milan” that both Christians and pagans could “follow whatever

¹⁶⁷ Bruun 1958: 16, 28-37. The mint at Lyon discontinued production earlier because it was shut down in 317.

¹⁶⁸ Barnes 2011: 18.

¹⁶⁹ Barnes 2011: 23; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.17. For a complete list of the literary evidence for this statue, see Basset 2004: 192-99.

¹⁷⁰ Barnes 2011: 23-25.

¹⁷¹ Barnes 1981: 48.

¹⁷² Drake 2000: 195.

¹⁷³ Drake 2000: 195, 204-205.

religion each one wished, in order that whatever divinity there is in the seat of heaven may be appeased” (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48.2; Creed 1984: 71). In Drake’s view, the appearance of religious ambiguity demonstrates that Constantine sought to reconcile pagans and Christians on broad points of agreement in order to foster religious tolerance.

Drake proposes that the use of ambiguous language in *Panegyric* 12 and the inscription on the Arch of Constantine demonstrate that pagans were willing to comply with Constantine’s reform of the state’s religious dialogue. He contends that a review of *Panegyric* 12 demonstrates that the orator simply reiterates the sentiments expressed in the “edict of Milan.”¹⁷⁴ As we have seen, the orator praises Constantine’s inspiration from an indefinite supreme god that held power above lesser divinities.¹⁷⁵ Drake notes that this passage corresponds to Constantine and Licinius’ sentiments that there was an unidentifiable supreme god in the heavens.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the orator validates the existence of multiple religions because each one worshipped the supreme divinity beneath a different name.¹⁷⁷ Whereas Barnes views this section as the orator’s attempt to make Constantine’s religion appeal to pagan courtiers, Drake contends that the orator derived the assertion of religious plurality from the “edict” wherein the emperors claim that each religion was a valid expression of faith to the *summa diuinitas*.¹⁷⁸ This assessment of ambiguous dialogue in imperial and court documents is also applicable to the appearance of the phrase *instinctu diuinitatis* on the Arch of Constantine. Therefore, Drake concludes that this ambiguous religious dialogue does not exhibit Constantine’s intolerance towards pagan deities, but only an attempt to reconcile pagan and Christian beliefs in order to promote religious harmony.

This section has analyzed imperial and court documents in order to elucidate the various influences that historians believe led Constantine and his courtiers to adopt ambiguous divine terminology. Historians propose that determining this motivation will help elucidate Constantine’s religio-political consciousness following his conversion after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Constantine publicly preferred a religiously ambiguous dialogue in order to appeal to commonalities between the pagan and Christian constituencies. However, historians have employed

¹⁷⁴ Drake 2000: 197, 206-207.

¹⁷⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 12.2.5.

¹⁷⁶ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48.2-3.

¹⁷⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 12.26.1.

¹⁷⁸ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48. 3-4.

different methodologies in order to determine the significance of the term *diuinitas/summa diuinitas* in compositions composed for the imperial court. Historians who believe that this disassociation of Constantine from paganism corresponds to the intolerance of Christian doctrine towards pagan deities assert the term exhibits Constantine's personal intolerance towards paganism. Alternatively, historians who perceive the similarities between the religious dialogue in the "edict of Milan" and court compositions maintain that this ambiguity derived from the willingness of Constantine's courtiers to comply with his new policy of an inclusive religious dialogue.

Constantine and the Christian Church

Historians believe that Constantine exhibited his intentions for the future of religion in the empire when he bestowed fiscal endowments on churches throughout the empire and granted to the Christian clergy the privileges that were traditionally reserved for pagan priests. They have primarily focused on elucidating the position Constantine intended Christianity to hold within the empire by discerning whether or not he gave special precedence to the Christian Church over other religions. First, historians have carefully analyzed the *Vita Constantini* and the *Liber pontificalis* in order to determine the significance of Constantine's endowments to the Church. Second, they have analyzed Constantine's religious edicts, preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, in order to determine his motivation for extending priestly exemptions to and creating new privileges for the Christian clergy. Historians have developed conflicting interpretations of this evidence based on differing perceptions of Constantine's religious mentality.

Richard Krautheimer hypothesizes that Constantine's church building program demonstrates that he actively favoured Christianity over traditional paganism.¹⁷⁹ According to the *Liber pontificalis*, Constantine commissioned the construction of twelve churches in Rome and its environs between 312 and 326.¹⁸⁰ However, the sixth-century compilers of the *Liber pontificalis* misattributed both St. Paul's and Peter's Basilica to Constantine. In fact, Pope Cornelius had constructed St. Paul's on the *Via Ostiensis* in 251 and it only became a fully-fledged basilica during the tenure of Pope Damasus, sometime after 366. Constantine

¹⁷⁹ Krautheimer 1999: 341.

¹⁸⁰ *Lib. Pont.* 34; Krautheimer 1999: 351-352.

also could not have commissioned or patronized St. Peter's Basilica because its construction has been dated to the reign of Constantius II, between 337 and 360.¹⁸¹ These facts reduce the number of Constantine's church commissions from twelve to ten. Nonetheless, Constantine endowed all ten of these churches with landed properties in order to provide the clergy with a yearly income. Krautheimer notes that the endowments to the Lateran Basilica were perhaps the most extravagant: not only did Constantine give this church an annual *latifundia* worth "up to and over 1,000 *solidi*" but also "urban real estate... yielding 2,000 *solidi* a year, [making] the Roman bishop one of the major landholders in the city."¹⁸² During the period that Constantine enriched the Church in the West, Krautheimer contends that the emperor did no more than neglect pagan temples.¹⁸³ However, he implies that Constantine definitely exhibited his preference for the Christian Church when he gained control of the East after the defeat of Licinius at Chrysopolis in 324.¹⁸⁴ Not only did Constantine commission the restoration, enlargement, and construction of new churches throughout the East but he also ordered the demolition of several temples, many of which were replaced with opulent churches.¹⁸⁵ The scholarly debate concerning these temple destructions will be discussed at length below. In sum, then, Krautheimer states that Constantine's endowments to the Church and the replacement of pagan temples with Christian churches reveal Constantine's desire to have Christianity become the dominant religion at the expense of paganism.

Furthermore, Barnes proposes that Constantine exhibited his intention to raise the Christian Church to a position of prestige over pagan religion when he extended the immunities and powers of pagan priesthods to their Christian counterparts and created new privileges exclusively reserved for the latter.¹⁸⁶ In 313 Constantine issued the first of two edicts that exempted all clergymen of the curial class from the public duties incumbent upon men of their rank.¹⁸⁷ Sometime before 316 Constantine also extended the practice of legally manumitting slaves in the presence of pagan priests to bishops. This privilege also gave bishops the power to confer citizenship on former slaves whose masters had been Roman

¹⁸¹ Holloway 2004: 151-154; Bowersock 2005: 5-13; Barnes 2011: 85-89; Bardill 2012: 248.

¹⁸² Krautheimer 1999: 354.

¹⁸³ Krautheimer 1999: 341.

¹⁸⁴ Krautheimer 1999: 341, 345.

¹⁸⁵ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.46.1-3, 3.25-32, 3.51-56; Krautheimer 1999: 344.

¹⁸⁶ Barnes 1981: 50.

¹⁸⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 16.2.1-2.

citizens.¹⁸⁸ Constantine may also have given Christian priests and their families exemptions from all taxes and all compulsory public services as early as 320.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, Barnes argues that Constantine created an innovative law that placed the Christian clergy in a more prestigious position than pagan priests. In 318 Constantine established the *episcopalis audientia*, or episcopal courts, alongside the Roman judicial system. These courts allowed Christian litigants to have their cases tried under episcopal law rather than Roman law. Bishops were given the power of unimpeachable verdicts: their decision had to be enforced and no appeals could be made.¹⁹⁰ Since no Roman precedent existed for endowing priests with judicial power, Barnes proposes that Constantine was inspired by Christian tradition.¹⁹¹ He argues that 1 Corinthians influenced Constantine to establish the episcopal courts because therein Paul censures Christians for taking their disputes to Roman courts rather than their priests:

Τολμᾷ τις ὑμῶν πρᾶγμα ἔχων πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον κρίνεσθαι ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ οὐχὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγίων; ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι οἱ ἅγιοι τὸν κόσμον κρινοῦσιν; καὶ εἰ ἐν ὑμῖν κρίνεται ὁ κόσμος, ἀνάξιοί ἐστε κριτηρίων ἐλαχίστων; οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ἀγγέλους κρινοῦμεν, μήτι γε βιωτικά; βιωτικά μὲν οὖν κριτήρια ἐὰν ἔχητε, τοὺς ἐξουθενημένους ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, τούτους καθίζετε; πρὸς ἐντροπὴν ὑμῶν λέγω (1 Corinthians 6:1-5).

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? I say this to shame you (NIV).

The extent to which Constantine empowered the Christian clergy has led Barnes to assert that the emperor did so because he wanted to establish Christianity as the most prestigious religion in the empire.

¹⁸⁸ Although the original law is no longer extant, the second edict from 316 is preserved in *Cod. Theod.* 4.7.1 and *Cod. Iust.* 1.13.1. The third edict reaffirming the power to confer citizenship from 321 is preserved in *Cod. Iust.* 1.13.2.

¹⁸⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.2.10; Pharr 1952: 442 n. 30; Barnes 1981: 50.

¹⁹⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 1.27.1; *Csirm.* 1.

¹⁹¹ Barnes 1981: 51.

Conversely, Paul Veyne hypothesizes that Constantine's patronage derived from traditional imperial euergetism and his policy to create equality between paganism and Christianity, as demonstrated in the "edict of Milan." He notes that throughout Roman history leaders had commissioned the construction of buildings dedicated exclusively to their patron deity especially when giving thanks for aid in a military victory.¹⁹² After Octavian had defeated Sextus Pompey at the Battle of Naulochus in 36 BC, he commissioned the temple of Apollo on the Palatine in gratitude for his victory. Similarly, he rebuilt the temple of Apollo at Actium in gratitude for the god's aid in his victory over Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC.¹⁹³ Furthermore, both Elagabalus and Aurelian had established temples to their patron deities *Sol Inuictus Elagabal* and *Sol Inuictus*, respectively.¹⁹⁴ Veyne contends that Constantine did not seek to place Christianity in a position over paganism because Augustus, Elagabalus, and Aurelian had patronized the cults of their individual divine *comes* without "foist[ing] that god on the public."¹⁹⁵ Moreover, he contends that Constantine extended priestly privileges to the Christian clergy in order to establish religious equality. He arrived at this conclusion because not only did the pagan cults retain their privileges and imperial subsidies during his reign, and did so until the early fifth century, but also because Constantine extended the exemption from public services to the Jewish clergy as well.¹⁹⁶

Qui deuotione tota synagogis Iudaeorum patriarchis uel presbyteris se dederunt et in memorata secta degentes legi ipsi praesident, immunes ab omnibus tam personalibus quam ciuilibus muneribus perseuerent, ita ut illi, qui iam forsitan decuriones sunt, nequaquam ad prosecutiones aliquas destinentur, cum oporteat istiusmodi homines a locis in quibus sunt nulla compelli ratione discedere. Hi autem, qui minime curiales sunt, perpetua decurionatus immunitate potiantur (*Cod. Theod.* 16.8.2).

If any persons with complete devotion should dedicate themselves to the synagogues of the Jews as patriarchs and priests and should live in the aforementioned sect and preside over the administration of their law, they shall continue to be exempt from all compulsory public services that are incumbent on persons, as well as those that are due to the municipalities. Likewise, such persons who are now perchance decurions shall not be assigned to any duties as official

¹⁹² Veyne 2010: 74-75.

¹⁹³ Vell. Pat., *Hist. Rom.* 2.81.3; cf. Cass. Dio, *Hist. Rom.* 49.15.5, 51.1.1-3.

¹⁹⁴ Veyne 2010: 74.

¹⁹⁵ Veyne 2010: 75.

¹⁹⁶ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.20.

escorts, since such men shall not be compelled for any reason to depart from those places in which they are. Moreover, such persons who are not decurions shall enjoy perpetual exemption from the decurionate (Pharr 1952: 467).

While Constantine only extended to them the privilege of exemption from public service, Veyne maintains that the emperor's treatment of Judaism, a group generally disliked by both pagans and particularly Christians, demonstrates that Constantine sought to establish religious equality.

Moreover, Drake proposes a counter-interpretation of the *episcopalis audientia*, which Barnes concludes Constantine had bestowed upon the bishops in order to increase their power. Whereas Barnes chose to analyze the abbreviated version of this law in *Cod. Theod.* 1.27.1 (of 318), Drake analyzes the complete version found in section 1.1 of the Sirmondian collection (which is an earlier collection independent of the *Codex Theodosianus*) of 333.¹⁹⁷ Drake hypothesizes that Constantine established the episcopal courts in order to ensure swift and moral justice to citizens who may have otherwise been at a disadvantage in Roman courts. He chose to analyze this rescript because it exists in its entirety and contains explanatory information that the compilers of the *Codex Theodosianus* edited out of the earlier edict found in section 1.27.1. Drake maintains that the explanatory information is paramount in ascertaining Constantine's motivation for establishing these courts because in other imperial documents regarding religion the emperor expressly states whether he has instituted a policy for practical or religious reasons. As we have seen from the "edict of Milan", Constantine promoted religious diversity because ensuring the beneficence of the highest divinity, whoever he may be, was in the public interest: Constantine explicitly states that this policy is made for practical reasons. According to Eusebius, Constantine issued a law placing restrictions on Jewish ownership of Christian slaves because "it was not right that those redeemed by the Saviour should be subjected by the yoke of bondage to the slayers of the prophets and murderers of the Lord" (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.27.1; Cameron and Hall 1999: 163).¹⁹⁸ Therefore, Drake reasons that Constantine would have explicitly stated in the rescript if he believed that pagans should not pass judgement on Christians. Instead, Constantine states that his purpose for this law was to

¹⁹⁷ Barnes 2011: 134. He acknowledges the existence of this rescript, but does not appear to believe that its contents alter his interpretation of the significance of the law.

¹⁹⁸ *Cod. Theod.* 16.9.1; Drake, 2000: 326.

reduce “the wicked seeds of litigation, so that wretched men, entangled in the long and nearly endless snares of legal procedure, may have a timely release from mischievous pleadings or absurd love of disputation” (*CSirm.* 1; Pharr 1952: 477).

Drake contends that Constantine was concerned about the continuous and costly appeals pursued by wealthy litigants against those of meagre wealth and minors who had no legal recourse to protect their inheritances from their guardians. As we have seen, Constantine wanted litigants to be free of court cases as swiftly as possible. Drake argues that allowing Christian litigants to transfer their cases to an episcopal court wherein the bishop would issue an unimpeachable verdict solved this issue within the Christian community. Constantine reasserts that a bishop’s verdict was applicable to all parties regardless of age whether the dispute was “between minors or between adults” (*CSirm.* 1; Pharr 1952: 477). In Drake’s view, this statement demonstrates that the issue at hand was not “the jurisdiction of the bishop[, but] whether that jurisdiction extended to suits involving minors.”¹⁹⁹ He proposes that Constantine entrusted bishops with this power because he believed that their religiosity rendered the truth they uncovered in the proceedings incorruptible and their verdicts morally upstanding.²⁰⁰ Thus, Drake concludes that the structure of this rescript demonstrates that Constantine’s primary impetus for establishing the episcopal courts was to ensure the provision of timely justice to his subjects rather than a preoccupation with empowering the bishops.

This section has attempted to elucidate the motivation behind Constantine’s empowerment of the Christian Church in order to determine his intentions for Roman religion after what some perceive to be his conversion in 312. The ancient sources demonstrate that between the period of 313 and 326 Constantine gave endowments and privileges to the Christian Church. Imperial precedent demonstrates that Constantine’s promotion of the Church continued a long tradition of patronizing the institution of the god to whom an emperor attributed their victories. While Constantine neither promoted nor enriched pagan institutions during this period, pagan priests continued to enjoy the same privileges and subsidies from the state that had long been conferred upon them. Whereas Krautheimer and Barnes believe that this neglect reflects Constantine’s intentions to enrich

¹⁹⁹ Drake 2000: 326.

²⁰⁰ Drake 2000: 327.

the Christian Church so that it could eventually supplant paganism, Drake asserts that Constantine only sought to bring the religions to the same level of prestige for the sake of religious equality. The fact that Constantine introduced episcopal courts as a legally binding form of justice alongside the Roman judicial system is certainly a noteworthy reform. Since individual priesthoods had never received this privilege, certain historians assert that this reform is a clear indication of Constantine's preference for Christianity. However, Drake notes that Constantine expressly states in the first Sirmondian constitution that he intended the law to provide swift justice to socially disadvantaged Romans, primarily the poor and minors. Therefore, he concludes that Constantine established the episcopal courts in order to resolve this problem within Christian communities.

Legislative Reform

Historians have proposed that Constantine revealed his intentions for Roman society when he issued reforms to the penal, moral, and marriage codes. They have carefully analyzed Constantine's edicts, alongside Roman tradition and Christian doctrine, in order to determine whether this legislation conformed to contemporary Roman attitudes or Christian principles. Whereas Barnes proposes that these reforms demonstrate a clear influence from Christian doctrine, David Potter and Judith Evans Grubbs argue that they actually conform to contemporary views within pagan society. These historians have developed conflicting interpretations of the evidence from fundamentally different perceptions of fourth-century Roman society and the extent to which they believe that Constantine allowed his religious convictions to influence imperial policy.

Barnes hypothesizes that Christian principles influenced the reforms that Constantine introduced into the penal system.²⁰¹ The abolition of crucifixion as a form of capital punishment in Constantine's territory is perhaps the most notable of these reforms. Although the *Codex Theodosianus* does not preserve any such edict, both Aurelius Victor and Sozomen attest to the existence of the law in their respective histories.²⁰² Since Constantine experienced a conversion to Christianity prior to the abolition of crucifixion, Barnes infers

²⁰¹ Barnes 1981: 51.

²⁰² Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 41.4; Sozom., *Hist. eccl.* 1.8.13.

that the emperor banned the practice out of reverence for Christ.²⁰³ Furthermore, Constantine declared in 315 that any tattoos placed on criminals condemned to gladiatorial schools or the mines should be restricted to the hands or calves so as not to mutilate the human face.

Constantine explicitly states in the edict that the purpose of this reform was to preserve the likeness of heavenly beauty that exists in the face of Man.²⁰⁴ Although Barnes implies that the sentiments expressed in this edict originated from Christian doctrine, he does not provide the supporting doctrinal evidence. Nonetheless, it may be deduced that he is referring to 1 Genesis 1:26-27 wherein God declares that Man should be made “in [his] image, in [his] likeness.” The correlation between Christian principles and these changes to the penal code has led Barnes to assert that Constantine allowed his religion to influence his policy.

Barnes also hypothesizes that Constantine instituted a complete ban on gladiatorial competitions in order to conform to Christian doctrine. The Christian community opposed gladiatorial games because of the senseless killings that occurred during these spectacles. This led the bishops at the Council of Elvira, held between 300 and 313, and the Council of Arles, held in 314, to declare that any Christian who participated in gladiatorial games would be excommunicated.²⁰⁵ Barnes believes that Constantine issued two laws a decade apart that reflect the growing influence of Christian doctrine on his imperial policy. In 315 Constantine ordered the Vicar of Africa, Domitius Celsus, to sentence kidnappers to *damnatio ad bestias* (“condemnation to the beasts”) or *damnatio ad ludum* (“condemnation to the games”) for slaves/freedmen and freeborn men, respectively.²⁰⁶ However, Constantine issued an edict in 325 that forbade *damnatio ad ludum* as a punishment for criminals:

Cruentia spectacula in otio ciuili et domestica quiete non placent. Quapropter, omnino gladiatores esse prohibemus eos, qui forte delictorum causa hanc condicionem adque sententiam mereri consueuerant, metallo magis facies inseruire, ut sine sanguine suorum scelerum poenas agnoscant (*Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1).

