

A Man of Visions:
**A New Examination of the Vision(s) of Constantine (Panegyric VI,
Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum*, and Eusebius' *De vita Constantini*)**

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ABSTRACT

Rajiv Kumar Bhola, 'A Man of Visions: A New Examination of the Vision(s) of Constantine (Panegyric VI, Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum*, and Eusebius' *De vita Constantini*)'

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This study seeks to address three main questions: How do Panegyric VI, Lactantius, and Eusebius characterise and utilise their respective visions in their narratives? In what ways are they similar and/or different? Are some or all of the accounts related and, if so, how do they contribute to the Christian Vision legend? In Chapter One the vision narrative in Panegyric VI is deconstructed to show that the panegyrist describes the vision as taking place on Constantine's return march from Massalia and that he is describing a dream-vision that took place at the sanctuary of Apollo at Grand. In Chapter Two it is argued that: Lactantius never resided in Gaul; he places the vision incorrectly in 312 because he did not know the details of the tradition and used Licinius' dream as a template; and the Christian character of the vision is part of his interpretation. In Chapter Three Eusebius' account is deconstructed to show that: the vision story derives from Constantine ca. 336; there is evidence that Constantine was reconstructing his past experiences; Eusebius inserted parallels with St. Paul to give the appearance of a conversion narrative; and Constantine's actual story shows little influence of Christian socialisation. In each chapter the core elements of the narratives are highlighted: each describes a dream-vision, in which a deity appears to Constantine with a promise of victory and a token representation of that promise. In Chapter Four it is argued that Lactantius and Eusebius are describing the same symbol, which is a *tau*-cross with a loop; and that the panegyrist and Eusebius describe the same vision: they give the same chronology, but the panegyrist avoids referencing a solar halo because it was an inopportune omen of civil war. In conclusion, all three sources describe the same experience from different perspectives: the vision of Apollo was being constantly adapted to incorporate new historical developments. Appended also is an argument for redating Panegyric VI to August 309 on the basis of the narratives of the panegyrist and Lactantius, as well as archaeological investigations at Cologne (Constantine's bridge over the Rhine) and Deutz (*Castellum Divitia*).

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As convoluted a topic as the life and reign of the emperor Constantine can be, I have found it far easier to write at length about him than this short note of gratitude, for the simple reason that I have had the pleasure of working with almost every member of the Department of Classics and Religious Studies in some capacity or other over the years, as well as members of various other departments at the University of Ottawa, and faculty at Carleton University and St. Paul University. Whether they realise it or not, each and every interaction, no matter what the subject, contributed enormously to the conceptualisation of my topic, and it pains me that I cannot name everyone here that has been an influence to me.

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

For the sake of conciseness, in the footnotes I have abbreviated the titles of secondary sources where possible. As such, in each chapter initial references to books appear with the main title and some pertinent publication information only, and a shortened title afterward; essays in edited volumes appear with the full title of the essay (thereafter shortened) and a reference to the volume in the same manner as for books, while subsequent mentions of the same volume are to the editors, main title, and page range only; and references to articles are treated in the same fashion as essays, with the titles of academic journals abbreviated according to the system promulgated by *L'Année philologique* (Paris, 1924–), where available. Full references, including sub-titles, series titles, publication houses, full journal titles, and extraneous information, are provided in the Secondary Bibliography.

With respect to primary sources – although one may at times note similarities to abbreviations used by various lexicons, dictionaries, and prosopographies – the system that I have employed is one that I have developed over the years, which generally refers to works by an abbreviation of the author's common name and of the standard title of the text, in a way that I hope is clear. An explanation of the abbreviations with full titles and references can be found in the Primary Bibliography, together with the principal English translations used. In cases where I refer to alternate English translations, these will be given as secondary sources, and I will also indicate where translations are my own. Additionally, references to the books of the *Bible* are according to the Göttingen 2nd edition of the *Septuaginta*, the United Bible Societies 4th edition of *The Greek New Testament*, and the New Revised Standard Version English translation, using the standard abbreviation system of the NRSV.

Finally, in keeping with the scholarly trend, I prefer the terms 'Before Common Era' (BCE) and 'Common Era' (CE) when giving dates. However, since much of this study concerns people and events in the Common Era, I generally omit this detail, the exception being cases where it adds to the clarity of the discussion (primarily in Chapter Four). In the same spirit as the BCE/CE system, I have also refrained from capitalising 'god' when it is used as a noun and not a proper name, such as in the phrase 'the Christian god'. For my own translations of ancient authors who do use it as a proper name, or in discussions (usually stemming from those authors) where I employ it as a proper name, it will be capitalised.

INTRODUCTION: LEGEND AND TRADITION

“History is myth... It’s not just a collection of names and dates and facts. It’s a belief system that ultimately tells more about the people buying into it than it does about the historical participants.”

Bentley Little, ‘The Washingtonians’, in *The Collection* (New York, 2002) 51-70, at 52

In the early 1520s the workshop assistants of the master painter Raphael completed the fourth and final *Stanza di Raffaello* in the *Palazzi Pontifici* (Vatican City), the *Sala di Costantino*. Although the work had been commissioned by Pope Julius II (1503-1513) almost 15 years earlier, a jumbled succession of popes and the death of Raphael himself in 1520 delayed the completion of this last room, arguably the largest of the *stanze*, until the papacy of Clement VII (1523-1524). The room features four main frescoes – one on each wall, two short and two long – that chronologically depict scenes from the early reign of the emperor Constantine (306-337), the ‘first Christian emperor’, that illustrate the triumph of Christianity through his conversion and his conferral of worldly authority on the papacy.¹

The third and fourth frescoes, occurring last in the historical sequence, represent respectively Constantine’s baptism by Pope Silvester I (314-335) in the *fons Constantini* in Rome, and the so-called *Donation of Constantine* conferring control of Rome and the Western empire on Pope Silvester. By Raphael’s time the *Donation* at least had been

¹ On the room and its interpretation, see B. Talvacchia, *Raphael* (London, 2007) 208-17.

revealed as a ninth or possibly eighth-century forgery to justify the papacy's assumption of political control from Rome.² Nevertheless, confronted at the time by Martin Luther's disputation and the ensuing Reformation, these images served the Church's political interests by reinforcing the version of history that the papacy wished to preserve.³

The remaining two frescoes, however, more closely reflect the accepted scholarly version of Constantinian history, though they still bear the deep impressions of twelve-hundred years of Catholic tradition. The second scenario in the sequence, which occupies one of the longer walls of the *sala*, depicts the definitive Battle of Milvian Bridge, where Constantine, aided by heavenly powers, defeated the usurper Maxentius (306-312) outside the gates of Rome on 28 October 312, thereby securing sole rule of the West. In this portrayal the forces of Constantine and Maxentius clash in heated combat alongside the Tiber; armed angels observe the conflict from above, while military standards – fitted with crosses – are hoisted high in the background. In the midst of the battle Constantine, illuminated by his golden uniform, golden crown, and golden staff, charges forward at the head of the fray, as if some messianic Alexander the Great, trampling Maxentius' fallen troops beneath his ivory steed. On the far side of the scene the mounted usurper and many

² Raphael's baptism scenario is likely based on a tradition found in later Byzantine biographies of Constantine. The story derives from the *Actus Silvestri*, which was likely composed in the late fifth or early sixth century. Whereas the Silvester tradition claims that Constantine was a persecutor and sought baptism to cure his severe leprosy, the Byzantine sources eliminate these details. Cf. S.N.C. Lieu, 'From History to Legend and Legend to History: The Medieval and Byzantine Transformation of Constantine's *Vita*', in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine* (London, 1998) 136-76; and id., 'Constantine in Legendary Literature', in N.E. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006) 298-321. The *Donation* also includes a version of the Silvester baptism. Lorenzo Valla proved the *Donation* as a forgery in 1440. On the date and circumstances of the *Donation*, see M. Edwards, *Constantine and Christendom* (Liverpool, 2003) xl-xlvi; and G.W. Bowersock, *On the Donation of Constantine* (Cambridge, MA; 2007) vii-xvi.

³ Talvacchia, *Raphael*, 208-217. Immediately following the start of the Reformation in late 1517, Pope Leo X (1513-1521) instructed Raphael to reconceptualise the frescoes, in order to emphasise Constantine's establishment of papal authority. Indeed, all four of the Vatican *stanze* maintain a continuous theme of papal power. However, the *Sala di Costantino*, originally the *Sala dei Pontefici*, was primarily used as a reception hall for entertaining important guests. Not surprisingly, in these two frescoes Pope Silvester is suspiciously made to resemble Pope Clement VII, a feature that would presumably not have been lost on its viewers.

of his soldiers can be seen struggling fitfully for their lives as they are consumed by the Tiber, while Constantinian archers fire on them from above, delivering the deathblow to Maxentius' failed enterprise as emperor of the Roman people. It is no surprise that this image appears amongst these frescoes. For the Church in Raphael's time, just as for many historians today, Constantine's victory over Maxentius and the liberation of Rome, vouchsafed by the assistance of the Christian god, marked the beginning of a momentous shift in the religious dynamic of the Roman Empire.⁴

Much more evocative perhaps is the first fresco that appears in the historical sequence of the room, from which the subsequent images derive their significance. On the day before the battle, Constantine's army is camped beside the Tiber. From atop a podium outside his tent the emperor stares intently into the sky. Throughout the camp Constantine's soldiers, weapons drawn, chaotically rush to meet him, their eyes fixed either heavenward in awe of the divine spectacle or upon the emperor in approval. High above, inside a break in the billowing dark clouds, three angels support a radiating cross, which appears to be fending off a winged serpent dominating the sky above the city of Rome. Beneath the burning symbol a banner of light, with the words EN TOYTΩI NIKΑ, bursts through the clouds, while all around a myriad of standards – some already fixed with versions of the divine sign – are held high by the captivated mob. Although mute, one can easily imagine the din erupting from the throng, some with cries of shock and others with excited shouts of 'Constantine, beloved by God!'

The primacy of the Vision is readily apparent in Raphael's pictorial of Constantine's contribution to the Church and that much has not changed. Like the captivated mob in the

⁴ On the significance of the battle in Western and religious history, see now R. Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge, 2011).

scenario, scholars today cannot engage in discussions of Constantine's endorsement of the Church or the religious transformation of the Roman Empire without addressing the question of his conversion to Christianity. In this context the famous 'Vision of Constantine' comes squarely into focus as part of an event crucial to the religious development of the first Christian emperor and the course of Western civilisation. Whether for its intrinsic value or simply good, old-fashioned story-telling, as an aspect of religious history the Vision is difficult to ignore. Even if regarded as fictitious, it is important, at the very least, because it helps in some small way to explain how the ruler of a traditionally polytheistic empire came to join the ranks of a frequently persecuted monotheistic minority.

The 'Constantinian Question' has been one of the easiest to ask, but the most difficult to resolve. Hidden within its deceptively singular form are numerous inquiries that hinge upon our ability to determine the depth and sincerity of Constantine's commitment to Christianity. In what ways did he use his imperial position to promote the Church? What was his role at Nicaea? Did he participate in forming an early New Testament canon? What kind of Christian was he? To what degree, if any, was he tolerant of non-Christians? And countless other thorny subjects.

Such ponderings are at times precarious, owing mostly to a limited amount of direct evidence and broad interpretations of the indirect evidence. A characteristic trait of Constantine's imperial policy that scholars almost never fail to note is the ambiguity of his religious representation. There is no better example than that remarkably indistinct phrase on the Arch of Constantine attributing his victory at the Milvian Bridge to 'divine inspiration' (*instinctu diuinitatis*). To whom exactly does this refer? Is this unidentified *diuinitas* Christian or something else? The longstanding assumption is that the expression, in all its

lack of clarity, must undoubtedly be a reference to the Christian god.⁵ More recent studies, however, contend that this wording was intentional, in order to render a wording palatable for Christians and ‘pagans’ alike or, more likely, that it was an unabashed ‘pagan’ interpretation of the events at the Milvian Bridge.⁶

Even so, the Constantinian programme is seemingly rife with religious inconsistencies and contradictions, which have plagued modern biographers. Constantine donated the Lateran to the Bishop of Rome, but continued to use ‘pagan’ representations on coinage and monuments as late as 325.⁷ He funded the construction of churches and destroyed temples, but never rescinded the title of *pontifex maximus*.⁸ He intervened in

⁵ N. Baynes, *Constantine and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London, 1972) 10, simply translates it as “by the prompting of the divinity”. Most scholars, though, have interpreted the expression as an attempt by the Senate to reconcile Constantine’s new religion. See, for instance, A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (trans. H. Mattingly; Oxford, 1948) 72; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979) 285 and 288; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1987) 620; J.R. Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital* (Oxford, 2002) 87; C.M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London, 2004) 142-4; T.D. Barnes, *Constantine* (Malden, MA, 2011) 19; P.J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove, IL., 2010) 118-9. Cf. J. Elsner, ‘Perspectives in Art’, in Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 255-77, at 259, who agrees that the Senate worded the dedication, but points out that we do not have enough examples of Constantinian dedications in this context to discern intent.

⁶ L. Jones Hall, ‘Cicero’s *instinctu divino* and Constantine’s *instinctu divinitatis*: The Evidence of the Arch of Constantine for the Senatorial View of the “Vision” of Constantine’, *J ECS* 6 (1998) 647-71, suggests that Cicero is the inspiration for the phrase, specifically to appeal to pagan sentiments, concluding (at 669-70) that both Christians and ‘pagans’ would have recognised it as such. N.E. Lenski, ‘Evoking the Pagan Past: *Instinctu divinitatis* and Constantine’s Capture of Rome’, *JLA* 1 (2008) 204-57, however, argues that the phrase echoes *evocatio* formula found in Livy and is a distinctly ‘pagan’ rendering, indicating also (at 221-6) that *instinctus* in the context of ‘divine inspiration’ was particularly Apolline, whereas early Christian sources show a general preference for *inspiratus*.

⁷ On the Lateran building project, see R.R. Holloway, *Constantine and Rome* (London, 2004) 57-61. Regarding Constantine’s ‘pagan’ imagery, see P. Bruun, ‘The Disappearance of Sol from the Coins of Constantine’, *Arctos* 2 (1958) 15-37; id., ‘Una permanenza del Sol Invictus di Costantino nell’arte cristiana’, in G. Bonamente and F. Fusco (eds.), *Costantino il Grande*, 2 vols. (Macerata, 1992-1993) 1.219-29. See now also J. Bardill, *Constantine* (Cambridge, 2012), particularly at 11-125 and 326-337.

⁸ Constantine’s ecclesiastical building policy and despoliation or destruction of temples occupies a large section of the third book of *Vita*; cf. Eus. *VC* 3.25-58. The hostile attitude described by Eusebius is generally taken at face value. See, for example, Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 671-3; T.G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (Scranton, 1996) 255-60; Odahl, *Constantine*, 141-61 and 232-42. On Constantine’s building policy, see R Krautheimer, ‘The Ecclesiastical Building Policy of Constantine’, in Bonamente and Fusco, *Costantino il Grande*, 2. 509-52; M.J. Johnson, ‘Architecture of Empire’, in Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 278-97; and, most recently, Bardill, *Constantine*, 237-59 (churches) and

numerous ecclesiastical disputes, but was only baptised on his deathbed.⁹ He associated with bishops and delivered an Easter sermon, but around that same time may also have executed his first son, Crispus, and murdered his second wife, Fausta.¹⁰ Details such as these create a veritable minefield when attempting to reconstruct Constantine's religious policy, and for that reason it has been an essential feature of Constantinian studies to determine in what capacity the emperor understood himself to be a Christian.

No task could be more understated. In the face of abundant ambiguities the historian's job is made significantly simpler by strict adherence to a fundamental point of departure: Constantine was a Christian. It is more than just a premise or heuristic tool; it is an unwavering historical fact that has crafted the lens through which Constantine and his age tend to be viewed. Facts are useful. However, inasmuch as we are concerned with 'facts', the Constantinian question is unquestionably a matter of 'interpretation'. Was Constantine a sincere Christian? It all depends on how one chooses to weigh the evidence.

Although Constantine is one of the most widely discussed figures in Roman history, the primary sources for his reign are actually quite sparse.¹¹ Indeed, much of our information

259-66 (temples). On the title of *pontifex maximus*, see Alan Cameron, 'The Imperial Pontifex', *HSPH* 103 (2007) 341-84; id., *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York, 2011) 51-6.

⁹ Regarding ecclesiastical disputes, I am referring to Constantine's well-known involvement in, for example, the Donatist dispute, the Council of Arles (314), and the Council of Nicaea (325), among others. Regarding Constantine's death-bed baptism, see Eus. *VC* 4.61-64.

¹⁰ Eusebius claims at various points in *Vita* that Constantine kept the company of certain bishops; cf., for example, *VC* 4.24, that Constantine was accustomed to dine with bishops. Cf. W. Eck, 'Eine historische Zeitenwende: Kaiser Constantins Hinwendung zum Christentum und die gallischen Bischöfe', in F. Schuller and H. Wolff (eds.), *Konstantin der Große* (Lindenberg, 2007) 69-94, regarding Constantine's association with bishops prior to 312. The Easter sermon is well-known as the *Oration to the Saints*, which Eusebius mentions at *VC* 4.32 and was appended, in Greek translation, as a fifth book to *Vita*. The oration was likely delivered in April 325 at Nicomedia. Cf. Barnes, *Constantine*, 113-20. According to post-Constantinian sources, Crispus was executed in 326 for engaging in an illicit sexual affair with his stepmother Fausta, who shortly afterward died under suspicious circumstances in an over-heated bath; cf. *ibid.*, 144-50.

¹¹ R. Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2007) 15, comments "Constantine is one of the best documented of the Roman emperors", a claim which T.D. Barnes, 'Review Article: Was There a

about the motivations behind Constantine's reign and policies comes primarily from one source, *De vita Constantini*, the *Life of Constantine* – the unofficial biography composed by his contemporary, Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, sometime in the late 330s. In his narrative, Eusebius paints the portrait of a pious individual, who is converted early in his reign by a miraculous visionary experience. Constantine then embarks on a mission to destroy the enemies of Christianity, that is, his political opponents, first in the West and then in the East, and 'Christianise' the Roman Empire. Moreover, *Vita* recounts innumerable instances where Constantine actively suppressed non-Christians – 'pagans', Jews, and Christian heretics alike – because their beliefs did not conform to his personal religious sentiments or his Christian mission. Additionally, Eusebius emphasises the role of Constantine's personal Christianity in all of his imperial decision-making and baldly describes a policy that is, at heart, a Christian policy.¹²

While *Vita* offers a mountain of supporting evidence that Constantine was a Christian, and most of all, a Christian emperor, it must be remembered that it too is an 'interpretation', but one that insists on 'fact'. As Raymond Van Dam poignantly states, Eusebius does what all historians are expected to do: "argue a point of view" and "fashion images of Constantine that fit into our own interpretive stances".¹³ Eusebius' point of view is that Constantine was a sincere Christian on a mission to convert the empire: the evidence for that interpretation is in the emperor's religious policy and the progress of his religious development, as enumerated across all four books of *Vita*. As far as images are concerned,

Constantinian Revolution?", *JLA* 2 (2009) 374-84, at 376, declares "dubious", and even "profoundly mistaken and deeply misleading".