Bloody spectacles displease Us amid public peace and domestic tranquillity.
Wherefore, since We wholly forbid the existence of gladiators, You shall cause those persons who, perchance, on account of some crime, customarily sustained that

²⁰³ Most historians believe philological errors led to the misattribution of section 9.5.1 of *Codex Theodosianus*, which prescribes crucifixion for slaves and freedmen who denounce their patrons for monetary gain, to Constantine rather than Licinius. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

²⁰⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 9.40.2.

²⁰⁵ Council of Elvira, *can.* 2; Council of Arles, *can.* 3.

²⁰⁶ *Cod. Theod.* 9.18.1; Barnes 1981: 53.

condition and sentence, to serve rather in the mines, so that they will assume the penalty for their crimes without shedding their blood (Pharr 1952: 436).

Barnes asserts that at this point Constantine had completely outlawed gladiatorial games because he states that he has “wholly forb[idden] the existence of gladiators” and Eusebius claims that Constantine did “prohibi[t] everyone... from defiling the cities by the carnage of gladiatorial combat” (*Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1; Pharr 1952: 436; Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.25.1; Cameron and Hall 1999: 161).²⁰⁷ Therefore, Barnes reasons that Constantine outlawed these competitions “partly on moral grounds, partly because of their pagan origin and association.”²⁰⁸

Barnes concedes that there is contemporary evidence that contradicts his hypothesis about gladiatorial competitions, but he believes that they can be easily explained. For instance, gladiatorial schools remained operational throughout the empire until Honorius forced them to close in 399.²⁰⁹ If Constantine had issued a complete ban on these games, would he have not closed the schools that produced gladiators? Barnes proposes that he would not have done so. He suggests that Constantine aimed to reorient Roman entertainment towards less violent spectacles such as chariot races, which became popular by the end of the fourth century, instead of forcing the issue.²¹⁰ In his view, this mild policy on entertainment explains why subsequent emperors issued bans on these kind of games — Constantine’s law was inefficient because it was not strictly enforced — and Libanius recorded that in 328 his uncle, Panolbius, organized combats in Syria without facing consequences.²¹¹ A rescript also exists from 337 wherein Constans addresses the request of the city of Hispellum to hold annual competitions in honour of the imperial cult.²¹² As we will see, many historians believe that Constans granted their request. However, Barnes maintains that an analysis of the language therein demonstrates that Constans actually

²⁰⁷ However, Barnes does not clarify whether this is the edict that banned gladiatorial combats or he had done so in an earlier one.

²⁰⁸ Barnes 1981: 53.

²⁰⁹ Salzman 1990: 237 n. 18.

²¹⁰ Barnes 1981: 53, 313 n. 102.

²¹¹ Lib., *Or.* 1.5; *Cod. Theod.* 15.12.2-3; Barnes 1981: 53, 313 n. 101.

²¹² Some historians, like Potter, attribute this rescript to Constantine because his name appears in the rescript alongside his sons, Constantine II and Constans. However, Barnes proposes that Constans issued the edict after the death of Constantine, sometime between 22 May and 9 September 337, “when there was an official pretence that the dead Constantine still reigned” (Barnes 2011: 22). If Constans did issue the edict, then it can be presumed that he would not enforce policies that contravened his father’s will. See also Bardill 2012: 263-264.

refused their request, albeit subtly. According to the rescript, the city had explicitly requested to hold “*spectaculum tam scenicorum ludorum quam gladiatorii muneris*/both theatrical shows and gladiatorial games,” but Constans only gave permission for the town to hold “*editionum*/ games” (*ILS* 705; Barnes 2011: 21-23). Since the Latin noun “*editio*” can mean simply “an exhibition”, Barnes maintains that the use of this word can “be construed tacitly to exclude gladiatorial shows.”²¹³ This interpretation of the contradictory evidence does not exclude the possibility that Constantine issued an empire-wide ban on gladiatorial competitions. Therefore, Barnes proposes that Constantine aimed to reform Roman entertainment based on Christian doctrine, but did not actively suppress the practice because it was as yet too engrained within society.

Finally, Barnes proposes that many of the moral and marriage reforms Constantine instituted in the decades after his conversion reflect Christian rather than Roman values.²¹⁴ Constantine first addressed the legal disabilities that had been placed on celibate and childless citizens for over four centuries. The Augustan *lex Iulia meritandis ordinibus* and *lex Papia Poppaea* from 18 BC and 9 BC, respectively, provided benefits to married citizens with children and prohibited the unmarried and childless from receiving inheritances, gifts, and property in order to promote traditional Roman values and ensure a steady population. Despite the unpopularity of the *lex Iulia* and *lex Papia* and the difficulties enforcing the regulations on the general populace, Roman emperors only ever amended the law to make it more effective because they probably viewed it as an important foundation of Roman identity.²¹⁵ However, Constantine broke with imperial precedent in 320 when he repealed the section of the law punishing celibate and childless citizens.²¹⁶ According to Eusebius, Constantine did not want to punish as criminals the people who were either naturally barren or chaste in their dedication to religion or philosophy.²¹⁷ Barnes notes that this act appealed especially to Christian communities because they not only viewed chastity as holier than marriage but also often required their clergymen to practise abstinence.²¹⁸ Furthermore, Constantine altered marriage laws in 331 in order to make unilateral divorce more difficult to

²¹³ Barnes 2011: 20-23.

²¹⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1; Barnes 1981: 52.

²¹⁵ Barnes 1981: 52, 313 n. 86.

²¹⁶ *Cod. Theod.* 8.16.1.

²¹⁷ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.26.2-4.

²¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 (NIV); Council of Elvira, *can.* 33; Barnes 1981: 52.

obtain. Although divorce had traditionally been obtained with relative ease depending on the situation, Constantine restricted the grounds on which unilateral divorce could be requested: whereas women could only divorce a husband for homicide, practising magic, or defiling a tomb, men could only divorce a wife for committing adultery, poisoning, or procuring. Individuals who petitioned for divorce on any other grounds would be punished.²¹⁹ In Barnes' view, Constantine's edict making divorce more difficult reflects the Christian principle that marriage was a sacred union that should not or could not be dissolved, depending upon the doctrine of each individual community.²²⁰ The correlation between Christian values and Constantine's reforms has led Barnes to conclude that Constantine sought to gradually guide Roman society towards Christianity.

However, Potter and Evans Grubbs have presented counter-interpretations of the evidence used to support the hypothesis that Christian principles inspired Constantine's legislative reforms. Potter analyses the literary evidence in order to demonstrate that Constantine banned crucifixion and only restricted participation in gladiatorial games in order to conform to contemporary ideas of Roman justice rather than Christian doctrine. Although Constantine's edict concerning crucifixion has not survived, Potter contends that the emperor also issued this reform in order to rid the penal system of an outmoded punishment. He proposes that the limited use of crucifixion during the Great Persecution demonstrates that the practice had become out-dated and even perceived as inhumane. The third century jurist Callistratus listed crucifixion as one of the most severe punishments for criminals in the Roman penal code alongside being burnt alive.²²¹ Potter presents an analysis of fifty-six judicial sentences issued against Christians between 303 and 311, which have been preserved in various Christian martyrologies, in order to discern the frequency with which crucifixion was used at the beginning of the fourth century. In the twelve instances that judges ruled for the highest penalty to be carried out, Potter notes that only one judge prescribed crucifixion and the remaining eleven ordered incineration.²²² He points out that reforms often occurred in the Roman penal code. For instance, Roman tradition had dictated

²¹⁹ *Cod. Theod.* 3.16.1. While an offending woman would have to forfeit her dowry and all her possessions to her husband and be exiled to an island, an offending man would lose his wife's dowry and if he married again would lose his new wife's dowry to his former wife.

²²⁰ Barnes 1981: 313 n. 90.

²²¹ *Dig.* 48.19.28.

²²² For a full list of the martyrologies and the proscribed method of death, see Potter 2010: 604- 606.

that throwing criminals off the Tarpeian rock in Rome was an acceptable form of execution, but the jurist Modestinus records that this practice had ended by the early third century.²²³ Potter suggests that Romans came to view crucifixion as inhumane because the pagan historian Aurelius Victor praises Constantine for abolishing the punishment that he described as “*teterrimum*/ utterly frightful” (Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 41.4; Bird 1994: 49). Since Eusebius does not mention Constantine’s abolition of crucifixion, Potter asserts that this action was not noteworthy in the Christian community.²²⁴

Furthermore, Potter asserts that Constantine did not outlaw gladiatorial games in *Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1 because, as we have seen, this edict only explicitly forbade the condemnation of criminals to gladiatorial competitions.²²⁵ Potter suggests that this edict demonstrates that Constantine did not view the practice of *damnatio ad ludum* as sufficient punishment for criminals: it condemned them to fight against other gladiators, but also gave them the opportunity to regain their freedom as victors in the games. Diocletian expressed similar concerns over this form of punishment in an earlier edict but refrained from completely forbidding the practice.²²⁶ Potter proposes that Constantine allowed these games to continue as long as the participants were either slaves or contracted freedmen, even though Christian doctrine opposed it.²²⁷ Finally, he does not believe that Constantine or his sons refused Hispellum’s request to hold gladiatorial combats. In fact, he states that Constantine “explicitly grant[ed] the people of [Hispellum] the right to celebrate him with gladiatorial combats” in 337, which demonstrates that he was not opposed to these games on principle.²²⁸ Therefore, Potter concludes that Constantine only instituted reforms concerning crucifixion and *damnatio ad ludum* in order to update the Roman penal system. However, he does concede that the influence of Christian principles is the only explanation for the law restricting tattoos on criminals.

Evans Grubbs also presents arguments to counter Barnes’ interpretations of the moral and marriage legislation. She hypothesizes that Constantine repealed the restrictions in the *lex Iulia* and *lex Papia* because it would help maintain positive relations with the Roman

²²³ *Dig.* 48.19.25.1; Potter 2010: 603.

²²⁴ Potter 2010: 603.

²²⁵ Potter 2010: 598.

²²⁶ *Cod. Iust.* 8.47.12; Potter 2010: 603.

²²⁷ Potter 2010: 598.

²²⁸ Potter 2010: 602.

senate. As discussed in Chapter 1, Constantine needed to gain the support of the senate in order to legitimize his claim to power. Evans Grubbs contends that Constantine enacted a series of reforms so that he could ensure the goodwill of the senatorial class.²²⁹ Although the provisions of the *lex Iulia* and *lex Papia* had proven difficult to enforce upon the general populace, the prominent position of senators made them accountable for any violations of these laws. Since individuals who accused senators of the more serious crimes therein — *stuprum* or *adulterium* — would gain one quarter of the accused’s property upon conviction, *delatores* harassed senators over the next four centuries.²³⁰ In the months after his victory at the Milvian Bridge Constantine outlawed the source of the senators’ anxiety: he initially decreed that informants should have their tongues cut out and then increased the penalty to capital punishment in 313.²³¹ Since the *lex Iulia* and *lex Papia* primarily affected the aristocracy, Evans Grubbs contends that when Constantine repealed the penalties against the celibate and childless in 320 he was continuing to appeal to the fiscal concerns of the senatorial class. Therefore, she concludes that Constantine instituted these “moral reforms” to garner political support rather than integrate Christian morals within the empire.

Moreover, Evans Grubbs contends that the restrictions that Constantine placed on unilateral divorce reflected the values of both the pagan and Christian constituencies. She argues that the divorce habits of the Roman aristocracy do not reflect the values of the general populace. Since marriage in the aristocracy often cemented political alliances, divorce was common because it allowed politicians to advance new agendas. For instance, Constantine divorced his first wife, Minervina, in order to marry Maximian’s daughter, Fausta, in 307, which allowed him to claim legitimacy through an original tetrarch. However, Evans Grubbs proposes that divorce was not as common in the middle and lower classes of Roman society because they did not have the same political incentive. Although there is little evidence on the divorce habits of the general populace, Evans Grubbs suggests that the relatively low number of divorces among the aristocracy may elucidate the situation. She notes that in a study of 562 aristocratic women “from the Augustan period to around [AD] 200” only “at most fifty-one” can be shown to have possibly divorced, the majority of which

²²⁹ Evans Grubbs 1993: 125.

²³⁰ Evans Grubbs 1993: 124-125.

²³¹ *Cod. Theod.* 10.10.1-2.

can probably be attributed to political strategy.²³² Since the lower and middle classes did not need marriage to cement alliances, she reasons that the divorce rate in the general populace would have been even lower. Therefore, she concludes that when Constantine issued restrictions on divorce he was addressing the moral concerns of both the Christian and pagan constituencies.

Furthermore, Evans Grubbs argues that the restrictions placed on unilateral divorce within the edict do not unequivocally conform to Christian principles. Christian doctrine only permitted divorce in the instance of adultery. The application of this doctrine was left to the discretion of individual Christian communities. Certain communities only granted divorce when the wife committed adultery, but others held men and women to the same code of sexual conduct, which permitted a woman to divorce her husband for the same offence. In either case, Constantine's stipulations do not conform to either of these Christian doctrines because he gave additional justifications for divorce from a wife and legal recourse for a woman to divorce her husband. Since he forbade women from divorcing their husbands for adultery, he also did not hold men and women to the same level of conduct. Finally, Evans Grubbs notes that Christian doctrine did not permit bilateral divorce, which Constantine never restricted. She proposes that Christian doctrine may have influenced Constantine to introduce adultery committed by the wife as a justification for divorce.²³³ However, the incompatibility of the entirety of the law to Christian principles demonstrates that he was not strictly interested in integrating Christian values into Roman society. Therefore, she concludes that Constantine only wanted to stabilize the institution of marriage.

This section has discussed the possible reasons why Constantine would have introduced reforms into the penal, moral, and marriage codes. Barnes assert that he instituted these laws in order to slowly Christianize the empire. However, other historians have challenged the extent to which these reforms actually reflect Christian principles. Therefore, they have analyzed these reforms in the light of Christian and pagan principles and found that Christian doctrine only explicitly influenced the reform restricting tattoos on criminals. Since scholars have conflicting interpretations of the legislative evidence, it is difficult to conclusively determine Constantine's intentions for Roman society through these reforms.

²³² Evans Grubbs 1993: 130; Evans Grubbs 1994: 367; Kajanto 1969: 99-113.

²³³ Evans Grubbs 1993: 128-129.

Constantine and Sacrifice

A number of historians believe that Constantine would have more clearly exhibited his religious sentiments after his final victory over Licinius in 324 than he had before because he no longer needed to consult with a pagan colleague on religious policy. That same year Constantine wrote a letter to Shapur II of Persia stating that he worshipped the Christian god, “shunning all abominable blood and foul hateful odours” (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.10.1; Cameron and Hall 1999: 157). This letter demonstrates that Constantine had developed an aversion to blood sacrifice as his Christianity matured. Similarly, Constantine expresses his distaste for paganism in his *Letter to the Eastern Provincials* in 325. Therein he explains his religious policy to his newly acquired territories in the form of a prayer.²³⁴ Historians have attempted to determine whether or not Constantine’s devotion to Christianity led him to ban sacrifice in the empire after he acquired the eastern provinces. Although there is no extant edict belonging to Constantine that bans sacrifice, historians generally agree that he restricted the practice to some extent. This consensus derives from the fact that Constantine issued an edict in 341 banning sacrifice wherein he cites his father’s law as a precedent, which would suggest that the populace had not heeded the original law. In addition to Constantine’s edict, historians have analyzed the various pagan and Christian sources that attest to some form of ban on sacrifice during Constantine’s reign in order to discern the nature of this law and how it reflects on the emperor’s ability to tolerate religious diversity in the later years of his reign.

Barnes hypothesizes that Eusebius’ assertion that Constantine banned “the erection of cult statues, the consultation of pagan oracles, divination of any sort, and sacrifice to the gods under any circumstances” in 324 is historically accurate.²³⁵ Although Eusebius does not preserve a copy of the original edict, Barnes maintains that this does not undermine the validity of his account. He argues that Constantine had probably sent the edict to his imperial officials who subsequently posted the terms of the laws in their provinces. Barnes reasons that Eusebius may have never seen the original law himself, but this does not mean that it did not exist. In his view, there is sufficient evidence to support Eusebius’ claims.²³⁶ Since Constantine remains silent on the topic of sacrifice in the *Letter to the Eastern Provincials*,

²³⁴ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.48-60.

²³⁵ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.45.1; Barnes 1981: 210.

²³⁶ Barnes 1984: 71-72.

he contends that the omission demonstrates that Constantine believed that the topic did not merit further discussion:

Εἰρηνεύειν σου τὸν λαὸν καὶ ἀστασίαστον μένειν ἐπιθυμῶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς οἰκουμένης καὶ τοῦ πάντων ἀνθρώπων χρησίμου. ὁμοίαν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν οἱ πλανώμενοι χαίροντες λαμβανέτωσαν εἰρήνης τε καὶ ἡσυχίας ἀπόλαυσιν. αὕτη γὰρ ἢ τῆς κοινωνίας γλυκύτης κάκεινους ἐπανορθώσασθαι καὶ πρὸς τὴν εὐθεΐαν ἀγαγεῖν ὁδὸν ἰσχύσει. μηδεὶς τὸν ἕτερον παρενοχλείτω. ἕκαστος ὅπερ ἡ ψυχὴ βούλεται κατεχέτω, τούτῳ κατακεχρήσθω. τοὺς δ' εὖ φρονοῦντας πεπεῖσθαι χρή, ὡς οὗτοι μόνον ἀγίως καὶ καθαρῶς βιώσονται, οὓς αὐτὸς καλεῖς ἐπαναπαύεσθαι τοῖς σοῖς ἀγίοις νόμοις. οἱ δ' ἑαυτοὺς ἀφέλκοντες ἐχόντων βουλόμενοι τὰ τῆς ψευδολογίας τεμένη. ἡμεῖς ἔχομεν τὸν φαιδρότατον τῆς σῆς ἀληθείας οἶκον, ὄνπερ κατὰ φύσιν δέδωκας. τοῦτο κάκεινοις εὐχόμεθα, ἵνα δηλαδὴ διὰ τῆς κοινῆς ὁμονοίας καὶ οὐτοὶ τὴν θυμηδῖαν ἀποφέρωνται (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.56).

For the general good of the world and of all mankind I desire that your people be at peace and stay free from strife. Let those in error, as well as the believers, gladly receive the benefit of peace and quiet. For this sweetness of fellowship will be effective for correcting them and bringing them to the right way. May none molest another; may each retain what his soul desires, and practise it. But persons of good sense are to be convinced that those alone will live a holy and pure life, whom you call to rely on your holy laws. Those who hold themselves back, let them keep if they wish their sanctuaries of falsehood. To us belongs the shining house of your truth, which you have given in accordance with nature. This we pray also for them, that by means of the general concord they too may enjoy what they desire (Cameron and Hall 1999: 113).

Therefore, Barnes contends that Constantine was willing to allow pagans to retain their temples, but the omission of sacrifice in this letter demonstrates that it had already been banned.²³⁷ The pagan grammarian Palladas provides further insight into the religious circumstances in the East after Constantine's victory. According to Palladas, "[the] Hellenes [were] men reduced to ashes, holding to [their] buried hopes in the dead; for everything [had] been turned on its head" (Palladas, *Anth. Pal.* 10.90; Wilkinson 2009: 43). Barnes contends that Palladas' lamentation on the state of paganism during the reign of Constantine supports his interpretation of the *Letter to the Eastern Provincials*.²³⁸ However, Barnes proposes that Constantine only enforced this ban in the eastern provinces, which had a larger Christian populace. He suggests that when Constantine was the western emperor he extended his father's

²³⁷ Barnes 1981: 210-211.