¹² For the image of Constantine in *Vita*, cf. Av. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Eusebius* (Oxford, 1999) 27-50. See also the narrative of Constantine's life and career by T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA; 1981) 3-61, which relies heavily on Eusebius.

¹³ Van Dam, *Roman Revolution*, 14-5 (quotes at 15).

Eusebius' Constantine is the ideal Christian monarch and an example to be emulated, particularly by his sons.

The mainstream portrait of Constantine appears much indebted to the one found in *Vita*, and to a certain extent it is. Some of the most influential and still highly respected contributions in the history of Constantinian scholarship arrive at the same depictions time and time again. Edward Gibbon, Norman Baynes, Andreas Alföldi and Timothy Barnes, to name just a few, all construct Constantine as a militant Christian bursting with intolerant zeal, who sincerely believed that “he had been chosen by Heaven to reign over the earth” and “that God had given him a special mission to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity”.¹⁴ Any religious ambiguities or perceived wavering in his dealings with non-Christians, therefore, are not examples of genuine toleration. Rather, under the pretence that he would preserve traditional worship, they were deliberate attempts to avoid alarming the predominantly non-Christian population as part of “a cautious strategy to shatter the position of paganism” and “[cut] the ground from under their feet”¹⁵:

As the years passed toleration of paganism gave place to active repression; the emperor felt that he was strong enough to advance to a frontal attack upon paganism. The important fact to realize, however, is that this alteration in policy entailed no change of spirit, only a change of method.¹⁶

These are conclusions taken straight from the pages of Eusebius, as are the aggrandising assumptions of Constantine's intolerance and sense of personal mission. They are interpretations built upon an interpretation masquerading as a single, intractable fact:

¹⁴ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. C. Dawson, 6 vols. (London, 1954-57) 2.128-392; Baynes, *Constantine*; Alföldi, *Conversion*; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*. Quotes: Gibbon, *Decline*, 2. 306, and Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 275, respectively.

¹⁵ Alföldi, *Conversion*, 28-9.

¹⁶ Baynes, *Constantine*, 19.

Constantine was a Christian. That is not to say that this is false: I certainly do not want to give the impression that the purpose of this study is to disprove Constantine's Christianity. Rather, it is extremely important that we recognise the character of the problem with which we are dealing.

The reality of Constantine's Christianity is not in doubt, precisely because it is solidified in the collective consciousness by nearly two millennia of Western tradition. It is an enduring tradition and therefore much more complex than a simple statement of fact. A tradition, even one bound by a core truth, nevertheless carries with it ample baggage; suppositions, assumptions, and expectations, both grandiose and mundane, that influence the interpretation of facts and evidence. Contrary to 'fact', which suggests a verifiable and empirical reality, 'tradition' is highly mutable and can be adjusted to suit the needs of different groups, or indeed generations, without threatening its fundamental tenets.

One such element of the Constantinian tradition is the famous Vision of Constantine, and by direct association his conversion to Christianity. As is evident in the frescoes of the *Sala di Costantino* certain modifications could be made to the tradition of Constantine's Christianity, such as his baptism and the Donation, without altering the kernel of truth around which the tradition developed. Could Raphael have conveyed the theme of the room as effectively if he did not include the story of Constantine's miraculous conversion or the triumph of Christianity at the Milvian Bridge? Probably not. These scenarios do not appear out of mere happenstance; they are part of a well-planned and cohesive visual rhetorical unit. Even though the Donation had been proven to be a forgery over eighty years earlier, by appealing to a much older and fundamental tradition like the conversion and mission of Constantine, perhaps there could be some hope for maintaining the tradition.

Blurred Vision

Legend and tradition are operative themes here, and while the present study is primarily focused on the contemporary evolution of the Vision legend, its importance for the tradition of Constantine's conversion to Christianity cannot be avoided. The circumstances of Constantine's conversion are quintessential to the Constantinian question; it is a logical assumption that for Constantine to have been a Christian he at some point underwent a conversion. A less logical assumption, however, is that quantifiable aspects, such as 'how' and 'when', can be definitively obtained. There are traditional answers, which are rooted in legend, and systematic analyses in modern scholarship, which seem to echo certain aspects of tradition.

Looking back at the 'Vision' of Raphael, he was of course working within a much different tradition that had been passed down through Byzantine biographies of the ninth to thirteenth centuries, and even earlier revisionist material, such as the late fifth-century *Actus Silvestri*, which is repeated in the *Donation*. Nevertheless, the legendary narrative has remained largely the same over the past 1700 years. Early in his reign Constantine had a visionary experience, in which the Christian god effectively endorsed his *imperium* by granting him a symbol as a guarantee of divine protection. As a result, Constantine converted to Christianity and employed the sign given to him by Christ in battle against the enemies of the Church, the first of which being the tyrant Maxentius.

As we shall examine, this time-honoured tradition of Constantine's intimate relationship with divine powers was well established during his lifetime. In his *Vita*, Eusebius provides the details of 'how' and 'when' in what is generally considered to be the authoritative version of Constantine's Vision; authoritative most of all because he claims to

have heard the story from the emperor himself.¹⁷ Prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge, the young emperor was troubled that the city of Rome continued to suffer under the tyranny of Maxentius. In entertaining the thought of liberating the illustrious city himself, he realised that he would require the assistance of a powerful deity. While Constantine was on the march, a radiant spectacle appeared suddenly in the sky. A sort of cross made of light manifested over the sun, along with the words $\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega\ \nu\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha$, ‘by this conquer’, shining beneath it. That night Christ appeared to Constantine in a dream with the same symbol and instructed him to use it as an aid against his enemies. Having been guaranteed divine assistance, he immediately immersed himself in Christian studies and began making preparations to march on Rome. Part of those preparations included the reproduction of the divine symbol – what would later become known as the *Labarum*.

It is clear that the historical tradition, even after so many centuries and alterations, is still much indebted to Eusebius’ account. I will discuss his narrative in greater detail later in this study, but what is essential to note at the moment is that his version directly connects the Vision to Constantine’s conversion. It is through this particular incident that Constantine becomes aware of and establishes a relationship with the Christian god, and takes his first steps as a Christian. Also noteworthy is that both the Vision and the conversion are situated firmly within the context of the civil war against Maxentius.

These three elements together form the central nexus within the tradition of Constantine’s Christianity and there is little doubt that Eusebius’ version is an attempt to describe a religious conversion. This, however, is not the only contemporary account of a

¹⁷ Context and Vision: Eus. *VC* 1.27-32. By claiming to have heard the story from Constantine himself (at 1.28.1) Eusebius insinuates that he was a trusted confidante. To the contrary, Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 266, argues that they could only have had four opportunities to speak to each other and that the story need not have been told in private.

visionary experience that results in something akin to a religious conversion. Another report, albeit brief, is given by the Latin rhetorician Lactantius in his pamphlet *De mortibus persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*), composed ca. 315.¹⁸ Lactantius records only a dream of Christ on the night before the Battle of Milvian Bridge, appears to describe a different symbol, and claims that the divine sign was marked on the soldiers' shields rather than made into some form of military standard.

Despite obvious similarities in these two accounts and although it is generally acknowledged that there exists at least some loose connection between the versions of Lactantius and Eusebius, Constantinian scholars have typically found these narratives difficult to reconcile. Eusebius' *Vita* has customarily been used to provide the principal framework for reconstructing the legend of Constantine's Vision and, in many reconstructions of this type, Lactantius is considered to be either providing an inaccurate/incomplete account of the same event or describing a completely different experience altogether, neither case necessarily being an attempt to account for a conversion.¹⁹

Supernatural elements aside, scholarly consensus on the chronology and context of Constantine's conversion do not differ much from the contemporary sources, though the old quandary of a sudden conversion has steadily been dissolving in favour of a gradual process of religious growth. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that Constantine must have been at

¹⁸ Lact. *DMP* 44.5.

¹⁹ See, for example, H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops* (Baltimore, 2000) 180, that Eusebius and Lactantius are telling the same story, with different details; cf. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 616. Alternately, R. Van Dam, 'The Many Conversions of the Emperor Constantine', in K. Mills and A. Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Rochester, NY, 2003) 127-51, at 135-6, considers Lactantius' version as just one of many visions. Cf. P. Keresztes, 'Patristic and Historical Evidence for Constantine's Christianity', *Latomus* 42 (1983) 84-94, who combines the two accounts, but concludes that Lactantius is referring to a second vision.

least sympathetic to Christianity from an early age and that his victory at the Milvian Bridge, which he believed was vouchsafed by his trust in the Christian god, provided the impetus to make a committed decision to adopt Christianity. The strongest evidence for this is in the before-and-after distinctions following his victorious entry into Rome in late 312, when the Christian character of his religious policies is more easily discernible, suggesting that a conversion had already taken place or was at the very least coming along well.²⁰ Through analyses of Constantine's religious policy, we arrive at a conclusion that, in accordance with tradition, directly associates his conversion with the battle.