²³⁸ Barnes 2011: 109-110.

edict to his own territories in 341.²³⁹ In his view, Constantine did not outlaw sacrifice in the West because he did not want to disappoint the predominantly pagan populace who had supported him since his victory over Maxentius in 312.²⁴⁰ Since Barnes asserts that Constantine wanted to create a Christian empire, he concludes that Constantine began by initiating a ban on pagan rituals in the eastern portion of the empire.

On the other hand, Bardill contends that Eusebius' account that Constantine completely outlawed sacrifice should not be used as a basis for understanding this law because numerous literary sources contradict him. Immediately after Eusebius makes this claim, he attached the *Letter to the Eastern Provincials* wherein Constantine himself asserts that he did not take any action against traditional cult rituals:

ταῦτα εἶπον, ταῦτα διεξήλθον μακρότερον ἢ ὁ τῆς ἐμῆς ἐπιεικείας ἀπαιτεῖ σκοπός, ἐπειδὴ τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ἀποκρύψασθαι πίστιν οὐκ ἐβουλόμην, μάλισθ' ὅτι τινὲς ὡς ἀκούω φασὶ τῶν ναῶν περιηρῆσθαι τὰ ἔθη καὶ τοῦ σκότους τὴν ἐξουσίαν. ὅπερ συνεβούλευσα ἂν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, εἰ μὴ τῆς μοχθηρᾶς πλάνης ἢ βίαιος ἐπανάστασις ἐπὶ βλάβῃ τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας ἀμέτρως ταῖς ἐνίων ψυχαῖς ἐμπεπήγει (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.60.2).

I have said these things and explained them at greater length than the purpose of my clemency requires, because I did not wish to conceal my belief in the truth; especially since (so I hear) some persons are saying that the customs of the temples and the agency of darkness have been removed altogether. I would indeed have recommended that to all mankind, were it not that the violent rebelliousness of injurious error is so obstinately fixed in the minds of some to the detriment of the common weal (Cameron and Hall 1999: 114).

Regardless of his personal sentiments, Constantine reassures the public that pagan rituals, which would have included sacrifice, would not be banned. Bardill contends that Constantine's own words should have more weight than the assertions of a Christian author who has often been proven to exaggerate facts for dramatic affect or to conform to his Christian agenda.²⁴¹ In his view, Constantine's letter validates Libanius' assertions that he did not "ma[ke any] alteration in the traditional forms of worship, but, though poverty reigned in the temples, one could see that all the rest of the ritual was fulfilled" (Lib., *Or.* 30.6; Norman 1969: 2: 105,107). Since Libanius was petitioning Theodosius I to preserve

²³⁹ Barnes 2011: 109.

²⁴⁰ Barnes 1981: 211.

²⁴¹ Bardill 2012: 287.

traditional paganism, historians have often believed that he invented imperial precedent in order to persuade the emperor. However, Theodosius subsequently issued an edict in 392 that comprehensively banned all forms of sacrifice, which not only suggests that the edicts of Constantine and his sons continued to be ignored by the public but also that they were not entirely prohibitive.²⁴² Moreover, Christian literature demonstrates that sacrifice continued to be practised during and after Constantine's reign. The Christian convert Firmicus Maternus' plea to the emperor Constans and Constantius II to end sacrifices, which continued to be practised daily within the temples, demonstrates that sacrifice had not been banned or at least not in the temples.²⁴³

Bardill hypothesizes that Eusebius was referring to an edict that extended Constantine's ban on the performance of divination in private residences to the eastern provinces. In 319 Constantine issued two edicts that forbade divination from being performed in private homes. He stipulated that any "soothsayers and priests" who entered a home even "under the pretext of friendship" would be burned alive and the homeowners would be "exiled to an island, after the confiscation of his property" (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.1-2; Pharr 1952: 237). Romans could continue practising pagan rituals, but only in public temples. Since Constantine issued these edicts in the years between his conflicts with Licinius, it is clear that he restricted pagan rituals to public places so that they could not be used in political intrigue to divine the emperors' futures. Bardill contends that Libanius' account of an acquaintance that continued to practise divination and sacrifice "despite the law which banned it and the death penalty inflicted on any who dared do so" demonstrates that this law was regulated to the private sphere because he describes this man as a recluse (*Lib., Or.* 1.27; Norman 1965: 21). Therefore, Bardill concludes that despite the emperor's devotion to Christianity, he did not ban public sacrifice, but only forbade those used in private divination rituals in order to avoid political intrigue.²⁴⁴

As we have seen, the evidence suggests that Constantine instituted restrictions on private pagan rituals, which often would include sacrifice, but that it still continued to be practised within the empire. While Barnes hypothesizes that Constantine enforced a ban in only the eastern empire in order to explain this disparity, Bardill suggests that Constantine

²⁴² *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12. See also *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.10-11 for Theodosius' earlier edicts on sacrifice.

²⁴³ *Firm. Mat., Err. prof. rel.* 16.3-4; cf. Barnes 1981: 246; Barnes 2011: 130.

²⁴⁴ Bardill 2012: 286.

only restricted sacrifice away from the private sphere in order to avoid the cultivation of political plots. Their hypotheses are not only based on different perceptions of the evidence but also to what extent they believe Constantine would enforce his own religion on his subjects. Since Barnes believes that Constantine had sought to reform the Roman Empire from almost the moment of his conversion in 312 to reflect Christian principles, he has no difficulty believing Eusebius' claim that Constantine instituted a complete ban on sacrifice. Alternatively, Bardill, based primarily on the evidence provided in Constantine's own letters, asserts that Constantine did not issue any widespread bans on public pagan ritual. In his view, the literary evidence attesting to a ban on sacrifice does not pose a problem to the hypothesis that Constantine did not enforce his beliefs on his subjects but rather narrows down the breadth of this restriction.

Constantine and Pagan Temples

Since Constantine expressed his preference for Christianity more overtly after his victory over Licinius, historians have attempted to discern the significance of the destruction and looting of certain pagan temples throughout the eastern empire. They have analyzed the socio-religious circumstances surrounding five temples in particular in order to elucidate the factors that influenced Constantine to order their destruction. Similarly, the spoliation of temple treasures and income property has been discussed in order to determine the cause for these actions and the extent to which they affected pagan institutions. While certain historians have seen these actions as evidence that Constantine began to actively suppress paganism in order to establish Christianity as the state religion, others have proposed that Constantine only took these actions to respond to socio-religious concerns and imperial fiscal needs, but otherwise behaved impartially towards the pagan and Christian religions.

Barnes hypothesizes that the demolition of five temples and the confiscation of property from eastern temples in general demonstrate that Constantine intended to institute Christianity as the state religion. Barnes arrives at this conclusion because the temples that were destroyed either sat atop Christian holy sites or offended Christian principles. Around 326 Constantine ordered the destruction of the temple of Venus at Jerusalem that the emperor Hadrian had constructed on the site believed to be Christ's Sepulchre. After the demolition of this temple Constantine famously commissioned the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre, over which his mother Helena directed construction during her sojourn in the city.²⁴⁵ Eusebius also records that Constantine ordered the destruction of an unknown temple at Mamre where Christians and Jews believed that Abraham had hosted messengers of God. In place of this temple, Constantine also ordered the construction of another church.²⁴⁶ Two temples of Venus, one at Aphaca and the other at Heliopolis, were condemned for practising ritual prostitution.²⁴⁷ Since the town of Heliopolis did not have a Christian clergy, Constantine also ordered the construction of a new church and established a see within the city.²⁴⁸ Finally, the close association between the temple of Asclepius at Aegae and the first-century pagan philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, who had been heralded as the pagan Christ, prompted the demolition of this temple.²⁴⁹ Since Constantine replaced three out of five of the temples that he destroyed with churches, Barnes asserts that this demonstrates that Constantine aimed to replace paganism with Christianity in the last years of his reign.²⁵⁰

Moreover, Barnes proposes that Constantine clearly exhibited his disregard for paganism when he pillaged the valuables from pagan temples to suit imperial financial needs. According to Eusebius, Constantine sent imperial officials throughout the eastern empire to collect gold and silver from the temples. While some valuables were to be melted down to fill the imperial coffers, cult statues were shipped to Constantinople to adorn the city.²⁵¹ Zosimus claims that Constantine had the postures of the pagan statues altered to devoid them of religious significance. Barnes contends that Palladas attests to this treatment of pagan statues:²⁵²

Χριστιανοὶ γεγαῶτες Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες
 ἐνθάδε ναιετάουσιν ἀπήμονες. οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτοὺς
 χόνη φόλλιν ἄγουσα φερέσβιον ἐν πυρὶ θήσει (Palladas, *Anth. Pal.* 9.528).

The owners of the Olympian palaces, having become Christian, dwell here unharmed; for the pot that produces the life-giving *follis* will not put them in the fire (Wilkinson 2009: 38).

²⁴⁵ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.25-30.

²⁴⁶ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.51-53.

²⁴⁷ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.55, 58.

²⁴⁸ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.58.

²⁴⁹ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.55.5-56.

²⁵⁰ Barnes 1981: 247.

²⁵¹ Euseb., *Or. Const.* 8.1-4; Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.54.1-8; Barnes 2011: 130.

²⁵² Zos., *Hist. nov.* 2.31.2-3. Barnes 2011: 130-131.

Barnes has inferred that Constantine used the wealth taken from the temples in order to finance the church building projects throughout the empire and the renovation of Constantinople, which Barnes asserts was an entirely Christian metropolis.²⁵³ He concludes that the destruction and spoliation of pagan temples in the East between 324 and 330 in order to fund Christian projects clearly demonstrates that he sought to promote the Christian Church to the detriment of paganism.

Alternatively, Bardill hypothesizes that Constantine only destroyed temples that threatened civil unrest, but otherwise did not hinder their existence or the construction of new temples. He contends that Constantine only destroyed temples on Christian holy sites in order to appease the Christian constituency. Eusebius provides an example of the outrage Christians felt at having pagan rituals performed on the site of Christ's sepulchre and Abraham's interaction with the messengers of god:

Τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τὸ σωτήριον ἄντρον ἄθεοί τινες καὶ δυσσεβεῖς ἀφανὲς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ποιήσασθαι διανενόηγτο, ἄφροني λογισμῶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ταύτη πη κρύψαι λογισάμενοι... εἴθ' ὡς οὐδενὸς αὐτοῖς λειπομένου, τῆς γῆς ὑπερθε δεινὸν ὡς ἀληθῶς ταφεῶνα ψυχῶν ἐπισκευάζουσι νεκρῶν εἰδώλων, σκότιον Ἀφροδίτης ἀκολάστῳ δαίμονι μυχὸν οἰκοδομησάμενοι, κάπειτα μυσαρὰς ἐταυθοῖ θυσίας ἐπὶ βεβήλων καὶ ἐναγῶν βωμῶν ἐπισπένδοντες (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.26.2-3).

It was this very cave of the Saviour that some godless and wicked people had planned to make invisible to mankind, thinking in their stupidity that they could in this way hide the truth... Then as though they had everything finished, above the ground they constructed a terrible and truly genuine tomb, one for souls, for dead idols, and built a gloomy sanctuary to the impure demon Aphrodite; then they offered foul sacrifices there upon defiled and polluted altars (Cameron and Hall 1999: 132).

If these temples had remained standing they would have proven a source of discord between the pagan and Christian constituencies, which could have resulted in violent and deadly riots. Therefore, Constantine demolished the temples and returned the sites to Christians. As we have seen, the temple of Asclepius had a strong connection to Apollonius of Tyana. The pagan Sossianus Hierocles penned a treatise on Christianity at the beginning of the Great Persecution called the *Lover of Truth* wherein he unfavourably compared Christ

²⁵³ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.45-46, 3.48.2; Palladas, *Anth. Pal.* 282; Barnes 1981: 428; Barnes 2011: 127-128.

to Apollonius.²⁵⁴ For this reason, Bardill suggests that Constantine destroyed this temple because it offended the Christian constituency and contravened his policy of religious equality. The temples of Venus at Aphaca and Heliopolis were only destroyed because ritual prostitution was practised there, which contravened Roman morality laws.²⁵⁵ Therefore, Bardill concludes that Constantine only destroyed temples when they posed a threat to civil tranquility or morality.

Moreover, Bardill not only asserts that Constantine left all other temples in the empire relatively unharmed, with the exception of spoliation, but that he also sanctioned the construction of new temples. He refutes Barnes' claim that Constantine eradicated all the temples in Constantinople during his renovation of the city. Zosimus records that not only did Constantine include a shrine to Castor and Pollux in the Hippodrome at Constantinople but also built two temples, one to Rhea-Cybele, and the other to the Tyche of Rome, near the forum.²⁵⁶ However, Bardill suggests that these may not have been fully-fledged temples, but only shrines to the Tyche of Constantinople and of Rome.²⁵⁷ Nonetheless, he notes that on the outskirts of Constantinople a temple existed called "the Capitol", which suggests that it was either dedicated to "the Capitoline triad — Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva — or at least to Jupiter Optimus Maximus himself."²⁵⁸ Although it is unknown whether Constantine commissioned this temple or it predated his reign, its continued existence demonstrates that Constantine did not eradicate all temples in the environs of Constantinople.²⁵⁹ Moreover, Constans permitted Hispellum to dedicate a temple to the imperial cult in 337, which signifies that he believed his father would not have been opposed to its construction.²⁶⁰ Therefore, Bardill contends that Constantine's policy towards temples after 324 demonstrates that he continued to promote the interests of both the pagan and Christian constituencies rather than attempt to replace paganism with Christianity.

Bardill also states that the spoliation of precious metals from temples does not conclusively prove that Constantine sought to suppress paganism. Bardill argues that Constantine needed to enrich the imperial coffers because his monetary reforms required an

²⁵⁴ Jones 2005: 18; Bardill 2012: 262.

²⁵⁵ Bardill 2012: 264-266.

²⁵⁶ Zos., *Hist. nov.* 2.31.1-3.

²⁵⁷ Bardill 2012: 262

²⁵⁸ Bardill 2012: 263.

²⁵⁹ Mango 2000: 177; Bardill 2012: 263.

²⁶⁰ *ILS* 705.

increase in gold and silver production.²⁶¹ Constantine introduced the gold *solidus* in 309 and the silver *miliarensis* in 324 in order to counter-act the devaluation of Roman coinage in the face of inflation.²⁶² Bardill suggests that one of the primary reasons for temple spoliation was the increased need for gold and silver in order to successfully implement this monetary reform. Although Constantine chose to loot the temples to fund his projects, he does not believe that this demonstrates a marked disregard for the pagan institution. He notes that over the third century many temples had been “destroyed, ruined, or... converted for other uses.”²⁶³ The condition of certain temples and the abandonment of pagan rituals had troubled Roman authors for some time. In the second century, Pliny expressed hope that the persecutions against the Christians would restore people to the temples and rites that in his time had already been long neglected.²⁶⁴ Arnobius also recorded in 303 that “the gods [were] neglected, and in the temples there [was] a very thin attendance... the time-honoured rites of institutions once sacred ha[d] sunk before the superstitions of new religions” (Arn., *Ad. Nat.* 1.24.3; Bryce and Campbell 1871: 18).²⁶⁵ The lack of care that pagans exhibited towards certain houses of worship in the fourth century suggests that Constantine could have repurposed the wealth of silver and gold hoarded in longstanding temples without greatly offending the pagan community. Moreover, this spoliation was not detrimental to pagan religion because Constantine allowed temples to remain open for worship and continued to subsidize the priesthods, as previously discussed. Therefore, the hypothesis that Constantine ordered the spoliation of the temples for pragmatic reasons undermines, though it does not completely exclude, the notion that he intended this policy to weaken pagan religion.

Historians have analyzed Constantine’s treatment of the temples in order to discern whether or not he remained tolerant of religious diversity when he no longer had to remain religiously neutral for political expediency. The literary evidence demonstrates that after 324 Constantine was vocal about his personal preference for Christianity, but it is more difficult to discern whether or not he acted on his personal sentiments because of the conflicting scholarly interpretations of the literary evidence. Historians who believe that Constantine had

²⁶¹ Bardill 2012: 264.

²⁶² Jones 1948: 227.

²⁶³ Bardill 2012: 264.

²⁶⁴ Plin., *epist.* 10.96.10.

²⁶⁵ Whereas Hildebrand refers to this work as *Adversus nationes* in his Latin edition, Bryce and Campbell choose to use the title *Adversus gentes*. For the cause of this disc see Bryce and Campbell 1871: xviii-xix.

become intolerant of paganism after his conversion assert that the evidence demonstrates that Constantine actively suppressed paganism in the aim of establishing Christianity as the official religion of the state. However, historians who believe Constantine retained his attitude of tolerance towards religious diversity assert that the evidence demonstrates that Constantine's actions against pagan temples were justified in order to preserve civic and civil harmony. Although they concede that Constantine looted valuables from the temples, they assert that he did so not out of malice but rather because his imperial agenda necessitated an increase in the imperial coffers.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed at elucidating the conflicting interpretations of Constantine's actions during his reign that have led historians to assert that he was either an intolerant or tolerant Christian. In the first-half of the twentieth century many historians, such as Baynes and Alföldi, hypothesized that Constantine worshipped the Christian god, even though he often did not adhere to the tenets of the Church, and aimed to undermine paganism in order to glorify his new religion. They argue that Constantine only behaved tolerantly towards paganism between 312 and 324 in order to avoid a political scandal, even though he demonstrated his desire for the Christian Church to eventually overwhelm and do away with paganism by promoting Christianity during this decade. In their view, Constantine only began to actively suppress pagan religion after Licinius' fall from power and have interpreted his actions towards pagan rites and temples during this time in this way. While historians in the first-half of the twentieth century may not have believed Constantine to be entirely tolerant of religious diversity, Barnes proposed in the 1980s that Constantine was a zealous Christian who planned to eradicate paganism and christianize the Roman Empire. In many instances, preconceptions of proper Christian behaviour have led him to interpret the evidence in a way that continually supports the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian, but in so doing he has cast the emperor as completely intolerant towards religious diversity. As a result of Barnes' more extreme hypothesis, historians like Drake, Bardill, and Potter, have re-analyzed the contemporary evidence from a more neutral perspective in order to uncover alternative explanations for Constantine's actions towards the Christian Church and pagan institutions. They have determined that many of his actions attempted to create

religious harmony and social stability. They propose that Constantine primarily promoted the Christian Church in order to make it an equal to pagan religion and only ever acted against the temples or rituals of the latter when it was necessary to maintain civil tranquility or to serve the financial needs of the state. Therefore, they hypothesize that when Constantine converted to Christianity he remained tolerant of religious diversity even when he became vocal about his religious preference after 324. In their view, Constantine had no desire to christianize the Roman Empire by eradicating paganism.

Chapter 3: The Evidence for Constantine's Continued Pagan Sympathies

Introduction

In spite of the agreement of virtually all modern scholars that the abundant contemporary evidence proves that Constantine converted to Christianity at some point after 312, Jacob Burckhardt and Alistair Kee hypothesize that he never did in fact convert. Burckhardt proposes that Constantine only feigned Christian beliefs in order to expand his political support to the Christian constituency. In his view, Constantine's pagan associations, unchristian conduct, and various edicts demonstrate that the emperor remained pagan throughout his life. Alternatively, Kee hypothesizes that the religio-political circumstances forced Constantine to adopt the Christian god as his patron deity. However, Kee contends that he never incorporated Jesus into his religion because the contemporary literature largely eschews explicit mentions of the Son of God in association with Constantine. This would mean that he was not a Christian, based on the definition of the word provided in the general introduction. These two hypotheses will be analyzed in this chapter, along with arguments of Drake who agrees that political considerations not only motivated Constantine's affiliation with the Christian Church but also his adoption of the Christian god as his patron deity. Even so, Drake believes that the contemporary evidence does demonstrate that Constantine gradually experienced a sincere conversion to Christianity.