Over the past fifteen years there has been greater attention paid to the number of visionary experiences to be found in the contemporary source material.²¹ The account that has been receiving the most attention, invariably as an asset and a complication, is the non-Christian vision preserved in the *Panegyrici Latini*, which predates the narratives of both Lactantius and Eusebius. In a panegyric delivered at Trier a few years before the Battle of Milvian Bridge (Panegyric 6), the orator emphatically describes a vision of Apollo that occurred while Constantine was marching back to the Rhine frontier from Marseilles.²² Following a somewhat disorganised series of events, the panegyrist claims that some sort of divine spectacle manifested in the sky, which was interpreted as a portent of a long-life and

²⁰ A formal conversion in 312 is the standard agreement, but there is disagreement on the significance of this date for Constantine's religious conduct. For instance, T.D. Barnes, 'The Conversion of Constantine', *EMC* 29 (1985) 371-91, sees more continuity in Constantine's religious policy before and after 312, and argues elsewhere (id., *Constantine and Eusebius*, 43) that Constantine announced his Christianity before Milvian Bridge; whereas, K. Bringmann, 'Die konstantinische Wende. Zum Verhältnis von politischer und religiöser Motivation', *HZ* 260 (1995) 21-47, contends that 312 reveals a stark turning point in the emperor's policy. Cf. Elliott, *Christianity*, 17-72, who argues that Constantine was raised as a Christian or converted before leaving Britain.

²¹ For instance, Van Dam, 'Many Conversions'; J.N. Bremmer, 'The Vision of Constantine', in A.P.M.H. Lardinois et al. (eds.), *Land of Dreams* (Leiden, 2006) 57-79; J. Long, 'How To Read a Halo: Three (or More) Versions of Constantine's Vision', in A. Cain and N.E. Lenski (eds.), *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, 2009) 227-35.

²² *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).21.3-7.

prosperous reign. The emperor turned to the nearest temple, paid his respects to the gods, and bestowed lavish donatives, before returning to the road to continue his march. This vision has normally been disregarded as the invention of the panegyrist and, until fairly recently, considered inconsequential to the Christian Vision tradition.²³ This is not wholly surprising. At a glance, the two traditions seem completely unrelated; one describes a pre-312 ‘pagan’ vision, the other a Christian vision in 312. Simply put, “Constantine was a visionary”.²⁴

As many are now aware, in 1989 Peter Weiss delivered a controversial paper at a colloquium in honour of Alfred Heuss, in which he argued that Constantine witnessed a rare, but well-documented, meteorological phenomenon on the road from Marseilles in early 310 and that the stories of the panegyrist, Lactantius, and Eusebius are intricately related.²⁵ As such, there was only one vision, that of Apollo in 310, which was reinterpreted by Constantine as a vision of Christ following a dream-vision on the night before the Battle of Milvian Bridge. From Weiss’ own recollection, the response to his presentation was “eloquent silence”.²⁶ This silence, however, was quickly replaced by disapproval in German print, even before the proceedings of the colloquium had been published in 1993.²⁷ In a

²³ See, for example, B.S. Rodgers, ‘Constantine’s Pagan Vision’, *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 259-78, at 265; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 36; and Elliott, *Christianity*, 51.

²⁴ Van Dam, ‘Many Conversions’, 134.

²⁵ P. Weiss, ‘The Vision of Constantine’, (trans. A.R. Birley), *JRA* 16 (2003) 237-59. Similar arguments, albeit separately, have been offered in the past, but Weiss’ hypothesis is more fully researched and better argued. Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948) 96, is perhaps the most widely recognised scholar to suggest a solar halo. Some notable attempts have been made to synchronise the visions of the panegyrist and Eusebius. Cf. H. Grégoire, ‘La “conversion” de Constantin’, *RUB* 36 (1930-1931) 231-72; W. Seston, ‘La vision païenne de 310 et les origines du chrisme constantinien’, *AIPHO* 4 (1936) 373-95; H. Grégoire, ‘La vision de Constantin “Liquidée”’, *Byzantion* 14 (1939) 341-51.

²⁶ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 257.

²⁷ P. Weiss, ‘Die Vision Constantins’, in J. Bleicken (ed.), *Colloquium aus Anlass des 80. Geburtstages von Alfred Heuss* (Kallmünz, 1993) 143-69. On the general reception of Weiss’ argument, see Weiss, ‘Vision’, 257-9; and Barnes, *Constantine*, 74-5.

lengthy review article published in 1998, Barnes wholeheartedly supported Weiss' hypothesis, praising it for removing "all the contradictions in the ancient evidence which have worried historians", and adding further in his most recent study on Constantine that Weiss' hypothesis "explains all the early evidence in a way which no earlier hypothesis had ever done".²⁸ Despite early and continued skepticism, since the translation of Weiss' article into English in 2003 more Constantinian scholars have been voicing their support for his hypothesis.²⁹

Why the acceptance of Weiss' theory – one of the only contributions to elucidate the Vision in this way – was initially so difficult, and why in some circles it remains so, is relatively easy to discern.³⁰ Weiss' hypothesis of a 'pagan' precursor to the official narrative undermines numerous elements of the Constantinian tradition; namely, that Constantine had one celestial vision, that it was a Christian vision and was immediately recognised as such, that it resulted in a conversion, and that it occurred before the Battle of Milvian Bridge. This tendency reveals the true fragility of the Vision tradition; it is as if the story were the stone and mortar of some colossal cyclopean structure that, if breached, would mean irreparable damage to the Christian hero dwelling inside. Ultimately, what makes Weiss' analysis so appealing, and for many so undesirable, is his ability to break away from an entrenched

²⁸ T.D. Barnes, 'Constantine and Christianity: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations', *ZAC* 2 (1998) 274-94, at 288; Barnes, *Constantine*, 75.

²⁹ Barnes, *Constantine*, 75.

³⁰ H.A. Drake, 'Solar Power in Late Antiquity', in Cain and Lenski, *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 215-26, at 218-20, offers also that Weiss' argument for the significance of the vision sometimes appears overtly teleological, as if to say that the early vision of Apollo formulated the trajectory of Constantine's imperial career. With respect to the civil war against Maxentius, Weiss does contend that Constantine was already contemplating invading Italy and that the vision gave him the proper motivation, but he argues as well that the experience instilled in the young emperor the conviction that he was pre-destined to become sole ruler and suggests that all of his subsequent actions were undertaken in order to realise this prophecy; cf. Weiss, 'Vision', 251-3 and 257.

aspect of established tradition and demonstrate through careful exegesis that the legend of Constantine's Vision was subject to change from the very start.

This is essentially the approach taken throughout this study. As much as the Vision legend was augmented and transformed in the many centuries following Constantine's reign, it is largely neglected that the evolution of the tradition was taking place even during his lifetime. We may possess only a small handful of contemporary vision narratives, but that does not mean that there was ever only one static version in circulation. Rather, we have to acknowledge that the stories of Constantine's relationship with divine powers and some sort of visionary experience, whether celestial or in a dream, were constantly being told and heard, re-told and heard again, retooled, elaborated, expanded, and only then occasionally recorded. The official Vision story narrated in *Vita* was merely the latest stage of the contemporary development of the Vision to be set down.

The first three chapters of this study offer dedicated discussions of the three main sources for the Vision narrative in order to underscore the independent contributions of each account. My format differs from customary treatments in that Panegyric 6 is included in the discussion and the three sources are addressed in chronological order. The tendency in modern scholarship is to open with Eusebius' 'official' narrative, to then supplement it with Lactantius' account, and finally, though not always, to consider Panegyric 6 in the context of Constantine's conversion. Given the relative recentness of Weiss' hypothesis and the slow, albeit growing, acceptance of his arguments, this approach has been necessary in the past. However, for examining the evolution of the tradition, it is somewhat detrimental, not least of all because it gives *Vita* automatic prominence in a process that, as we shall see, began thirty years earlier. These three accounts require careful textual and contextual examination in their proper sequence so as to highlight not only their fundamental similarities, but also to

gain appreciation for their essential differences. Having done so, in the fourth chapter I consider the narratives together in order to demonstrate that the three accounts differ only at face value – there is, in fact, much continuity in their representations and what disagreements appear to exist between them can actually be reasonably reconciled. Rather than representing three independent traditions, the panegyrist, Lactantius, and Eusebius were operating within the same tradition, but from differing temporal and contextual perspectives – their accounts instead represent different stages of a larger process of mythmaking that took place over the span of thirty years.

In the process of this study, I have tried to be very judicious with respect to my bibliography. The corpus of Constantinian studies is extremely large, which I estimate to be approximately between two-thousand and twenty-five-hundred titles at present. According to the New Testament scholar Kurt Aland, by 1955 he had compiled a list of over fifteen-hundred titles on Constantine that had been published since 1900.³¹ The volume of literature published before 1900, some of which is still highly regarded today, is considerable, as is the number of works that have been published since 1955; at least a few new publications appear annually, though it would seem that the rate has been steadily increasing over the past fifteen years. When one also considers the volume of publications that appear each year on various topics related to the religious transformation of the Roman world, the development of early Christianity, and the status of Roman religion(s) in Late Antiquity, which cannot help but draw upon and form conclusions about Constantine's conversion and the Vision legend, the number of relevant works becomes astronomical. For this reason I have restricted my bibliography to some of the most notable examinations of Constantine, giving preference to more recent discussions and avoiding repetition where possible, unless to make a point. The

³¹ K. Aland, 'Die religiöse Haltung Kaiser Konstantins', *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957) 549-600, at 549.

actual amount of research that I have conducted on Constantine over the years includes many titles that will not be found cited here, though all have at some point influenced my ideas and conceptualisations. While I have tried to be diligent in properly sourcing the ideas expressed in this study, I duly acknowledge the possibility, and apologise in advance, if I neglect to give appropriate credit.

With such a mountain of literature and the various methodologies that have been applied to this topic thus far, it is a wonder as to what a stroll down a well-trodden path might accomplish. Although it is uncustomary to enter into a study with negative statements, I cautiously offer nonetheless that there is not so much a central research ‘question’ as there is a research ‘interest’, for the main reason that I do not want to prejudice my investigations from the outset. Rather, in place of a main research question, there are numerous lines of inquiry. Namely, what does each author say about their respective visions, and how do they characterise and utilise it in their narratives? In what ways are they similar and/or different? Are some or all of the accounts related and, if so, how do they contribute to the grand legend of a Christian conversion connected with the vision experience that emerges at the end of Constantine’s reign? By dealing with each narrative in isolation my intent is to assess how each account is operating independently before addressing how they are interacting. As such, this study seeks to offer new perspectives on not just the Vision legend, but the sources and their authors as well. At times this general approach is relativistic, since I stress consideration of the social, political, historical, cultural, and even personal contexts surrounding each account. My aim, however, is to pursue new ways of thinking about Constantine’s Vision without unconditionally assuming, firstly, that the three accounts are related (or unrelated, for that matter) and, secondly, that the Christian legend began as a Christian tradition. In the end, I hope, this study will be a suitable response to those who

wonder, occasionally in print, whether there is something new that can be said about the Vision of Constantine.

CHAPTER ONE: THE VISION OF APOLLO

“Thanne gan me to meten a merveillous swevene—
That I was in a wildernesse, wiste I nevere where.”
W. Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, Prologue, lines 11-2³²

The beginning of August was an important occasion for the capital city of Trier (Augusta Treverorum): it was the anniversary of the founding of the city, now an imperial residence.³³ As part of the festivities of 309 a distinguished visiting orator delivered a flattering panegyric, not about the city *per se*, but rather its most illustrious resident, the son and successor of Constantius Chlorus, the emperor Constantine, whose *dies imperii* had been celebrated only a short time earlier (25 July).³⁴

Towards the end of the panegyric the orator turns briefly to the topic of Constantine’s divine patron, Apollo (Sol): *Vidisti enim, credo, Constantine, Apollinem tuum*. These words have had a particular resonance ever since the 1930s when Henri Grégoire vehemently asserted that not only is the vision of Apollo the basis for the Christian tradition, it is the only

³² A.V.C. Schmidt (ed.), *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman. A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17*, 2nd ed. (London, 1995) 1.

³³ The panegyrist states the occasion of the speech at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).1.1 and says (at 2.3) that Constantine’s *dies imperii* (25 July) was recently celebrated. C. Jullian, *Histoire de la Gaule*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1908-1928) 7.104 (n. 4), suggests the first of August; cf. C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994) 212, that this is offered “on no compelling grounds, but it is likely to be approximately correct”.

³⁴ The traditionally accepted year of 310 for this panegyric is not tenable; it was likely delivered on 1 August 309. See Appendix A for a justification of this dating.

officially sanctioned version, the later narrative in *De vita Constantini* being a post-Eusebian fabrication.³⁵ Even though these latter contentions should have had no bearing on the possible influence of the vision of Apollo, it was nevertheless swiftly – and decisively, for many – dismissed as a figment of the panegyrist’s imagination.³⁶

As a result of this trend, in his 1968 article ‘Constantine and the Miraculous’, Ramsey MacMullen could describe the vision of Apollo as “somewhat less well known if hardly less debated” and, in his biography of Constantine a year later, he chides scholars for “dodging the account”, “distort[ing] it” or “reasoning it away”.³⁷ In neither of these publications, however, is MacMullen attempting to resurrect Grégoire’s argument, nor does he regard the vision as having actually occurred, or at least not necessarily in the way the panegyrist describes.³⁸ For him the tale is a product of the age, of a culture that expected

³⁵ On the primacy of the ‘pagan’ vision, see H. Grégoire, ‘La ‘conversion’ de Constantin’, *RUB* 36 (1930-1931) 231-72, at 255-8; ‘La statue de Constantin et le signe de la croix’, *AC* 1 (1932) 135-43, at 135; and ‘La vision de Constantin “liquidée”’, *Byzantion* 14 (1939) 341-51. On the authorship of the *Vita Constantini*, see id., ‘Eusèbe n’est pas l’auteur de la ‘Vita Constantini’ dans sa forme actuelle et Constantin ne s’est pas “converti” en 312’, *Byzantion* 13 (1938) 561-83. Cf. A. Piganiol, *L’Empereur Constantin* (Paris, 1932) 50, in early agreement that the ‘pagan’ vision is “la seule vision authentique de Constantin”.

³⁶ J. Bidez, ‘À propos d’une biographie nouvelle de l’empereur Constantin’, *AC* 1 (1932) 1-7, at 5-6; and, H. Lietzmann, ‘Der Glaube Konstantins des Großen’, in *Kleine Schriften. I* (Berlin, 1958) 186-201, at 187-91. For the early rejections as decisive, see for instance A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Conversion and Pagan Rome* (trans. H. Mattingly; Oxford, 1948) 18 (n. 3), who does not discuss the vision except to say in a footnote that it has been proven that “the vision of Apollo only took place in the fancy of the Panegyrist and is a mere literary fiction”, following Bidez. T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981) 36, contends that the panegyrist invented the vision in order to persuade Constantine to become a patron to his hometown. Barnes has had the most influence on the issue in recent scholarship, at least prior to his change of view in id., ‘Constantine and Christianity: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations’, *ZAC* 2 (1998) 274-94, at 287-9.

³⁷ R. MacMullen, ‘Constantine and the Miraculous’, *GRBS* 9 (1968) 81-96, at 83; id., *Constantine* (New York, 1969) 65-7 (quotes at 67). Although between 1931 and 1969 numerous publications appeared on various topics related to the vision of Apollo, MacMullen’s contention is quite apt. For example, A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948), ignores the vision completely; and J.H. Smith, *Constantine the Great* (London, 1971), even though he notes MacMullen’s 1969 publication and indeed recommends it (at 328-9), says only that (at 86) “the emperor had consulted the oracle at Apollo’s temple, and left magnificent offerings for the god”.

³⁸ MacMullen is not very explicit about what he thinks of the ‘pagan’ vision. In his article, ‘Constantine and the Miraculous’, he avoids the debate on authenticity and authorship entirely, while in *Constantine*, at 67, he

divine goodwill for their rulers in the form of portents and visions, and not at all indicative of some concealed “secular motivation”.³⁹

This latter point addresses what is perhaps a core tendency in the Vision debate that has affected previous reception of the panegyrist’s account. Because of the longevity of the Christian tradition and the general acceptance of the account in *Vita*, the ‘pagan’ vision, being more recent as evidence in the debate and not Christian, is sometimes simply disregarded as not pertinent.⁴⁰ This bias is certainly not restricted to this panegyric. The lack of Christian, and overwhelming presence of non-Christian, imagery on the Arch of Constantine is customarily regarded as the programme of the ‘pagan’ aristocrats who commissioned it. Similarly, the continuity of Sol on Constantine’s coinage and other instances of ‘religious ambiguity’ in his policy are, at best, examples of “faith imperfectly exercised”, or, as is much more commonly asserted, techniques employed to placate the ‘pagan’ populace whose system of worship he intended to demolish.⁴¹ However often it may

simply states that the panegyrist is offering an “artistic” representation of “whatever Constantine actually saw”. J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979), 282, says almost nothing on the matter as well, but refers to a “religious experience” at the temple of Apollo.

³⁹ MacMullen, *Constantine*, 67. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change*, 240, points out that emperors, regardless of a personal relationship with divinities, were not expected to possess supernatural powers or perform miracles. Cf. B.H. Warmington, ‘Aspects of Constantinian Propaganda in the Panegyrici Latini’, *TAPhA* 104 (1974) 371-84, at 372 and 377-8, that the vision story would have procured little or no political support, either in Gaul or empire-wide.

⁴⁰ A more recent example is W.V. Harris’ extensive study on ancient dreams [*Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 2009)], in which he comments only (at 116): “Before his Italian campaign Constantine had claimed, so it seems, to have seen a vision or dream at a famous shrine of Apollo in Gaul; Apollo promised him victory”. This he uses as evidence for Constantine’s dream-vision before the Battle of Milvian Bridge to show that the emperor knew from previous experience how to manipulate his soldiers.