This chapter will discuss Burckhardt and Kee's interpretation of the evidence in order to clarify their assertions that Constantine did not convert to Christianity. The first section will re-evaluate the religio-political circumstances in the early fourth century in order to determine whether or not political motivations would have influenced Constantine to alter his religious allegiance. Then the credibility of Lactantius and Eusebius will be discussed in order to determine whether or not their narratives contain anything of historical value. Based on these analyses, the next section will present alternative interpretations of Constantine's adoption of the christogram as his military insignia. This will be followed by a discussion on the various factors that led Constantine to promote Christianity in order to determine whether political considerations or personal religion influenced Constantine's course of action. Once Burckhardt and Kee's interpretation of Constantine's religious and

political mentality before and after the battle of the Milvian Bridge has been established, the remaining evidence will be divided into two sections because they employ fundamentally different methodologies in order to support their individual hypotheses that Constantine was not a Christian. The first of these sections will discuss the numismatic, epigraphic, and literary evidence that Burckhardt believes demonstrates that Constantine continued to exhibit pagan sympathies and un-Christian behaviour. The final section will present Kee's analysis of the *Vita Constantini*, *Oratio de laudibus Constantini*, and the *Oratio ad coetum sanctorum* in order to elucidate his assertion that Christ did not factor into Constantine's religion. Drake's arguments will be incorporated into most of these sections in order to clarify how political tactic could have turned into sincere religious belief. Since Drake does not cover all of the topics that will be discussed, the hypothesis of Barnes, Bardill, and Scott Bradbury will be presented in certain sections. This chapter aims to elucidate the conflicting interpretations of the evidence that have led historians to assert that Constantine either remained pagan or only revered the Christian god as a powerful divinity.

Political Motivations

Both Burckhardt and Kee's hypotheses are based on the premise that political considerations would have influenced Constantine's religious allegiance. This concept was introduced in Chapter 1 with an analysis of Drake's hypothesis that Constantine converted to Christianity in order to not only extend his religious legitimacy to the Christian constituency but also resolve the "Christian question". Although Burckhardt and Kee also believe that Constantine recognized the benefits of appealing to the Christian constituency at various points during his reign, they have perceived alternative religio-political scenarios preceding the Battle of the Milvian Bridge that would not have required Constantine to convert to Christianity. Whereas Burckhardt hypothesizes that the Christian constituency did not have enough power to influence imperial politics in 312, Kee maintains that while Constantine did need to gain the religious legitimacy of the Christians, adopting the Christian god as his patron deity was sufficient. Their hypotheses are based on fundamentally different perceptions of the religio-political circumstances in the empire between 306 and 312.

Although Burckhardt does not provide an in-depth analysis of the position of Christianity between 306 and 312, his belief that the Christian constituency had little to no

power can be deduced from his statements about tolerance in specific territories during this period. First, he claims that Constantine only enforced a policy of toleration and restitution for Christians in Britain and Gaul because his father's tolerant example had led him to feel sympathy for the plight of Christians.²⁶⁶ Second, he asserts that Maximinus and Maxentius granted toleration in their individual territories either "as a political device or only to annoy Galerius" whenever the imperial succession was in question.²⁶⁷ He contends that Maximinus either harshly enforced the persecution in order to gain favour with Galerius or became more relaxed in his enforcement when he wanted to defy his superior. Although Burckhardt does not elaborate on Maximinus' succession dilemma, he is probably referring to the fact that Galerius did not promote his caesar Maximinus to replace the western augustus Severus, who committed or was forced to commit suicide after his failed attempt to wrest control of Rome from Maxentius, but instead chose to appoint his general Licinius to the position on 11 November 308.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, he argues that Maxentius only granted toleration to Christians in Italy and Africa to annoy Galerius because the latter had refused to recognize Maxentius as a legitimate member of the Tetrarchy.²⁶⁹ Since Burckhardt believes that emperors only enforced toleration between 306 and 312 either to assuage their conscience or to irritate their superior, it is apparent that he does not believe that the Christians held enough power to influence the creation of a tolerant religious policy that appealed specifically to them. Therefore, Burckhardt maintains that Constantine would have remained pagan after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge because he had no political inducement to convert to Christianity.

Burckhardt's argument is problematic because he bases his interpretation of the religio-political circumstances on the premise that Maximinus and Maxentius granted periods of toleration only to irritate Galerius. First, there is no evidence that Maximinus ever granted periods of toleration to Christians before the issuance of the edict of toleration on 30 April 311.²⁷⁰ Since Galerius died days after the issuance of this edict, it cannot be said that Maximinus ever granted toleration to show his displeasure to the emperor.²⁷¹ Second,

²⁶⁶ Burckhardt 1967: 273, 293-294.

²⁶⁷ Burckhardt 1967: 273.

²⁶⁸ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 26.8-11; *PLRE* 1, Val. Licinianus Licinius 3, p. 509.

²⁶⁹ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 26.1-5.

²⁷⁰ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 35.1-2.

²⁷¹ *PLRE* 1, C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus 9, p. 575.

Maxentius certainly incited the anger of Galerius when he usurped power in Italy and Africa, but it seems unlikely that sheer spite would have led him to cease persecution in his territories when he was denied legitimacy in 306. In fact, Barnes points out that Maxentius actually aimed to reconcile with the Tetrarchy instead of goading them further. Initially, Galerius expressed his disapproval of Maxentius' usurpation when he announced that Severus and Maximinus would be the consuls for 307. In response, Maxentius announced that Galerius and Maximinus were his own choices for the consulship.²⁷² Therefore, the hypothesis that Maxentius only granted toleration to annoy Galerius does not seem to coincide with his attitude towards the Tetrarchy at this time. What reason then would Maxentius have had for implementing a policy of toleration and restitution towards Christians? The Christian constituency must have been able to provide something that Maxentius lacked.

This question brings us back to Drake's hypothesis that as a usurper Maxentius would need to gain as much political support in order to legitimize his claim to power. Maxentius gained legitimization for his regime from the popular support of the people. For instance, Galerius had recently enforced a tax census on the city of Rome and moved to abolish the praetorian guard, but Maxentius reversed these measures.²⁷³ Since he also granted religious tolerance and restitution for property seized during the persecutions, Drake asserts that he attempted to expand his support to the Christian constituency. In his view, Constantine would also have employed this tactic because he had also begun his imperial career as a usurper. While the Christians may not have been politically significant in 306, Maxentius and Constantine's individual religious policies would have given the Christians the power to ally themselves with the emperor that would provide the best treatment for their people. Both Constantine and Maxentius had developed reputations as protectors of Christianity before engaging in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, as discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore, Constantine needed to find a way to ensure their allegiance. While Drake proposes that Constantine converted to Christianity in order to simultaneously resolve the "Christian question" and extend his religious legitimacy to their constituency, Kee hypothesizes that

²⁷² *Chron. Min.* 1.66; Barnes 1981: 30.

²⁷³ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 26.1-6.

Constantine only needed to adopt the Christian god as his patron deity in order to resolve both of these issues.

Kee contends that Constantine simply changed his patron deity from Apollo to the Christian god in order to respond to his political needs, just as he had done in 310.²⁷⁴ As previously discussed, Constantine had originally sought political and religious legitimization within the framework of the Tetrarchy after he assumed power on 25 July 306. He had married Maximian's daughter a year later in order to strengthen his legitimacy as the son-in-law and son of two original tetrarchs; and inherited his father-in-law's patron deity Hercules. Although Constantine seemed established within the Tetrarchy as a caesar, Maximian's military *coup* in 310 undermined his legitimacy. Therefore, Kee argues that Constantine changed his patron deity from Hercules to Apollo in order to invoke the memory of his father, a senior tetrarch whose patron deity is believed to have been Sol, and thus appeal to the religious sentiments of the population of Gaul, where Apollo was worshipped with ubiquity in many local forms.²⁷⁵ Kee proposes that prior to his military engagement with Maxentius Constantine sought a deity who would advance his political ambitions outside of this province. He believes that Constantine chose to exchange Apollo for the Christian god in order to extend his religious legitimacy to the Christian constituency. Furthermore, he maintains that Constantine perceived the benefit of defeating Maxentius with the aid of a god whose power no emperor had previously tested: he could claim that his god was especially powerful because he ensured Constantine's victory against Maxentius, while Hercules and Jupiter had failed to help Severus in 306 and Galerius in 307.²⁷⁶ Kee implies that Constantine could extend his religious legitimacy to the Christian constituency without a conversion because his adoption of the Christian god would ensure their allegiance to him. However, he does not mention any need for Constantine to adopt an ambiguous religious dialogue in order to ensure religious legitimization from both the Christians and the pagans. Instead, Kee maintains that the ambiguous language in the "edict of Milan" and the inscription on his triumphal arch accurately reflect Constantine's religious mentality: he rejected the old gods, but also refused to commit to Christianity.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Kee 1982: 12-13.

²⁷⁵ Kee 1982: 13; Graff 2009: 74.

²⁷⁶ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 26.8-9, 27; Kee 1982: 12-14.

²⁷⁷ Kee 1982: 21-22, 90.

Although Drake agrees that Constantine initially adopted the Christian god as his patron for political expediency, he asserts that the literary evidence demonstrates that Constantine exhibited traits that modern sociologists associate with a conversion.²⁷⁸ First, he notes that converts experience multiple religious awakenings over an extended period of time wherein their perception of the world slowly adjusts to conform to the tenets of the religion in question.²⁷⁹ In Drake's view, this corresponds to Eusebius' statement that Constantine often experienced a religious epiphany before engaging in battle over the course of his reign:

Ἄλλ' ὁ μὲν τοιούτοις ἐμπλέκων ἑαυτὸν κατὰ βαράθρων ἀπωλείας ὄθει, βασιλεὺς δ' ἐπεὶ ἑώρα δευτέρας αὐτῷ δεῖσθαι πολέμου παρατάξεως, τῷ αὐτοῦ σωτῆρι τὴν σχολὴν ἀνετίθει, τοῦ μὲν στρατοῦ τὴν σκηνὴν ἐκτὸς καὶ πορρωτάτῳ πηξάμενος, ἀγνῆ δ' ἐνταυθοῖ χρώμενος καὶ καθαρᾷ διαίτη τῷ τε θεῷ τὰς εὐχὰς ἀποδιδούς... τοῦτο δ' αὐτῷ σύνηθες ἦν πράττειν καὶ εἶποτε ἄλλοτε παρατάξει πολέμων ὠρμᾶτο συμβαλεῖν... ἐπὶ σχολῆς δὲ τῷ αὐτοῦ θεῷ τὰς ἱκετηρίας ποιούμενος πάντως πού και θεοφανείας ἐτύγχανεν, εἶθ' ὥσπερ θειοτέρα κινηθεὶς ἐμπνεύσει, τῆς σκηνῆς ἀναπηδήσας ἐξαίφνης, κινεῖν αὐτίκα τὰ στρατιωτικὰ καὶ μὴ μέλλειν ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῆς ὄρας ξιφῶν ἄπτεσθαι παρεκελεύετο (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.12).

While he was getting involved in things of such a kind, and pushing himself down into the pits of perdition, the Emperor, seeing that he would need to organize another campaign, dedicated the respite to his Saviour: he pitched his tent outside the camp a long way off, and there he observed a chaste and pure rule of life, offering up his prayers to God... His habitual practice, on every other occasion when he was setting out to engage in battle, had been this... while taking his time in making supplications to his God he would sooner or later receive a revelation from God, and then as if moved by divine inspiration he would rush suddenly from the tent, immediately rouse his troops, and urge them not to delay, but to draw their swords at once (Cameron and Hall 1999: 99-100).

Drake argues that Constantine swore to Eusebius over two decades later that he had converted sometime after the epiphany experienced before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge because converts often “[construct] more discontinuity than actually existed and in retrospect [perceive] the conversion experience as a moment of stark change, a dramatic break.”²⁸⁰ Second, he observes that Eusebius records that Constantine took the initiative to educate himself on Christian doctrine and society.²⁸¹ According to Eusebius, Constantine consulted

²⁷⁸ For a list of the sociological studies used to support this argument, see Drake 2000: 505 n. 53.

²⁷⁹ Drake 2000: 188.

²⁸⁰ Drake 2000: 188.

²⁸¹ Drake 2000: 189.

with Christians in his entourage who could instruct him on “the reasons for [Christ’s] coming... [and] decided personally to apply himself to the divinely inspired writings” so that he could understand Christianity (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.32.2-3; Cameron and Hall 1999: 82). Furthermore, he would not only invite humble clergymen to dine with him but would also give out donations to the poor, a central tenet of Christian society.²⁸² In Drake’s view, Constantine’s behaviour corresponds to the socialization of converts wherein they learn the “standards, histories, and reference points” of the religious community.²⁸³ The literary evidence has led Drake to assert that Constantine may have initially adopted the Christian god as his patron for political expediency, but experienced a sincere, gradual conversion to the religion over the course of his life.

This section has attempted to elucidate the possible scenarios in which Constantine could resolve his need for legitimacy and the “Christian question” without converting to Christianity. Burckhardt proposes that Constantine did not need to convert to gain the political or religious support of Christians before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge because their constituency had little to no influence on imperial politics, which also means that a policy of tolerance and restitution would have been sufficient to resolve the “Christian question”. However, a reassessment of the political circumstances between 306 and 312 suggests that Christians had gained some political influence during this period. Before Constantine and Maxentius engaged in battle in 312, they both had the support of the Christian constituency as protectors of Christianity, which has led Kee and Drake to assert that Constantine needed to create a strategy that would ensure his legitimacy on religious grounds. Although they both agree that Constantine only needed to adopt the Christian god as his patron deity in order to achieve this, they disagree on how this decision would have affected his religious mentality. Whereas Kee maintains that Constantine could have worshipped the Christian god in the same manner as a pagan deity, Drake believes that Eusebius’ description of Constantine’s behaviour after 312 demonstrates that he did experience a gradual conversion to Christianity.

²⁸² Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.42-43.

²⁸³ Drake 2000: 188.

The Dream and the Vision of Constantine

As discussed in Chapter 1, Lactantius' and Eusebius' narratives provide invaluable evidence to support the hypothesis that Constantine converted to Christianity sometime after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Lactantius records that Constantine experienced a dream wherein Christ instructed him to fight under his cipher in order to achieve victory. Alternatively, Eusebius records that Constantine first witnessed a vision in the sky around noon and then Christ appeared to him in a dream to confirm the reality of what he had seen. Although historians debate whether Lactantius or Eusebius provide the more historically accurate account, many agree that there may have been some kind of religious epiphany that led Constantine to convert once the Christian god had assured his victory in battle. Since these narratives are the largest impediment to Burckhardt and Kee's individual proposals that Constantine never converted, they aim to uncover evidence that undermines the historicity of these accounts. Burckhardt argues that the untrustworthy nature of both Eusebius and Constantine — his refusal to acknowledge Lactantius as a source will be discussed below — demonstrates that the account is fiction. Alternatively, Kee proposes that the narratives were symbolic rather than historical. Although both have employed different methods to interpret the literary evidence, Burckhardt and Kee agree that Constantine experienced neither a dream nor a vision that led to his conversion.

Burckhardt hypothesizes that Constantine fabricated the story of a vision at the end of his reign, to which the bishop added further embellishment.²⁸⁴ Although he does not attribute any part of the narrative specifically to Constantine or Eusebius, Burckhardt does assert that the inability of either man to make entirely truthful statements undermines the veracity of this account. Burckhardt proposes that Constantine's vows held little to no value because he had often broken them throughout his reign. When the Donatist affair embroiled the African clergy in great conflict, Constantine ordered the bishops to convene a council at Arles in 314, at the behest of the Donatists, in order to determine whether Caecilian or Donatus was the rightful bishop of Carthage. Once the council at Arles had decided in favour of Caecilian, Constantine sent a letter to the bishops to inform them that he would uphold their decision because he was not qualified to interfere in church matters.²⁸⁵ However, Constantine then

²⁸⁴ Burckhardt 1967: 296.

²⁸⁵ Optatus, *De schism. don.*, app. 5.

entertained the appeals of the Donatists and summoned Caecilian to his court in order to resolve the matter himself.²⁸⁶ According to Burckhardt, Constantine also demonstrated his unreliability when he swore that he would spare Licinius' life after the latter had been captured in 324, but decided a year later to have him executed.²⁸⁷ Burckhardt also gives little credence to any of Eusebius' accounts because he believes him to be the "first dishonest historian of antiquity."²⁸⁸ He notes that Eusebius not only embellishes historical events to add a dramatic flare but also to place them in terms of religious polarity. For instance, Eusebius claims that Licinius had the Christian god on his side before he engaged in battle with Maximinus, the most vehement of the persecuting emperors, but Licinius is cast as a god-hating emperor before his final confrontation with Constantine.²⁸⁹ Since Burckhardt believes that both Constantine and Eusebius are unreliable, he concludes that they fabricated the story of the vision and the dream, but he remains silent on the possible motive for the creation of such a legend.

Although Burckhardt maintains that Eusebius narrative can now "be eliminated from the pages of history," there are a number of problems with his assessment.²⁹⁰ Burckhardt fails to distinguish between blatant deceitfulness and the need to adopt new courses of action in order to ensure civil tranquility. Constantine certainly did intervene in the Donatist affair after the Council of Arles had settled the issue, but only because it did not calm the protests of the Donatists. Since the council had failed to restore peace between the Christian factions in Africa, Constantine took it upon himself to find a resolution. Furthermore, the *Origo Constantini* states that Constantine had intended to allow Licinius to retire to private life, but decided to execute him in order to safe-guard against further political turmoil. For instance, Constantine had previously spared the life of Maximian after his military *coup* only for the latter to attempt to assassinate him in his sleep.²⁹¹ A closer inspection of the circumstances reveals that Constantine only ever went back on his word when he needed a new course of action to maintain peace within the empire. We also discussed in Chapter 1 that Eusebius does have a tendency to embellish historical events, but his dramatizations are often based on

²⁸⁶ Optatus, *De schism. don.* app. 7.

²⁸⁷ *PLRE* 1, Val. Licinianus Licinius 3, p. 509.

²⁸⁸ Burckhardt 1967: 283.

²⁸⁹ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.10.3, 9.11.9, 10.8.14-19; Burckhardt 1967: 261.

²⁹⁰ Burckhardt 1967: 296.

²⁹¹ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 30; *Orig. Const.* 5.28- 29.

historical truths. Finally, Burckhardt completely ignores Lactantius' account that Constantine received divine instruction in a dream. He appears to dismiss Lactantius as a possible source because he finds the author unreliable in this instance.²⁹² Like Eusebius, Lactantius certainly has a flare for the dramatics, but his accounts are not completely devoid of historical facts. Although this assessment demonstrates that the narratives cannot be dismissed solely on the fundamental unreliability of Constantine and the contemporary sources, it does not begin to prove whether or not Lactantius and Eusebius provide historically accurate accounts. As discussed in Chapter 1, modern historians still cannot determine for certain whether Constantine experienced a vision or a dream or nothing at all.

Kee hypothesizes that Lactantius and Eusebius created these narratives in order to endow Constantine's pragmatic decision to adopt the Christian god with religious validation. He contends that Eusebius created a vision because they were understood in the ancient world to be precursors to a conversion or an exchange in divine patronage. As we have seen, the orator of *Panegyric 6* records that Constantine witnessed a vision of Apollo as he approached the temple of Apollo Grannus in Gaul, which led him to adopt the sun-god as his patron.²⁹³ Since an analysis of the political circumstances reveals that Constantine had adopted Apollo in order to strengthen his claim to power, Kee proposes that the orator had created this vision in order to validate his exchange in divine patronage. This has led Kee to assert that Eusebius also employed a vision in order to ratify Constantine's adoption of the Christian god. Since dreams were also understood as a source of divine inspiration, Kee reasons that both Lactantius and Eusebius record that Constantine experienced a dream wherein he was instructed to fight underneath a cipher of Christ in order to make his actions appear divinely inspired. Moreover, Kee argues that Lactantius and Eusebius used the dream in order to present Constantine as a Christian because Christ appears "as the source of inspiration" in both of these narratives.²⁹⁴ The literary precedent for visions and dreams has led Kee to conclude that the stories of the dream and/or the vision symbolize Constantine's adoption of the Christian god rather than recount historical events.

Bardill comes to a similar conclusion about the narratives in Chapter 1, but he states that the literary precedent does not definitively prove that Lactantius' and Eusebius' accounts

²⁹² Burckhardt 1967: 258, cf. 213.

²⁹³ Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 248 n. 91.

²⁹⁴ Kee 1982: 18-19.

are purely symbolic. Since Romans had been predisposed to expect the gods to communicate with them through dreams or visions, Constantine may have had some sort of religious epiphany that in hindsight he believed had arrived in this form. Historians who believe that Constantine converted after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge have presented many hypotheses in order to determine exactly what the stories of a dream and a vision can tell us about Constantine's religion. However, it is impossible to prove whether Constantine believed he had experienced some sort of divine inspiration or Lactantius and Eusebius created these narratives in order to endow Constantine with religious legitimacy. The uncertain origin of these narratives makes Kee's hypothesis a plausible explanation, but this is not definitive proof that Constantine did not convert to Christianity.

This section has aimed to elucidate the interpretation of the tales of Constantine's dream and vision from the perspective of historians who hypothesize that he never converted to Christianity. Burckhardt hypothesizes that Constantine did not experience a dream or a vision because he believes that the emperor conspired with Eusebius to create this narrative to an undefined end. However, Burckhardt only superficially addresses the credibility of this narrative when he questions the general reliability of Constantine and Eusebius. Since he also declines to even discuss the dream recorded in *De mortibus persecutorum*, his analysis of the evidence is incomplete. Alternatively, Kee has addressed whether or not these accounts should be read as symbolic or literal events. He argues that the literary precedent for dreams and visions demonstrates the utility of these narratives in explaining Constantine's pragmatic decision to adopt the Christian god in a way that also endowed him with religious validation. Nonetheless, it remains difficult to prove whether or not Constantine had, or even believed that he had, actually experienced such a dream or vision.

The Christogram

Despite the debate about whether or not Constantine witnessed an instructive dream or vision, neither Burckhardt nor Kee can deny that Constantine adopted a cipher of Christ — they both agree that it was a christogram — as his military insignia before battle in 312 because the numismatic evidence corroborates Constantine's later use of this symbol. Since they concede that the christogram is an explicitly Christian emblem, they aim to explain why Constantine would adopt this symbol when he was not a Christian convert. Whereas

Burckhardt proposes that Constantine only aimed to declare his new position as the pagan protector of Christianity, Kee contends that Constantine adopted the emblem to signify his allegiance to the Christian god. Burckhardt and Kee's interpretations of the christogram's significance are based on fundamentally different perceptions of Constantine's religious and political mentality.

Since Burckhardt believes that Constantine was a tolerant pagan like his father, he hypothesizes that the emperor adopted the christogram as his military insignia before battle in order to demonstrate that he aimed to integrate Christians into society and protect their interests for the sake of civil tranquility.²⁹⁵ He argues that neither Constantine's role as the Christian protector nor this explicitly Christian emblem would have prompted the ire of the pagan constituency because they had grown weary of the Great Persecution, which had wrought civil unrest.²⁹⁶ According to Eusebius, many pagans in the East welcomed Maximinus' orders to implement the edict of toleration in his territories in 311:

τῆς τοσαύτης μεταβολῆς τὸ παράδοξον ἀποθαυμάζων μέγαν τε καὶ μόνον ἀληθῆ τὸν Χριστιανῶν θεὸν ἐπιβωύμενος... εἶτα δὲ καὶ οἱ γενναῖοι τῆς θεοσεβείας ἀθληταὶ τῆς εἰς τὰ μέταλλα κακοπαθείας ἐλευθερούμενοι ἐπὶ τὰς αὐτῶν ἐστέλλοντο, γαῦροι καὶ φαιδροὶ διὰ πάσης ἰόντες πόλεως εὐφρασύνης τε ἀλέκτου καὶ ἦν οὐδὲ λόγῳ δυνατὸν ἐρμηνεῦσαι παρρησίας ἔμπλεοι... καὶ τοὺς μετὰ τιμωρίας ἀπηνεστάτης μικρῶ πρόσθεν δεσμίους τῶν πατρίδων ἀπεληλαμένους εἶδες ἂν ἰλαροῖς καὶ γεγηθόσι προσώποις τὰς αὐτῶν ἐστίας ἀπολαμβάνοντας, ὡς καὶ τοὺς πρότερον καθ' ἡμῶν φονῶντας τὸ θαῦμα παρὰ πᾶσαν ὀρῶντας ἐλπίδα, συγχαίρειν τοῖς γεγενημένοις (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.1.9, 9.1.10-11).

All the unbelieving heathen were astonished at the wonder of so great a transformation and hailed the Christians' God as alone great and true... Then, too, the noble champions of godliness, released from their misery in the mines, returned to their own homes, rejoicing and beaming as they went through every city, exuding an indescribable delight and confidence... Those who a little earlier had been prisoners, cruelly punished and driven from their homelands, now regained their own hearths with smiles of elation, so that even those who had thirsted for our blood saw this unexpected wonder and shared our joy at what had happened (Maier 2007: 287).

Since Constantine's primary goal was political success, Burckhardt maintains that he would not have taken any actions that might have proven politically disadvantageous. He proposes

²⁹⁵ Burckhardt 1967: 295-296.

²⁹⁶ Burckhardt 1967: 268, 273.

that if pagans had expressed any objection to this explicitly Christian symbol, then he would have abandoned his plans to integrate Christians into society. However, Burckhardt asserts that pagans readily accepted this approach to the “Christian question” because Eusebius records that Constantine displayed the christogram as his military insignia on his statue in the Basilica Constantiniana.²⁹⁷ Moreover, he maintains that the christogram did not signify Constantine’s conversion because the inscription on the statue only heralds the military importance of the insignia. Therefore, Burckhardt concludes that the christogram represented Constantine’s imperial policy, not his personal religion.

However, Burckhardt’s argument that Constantine only adopted the christogram in order to demonstrate his position as the pagan protector of Christianity hinges on an out-dated assessment of the religio-political circumstances at the beginning of the fourth century, as discussed above. While Constantine was certainly a tolerant pagan prior to engaging in battle at the Milvian Bridge, he could not have ignored that the adoption of the Christian god would have ensured the allegiance of the Christian constituency, who also had their rights protected under Maxentius. As discussed in Chapter 2, Constantine could appeal to both the Christian and pagan constituencies through an ambiguous religious policy that recognized divine singularity and religious plurality. Burckhardt’s assessment also rejects the validity of Lactantius’ and Eusebius’ narratives as either factual or symbolic accounts because he perceives them to be completely unreliable. As we have seen, it is difficult to prove whether or not these narratives are factual accounts, but if they are at least symbolic they represent a change in Constantine’s religious allegiance: at their core is the story of an emperor who believed that the symbol of the Christian religion would be powerful enough to ensure his victory in battle. Since Constantine originated from a pagan family, he would have had to pay homage to the god to whom this symbol belonged in gratitude for his victory. Furthermore, the inscription on the statue in the Basilica Constantiniana heralded the christogram as Constantine’s saving-sign in battle because it was a military insignia; the religious import is within the sign itself. Therefore, Burckhardt’s arguments do not exclude the possibility that Constantine’s political decision to adopt the christogram was eventually followed by a conversion to Christianity.

²⁹⁷ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.1; Burckhardt 1967: 295.

Alternatively, Kee proposes that Constantine adopted the christogram in order to represent his alliance with the Christian god rather than his new-found Christianity. He contends that if Constantine had converted to Christianity in 312, then he would have adopted a simple cross in order to exhibit his altered religious sentiments because it was a common symbol among Christians.²⁹⁸ Instead, Constantine chose the more ambiguous christogram in order to test the power of his new patron that “was capable of Christian interpretation and yet it was not simply Christian” because pagans could create their own interpretation of this monogram.²⁹⁹ Kee argues that the evolution of this military insignia during Constantine’s reign demonstrates that it was not intended to display his Christian faith. Lactantius provides the earliest description of Constantine’s insignia in *De mortibus persecutorum* from 315. Therein he claims that Constantine placed a simple christogram — or staurogram, depending on one’s interpretation of the Latin — atop his military standard.³⁰⁰ Eusebius provides a slightly altered description of the insignia, which was written over two decades later:

Ἦν δὲ τοιῷδε σχήματι κατεσκευασμένον. ὑψηλὸν δόρυ χρυσοῦ κατημφιεσμένον κέρας εἶχεν ἐγκάρσιον σταυροῦ σχήματι πεποιημένον, ἄνω δὲ πρὸς ἄκρῳ τοῦ παντὸς στέφανος ἐκ λίθων πολυτελῶν καὶ χρυσοῦ συμπεπλεγμένος κατεστήρικτο, καθ’ οὗ τῆς σωτηρίου ἐπηγορίας τὸ σύμβολον δύο στοιχεῖα τὸ Χριστοῦ παραδηλοῦντα ὄνομα διὰ τῶν πρώτων ὑπεσήμενον χαρακτήρων, χιαζομένου τοῦ ῥῶ κατὰ τὸ μεσαίτατον (Euseb., *Vit Const.* 1.31.1).

It was constructed to the following design. A tall pole plated with gold had a transverse bar forming the shape of a cross. Up at the extreme top a wreath woven of precious stones and gold had been fastened. On it two letters, intimating by its first characters the name “Christ”, formed the monogram of the Saviour’s title, *rho* being intersected in the middle by a *chi* (Cameron and Hall 1999: 81).

According to Eusebius’ account, the design of Constantine’s military insignia had evolved to include a wreath that enclosed the christogram. Since both Constantine and his father, Constantius, had associations with solar-worship, Kee argues that the wreath represented the sun. He notes that Celtic Christians in later centuries superimposed a cross on a circular disk representing their former worship of the sun. He implies that if Constantine had been a

²⁹⁸ Kee 1982: 17-18.

²⁹⁹ Kee 1982: 18.

³⁰⁰ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 44.5.

Christian, then he would have incorporated a cross within the wreath.³⁰¹ Therefore, Kee hypothesizes that the christogram enclosed within a wreath exhibited the alliance between Constantine the “son of the sun and the God of the Christians.”³⁰²

Kee’s interpretation of the iconographic evidence hinges on the premises that a Christian would have adopted an exclusively Christian symbol and that a wreath must have a solar interpretation. However, Constantine would not have been just a Christian, he was also an imperial contender in a predominantly pagan empire. Constantine’s army would also have been primarily pagan because Christian soldiers had been dismissed from the army during the Great Persecution. Therefore, it would not have been politically expedient to choose a military insignia that would have alienated those who retained pagan beliefs. Since the various Christian *nomina sacra* employed Greek letters that formed secular monograms commonly found in pagan literature, Constantine could express his faith in the Christian god and provide pagans with the opportunity to endow the emblem with their own interpretation. Furthermore, Kee’s interpretation of the wreath as a solar symbol ignores their iconographic significance on Roman military standards. Geir Hellemo points out that the military *aquila*, the standard for individual Roman legions, had long portrayed an eagle that was often depicted holding a laurel wreath between its wing tips. Greco-Romans could only have understood the addition of a wreath to the *aquila* as the hopes of an impending victory because they had been given as prizes in athletic competitions for well-over a millennia by Constantine’s reign.³⁰³ Hellemo proposes that Constantine simply reworked the traditional standard to represent the christogram wreathed in victory instead of the eagle.³⁰⁴ While solar imagery certainly appears throughout Constantine’s reign either in statuary or coinage up until 323, the wreath in a military context only signifies victory and does not have any solar significance. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the possibility that the christogram only represented his alliance with the Christian god rather than Christ.

This section has aimed to elucidate the circumstances wherein Constantine could have adopted the christogram as his personal military insignia without the emblem’s representing his conversion to Christianity. Burckhardt believes that the christogram only

³⁰¹ Kee 1982: 19-20.

³⁰² Kee 1982: 20.

³⁰³ See Aristophanes’ *Plutus*: lines 581-586 for an example of wreaths as a symbol of victory from the late fourth century BC.

³⁰⁴ Hellemo 1989: 98-99.

represented Constantine's desire to protect the Christian constituency from further persecution. However, his arguments do not exclude the possibility that Constantine viewed the Christian god as responsible for his victory against Maxentius because he had fought under a Christian emblem. Therefore, it is entirely plausible that Constantine later adopted the Christian god as his patron deity or even converted to Christianity. Alternatively, Kee asserts that the christogram only represents the alliance Constantine established with the Christian god prior to battle. While it is entirely plausible that Constantine initially adopted this sign to enlist the aid of the Christian god alongside Apollo, Kee's arguments do not exclude the possibility that Constantine decided to commit entirely to the Christian faith.

Constantine and the Christian Church

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literary sources record that Constantine bestowed fiscal endowments on churches throughout the empire and privileges to the Christian clergy after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Burckhardt and Kee hypothesize that the promotion of the Christian Church demonstrates Constantine's political goals rather than his religious sentiments. Whereas Burckhardt asserts that Constantine implemented a policy of promotion in order to co-opt the growing power of the Church, Kee proposes that Constantine aimed to placate the Christian god in order to ensure not only civil tranquility but also his continued political success. Alternatively, Drake maintains that both Christian devotion and pragmatic politics led Constantine to implement this policy.

Burckhardt hypothesizes that Constantine commissioned churches and provided fiscal endowments partially to exhibit his gratitude to Christ for his victory over Maxentius, but primarily in order to advance his social program. He contends that Ambrose's account of Helena's finding of the cross of Christ provides the first evidence for Constantine's religious interest in Christianity. Therein Ambrose claims that Helena fixed the nails of the cross into a diadem for her son.³⁰⁵ In Burckhardt's view, this talismanic usage of the nails, intended to ensure Constantine's future success, demonstrates that he had developed a superstition about Christ. However, he argues that this interest was only superficial because Constantine never made a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.³⁰⁶ Burckhardt implies that this

³⁰⁵ Ambrose, *De obit. Theo.* 47; cf. Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.17.

³⁰⁶ Burckhardt 1967: 371-372.

superstition would have begun after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, which would explain why Constantine commissioned churches in Rome and its environs beginning in 312. Even so, he maintains that church historians over-exaggerated the extent of Constantine's commissions and endowments. Burckhardt does not provide an in-depth analysis of the literary or archaeological evidence. Nonetheless, he states that "the fabulous sumptuousness of his church building and offerings as it is depicted [in the *Liber Pontificalis*] is in fact to be reduced to a relatively small [number], which induces some doubt concerning the Emperor's generosity in general."³⁰⁷ Therefore, Burckhardt concludes that Constantine did patronize churches in gratitude for Christ, but the extent of his patronage has been over-exaggerated.

Furthermore, Burckhardt contends that Constantine primarily patronized the Church in order to fund Christian charities that provided aid to the socially disadvantaged. Although wealthy members of Greco-Roman society felt an obligation to improve their communities through euergetism, philanthropy among pagans depended on the individual because it was not institutionalized into religion. Conversely, charity had become a central tenet of the Christian religion: Jesus had not only praised those who provided for him when he had nothing but also sacrificed his own life for the salvation of his followers.³⁰⁸ Burckhardt notes that many Christian bishops had established hostels, poorhouses, old-age homes, hospitals and/or orphanages for the less fortunate members of their community.³⁰⁹ In his view, Constantine informed Caecilian that the imperial finance minister, Ursus, would distribute 3,000 *folles* to his church in order to fund these social services.³¹⁰ Similarly, he argues that Constantine established the see in Heliopolis around 326 in order to relieve the suffering of the poor in that city.³¹¹ Therefore, Burckhardt concludes that Constantine's social agenda influenced his policy towards the Christian Church more than his superficial interest in Christianity.

Burckhardt also postulates that Constantine rewarded the Christian clergy with priestly privileges and exemptions because he perceived that the hierarchical structure of the Church could provide support for his rule against Licinius. He proposes that Constantine understood that gaining the endorsement of the bishops would in theory ensure the support of

³⁰⁷ Burckhardt 1967: 353.

³⁰⁸ Matthew 25:34-40; John 3:16 (NIV); Constantelos 2008: 199.

³⁰⁹ Burckhardt 1967: 321.

³¹⁰ Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 10.6.1-3.

³¹¹ Burckhardt 1967: 322.

the entire Christian population because they held religious authority over their individual sees. Burckhardt argues that Constantine extended the privileges traditionally reserved for the pagan priests in order to gain the devotion of the Christian clergy.³¹² Although Burckhardt does concede that Constantine's establishment of the *episcopalis audientia* in 318 was unprecedented, he asserts that Constantine only gave bishops the power of unimpeachable verdicts in order to remove any cause for discord between "the secular and clerical judges."³¹³ The Christian clergy would have been indebted to Constantine for such a great reversal in the aftermath of the Great Persecution. Therefore, Burckhardt concludes that Constantine promoted the position of the clergy so that they would readily act as agents to spread his authority throughout the empire.³¹⁴

Although Kee also asserts that sincere devotion to Christianity did not lead Constantine to patronize the Christian Church, he proposes an alternative motivation based on an analysis of Constantine's letters about religion from 313. He hypothesizes that Constantine patronized the Church in order to incite the goodwill of the Christian god so that he would ensure the emperor's continued success. He notes that Constantine and Licinius clearly state in the "edict of Milan" that they decided on a policy of religious tolerance "so that the supreme Divinity... may be able to show [them] in all matters His accustomed favour and benevolence" in order to ensure civil tranquility (Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48.3-4; Creed 1984: 71).³¹⁵ Constantine also expressed these sentiments in a letter that informed Anullinus that the clergy would receive exemptions and privileges:

ἐπειδὴ ἐκ πλειόνων πραγμάτων φαινεται παρεξουθενηθεῖσαν τὴν θρησκείαν, ἐν ἧ ἡ κορυφαία τῆς ἀγιωτάτης ἐπουρανίου αἰδῶς φυλάττεται, μεγάλους κινδύνους ἐνηνοχέει τοῖς δημοσίοις πράγμασιν αὐτὴν τε ταύτην ἐνθέσμως ἀναληφθεῖσαν καὶ φυλαττομένην μεγίστην εὐτυχίαν τῷ Ῥωμαϊκῷ ὀνόματι καὶ σύμπασι τοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγμασιν ἐξαιρετον εὐδαιμονίαν παρεσχηκέναι, τῶν θεῶν εὐεργεσιῶν τοῦτο παρεχουσῶν (Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 10.7.1).

Many facts prove that the vitiation of religious worship, by which the highest reverence for the most holy, heavenly [Power] is preserved, has greatly endangered public affairs and that its lawful restoration and preservation have conferred the

³¹² Burckhardt 1967: 279, 306.

³¹³ Burckhardt 1967: 308.