⁴¹ Quote: N.E. Lenski, ‘Introduction’, in id. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006) 1-13, at 10. Regarding the emperor’s ambiguity as deception, see for example, E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. C. Dawson, 6 vols. (London, 1954-1957 [1776-1788]) 3.393: “The partial acts of severity which he occasionally exercised, though they were secretly promoted by a Christian zeal, were colored by the fairest pretenses of justice and the public good; and while Constantine designed to ruin the foundations, he seemed to reform the abuses of the ancient religion”; N.H. Baynes, *Constantine and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London, 1972) 19, “As the years passed ... the emperor felt that he was strong enough to advance to a frontal attack upon paganism”; Alföldi, *Conversion*, 28, “Constantine did

be acknowledged that Constantine converted, that is to say that “there was a time ... when he was not, and after when he was, a Christian”, it is nevertheless difficult to imagine – or indeed accept – a Constantine who at some point believed in Apollo/Sol, Jupiter, Hercules, and other traditional divinities with a fervency akin to what he later demonstrated for Christ.⁴² As such, the significance of what is invariably termed the ‘vision of Apollo’ or simply the ‘pagan vision’ remains a contentious issue.

Weiss and the ‘Pagan’ Vision

With regard at least to the relationship between the narratives of the panegyrist, Lactantius, and Eusebius, it would be an extreme understatement to say that Weiss has reinvigorated the Vision debate. Concerning the Apollo vision alone, it is fair to say that he has created an entirely new one.⁴³

What we must always hope for, indeed, is that you prosper and succeed even beyond your prayers, we who put all our hopes in the lap of your majesty, and wish for your presence everywhere, as if that boon were feasible. Take for instance the short time you were away from the frontier. In what terrifying fashion did barbarian perfidy vaunt itself! Of course all the while they asked themselves: “*When will he arrive there? When will he conquer? When will he lead back his exhausted army?*” when all of a sudden upon the news of your return they were prostrated, as if thunderstruck, so that no more than one night’s anxiety should lay its claim on your pledge to save the commonwealth. For on the day after that news had been received and you had undertaken the labor of double stages on your journey, you learnt that all the waves had subsided, and that the all-pervading calm which you had left behind had been restored. Fortune herself so ordered this matter that the happy outcome of your affairs

not intend to use force. He must, therefore, use a cautious strategy to shatter the position of paganism... But, all the time ... he keeps on shedding those relics of his old creed, which he could not abandon immediately after the Mulvian Bridge”; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 211, “Constantine defines a policy which he was to maintain until his death. Christianity is the emperor’s religion ... In many matters, Constantine showed a caution which has often seemed to imply a policy of religious toleration. He would not risk rebellion or civil disobedience”.

⁴² MacMullen, *Constantine*, 74.

⁴³ Grégoire argues that the vision of Apollo was ‘Christianised’, but does not consider a solar halo. Jones, *Conversion of Europe*, 96, does not mention the Apollo vision at all, but postulates a solar halo for the vision of the cross in *Vita*.

prompted you to convey to the immortal Gods what you had vowed at the very spot where you had turned aside toward the most beautiful temple in the whole world, or rather, to the deity made manifest, as you saw. For 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. For this is the number of human ages which are owed to you without fail—beyond the old age of a Nestor. And—now why do I say “I believe”?—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. And this I think has now happened, since you are, O Emperor, like he, youthful, joyful, a bringer of health and very handsome. Rightly, therefore, have you honored those most venerable shrines with such great treasures that they do not miss their old ones, any longer. Now may all the temples be seen to beckon you to them, and particularly our Apollo, whose boiling waters punish perjuries—which ought to be especially hateful to you.⁴⁴

This account has nearly always been approached with skepticism, often easily remedied by concluding that the story was concocted by the panegyrist himself for this occasion.⁴⁵ If entertaining the possibility, however, that Constantine was indeed the source of the

⁴⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).21: *Quod quidem nobis semper optandum est ut prosperos habeas etiam ultra tua uota successus, qui omnem spem in gremio maiestatis tuae ponimus et tuam ubique praesentiam, quasi dari possit, expetimus. Ecce enim, dum a limite paulisper abscesseras, quibus se terroribus barbarorum perfidia iactauerat, scilicet dum sibi illa proponunt: quando perueniet? Quando uincet? Quando fessum reducet exercitum? Cum repente audito reditu tuo uelut attoniti conciderunt, ne tuum pro re publica uotum amplius quam unius noctis cura tetigisset. Postridie enim quam accepto illo nuntio geminatum itineris laborem susceperas, omnes fluctus resedisse, omnem quam reliqueras tranquillitatem redisse didicisti, ipsa hoc sic ordinante Fortuna ut te ibi rerum tuarum felicitas admoneret dis immortalibus ferre quae uoueras, ubi deflexisses ad templum toto orbe pulcherrimum, immo ad praesentem, ut uidisti, deum. Vidisti enim, credo, Constantine, Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria coronas tibi laureas offerentem, quae tricenum singulae ferunt omen annorum. Hic est enim humanarum numerus aetatum quae tibi utique debentur ultra Pyliam senectutem. Et—immo quid dico ‘credo’?—uidisti teque in illius specie recognouisti, cui totius mundi regna deberi uatum carmina diuina cecinerunt. Quod ego nunc demum arbitror contigisse, cum tu sis, ut ille, iuuenis et laetus et salutifer et pulcherrimus, imperator. Merito igitur augustissima illa delubra tantis donariis honestasti, ut iam uetera non quaerant. Iam omnia te uocare ad se templa uideantur praecipueque Apollo noster, cuius feruentibus aquis periuria puniantur, quae te maxime oportet odisse.* The first emphasis in the translation indicates my correction of Nixon and Rodgers’ translation, “When will he reach here?” (*Quando perueniet?*). The context indicates that the ‘barbarians’ are not wondering when he will arrive at the Rhine frontier, but at the destination of his campaign; oddly, the ‘barbarians’ are depicted as very aware of Constantine’s movements. The second emphasis is in the original.

⁴⁵ E. Galletier, ‘La mort de Maximien d’après le panégyrique de 310 et la vision de Constantin au temple d’Apollon’, *REA* 52 (1950) 288-99, proposes instead that the priests at Granum invented the story. J.N. Bremmer, ‘The Vision of Constantine’, in A.P.M.H. Lardinois et al. (eds.), *Land of Dreams* (Leiden, 2006) 57-79, at 71, credits the story to Constantine on the assumption that “it was not customary” for panegyrist to invent their own details; cf. W.V. Harris, ‘Constantine’s Dream’, *Klio* 87 (2005) 488-94, at 492-3, who notes that Menander Rhetor’s handbook explicitly states that orators are permitted to invent dreams for the emperor, though Harris states elsewhere (at 490) that “it was a delicate matter to write about the living emperor’s divinatory pronouncements”.

wondrous tale, it is often confidently assumed that he made it up.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, judging from the orator's description, if such a phenomenon did occur or was claimed to have occurred, it was a private experience in the sanctuary. General consensus between Grégoire's 1931 publication and the 2003 English translation of Weiss' article rests content with some combination of these opinions.

⁴⁶ A. Kee, *Constantine Versus Christ* (London, 1982) 11-3, argues that Constantine's decision to change from the Hercules of Maximian to the patronage of Apollo was a pragmatic decision and that the vision story was used to manufacture divine approval. See also P. Barceló, 'Constantins Visionen: Zwischen Apollo und Christus', in P. Barceló and V. Rosenberger (eds.), *Humanitas* (München, 2001) 45-61, at 48-54, that the vision was a response to the insecurity of his imperial position (a crisis), which was made evident by Maximian's revolt; cf. R. Van Dam, 'The Many Conversions of Constantine', in K. Mills and A. Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Rochester, 2003) 127-51, at 134-5. K. Kraft, *Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung* (Tübingen, 1955) 11-3 (n. 1), argues that the panegyrist uses *credo* in order to express rhetorical disbelief in Constantine's story; while Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 36, contends that the orator's words "betray the fiction"; cf. R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1987) 611 and 619. This is a supposition that has perhaps acquired too much weight as evidence, especially since Eusebius expresses hesitation in his own account (Eus. *VC* 1.28.1); cf. Av. Cameron, 'Constantinus Christianus', *JRS* 73 (1983) 184-90, at 186. A more acceptable view is offered by B. Müller-Rettig, *Der Panegyricus des Jahres 310 auf Konstantin den Grossen* (Stuttgart, 1990) 276 and 280, who contends (*contra* Kraft) that the panegyrist uses *credo* "als sprachliches Signal für die absolute Intimität der Epiphanieszene" (at 276); cf. Bremmer, 'Vision', 71 (n. 65), in support. While I agree that Kraft's assessment is incorrect, I do not fully accept Müller-Rettig's explanation either. This is not the only instance where the panegyrist uses *credo*: at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).10.1 he says, *Ignobilem, credo, aliquam barbarorum manum, quae repentino impetus et improviso latrocinio ortus tui auspicial temptasset, adfecisti poena temeritatis?* ("You have visited with punishment for their rashness, I believe, some contemptible band of barbarians who tested the very beginnings of your reign with a sudden attack and unexpected brigandage"), in reference to the revolt of Ascaric and Merogaisus in mid or late 306. This description could refer to their defeat in battle or their execution in the amphitheatre at Trier, neither case being intimate, exclusive, or potentially false. Also notable is that the orator does not use *credo* where we might expect him to express disbelief, such as when he mentions Constantine's descent from Claudius II Gothicus (at 2.1-2), something that is generally considered to be fictitious. To what extent the panegyrist was representing the views of the court has been a consistent debate, which remains unsettled. For instance, T. Grünewald, *Constantinus Maximus Augustus* (Stuttgart, 1990) 50-4, places a high value on the imperial court's efficiency in orchestrating propaganda and argues that the panegyric was arranged to test new propaganda, with the result that the venue and occasion essentially turned the local festival-goers into a small focus group; cf. Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 1-3. At the other extreme, K.A.E. Enenkel, 'Panegyrische Geschichtsmythologisierung und Propaganda. Zur Interpretation des Panegyricus Latinus VI', *Hermes* 128 (2000) 91-126, at 92-101 and 112-3, argues that the panegyric does not reflect official propaganda and even contradicts the interests of the court, commenting (at 125-6) that this is probably why he was not invited to speak for Constantine's *dies imperii*. I believe that C.E.V. Nixon, 'Latin Panegyric in the Tetrarchic and Constantinian Period', in B. Croke and A.M. Emmett (eds.), *History and Historians in Late Antiquity* (Sydney, 1983) 88-99, at 91, is closer to the fact of the matter in that the panegyrist, at least, received "some kind of encouragement from the court" and perhaps needed approval on delicate discussions (such as the revolt of Maximian); see also B.S. Rodgers, 'Divine Insinuation in the *Panegyrici Latini*', *Historia* 35 (1986) 69-104, at 96, that the speakers "were not stupid provincials who understood little about the emperor's policies", nor did they "have their speeches dictated to them".