³¹⁴ Burckhardt 1967: 306.

³¹⁵ Kee 1982: 91.

greatest good fortune on the Roman name and extraordinary prosperity on all humankind-blessings bestowed by divine grace (Maier 2007: 327).

Constantine continued this theme in his *Letter to the Eastern Provincials* when he contrasted the fate of the persecuting emperors to his own success.³¹⁶ Although Kee briefly discusses the creation of the episcopal courts, he focuses on the language of *Cod. Theod.* 1.27.1 and *CSirm.* 1 instead of the unprecedented nature of this law. Since Constantine does not profess his Christianity in either of these documents, Kee implies that sincere religious devotion did not lead to the creation of these courts, but he does not propose another motivation.³¹⁷ Moreover, Kee contends that Constantine demonstrates that Christian sentiment did not factor into his decision to promote the Christian Church because he avoids mentioning Christ in his letter to Caecilian:

ἡ θεϊότης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ σε διαφυλάξει ἐπὶ πολλοῖς ἔτεσιν (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 10.6.5).

May the divinity of the great God keep you safe for many years (Maier 2007: 327).

Since Constantine did not mention Christ even in a letter to a bishop, Kee maintains that he did not recognize the divinity of the incarnated Son of God. His hypothesis about the absence of Christ from imperial and court documents will be discussed at length below. In sum, then, Kee states that these letters reveal that Constantine only patronized the Church in order to gain divine favour from the Christian god.

Drake does agree with Burckhardt that Constantine also sought to advance his social program through Christian charities. However, Drake argues that the religious reforms of the emperor Julian provide evidence that both sincere devotion and pragmatism could lead an emperor to enact a single policy.³¹⁸ As Constantine's nephew, Julian was raised as a Christian in the same manner as his cousins: Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans. However, he converted to Neoplatonic paganism around 351.³¹⁹ When he became sole emperor in 362, Julian enacted various measures to fashion pagan religion after the Christian Church in order to strengthen paganism. Drake points out that one of these measures was to

³¹⁶ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.48-60.

³¹⁷ Kee 1982: 96-97.

³¹⁸ Drake 2000: 341.

³¹⁹ Browning 1976: 44-45.

institutionalize charity within pagan religion. Julian informed the high priest of Galatia, Arsacius, that he would be providing funds so that the pagan priests could follow the example of the Christian clergy.

ἐκάστου γὰρ ἑνιαυτοῦ τρισμυρίους μοδίους κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Γαλατίαν ἐκέλευσα δοθῆναι σίτου καὶ ἑξακισμυρίους οἴνου ξέστας. ὧν τὸ μὲν πέμπτον εἰς τοὺς πένητας τοὺς τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν ὑπηρετουμένους ἀναλίσκεσθαι φημι χρῆναι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τοῖς ξένοις καὶ τοῖς μεταιτοῦσιν ἐπινέμεσθαι παρ’ ἡμῶν. αἰσχρὸν γάρ, εἰ τῶν μὲν Ἰουδαίων οὐδεὶς μεταιτεῖ, τρέφουσι δὲ οἱ δυσσεβεῖς Γαλιλαῖοι πρὸς τοῖς ἑαυτῶν καὶ τοὺς ἡμετέρους, οἱ δὲ ἡμέτεροι τῆς παρ’ ἡμῶν ἐπικουρίας ἐνδεεῖς φαίνονται. δίδασκε δὲ καὶ συνεισφέρειν τοὺς Ἑλληνιστὰς εἰς τὰς τοιαύτας λειτουργίας καὶ τὰς Ἑλληνικὰς κώμας ἀπάρχεσθαι τοῖς θεοῖς τῶν καρπῶν, καὶ τοὺς Ἑλληνικοὺς ταῖς τοιαύταις εὐποιαῖς προσέθιζε, διδάσκων αὐτούς, ὡς τοῦτο πάλαι ἦν ἡμέτερον ἔργον (Julian, *epist.* 22).

For I have given directions that 30,000 *modii* of corn shall be assigned every year for the whole of Galatia, and 60,000 pints of wine. I order that one-fifth of this be used for the poor who serve the priests, and the remainder be distributed by us to strangers and beggars. For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us. Teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service of this sort, and the Hellenic villages to offer their first fruits to the gods; and accustom those who love the Hellenic religion to these good works by teaching them that this was our practice of old (Wright 1923: 69, 71).

Since Julian, who was a devout pagan, aimed to reform aspects of pagan religion so that it could offer relief for the lower classes of society, Drake believes that Constantine could have been a Christian who employed the already established Christian charities to advance his own social program.³²⁰

Furthermore, Drake also agrees with Kee that Constantine retained the pagan *do ut des* concept of piety, but he does not believe that this excludes the possibility that Constantine either accepted the teachings or the divinity of Christ.³²¹ Drake asserts that Christ did factor into the emperor’s religion to different extents after 312. As discussed above, he maintains that Constantine spent the next decade learning the tenets and the customs of the Christian community. However, Drake asserts that during this time

³²⁰ Drake 2000: 342.

³²¹ Drake 1976: 159 n. 2, 164 n. 16.

Constantine had a not yet distinguished Christ from Apollo.³²² In his view, Constantine exhibited his confused religious consciousness in an edict from 321 that made Sunday a day of religious observance:

Sicut indignissimum uidebatur diem solis ueneratione sui celebrem altercantibus iurgiis et noxiis patrium contentionibus occupari, ita gratum ac iucundum est eo die quae sunt maxime uotiuua conpleri. Atque ideo emancipandi et manumittendi die festo cuncti licentiam habeant et super his rebus acta non prohibeantur (*Cod. Theod.* 2.8.1).

Just as it appears to Us most unseemly that the Day of the Sun, which is celebrated on account of its own veneration, should be occupied with legal altercations and with noxious controversies of litigation of contending parties, so it is pleasant and fitting that those acts which are especially desired shall be accomplished on that day. Therefore, all men shall have the right to emancipate and to manumit on this festive day, and the legal formalities thereof are not forbidden (Pharr 1952: 44).

Although Christians met regularly on Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, Constantine states that the Sun should be venerated on that day. This has led Drake to assert that Constantine believed the Sun and Christ were interchangeable.³²³ If Constantine had accepted Christ-Sol as part of his religion, then this would technically mean that he was a Christian, albeit an unconventional one. Therefore, Drake maintains that it is entirely plausible that Christian devotion led Constantine to patronize the Church.

This section has presented the various interpretations of Constantine's promotion of the Christian Church in order to clarify scholarly assertions that it does not exhibit Constantine's devotion to Christianity. Burckhardt has claimed that the literary sources demonstrate that Constantine only took a superficial interest in the religion. Therefore, he hypothesizes that Constantine promoted the Church in order to advance his political agenda. Alternatively, Kee proposes that he promoted the Church in order to ensure the goodwill of the Christian god. He contends that Christ did not factor into this *do-ut-des* relationship because he omits any reference to him in a letter to the bishop Caecilian. Drake agrees with aspects of both Burckhardt and Kee's hypothesis. He proposes that Constantine's fiscal endowments to the Church had the added benefit of advancing social services, but he does

³²² Drake 1976: 76-77. He believes that Constantine only recognized Christ as a separate divine being after Helena uncovered the cross of Christ in 326.

³²³ Drake 1976: 76-77; cf. Kee 1982: 96.

not believe that this excludes the possibility that sincere religious devotion also played a role in this decision. Furthermore, he has no trouble believing that Constantine retained a *do ut des* concept of piety because he had spent forty years of his life as a pagan. However, he maintains that the literary and legislative evidence suggests that Constantine did recognize the teachings or divinity Christ to some extent.

Legislative Reform

The reforms that Constantine instituted to the penal, moral, and marriage codes were discussed in chapter 2 in order to clarify the individual hypotheses that he either wanted to christianize Roman society or update the legal system to reflect the contemporary standards of society. Historians who hypothesize that Constantine was not a Christian have handled the legislative evidence in an entirely different manner: they aim to demonstrate that this evidence neither proves nor supports the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian. Moreover, they have often dismissed almost the entirety of these reforms as irrelevant to Constantine's religion. For instance, Burckhardt only discusses Constantine's edict on gladiatorial games from 325. He hypothesizes that Constantine banned these games, but only to appease the Christian bishops. Alternatively, Kee dismisses the penal, moral, and marriage legislation because religion does not appear within the language of those edicts.³²⁴ He focuses on a non-reformative edict issued between 314 and 323 that proscribed crucifixion as the punishment for any slaves or freedmen who accused their master or patron of treason.³²⁵ Since the *Codex Theodosianus* ascribes this law to Constantine, Kee implies that he could not have been a Christian because he flouted the crucifixion of Christ. Moreover, neither Burckhardt nor Kee discuss the possibility that Constantine placed some sort of ban on ritual sacrifice.

Burckhardt hypothesizes that the ban on gladiatorial games instituted in 325 does not prove that Constantine was a Christian because he asserts that the emperor only issued this law "as a concession to" the bishops present at court.³²⁶ Although Burckhardt does not provide an in-depth analysis to support his statements, the basis for his argument likely derives from three factors. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Christian community opposed

³²⁴ Kee 1982: 95.

³²⁵ *Cod. Theod.* 9.5.1. For the difficulty dating this law, see Pharr 1952: 230 n. 7.

³²⁶ Burckhardt 1967: 299.

gladiatorial competitions so much that they would excommunicate any Church member who participated in these spectacles.³²⁷ Although the edict explicitly states that the purpose of the ban was to promote “public peace and domestic tranquillity”, Burckhardt reasons that the only explanation for the creation of this law is the observance of Christian doctrine (*Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1; Pharr 1952: 436). As discussed above, Burckhardt believes that Constantine aimed to gain the goodwill of the bishops in order to extend his political support to Christians throughout the empire. Therefore, he perceives this edict as another manner in which Constantine could have increased the support for his rule among the bishops. Moreover, Burckhardt states that this does not reflect the religious mentality of Constantine because he ignored the law himself. Although Burckhardt does not elaborate on this point, he is most likely referring to the fact that Constantine permitted Constans to issue the rescript from 337 that allowed the town of Hispellum to hold gladiatorial games in honour of the imperial cult. These factors may have led Burckhardt to assert that Constantine’s edict banning gladiatorial games does not reflect his personal religious mentality.

The hypotheses of Barnes and Potter about *Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1 and the subsequent continuance of gladiatorial competitions have already been discussed in chapter 2. Barnes maintains that Christian doctrine inspired Constantine to issue a complete ban on gladiatorial games and that Constans tactfully refused Hispellum’s request to hold them. Alternatively, Potter asserts that this edict only outlawed *damnatio ad ludum* as a criminal punishment. In his view, Constans approval of gladiatorial games in Hispellum demonstrates that Constantine was not opposed to them on principle. Although Barnes and Potter arrive at fundamentally different conclusions, their hypotheses contain the same implication: if Christian doctrine influenced Constantine to create *Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1, then Constans would not have allowed Hispellum to hold any gladiatorial competitions. Therefore, let us consider a third hypothesis that aims to demonstrate that Constans could have granted Hispellum’s request without undermining the possibility that Christian doctrine influenced Constantine to issue a ban on gladiatorial games.

Scott Bradbury hypothesizes that Constantine intended *Cod. Theod.* 15.12.1 to be a “moralizing law” that only aimed to declare his notion of ideal societal conduct to the populace instead of strictly banning all gladiatorial games. He proposes that Christian

³²⁷ Council of Elvira, *can.* 2; Council of Arles, *can.* 3.

emperors used moralizing laws, as long as the majority of the public remained pagan, to promote the cessation of certain pagan traditions in a way that would preserve civil tranquility. Bradbury contends that Constantius II's edict banning sacrifice in 341 best exemplifies this concept:

Cesset superstitio, sacrificiorum aboleatur insania. Nam quicumque contra legem diui principis parentis nostri et hanc nostrae mansuetudinis iussionem ausus fuerit sacrificia celebrare, competens in eum uindicta et praesens sententia exeratur (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.2).

Superstition shall cease; the madness of sacrifices shall be abolished. For if any man in violation of the law of the sainted Emperor, Our father, and in violation of this command of Our Clemency, should dare to perform sacrifice, he shall suffer the infliction of a suitable punishment and the effect of an immediate sentence (Pharr 1952: 472).

However, Bradbury contends that this law was not strictly enforced because imperial officials did not punish the pagan philosopher Demetrius Cythras for performing sacrifices nearly twenty years later. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, imperial officials brought Demetrius to trial in 359 for sacrificing to the goddess Besa. Although Demetrius confessed to performing sacrifices for many years, the officials released him when they felt certain that he had not done so for the purpose of divination.³²⁸ Bradbury reasons that the officials did not punish Demetrius for breaking the aforementioned edict because Constantius did not expect them to enforce it.³²⁹ He states that Constantius and his officials decided to passively criticize traditions of the pagan majority because they worried that more active measures would have led to civil unrest.³³⁰ Furthermore, Bradbury contends that general moralizing laws could be overruled to allow certain practices to continue in specific cases. For instance, Constantius informed the urban prefect of Rome, Catullinus, on 1 November 346 that pagan temples outside the city walls could remain open so that they could fulfill their role in traditional ceremonies and festivals.³³¹ Nonetheless, the next month Constantius ordered temples “in all places and in all cities” to be closed immediately (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.4; Pharr 1952: 472). In Bradbury's view, the fact that Constantius ordered temple closures after he

³²⁸ Amm. Marc. 19.12.12.

³²⁹ Bradbury 1994: 133-134.

³³⁰ Bradbury 1994: 139.

³³¹ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3; Bradbury 1994: 135-136.

had given permission for Roman temples to remain open does not undermine the hypothesis that moralizing laws could be overturned in certain instances.³³² Bradbury's analysis implies that Constans could have approved Hispellum's request without undermining the possibility that Christian doctrine influenced Constantine to create a moralizing law against gladiatorial games.³³³

Since Kee does not perceive any religiously significant language within the edict about gladiators, he only briefly mentions it as a social reform.³³⁴ Alternatively, he turns his attention to the edict wherein Constantine prescribes crucifixion as a criminal punishment for freedmen and slaves who acted as *delatores* against their patrons or owners:

In seruis quoque uel libertis, qui dominos aut patronos accusare aut deferre temptauerint, professio tam atrocis audaciae statim in admissi ipsius exordio per sententiam iudicis conprimatur ac denegata audientia patibulo adfigatur (*Cod. Theod.* 9.5.1).

In the case of slaves also, or of freedmen who attempt to accuse their masters or patrons, respectively, or to report them to the authorities, the assertion of such atrocious audacity shall be repressed immediately at the inception of the guilty act itself, through the sentence of the judge, a hearing shall be denied such slave or freedmen, and he shall be affixed to the cross (Pharr 1952: 230).

Kee proposes that this edict alone seriously weakens the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian because it exhibits a blatant disregard for the suffering of Christ.³³⁵

However, the preponderance of modern historians maintains that Constantine actually abolished crucifixion because both Aurelius Victor and Sozomen attest to this legislative reform. Barnes presents an analysis of *Cod. Theod.* 9.5.1 in order to demonstrate that the compilers of the *Codex Theodosianus* misattributed an edict of Licinius to Constantine. According to the introduction to this edict, Constantine sent this law to Maximus, the urban prefect of Rome, on 1 January 314. Barnes notes that Constantine only had one official named Maximus: Valerius Maximus Basilius who served as the urban prefect between 1 September 317 and 13 September 323.³³⁶ Although this disparity has led some historians to

³³² Bradbury 1994: 135-136.

³³³ Bradbury 1994: 135, 139.

³³⁴ Kee 1982: 95.

³³⁵ Matthew 27:32-37; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19: 17-19 (NIV); Kee 1982: 97.

³³⁶ Barnes 1976: 275.

deduce that the compilers misdated the edict, Barnes proposes that an inscription from Lyttus in Crete, which preserves a copy of the original law, demonstrates that the edict was not sent to an urban prefect:³³⁷

[S]uper i<s>tis i[taque o]mnibus tam ad praefectos nostros quam eti[am et p]raesides et rationalem et magistrum priuat[ae] scripta direximus... (*ICr* 18.188)

Accordingly, we have written about all these matters not only to our prefects but also to the governors and the treasurer and the master of our private estate (Allan et al. 2003: 239).

The author refers not only to high-ranking officials but also to multiple prefects. Since the urban prefecture was a position held exclusively in Rome, there could only be one urban prefect at a time. On the other hand, each emperor had his own praetorian prefect, which means that there were two in 314. This has led Barnes to assert that the recipient of this letter must have been a praetorian prefect.³³⁸ As mentioned above, Constantine had one official named Maximus who only served as an urban prefect. Therefore, Barnes reasons that Licinius had a praetorian prefect named Maximus.

Furthermore, Barnes proposes that the political circumstances in the eastern provinces in late 313 would have compelled Licinius to issue an edict against *delatores*. Barnes notes that a sudden shift in political power provided an opportunity for *delatores* to accuse those suspected of being enemies of the new emperor in order to receive monetary rewards.³³⁹ When Licinius gained complete control over the eastern empire on the death of Maximinus in late August or early September 313, he executed Maximinus' family members and supporters in order to secure his position.³⁴⁰ Barnes suggests that this atmosphere most likely led to an increase in the number of *delatores* coming forward. He concludes that both the political circumstances in the East in 313 and the subsequent issuance of *Cod. Theod.* 9.5.1 on 1 January 314 support the hypothesis that Licinius issued the edict ordering slaves and freedmen to be crucified for accusing their owners or patrons of treason. Since Barnes

³³⁷ Barnes 1976: 275-276.

³³⁸ Barnes 1976: 276. However, he does not explain why Licinius would incorporate Constantine's praetorian into this edict if Constantine had issued orders in his territories against crucifixion.

³³⁹ Barnes 1976: 276.

³⁴⁰ Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 49.7-51.2. For the *terminus ante quem* for Maximinus' death, see Creed 1984: 123 n. 49.2.

believes that Constantine did not issue the edict, he maintains that it does not undermine the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian.

This section has analyzed the individual edicts that Burckhardt and Kee claim demonstrate that Constantine was not a Christian. Although Burckhardt asserts that the ban on gladiatorial competitions is the only one of Constantine's reformatory laws that corresponds to Christian principles, he believes that the rescript issued by Constantine in 337 undermines the possibility that Constantine opposed these games on principle. Potter agrees that Constantine did not oppose gladiatorial games. However, he believes Constantine only banned *damnatio ad ludum* as a punishment for criminals. Alternatively, Bradbury proposes that Constantine did issue a complete ban on gladiatorial competitions based on Christian principles. However, he maintains that Constantine only intended the edict to sway society towards Christian conduct because enforcing a strict ban on a deeply engrained Roman tradition risked inciting riots. In his view, this explains why Constantine permitted Hispania to hold gladiatorial competitions when they explicitly requested them. On the other hand, Kee proposes that the only non-religious edict significant to Constantine's personal beliefs demands crucifixion as a punishment for lower class *delatores*. However, Barnes hypothesizes that Licinius composed this edict while he was establishing his rule in the eastern provinces between 313 and 314. The various factors surrounding the creation of these edicts make it difficult to determine the impetus for this legislation and, sometimes, who composed them. Therefore, it is often impossible to arrive at a conclusive answer as to what it tells us about Constantine's religion.

Pagan Continuity

Historians who hypothesize that Constantine did not convert propose that he exhibited his pagan sentiments through his continued association with pagan deities, philosophers, and priests. Since Kee does not factor in any of the following evidence into his argument, this section will primarily focus on the arguments presented by Burckhardt. He has analyzed the numismatic and epigraphic evidence in order to demonstrate that there was more pagan continuity within imperial iconography and inscriptions than one would expect from a Christian emperor. He also analyzes the literature in order to elucidate Constantine's

thoroughly un-Christian behaviour between 312 and 337. Burckhardt argues that this evidence demonstrates that Constantine remained pagan throughout his life.

Burckhardt hypothesizes that Constantine remained pagan after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge because he continued to employ pagan iconography in architecture and coinage. At a glance, it is obvious that the Arch of Constantine depicts pagan deities and scenes of sacrifice. However, Burckhardt focuses on the premise that a close inspection of the arch reveals that the phrase *instinctu diuinitatis* has replaced a previous inscription: *nutu I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus)*. He proposes that the senators who had composed the inscription of the arch originally attributed Constantine's victory to Jupiter because they had not perceived a change in the emperor's religion. In Burckhardt's view, Constantine had the inscription changed to the more ambiguous phrase *instinctu diuinitatis* in order to conform to his new religious policy of equality.³⁴¹ Moreover, he notes that Constantine continued to mint coins that depicted Sol as his *comes* and Mars as his *conseruator* and even erected a statue of himself in the guise of Apollo atop a porphyry column in Constantinople, as discussed in chapter 2. Furthermore, he finds it peculiar that a Christian emperor would not only continue to hold the position of *pontifex maximus* of pagan religion but also promote this position through coinage.³⁴² The abbreviated form of this title, *PM*, appears on four separate gold coin-types minted at Trier between 313 and 315 and on another two gold issues minted at Trier between 319 and 320.³⁴³ Although Burckhardt does not explain how this iconography and the retention of the title *pontifex maximus* weakens the hypothesis that Constantine had converted, his argument probably rests on the premise that a Christian would not tolerate any association with pagan deities because they could only worship the Creator God and viewed pagan deities as lesser demons.

Moreover, Burckhardt implies that the absence of exclusively Christian images on coinage, statuary, and architecture supports his hypothesis. Although Burckhardt again does not provide a supporting argument for his observation, he probably observes that emperors often minted coins that depicted their patron deity after significant military victories. Since Augustus attributed his victory at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC to Apollo, he minted coins

³⁴¹ Burckhardt 1962: 272.

³⁴² Burckhardt 1962: 293-294. He does not provide any specific examples.

³⁴³ *RIC* 7 Trier 18-21, 242, 244, pp. 165, 185.

that depicted this deity in 28 BC.³⁴⁴ Similarly, Domitian minted coins in honour of his patron goddess Minerva after he had defeated the Germanic tribe of the Chatti in 83.³⁴⁵ This precedent may have led Burckhardt to believe that if Constantine was a Christian or believed the Christian god had aided him in battle, he would have issued coins with exclusively Christian iconography.

Burckhardt argues that Constantine's continued patronage of paganism also undermines the hypothesis that he was a Christian. Burckhardt notes that Constantine recommenced temple-building projects in the last decade of his reign. As discussed in Chapter 2, Constantine commissioned two shrines to Rhea-Cybele and a shrine to Castor and Pollux in Constantinople during the renovation of the city. According to a lost inscription, Constantine also restored the temple of Concordia at Rome in 331. Constantine later permitted the town of Hispellum to dedicate a temple to the imperial cult in 337.³⁴⁶ In Burckhardt's view, the five temple destructions Constantine ordered around 326 do not undermine the significance of these constructions and restorations because those temples had promoted either immorality or civil unrest. He also asserts that the plundering of pagan temples did not demonstrate Constantine's intolerance towards paganism but rather his need to fill the imperial coffers.³⁴⁷ Furthermore, Burckhardt notes that Constantine continued to cultivate positive relationships with pagan philosophers and priests. The sixth-century historian Lydus records that the neoplatonist Sopater was highly regarded in Constantine's court at Constantinople. Constantine even invited him to participate in the founding rites of the city in 324.³⁴⁸ Although Burckhardt does not cite further instances of Constantine consorting with pagans, Bardill notes that Constantine not only permitted the Athenian priest Nicagoras to travel to Constantinople on the imperial post but also honoured a priest from the temple of Apollo at Delphi.³⁴⁹

Finally, Burckhardt contends that Constantine behaved in a decidedly un-Christian fashion in the years that he patronized the Christian Church. In the decade after Constantine's victory over Maxentius in 312, Constantine not only allowed pagan liturgies to

³⁴⁴ *RIC* 1 Lugdunum 170-171, 179-180, 190-193, pp. 52-54.

³⁴⁵ *RIC* 2 Rome 45-48a, 52-56, pp. 159-160.

³⁴⁶ Burckhardt 1967: 302. Although he misattributes the authorship of the rescript to Constantine, Constantine's approval demonstrates that his father would not have opposed a temple to the imperial cult.

³⁴⁷ Burckhardt 1967: 304-305. Alternatively, Kee (1982: 31) only mentions the temple spoliation in passing.

³⁴⁸ Lydus, *De mens.* 4.2.

³⁴⁹ Bardill 2012: 304.

be carried out in public but also declared that the auspices should be read whenever lightning struck a public building.³⁵⁰ Furthermore, Constantine also played a central role in a series of deaths — Maximian, Maxentius, Bassianus, Crispus, Licinius, and Licinius II — to secure his position as emperor, with the exception of the execution of Fausta whose crime remains a topic of speculation.³⁵¹ Burckhardt argues that Constantine could not have been a Christian because he ordered the murder of his wife, son, and young nephew Licinius II. Although he does not elaborate on this point, his argument likely derives from the fact that the Ten Commandments explicitly forbid murder.³⁵² Therefore, Burckhardt concludes that Constantine's continued associations with paganism and his decidedly un-Christian behaviour demonstrate that Constantine remained pagan.

However, Burckhardt's assessment of the numismatic evidence fails to take into consideration several factors. He does not realize that Constantine gradually phased out the images of Sol and Mars that appeared on his coinage between 317 and 324. The continued appearance of pagan deities on coinage for only twelve years after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge does not necessarily indicate that Constantine retained pagan beliefs. Since all of the original tetrarchs had at some point issued coinage depicting Mars or Sol, Constantine could use these images to reinforce his claim to legitimacy to the military and the general public. The dynastic implications of pagan imagery probably led Constantine to retain it on his coinage until 323. He could have continued to use the attributes of Apollo on his statuary because pagans and Christians used this iconography in order to represent the sun-god and Christ, respectively.³⁵³ Furthermore, Constantine's retention of the title *pontifex maximus* does not undermine the hypothesis that he was a Christian: all his Christian successors held this title at least until the end of the fourth century, and, for instance, as *pontifex maximus* Constantius II even filled vacancies in the pontifical colleges during his visit to Rome in 357.³⁵⁴ If Constantine had immediately discarded all pagan iconography and associations after his conversion, this radical change might have led the shocked pagan constituency to support Licinius who continued to practise paganism. Finally, upon closer inspection of the

³⁵⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.1.

³⁵¹ Burgess 2008: 5.

³⁵² Exodus 20:13 (NIV); Burckhardt 1967: 283-284.

³⁵³ Bardill 2012: 329.

³⁵⁴ *Amm. Marc.* 16.10.4-12 (see Cameron 2011: 33). Although Zosimus states that Gratian renounced the title when he became emperor in 367 (*Zos., Hist. nov.* 4.36.7-10), there is no evidence to support this statement: see Cameron 2011: 51-56.

inscription on the Arch of Constantine there is no evidence that *instinctu diuinitatis* replaced *nutu I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus)*. Moreover, the small space that would have been allotted to the phrase *nutu I.O.M.* would not have been enough to fit the phrase *instinctu diuinitas*. Therefore, Burckhardt's hypothesis that the senators of Rome saw no change in Constantine's religious attitude does not withstand scrutiny.

Burckhardt's hypothesis also ignores the political and religious implications of incorporating explicitly Christian images into imperial iconography. Since pagans would probably have felt threatened at the disappearance of their deities from imperial iconography, the sudden appearance of exclusively Christian iconography would also probably have further alienated them. As we have seen, the christogram is the only Christian emblem that appears on Constantine's coinage, but only does so sparingly and in a military context. Furthermore, Grigg proposes that Constantine did not introduce more explicitly Christian imagery because he did not want to upset Christian bishops.³⁵⁵ Although the literary and archaeological evidence demonstrate that Christians often created religious images, Grigg notes that the bishops at the Council of Elvira had banned religious iconography from churches.³⁵⁶ He concedes that the canons from this council only reflect the sentiments of the clergy in Spain. However, he observes that the Spanish bishop Ossius of Cordoba had been at Constantine's court since before 312. Since Ossius had participated in the Council of Elvira, Grigg contends that he dissuaded Constantine from employing explicitly Christian symbols in order to avoid offending the Spanish bishops.³⁵⁷ Therefore, he concludes that the absence of Christian iconography does not exclude the possibility that Constantine was a Christian.

Although Constantine constructed at least four temples during his reign and continued to cultivate relationships with pagan philosophers and priests, this does not definitively reveal his religious consciousness. Since Constantine remained the *pontifex maximus*, he would have been expected to entertain the concerns of the pagan constituency as their religious leader. Therefore, Constantine probably allowed the construction and restoration of temples at Constantinople, Hispellum, and Rome in order to appeal to the

³⁵⁵ Grigg 1977: 23-24.

³⁵⁶ Council of Elvira, *can.* 36; Grigg 1977: 30-32. See Bardill 2012: 329 for an example of early Christian art that depicted Christ as Sol.

³⁵⁷ Grigg 1977: 24, 28-30.

concerns of pagans in these cities. Furthermore, Constantine could not ban pagan philosophers and priests from his court without alienating the predominant religious group of the empire. Similarly, Jean Gaudemet implies that Constantine could not have banned pagan priests from performing public auspices without inciting the ire of the pagan constituency because this ritual was entrenched in public and imperial tradition.³⁵⁸ Therefore, it is plausible that Constantine only made decisions regarding public religion that would be the most expedient to his political position.

Finally, Burckhardt believes that the fact that Constantine murdered his son, wife, and nephew exhibited his non-Christian mentality. However, Barnes hypothesizes that Crispus and Fausta died in the midst of a political scandal. He maintains that Crispus was executed for treason and that Fausta committed suicide in order to avoid execution. He argues that Aurelius Victor's account that Crispus had been put to death after a judicial verdict implies that he had a proper trial.³⁵⁹ Barnes proposes that Firmicus Maternus provides insight into the accusations laid against Crispus when he records that Constantine had tried the case of the Roman politician Albinus who had been accused of adultery and practising magic; Albinus had been exiled, but the emperor unexpectedly recalled him to public life shortly thereafter.³⁶⁰ Barnes contends that Constantine's sudden about-face corresponds to his regret after the death of Crispus. Therefore, he reasons that Crispus had been accused with Albinus of casting the emperor's horoscope.³⁶¹ Furthermore, Fausta's close association to the accusations laid against Crispus has led Barnes to assert that she had either manipulated Constantine into trying his son for treason or provided false witnesses for the trial. When Constantine discovered her treachery, he planned to have her tried as well, but she committed suicide in order to avoid a gruesome execution.³⁶² Barnes concludes that Fausta had conspired against Crispus in order to promote the position of her sons — Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans — in the line of succession.³⁶³ Although Constantine did have Crispus executed, he was an emperor before all else and had to respond to political threats in the proper manner or else risk being deposed. Licinius II probably did

³⁵⁸ Gaudemet 1947: 51.

³⁵⁹ Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 41.11.

³⁶⁰ Firm. Mat., *Math.* 2.29.10-20.

³⁶¹ Barnes 2011: 149; cf. Guthrie 1966: 325-328; Pohlsander 1984: 104-106.

³⁶² Barnes 2011: 147-148; cf. Pohlsander 1984: 103-104, 106.

³⁶³ Barnes 2011: 149.

not even receive a trial, but this same reasoning applies because he was the heir to the deposed Licinius who was a future threat to Constantine and his sons' rule. Since Burckhardt implies that a Christian could not eliminate a political threat through execution, he excludes any possibility for any emperor to be a Christian. However, Roman emperors who were Christian would have had to break certain doctrinal tenets in order to maintain their authority.

This section has discussed the evidence that Burckhardt believes demonstrates that Constantine remained a pagan throughout his life. Burckhardt primarily focuses on Constantine's continued associations with paganism and the pagan community. His hypothesis rests on the premise that a Christian emperor would not only have altered religious iconography in order to reflect his personal religion but also avoided all associations with paganism. Constantine certainly continued to have ties to the pagan community after 312, but it would have been difficult for him to effectively rule a predominantly pagan society otherwise. Moreover, Burckhardt implies that a true Christian emperor would adhere to all tenets of the faith. However, he does not consider that such actions would not only have alienated Constantine from the majority of the populace but also threatened his position as emperor.

Constantine and Christ

While Burckhardt focuses on a wide-range of evidence to demonstrate that Constantine remained pagan, Kee maintains that the language within the *Oratio de laudibus Constantini* and the *Vita Constantini* are sufficient evidence to prove that Christ did not factor into Constantine's religion. He begins with an analysis of the *Oratio*, a panegyric that Eusebius delivered during Constantine's tricennial celebration on 25 July 336. He argues that several factors have made this document best suited to reveal Constantine's religious sentiments. First, a bishop who was familiar with Constantine's religion composed the panegyric. Second, Eusebius delivered the panegyric in front of both pagans and Christians at the imperial court, which would minimize Eusebius' efforts to overtly christianize Constantine. Third, Eusebius provides a mature view-point of Constantine's religion because it was delivered ten months before the emperor's death on 22 May 337.³⁶⁴ Kee also analyzes

³⁶⁴ *PLRE* 1, Fl. Val. Constantinus 4, p. 224.

Eusebius' representation of Constantine's religion in the *Vita Constantini* alongside the emperor's compositions in order to determine whether or not these documents support his interpretation of the oration.

Kee hypothesizes that the *Oratio* reveals that Constantine was a monotheistic worshipper of the Christian god, but did not include Christ within his religion. He maintains that Eusebius reveals that Constantine worshipped the Christian god alone when he implies that the *summa diuinitas* is the same god with whom Constantine made a pact prior to the Battle of the Milvian Bridge.³⁶⁵

Πανήγυρις μὲν αὕτη βασιλέως μεγάλου.... μέγαν δ' ἐγὼ βασιλέα καλῶ τὸν ἀληθῶς μέγαν. τοῦτον δ' εἶναι φημι (οὐ νεμεσσήσει δὲ παρὼν βασιλεύς, ἀλλὰ καὶ συνευφημήσει τῇ θεολογίᾳ) τὸν ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὅλων, τὸν πάντων ἀνώτατον, τὸν ὑπέρτατον, τὸν ὑπερμεγέθη... τοῦτον ἡμῖν τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ καλλίνικος ἡμῶν βασιλεὺς ἀνυμνεῖ συνησθημένος εὖ μάλα τοῦ τῆς βασιλείας αἰτίου (*Or. Const.* 1.1, 1.3).

This is, then, a celebration of the Supreme Sovereign... And I mean by "Supreme Sovereign" the One who is truly supreme; this one, I say – nor will the sovereign who is present resent it, but rather will he join in praise of the divine teaching- is the One who is Above the Universe, the Highest of All, the Greatest, the Supreme Being... This One, the Supreme Sovereign, our triumphant sovereign himself praises to us, having fully perceived in Him the cause of his empire (Drake 1976: 84).

However, he notes that in the remainder of the panegyric Eusebius discusses the divine Logos rather than Christ. We discussed to some extent in Chapter 2 how Christians often employed Platonic terms in order to make Christian doctrine more accessible to pagans: God is the *summa diuinitas* who created and rules every celestial and worldly being and Christ is the Logos of God, a substance attached to God, who helps manage the order of the universe. Christians used this term to refer to Christ when he was both un-incarnate and incarnate. Nevertheless, Kee argues that the manner in which Eusebius uses the term "Logos" demonstrates that he did not mean Christ:

τοῦτον καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπὶ πᾶσι καὶ πρὸ πάντων καὶ μετὰ πάντας ὁ προὼν αὐτοῦ μονογενῆς λόγος, ὁ δὴ μέγας ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ... τῆς πάντων ὑπεριλάσκεται σωτηρίας, πρωτείοις μὲν τῆς τῶν ὅλων ἀρχῆς δευτερείοις δὲ τῆς

³⁶⁵ Kee 1982: 28.

πατρικῆς βασιλείας ἐνδοξαζόμενος, ὅτι δὴ τὸ φῶς αὐτὸς ἦν τὸ ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὅλων ἀμφὶ τὸν πατέρα χορευὼν μεσιτεῦδόν τε καὶ διεῖργον τῆς τῶν γενητῶν οὐσίας τὴν ἀναρχὸν καὶ ἀγένητον ἰδέαν... παρ' οὗ καὶ δι' οὗ τῆς ἀνωτάτω βασιλείας τὴν εἰκόνα φέρων ὁ τῷ θεῷ φίλος βασιλεὺς κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ κρείττονος τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ἀπάντων τοὺς οἴακας διακυβερνῶν ἰθύνει... καὶ ὁ μὲν τῶν ὅλων σωτὴρ τὰς οὐρανίους πύλας τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς βασιλείας τοῖς ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε μεθισταμένοις ἀναπετάννυσιν. ὁ δὲ ζήλω τοῦ κρείττονος πάντα ῥύπον ἀθέου πλάνης τῆς κατὰ γῆν βασιλείας ἀποκαθηράμενος χοροὺς ὁσίων καὶ εὐσεβῶν ἀνδρῶν εἴσω βασιλικῶν οἴκων εἰσκαλεῖται, αὐτανδρον τὸν σύμπαντα στόλον τῶν ὑπ' αὐτῷ κυβερνωμένων διασώσασθαι προμηθούμενος (*Or. Const.* 1.6, 2.5).

Him He who is above all, before all, and after all, His Pre-Existing and Only-Begotten Logos, yes, the great high priest of the great God... petitions for the salvation of everyone, distinguished with first rank of the universe, but second to rule in the paternal kingdom. For He was the very light beyond the universe, which plays around the Father, which mediates and separates the eternal and ungenerated Form from created existence... from whom and through whom bearing the image of the higher kingdom, the sovereign dear to God, in imitation of the Higher Power, directs the helm and sets straight all things on earth... The Universal Saviour throws wide the heavenly gates of His Father's kingdom to those who depart hence for there; the other, in imitation of the Higher Power, has cleansed all the filth of godless error from the kingdom on earth, and invites bands of holy and pious men into the royal chambers, taking care to preserve intact each and every one of all those entrusted to his care (Drake 1975: 85-86).

Eusebius expresses a belief in the Logos as the indefinite celestial substance who is the imitation of God in the heavens. However, he deems Constantine as the earthly imitation of God, the Logos incarnate.³⁶⁶ Kee also notes Constantine does not require Christ to be his intermediary to God to ensure his eternal salvation. According to Eusebius, God granted Constantine an eternal reign in exchange for his piety and service on earth without any mention of Christ or the Logos, even though Christians believe that eternal salvation can only be achieved through the acceptance of Christ.³⁶⁷ Kee finds it peculiar for a Christian bishop to avoid the name of Christ in such a manner, but reasons that Eusebius would not have employed any theology that would have offended Constantine. Therefore, he concludes that Eusebius does not explicitly name Christ as he discussed the nature of the Logos because he knew that Constantine did not worship Him.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Kee 1982: 29.

³⁶⁷ Euseb., *Or. Const.* 6.2.

³⁶⁸ Kee 1982: 32.