Furthermore, between Grégoire and Weiss, the sequence of events described in this episode – no matter to whom one credits the story – is in relative agreement. On his way back to the Rhine frontier from Massalia (Marseilles), Constantine received word that the ‘barbarians’ (i.e. the Franks) were running rampant in his absence.⁴⁷ He began a forced march and, on the next day, received an update that the Franks had withdrawn. To celebrate, as it were, he detoured from the main road to the rural temple of Apollo at Granum (Grand, in the Vosges) and, in the cult centre, had a visionary experience involving Apollo and Victoria.⁴⁸ After bestowing ample treasures for the shrines there, Constantine returned to the very spot on the road where he had detoured and continued on his way.

Weiss’ article, however, makes significant and profound adjustments to the events described, the inspiration for which comes from his own experience. “Some years ago”, he relates,

on an autumn afternoon at Würzburg ... my wife and I saw a double-ring halo-system stretching far out across the sky. The rings were relatively faint, but the concentrations of light at both were all the more intensive: three of each, arranged in a cross-shape around the sun; and clear cross-shaped rays shone out very distinctly from the sun itself. We were quite amazed, as we had never seen anything like it – indeed, had never even reckoned with the possibility of such a phenomenon. A solar halo like this is all of a sudden ‘there’, it ‘appears’ ... one is taken unawares... Then suddenly it is gone, as if it had never been there: the sky is its

⁴⁷ For the visit to the temple while en route to Massalia, see, for example, MacMullen, ‘Constantine and the Miraculous’, 83; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 36. Galletier, ‘La mort de Maximien’, 295-7, argues convincingly that Constantine received the news while on his return march north, not while heading south. On the other hand, in his introduction to M. Vermes’ translation of Panegyric 6 [‘Constantine’s ‘Pagan Vision’: The Anonymous Panegyric on Constantine (310), *Pan. Lat.* VII(6)’, with introduction and notes by S.N.C. Lieu, in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds.), *From Constantine to Julian* (London, 1996) 63-96], Sam Lieu (at 72) leaves the possibility open: “On his way either to or back from Massilia”. The Franks are assumed, based on Lactantius’ claim (at *DMP* 29.3-4) that Constantine was campaigning against the Franks when Maximian revolted.

⁴⁸ E. Galletier, *Panegyriques latins*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1949-1955) 2.72 (n. 1), understands *deflexisses* as indicating that it was after Constantine had turned towards the temple to offer thanks for the successful enterprise against Maximian that he received the news of the Franks’ withdrawal; cf. Jullian, *Histoire*, 7.107 (n. 2).

usual self again, and each according to his own inclination can store away in the memory what he has witnessed.⁴⁹

Rather than a private vision, as has been traditionally been assumed, Weiss contends that Constantine actually witnessed a very public meteorological event, specifically “a *double* ring-halo – in other words, a really spectacular display”.⁵⁰ This, Weiss argues, is what Constantine saw, not surreptitiously in the temple, but openly on the road, and it is this event that became the precursor to the canonical Vision decades later: “... each ring with three mock suns arranged in cross-formation around the sun, tangent arcs or points of intersection with the circle, presumably with a more or less distinct light-cross in the middle”.⁵¹ By this reckoning, Apollo and Victoria appeared in the sky to Constantine offering him laurel wreaths, which were “the three concentrations of light on each halo-ring”.⁵²

To support this reinterpretation, Weiss makes two essential alterations to the understanding of the passage. First, he claims that it was the solar halo that prompted Constantine’s detour to Granum, not his victory over Maximian or news of the Franks’ withdrawal; and second, that it was only after he had returned to the main road that he received word that the frontier was calm once more. Though I find these points to be somewhat mistaken, his analysis and reinterpretation of the vision of Apollo make it

⁴⁹ P. Weiss, ‘The Vision of Constantine’, (trans. A.R. Birley), *JRA* 16 (2003) 237-59, at 244. This has to a certain extent entered into the debate as well: Weiss comments (at 258) that his theory is readily accepted by “those who have themselves witnessed a great solar halo”. T.D. Barnes, *Constantine* (Malden, MA, 2011) 76, anecdotally recalls a scholar’s rejection of Weiss’ claim to having seen a solar halo, and says that such dismissals are inconsequential for the validity of his hypothesis. It truly would be the height of irony if the issue of Constantine’s conversion should devolve into a debate on whether Weiss actually saw a solar halo – the ‘Vision of Weiss’, as it were.

⁵⁰ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 250; emphasis in the original.

⁵¹ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 250.

⁵² Weiss, ‘Vision’, 249. The Latin term *corona*, while meaning ‘crown’ (here, *laureae coronae*, ‘laurel crowns’), was used to describe solar halos, usually referring to a ring or points of light around the real sun; see, for example, Pliny *Nat. hist.* 2.28 and Jul. Obseq. *DP* 68.

abundantly clear that discussion of this account, though earlier than 312 and non-Christian, is absolutely essential for the Vision debate.⁵³ Regardless of whether one concludes that the panegyrist invented it or that it was merely part of Constantine's propaganda, that it happened in a shrine or on the road, that it was a dream or a solar halo (or indeed nothing at all), it is nonetheless a contemporary vision account that could have lent itself to later tradition.

The Story, As We Have It

Unfortunately for Weiss' proposition the required chronological revisions are simply untenable. The account is not, as he frames it, built up "with flashback and gradual revelation, at the cost of clarity".⁵⁴ The critique that the orator's description is confusing is not unique to Weiss; similar judgements are rendered to support the argument that the panegyrist concocted the story or did not know the details very well.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, such an assessment is flawed, mainly because it depends on a certain modern egotism. To be sure, it is we – the historians – looking back on the orator's words that suffer, and not the panegyrist's narrative or credibility.

⁵³ This has been previously stressed, even by scholars who have argued against a connection between the various vision accounts; see, for example, J. Moreau, 'Sur la vision de Constantin (312)', *REA* 55 (1953) 307-33, at 314: "Sans doute ne peut-on étudier séparément la vision païenne de 310 et le songe chrétien de 312". Cf. K.M. Girardet, 'Das Christentum im Denken und in der Politik Kaiser Konstantins d. Gr.', in id. (ed.), *Kaiser Konstantin der Grosse* (Bonn, 2007) 29-53, at 32, that it must first be asked if there is any truth to the vision.

⁵⁴ Weiss, 'Vision', 249. It is necessary to heed the observations of S.G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1981) 5, that "such panegyrics had to be concise, systematic and comprehensive, but simple. Narrative detail and linguistic and structural complexity yielded to clarity".

⁵⁵ Against this, see Barceló's ('Constantins Visionen', 49) poignant comment that official proclamations of revelations and visions were carefully arranged; cf. M. Mause, *Die Darstellung des Kaisers in der lateinischen Panegyrik* (Stuttgart, 1994) 45-6, that presenting new information in panegyrics was rare.

Panegyric 6 exists now as a text in a *corpus* of exemplary Gallic rhetoric, but in its own time it was an oration, intended to be presented to a knowledgeable honorand and, as one would hope, a somewhat knowledgeable audience.⁵⁶ When scholars turn to this oration (or text) it is often to scour for historically factual elements. Not that there is none to be found: for instance, this panegyric is the earliest source for Constantine's fictitious descent from Claudius II Gothicus (268-270); it provides the only literary evidence we have for the bridge at Cologne (Colonia Agrippina); and it has proven useful for charting Constantine's route from the Rhine frontier to Massalia during Maximian's revolt.⁵⁷

It most certainly is not, however, historiography.⁵⁸ This underscores an important element of ceremonial panegyric: as much as panegyrists are interested in events, whether

⁵⁶ The audience is a context that is typically downplayed in the discussion of this speech; the panegyric may be about Constantine, but it is intended for an audience. Cf. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 1, that panegyrics in antiquity are counted in the category of "speeches for the entertainment and pleasure of the audience" (cf. Mause, *Darstellung*, 61-2); and J. Long, 'How to Read a Halo: Three (or More) Versions of Constantine's Vision', in A. Cain and N.E. Lenski (eds.), *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, 2009) 227-35, at 229, that this would have included Constantine's soldiers. S. de Beer, 'The Panegyric Inventio: A Rhetorical Analysis of *Panegyricus Latinus V*', in K.A.E. Enenkel and I.L. Pfeijffer (eds.), *The Manipulative Mode* (Leiden, 2005) 295-318, however, is a bit of an anomaly in that she perhaps over-emphasises the role of the audience in her analysis of the composition of *Pan. Lat.* 5(8). Regarding the panegyric *corpus*, Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 6-8 and 30-5, maintain that the speeches were composed by professional rhetorical instructors and that the collection was created by the schools of Gaul for teaching purposes, adding (at 33) that "the speeches were selected as admirable specimens of their rhetorical genre, and not for political or historical reasons". There are other contexts that can contribute, but are not necessary for the present discussion; see, for example, Nixon, 'Latin Panegyric', 94-8, that the ideas and concepts expressed in the *Panegyrici Latini* became part and parcel of the education process in Gaul.