Kee proposes that the language in both the *Vita Constantini* and Constantine's compositions supports the hypothesis that Christ did not factor in his religion. He begins with an analysis of the title "Saviour." Christians traditionally reserve this title for Christ because he sacrificed his incarnated body in order to ensure the salvation of Man. However, Kee notes that "Saviour" is used to refer primarily to the Christian God in Constantine's letters and often when Eusebius is describing the emperor's religion.³⁶⁹ Constantine heralds "our great God, the Saviour of all," in a letter to the Bishops Alexander and Arius (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.71.4; Cameron and Hall 1999: 118). Similarly, Constantine addresses the Christian god as the Saviour in both an address to the Council of Nicaea and in a letter to Eusebius.³⁷⁰ Kee observes that Eusebius also often employs the title "Saviour" as a reference to the Christian God when discussing the religion of Constantine. For instance, Eusebius claims that Constantine believed the Christian god to be the "saviour and guardian of his Empire" (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 1.27.2; Cameron and Hall 1999: 80).³⁷¹ Then Kee presents an analysis of the term "Lord" also traditionally reserved for Christ in order to determine whether or not it receives the same treatment as "Saviour".³⁷² He found that in both his letters to Eusebius and Shapur II Constantine attributes to the Christian god the title "Lord".³⁷³ Moreover, Eusebius primarily uses the terms "Saviour" and "Lord" as explicit references to Christ whenever he is describing events from his own perspective.³⁷⁴ The omission of references to Christ in relation to Constantine's religion throughout the majority of these documents has led Kee to conclude that Constantine was not a Christian.

He concedes that Christ does appear as part of Constantine's religion in a few instances, but does not believe that they diminish his assessment. For instance, he claims Constantine makes two explicit references to Christ in his *Oratio ad coetum sanctorum* and in a letter to Eusebius. Constantine delivered his oration to a congregation of bishops on the occasion of Easter in 313.³⁷⁵ Although the entirety of the oration consists of twenty-five chapters, Kee argues that the first twenty-one chapters cannot be attributed to Constantine because they not only read as a Christian *apologia* but there is also only one vague mention

³⁶⁹ Kee 1982: 53.

³⁷⁰ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.12.2, 4.36.1.

³⁷¹ See also Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.23.1.

³⁷² Kee 1982: 53.

³⁷³ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.53.3-4, 4.13.

³⁷⁴ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 2.25, 2.29.1, 33; Kee 1982: 53-54.

³⁷⁵ Edwards 2003: xxiii-xxix.

of the authors as a person of importance in the second chapter, which Kee believes would be more explicitly stated if Constantine had actually composed these chapters.³⁷⁶ This has led Kee to conclude that Constantine only composed chapters twenty-two to twenty-five, if any of this oration at all, because they discuss concepts of piety and divine rewards for the empire.³⁷⁷ Throughout these four chapters Constantine continually used the term “Saviour” in order to mean God, but at the very end he abandons all vagueness when he states that:

χρη̄ τοίνυν πάντας τοὺς τὴν εὐσέβειαν καταδιώκοντας χάριν ὁμολογεῖν τῷ σωτῆρι τῶν πάντων ἕνεκεν τῆς ἡμετέρας αὐτῶν σωτηρίας καὶ τῆς τῶν δημοσίων πραγμάτων εὐμοιρίας, ὅσiais τε εὐχαῖς καὶ λιτανείαις ἐπαλλήλοις ἐξιλεοῦσθαι τὸν Χριστὸν ἡμῖν, ὅπως τὰς εὐεργεσίας αὐτοῦ διαφυλάττοι (Euseb., *Or. coet. sanct.* 26).

Those who pursue piety should, however, confess their gratitude to the Saviour of all for our own salvation and the good state of public affairs, and petition Christ for one another with holy prayers and litanies (Edwards 2003: 62).

Constantine also sent a letter to Eusebius praising him for successfully explaining “the mysteries of Christ” at Easter (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.35.1; Cameron and Hall 1999: 166). Kee argues that these appearances do not outweigh the overwhelming absence of Christ in Constantinian documents. He reasons that Constantine has either “included [Christ] for the benefit of [his Christian audience], in order to enlist their support... or [these appearances] indicate some of the slight christianizing which Eusebius occasionally undertakes.”³⁷⁸ Furthermore, Eusebius states that Constantine not only “continually announced the Christ of God with complete openness” but also was baptized on his deathbed (Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.2.2; Cameron and Hall 1999: 121).³⁷⁹ Kee contends that Eusebius added the former passage in order to express his own desire that Constantine had accepted Christ, the final step in becoming a Christian.³⁸⁰ Moreover, Kee asserts that Constantine’s baptism does not represent an acceptance of Christ because in Eusebius’ *Oratio* the emperor does not need him to be his intermediary to eternal life. In his view, Constantine perceived baptism as the final confirmation to his immortality rather than his

³⁷⁶ Kee 1982: 80, 82-83.

³⁷⁷ Kee 1982: 83-84.

³⁷⁸ Kee 1982: 56, 85-86.

³⁷⁹ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.61-62.

³⁸⁰ Kee 1982: 55, 57-58.

salvation. The circumstances surrounding the appearances of Christ in these documents has led Kee to conclude that they do not accurately reflect Constantine's religious mentality.

Alternatively, Barnes proposes that Constantine's oration does support the hypothesis that he had converted to Christianity. He contends that Constantine did compose the twenty-one chapters that resemble a Christian *apologia*. Barnes states that many scholars have doubted the authenticity of this section because they have assumed "that Constantine was an ill-educated soldier, with little or no knowledge of literature or Greek philosophy."³⁸¹ However, Barnes argues that Constantine had every opportunity to receive an education because of his position as the son of a tetrarch and then an emperor himself. When Constantine lived at Diocletian's court at Nicomedia, he had access not only to pagan philosophers but also the Christian rhetor Lactantius who resided there until 303. Constantine continued to have access to the teachings of Lactantius when he employed the rhetor to tutor his son Crispus.³⁸² Barnes reasons that these academic resources taught Constantine to express Christian doctrine in terms of Platonic philosophy. In his view, Constantine did so in the first twenty-one chapters of his oration wherein he explains his view of Christ as the divine Logos in his celestial and earthly form:

Πλάτων... πρῶτον μὲν θεὸν ὑφηγήσατο τὸν ὑπὲρ τὴν οὐσίαν, καλῶς ποιῶν, ὑπέταξε δὲ τοῦτῳ καὶ δευτέρον, καὶ δύο οὐσίας τῷ ἀριθμῷ διεῖλε, μιᾶς οὐσης τῆς ἀμφοτέρων τελειότητος, τῆς τε οὐσίας τοῦ δευτέρου θεοῦ τὴν ὑπαρξιν ἐχούσης ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου... εἷς ἂν οὖν εἶη κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβῆ λόγον ὁ τὴν πάντων ἐπιμέλειαν ποιούμενος προνοούμενός τε αὐτῶν θεός λόγῳ κατακοσμήσας τὰ πάντα. ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτὸς θεὸς ὢν αὐτὸς τυγχάνει καὶ θεοῦ παῖς... φασὶ δὴ τινες ἀνόητοι καὶ δυσσεβεῖς ἄνθρωποι, δικαιωθῆναι τὸν Χριστὸν ἡμῶν... αἰτιῶνται γὰρ τὸν τῶν ἀγαθῶν παραίτιον πάντων, Χριστόν, θεόν τε καὶ θεοῦ παῖδα (Euseb., *Or. coet. sanct.* 9, 11).

And Plato... did well when he postulated the god above being, then made a second subordinate to this one, dividing the two essences numerically, while both shared one perfection and the essence of the second god received its concrete existence from the first... According to the exact account then, there would be one God who exercises care over all things and takes thought for them, having set all other things in order by his Word. And the Word is himself God and the child of God... Now there are some thoughtless and impious people who say that our Christ was punished by justice... For they blame the author of all goods, Christ, God and child of God (Edwards 2003: 14-15, 21-22).

³⁸¹ Barnes 1981: 73.

³⁸² Barnes 1981: 47, 73-74.

Although Barnes does not address this topic, this passage may clarify why Constantine and Eusebius refer to the Christian god as the “Saviour” and “Lord”: it is an implicit reference to Christ because Constantine believes Him to be one with God. Therefore, it is plausible that Eusebius and Constantine do continually refer to Christ throughout their documents without mentioning him by name.

Furthermore, Drake hypothesizes that Eusebius omitted the name of Christ from his panegyric in order to conform to the religiously ambiguous dialogue that had been required of orators since 313.³⁸³ As discussed in Chapter 2, he maintains that Constantine developed this dialogue in order to create a religiously neutral public sphere that promoted religious and civil tranquility. Drake argues that references to Christ would not have been in the public interest because the Logos incarnate in Jesus Christ was the primary point of contention between Christians and pagan monotheists. The latter certainly believed in the Logos and the ability of a god to develop human form, but they did not believe that a god would sully himself with the ordeals of childbirth or death in the way that Jesus had.³⁸⁴ In his view, Eusebius’ omission of this divisive topic in front of a partially pagan court demonstrates that he was adhering to the imperial religious dialogue. Moreover, Drake asserts that this dialogue should not be construed as a representation of Constantine’s personal beliefs because it was consciously developed to reconcile the opposing religious factions.

On the other hand, Drake perceives the statement that God alone would bestow Constantine with an eternal rule as a possible reflection of one of Constantine’s personal beliefs. He concedes that the special relationship between Constantine and God expressed in this passage corresponds to the idea from *Panegyric* 12 that Constantine was such a divine favourite that the *summa diuinitas* only showed himself to the emperor. However, he does not believe this passage is empty rhetoric because another parallel exists in the *Vita Constantini*. Therein, Eusebius recounts that a courtier told Constantine that God would judge him worthy to “rule alongside the Son of God” in the next life, but Constantine chastised the courtier for his bold statement.³⁸⁵ In Drake’s view, Constantine did hope that God was “prepared to break the limits of human existence for his Favourite” because

³⁸³ Drake 1976: 57-60.

³⁸⁴ Drake 1976: 55.

³⁸⁵ Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 4.48.

“sometimes we do not want spoken that which we most want to happen.”³⁸⁶ Since Drake concludes that Eusebius’ statement in the *Oratio* only expresses Constantine’s hopes to rule in the afterlife as a reward for his piety, he implies that this passage has nothing to do with Constantine’s acceptance or rejection of Christ as his path to eternal life. As discussed above, Drake believes that Constantine did have a confused concept of Christ as Apollo after his conversion in 312. However, he believes that Constantine developed a more profound understanding of Christ as a separate divine being when Helena uncovered the cross of Christ while excavating the site of Christ’s sepulchre. Although this is not definitive proof that Constantine accepted Christ, Drake argues that Constantine at least revered Him enough to not only incorporate his nails into his helmet but also include the location where the crosses were found into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.³⁸⁷

This section has explored the theological terms in Constantinian documents that have led Kee to assert that Constantine was not a Christian. Kee proposes that throughout the *Oratio* and the *Vita Constantini* Eusebius avoids associating the name Christ with Constantine because he knew that the emperor did not revere Him. In his view, a close inspection of Constantine’s own letters to the clergy and his oration to the bishops supports this hypothesis. However, Barnes and Drake have presented individual interpretations of the evidence that either support or do not diminish the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian. Barnes hypothesizes that Constantine composed the entirety of the oration, which includes a section, omitted by Kee as inauthentic, explaining that Christ is the Logos incarnate, the child of God, and God. Therefore, Barnes maintains that this oration certainly supports the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian. Furthermore, Drake maintains that the name of Christ does not appear in Eusebius’ *Oratio* because the bishop had to comply with Constantine’s policy of an ambiguous monotheistic dialogue in order to avoid offending pagans at court. While Constantine and Eusebius certainly use the terms “Saviour” and “Lord” in an unconventional manner, it is difficult to determine whether Kee or Drake proposes the more accurate hypothesis.

³⁸⁶ Drake 1976: 75-76.

³⁸⁷ Drake 1976: 76-77.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to clarify the arguments behind the hypotheses that Constantine either remained pagan or only adopted the Christian god as his patron deity. Burckhardt aims to demonstrate that Constantine would not have converted to Christianity in 312 because it would have been an irrational choice for an ambitious ruler of a pagan empire to adopt the beliefs of a powerless minority religion. He asserts that Constantine only enacted a tolerant religious policy throughout his reign because his father had done the same. In Burckhardt's view, any Christian actions that Constantine took can be explained by his desire for religious equality, the extension of his political support, or the advancement of his social programs. These factors have led Burckhardt to give more weight to evidence about Constantine's religion that demonstrates continuity rather than change. Since Burckhardt wrote in the mid-nineteenth century before the establishment of modern Constantinian studies, many of his arguments have long since been easily contradicted, especially since he often does not supply evidence or citations to support them. Alternatively, Kee proposes that the majority of the contemporary evidence suggests that Constantine adopted the Christian god as his patron deity, but a close inspection of the literature reveals that he did not accept Christ as a personal religious figure. While Kee does observe some interesting omissions of Christ in Constantinian documents, he never actually excludes the possibility that Constantine was a Christian. If the entirety of the *Oratio ad coetum sanctorum* can be attributed to Constantine, then this would confirm that he did affiliate with Christ to some extent. This oratio in combination with Constantine's own letters indicates that he understood that God and Christ were made of the same substance, but had difficulty properly expressing this relationship and distinguishing between the two. Even if Constantine did not compose the entire oration, Drake has proposed an entirely plausible explanation for the omission of Christ's name from Eusebius' *Oratio*, upon which Kee has based his entire hypothesis. As discussed in Chapter 2, Drake proposes that Constantine developed an ambiguous religious dialogue not only in order to maintain the support of both the pagan and Christian constituencies but also to reconcile the religions of the empire on doctrinal commonalities. Therefore, Drake reasons that Eusebius describes Constantine's religion in terms of Platonic philosophy in order to conform to this on-going policy. The abundance of

contemporary evidence connecting Constantine to Christianity has led the majority of historians to reason that it is more likely that he was in fact a Christian.

Chapter 4: General Conclusion

This thesis has presented an analysis of the contemporary evidence that historians have used to develop hypotheses about the religious beliefs of Constantine. These three chapters have demonstrated that the literary, numismatic, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence on this topic is so malleable that it can be used to support quite contradictory hypotheses, for instance that Constantine did or did not convert to Christianity, as long as the arguments and logic behind those interpretation are sound. Moreover, the abundance of contradictory evidence from this period means that every historian, no matter what his hypothesis is, must confront and explain evidence that contradicts it.

Modern historians predominantly subscribe to the hypothesis that Constantine converted to Christianity after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Although scholars have debated about what led Constantine to convert and its effects on Roman society for well over a century, it is difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion because both sides provide important points in favour of their hypotheses. For instance, Barnes and Drake disagree on the primary impetus for the conversion, but they propose equally plausible scenarios. Barnes notes that the impending confrontation with Maxentius, which had ended poorly for two previous emperors and would decide the course of Constantine's imperial career, would have been stressful enough for Constantine to search for help in a divinity more powerful than Apollo. On the other hand, Drake points out that Constantine could have adopted the Christian god as his patron in order to secure the support of the Christian constituency over Maxentius through religious legitimization. Similarly, Barnes and Drake make equally valid points when attempting to determine whether or not the absence of pagan deities in *Panegyric 12* demonstrates that Constantine became intolerant of paganism after his conversion. Barnes observes that this panegyric conforms to the Christian doctrine that forbade adherents from associating with pagan deities, which has led him to affirm that Constantine became intolerant of religious diversity. However, Drake notes that the language therein corresponds to the divine ambiguity in the "edict of Milan". This has led him to assert that Constantine created an ambiguous religious policy in order to reconcile the pagan and Christian constituencies. Once an individual historian has arrived at a conclusion on these two sub-topics, he or she will often find more evidence to support his hypothesis because the vagueness of the contemporary evidence allows it to conform to multiple valid hypotheses.

This concept does not necessarily apply to Burckhardt and Kee's hypotheses because they employ different methodologies to prove that a conversion never occurred. Primarily, they aim to demonstrate that more continuity with paganism existed in Constantine's religious mentality than has been previously believed. But a large part of their method is to interpret the evidence in a way that undermines the hypothesis that Christian devotion directed Constantine's actions. Even so, they also provide valid observations to support certain arguments. For instance, Burckhardt observes that the institutionalization of charities within Christianity would have been beneficial to any emperor who hoped to advance a social program in order to explain why Constantine would patronize the Christian Church without being an adherent to the faith. On the other hand, Kee points out that these measures resemble those of a pagan emperor fulfilling requirements of a *do ut des* form of piety. These are entirely plausible scenarios, even though they do not exclude the possibility that Christian devotion could also have been involved in this decision.

Moreover, historians have had to handle the existence of contradictory historical records. For the most part, historians explain away certain evidence in a way that supports their general hypothesis. As we have seen, the *Codex Theodosianus* attributes to Constantine an edict that prescribed crucifixion as a criminal punishment even though Aurelius Victor and Sozomen state that he banned crucifixion. Since Barnes finds this edict out of character for an emperor who had established such close ties to Christianity, he presents an analysis of the legislative and epigraphic evidence in order to demonstrate that Licinius composed this law, not Constantine. Alternatively, some historians choose to gloss over the evidence that may contradict their hypotheses. Burckhardt does so when he quickly dismisses Eusebius' story of a vision and a dream based on the premise that neither Constantine nor Eusebius are reliable sources, without analyzing the narrative itself. Although most historians provide some statement on the evidence that contradicts their hypotheses, sometimes they simply ignore it. When Barnes makes his arguments that Constantine sought to subvert paganism, he ignores the fact that Constantine continued to allow the imperial treasury to provide stipends to pagan temples. Similarly, Kee maintains that the edict ordering the crucifixion of lower class *delatores* undermines the hypothesis that Constantine was a Christian, but he completely omits the fact that Aurelius Victor and Sozomen provide evidence to the

contrary. This analysis has demonstrated that historians tend to develop an interpretation of the evidence that supports their individual views of Constantine's religion.

This much can also be said of both the Christian and pagan contemporary sources. The Christian historians who wrote about Constantine laud him as the first pious Christian emperor because they believe that this is the only explanation for his promotion of the religion to a position of privilege in the aftermath of the Great Persecution. Therefore, they perceive Constantine's military insignia, patronage of the Church, actions against pagan temples, and participation in church councils as declarations of sincere faith. Alternatively, pagan authors are divided on their interpretation of Constantine's actions. Palladas expresses his belief that the spoliation of temples had initiated the downfall of traditional religion. Although Libanius concedes that the temples were looted, he claims that Constantine left pagan rituals intact with the exception of some sort of ban on sacrifice. Aurelius Victor also praises Constantine for abolishing the practice of crucifixion, which even as a pagan he found abhorrent, and regulating religion. Although Christian and pagan authors certainly provide evidence for the actions Constantine took regarding religion, their individual interpretations only reflect their personal perception of events rather than Constantine's personal religious beliefs or mentality. This makes it even more difficult for modern historians to arrive at any certitude about Constantine's beliefs because they also must attempt to determine how much any contemporary author has allowed his personal bias to affect his historical account.

This thesis has analyzed the modern scholarly hypotheses and the contemporary evidence in order to determine what they can tell us about Constantine's religion. Historians have presented arguments both in support of the individual hypotheses that Constantine converted or had a latent pagan concept of piety. The same is true for the hypotheses that Constantine either became intolerant of paganism after his conversion or that he remained as tolerant as he had been as a pagan. I tend to agree with an amalgam of the hypotheses put forth by Drake and Potter that political motivations partially led Constantine to convert to Christianity, while his sincere devotion to the faith augmented over time. The political aspects of his conversion, then, led him to implement a tolerant religious policy aimed at establishing religious equality and social stability. Regardless of my own opinion, this thesis has demonstrated that the evidence can be interpreted in ways that supports quite different

hypotheses, which means that there can be no “correct” answer about the religion of Constantine.

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