⁵⁷ Claudius II Gothicus, at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).2.1-2; the bridge, at 13. Regarding the journey to Southern Gaul, see the discussion below. See B. Bleckmann, 'Sources for the History of Constantine', in Lenski, *Age of Constantine*, 14-31, at 24, that the Gallic panegyrics are "among the most important and fruitful sources we have"; cf. R. Rees, 'The Modern History of Latin Panegyric', in id. (ed.), *Latin Panegyric* (Oxford, 2012) 33-41.

⁵⁸ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 5-6, demonstrates the distinction beyond doubt. Enenkel, 'Geschichtsmythologisierung', *passim*, systematically exposes historical inaccuracies in the narrative, which he credits to the panegyrist's unofficial 'mythologising'. As an example of modern reception of the panegyrics as historiography, when describing Constantius' journey to Britain in 296, *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).5.4 claims that the seas were unusually calm, whereas 8(5).14.4-5 (delivered at Trier on 1 March 297) states rather that they were quite hostile. From this it has been suggested that Constantius made two journeys, one which was so stormy that they were forced to turn back to Gaul, and the other calm. Cf. D. Eichholz, 'Constantius Chlorus' Invasion of Britain', *JRS* 43 (1953) 41-6, at 44-5; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 134 (n. 53), 138 (n. 63), and 224 (n.

ancient or recent, they are not interested in history – or historiography – for its own sake, but rather the interpretations that can be gleaned from those events to further the particular image they are shaping. Where possible, and without injuring the progression of the narrative, orators can avoid elaborating on finer details that do not serve their preoccupation, particularly elements that do not embody, for example, cardinal values expected of rulers, such as justice and foresight, or values that establish and reinforce *auctoritas* and *dignitas*.⁵⁹

When the panegyrist describes in delicate detail the revolt of Maximian at Arelate (Arles), he provides the particulars of Constantine's journey south, from Cologne to Cabillunum (Chalon-sur-Saône), sailing down the Saône to the Rhône, landing at Arelate and marching finally to Massalia, where Maximian had fortified himself.⁶⁰ This is neither intended as idle itinerary, nor is it presented as such. Constantine is portrayed as maintaining his composure (*grauitas*) and making the usual travel arrangements, while his army, enraged on his behalf, practically bursts out of the camp without him. The long journey south was completed in a matter of days, the orator claims, because the soldiers refused rest – fueled by rage and a desire to defend the honour of their emperor, as they were. The Saône was too slow for them and the much swifter Rhône was considered no better.⁶¹ When they landed at Arelate, once again the army flew forth, dominating the very wind in their wild rush to

22). Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 100, asserts that the description of the sea as calm in Panegyric 6 is purely symbolic.

⁵⁹ For instance, concerning Maximian's various stays and activities in Gaul between his expulsion from Rome and his revolt, Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 238-9 (n.66), note, "The panegyrist has simplified and compressed a complicated succession of events". Regarding the focus on values, see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 21-33, with references. On various imperial values in the *Panegyrici Latini*, see the excellent discussion by M.-C. L'Huilier, *L'Empire des mots. Orateurs gaulois et empereurs romains, 3e et 4e siècle* (Paris, 1992) 321-60, with a table of occurrences (at 331).

⁶⁰ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).18.1-6. According to the narrative, it was only once they reached Arelate that they learned Maximian had departed for Massalia.

⁶¹ See Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 244 (n. 81), with ancient references on the speed of the rivers.

Massalia. “It must be confessed Emperor”, the orator says, “despite this bodily strength of yours, and your eagerness of spirit, at times you struggled to keep up with the army you commanded!”⁶²

The entire episode is wrought with embellishment and, though we may accept that the speaker is faithfully recounting the landmarks of the journey, we need not believe that Constantine’s army was in fact wild and out of control. Most likely Constantine ordered a forced march to Cabillunum and opted to sail down the Saône/Rhône to Arelate in order to allow his troops some rest.⁶³ The panegyrist’s rendition, however, allows him to represent the emperor as calm and in control of his emotions in this crisis, and at the same time demonstrate the soldiers’ endearing respect for their commander. This recognition of Constantine’s *auctoritas* and *dignitas* by the army is alluded to here and there throughout the entire panegyric, but most strikingly in the passage immediately preceding the journey south, in which instance the panegyrist abandons all coyness: “And so when your soldiers see you walking, they admire and love you; they follow you with their eyes; you are in their thoughts; they consider that they are submitting themselves to a god, whose form is as beautiful as his divinity is certain”.⁶⁴

The panegyrist’s focus aside, his description of Maximian’s revolt is somewhat lacunose. For example, he states that Maximian was received by Constantine as a private

⁶² *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).18.5: *Confitendum est, imperator: cum hoc tuo uigore corporis, hoc mentis ardore laborasti interdum ut quem ducebas sequeris exercitum.*

⁶³ Cf. Lact. *DMP* 29.6, who places the initiative on Constantine.

⁶⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).17.4: *Itaque te cum ingredientem milites uident, admirantur et diligunt, sequuntur oculis, animo tenent, deo se obsequi putant, cuius tam pulchra forma est quam certa diuinitas.* The lavish description of the fidelity of the soldiers may also be the panegyrist’s attempt to deter the audience from the unfortunate reality that Maximian’s force was made up of a portion of Constantine’s army, although he maintains (at 16 and 20.2) that their complicity was secured through bribery; cf. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 242 (n. 78).

citizen and guest in Gaul, but that the army was instructed to follow his orders.⁶⁵ In reference to Maximian as disloyal, the panegyrist mentions the oath sworn to Diocletian in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (Rome, in 303), but alludes also to an oath sworn to Constantine personally.⁶⁶ He does not explain that Maximian assumed control of the treasury at Arelate or that this is how he acquired the funds to bribe the troops to support him in his revolt;⁶⁷ he does not even state explicitly that the revolt started at Arelate.⁶⁸ Apart from Maximian's suicide, the panegyrist does not discuss any of the happenings or activities in the aftermath of the siege of Massalia and, unlike the description of the journey south, he provides no details whatsoever for the march north (save the vision of Apollo, yet still for this no landmarks are given).⁶⁹

None of these situations is elucidated by the orator. Although we can in some cases fill in the gaps with information from other sources, based on this narrative alone we are at a loss. The audience, however, was presumably not.⁷⁰ While the panegyrist is mainly

⁶⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).15.1. Cf. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 34, that Maximian commanded a portion of the troops. We can only speculate at how much power Maximian was allowed to exercise.

⁶⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).15.6. Again, we can only speculate. The panegyrist alludes (at 16.1) to the oath being sworn in the palace at Trier. Cf. Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 223-4; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 239 (n. 66) and 241 (n. 74). Lactantius (*DMP* 29.3) states that Maximian abdicated in Constantine's presence in Gaul.

⁶⁷ See Lact. *DMP* 29.5, that Maximian seized a treasury, presumably at Arelate, and gave much of it to the soldiers as donatives (i.e. bribes).

⁶⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).16.1. The panegyrist says only that Maximian used up the supplies at the post stations (this is the first we hear of Maximian on a march), established himself "within the walls" (of which city?), and sent dispatches and bribes to the armies (where?). From the speaker's account of the journey it is clear that he knew that the city was Arelate. We can infer further that his omission of details reflects the audience's knowledge of these events.

⁶⁹ Constantine's actions in the south are pertinent for us, but not for the panegyrist. We can (again) speculate that Constantine intended to remain at Massalia for a few days, in order to allow his troops some rest, gather supplies for the return march, and reintegrate the soldiers returning to his command. He may have wished to oversee damage control in Arelate as well.

⁷⁰ Mause, *Darstellung des Kaisers*, 45-6, that the emperor already knows all the facts, but also that the facts are rarely new for the audience. Something to note perhaps: at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).2.1, the panegyrist makes explicit that Constantine's descent from Claudius II Gothicus is not common knowledge.

concerned with events that offer favourable interpretations, which entails also the omission or misrepresentation of potentially embarrassing details, in many instances he is simply passing over unnecessary information.⁷¹ Distanced as we are from the events in Gaul in 309, those elements of the narrative that seem confusing or vague only appear to be unclear and only to us. In all likelihood his listeners were much better informed about recent events than we often allow in our analyses. It is not farfetched to suppose that there were other sources of information on these and other topics; certainly rudimentary gossip from the soldiery, but perhaps other orations, which is plausible when we consider that this panegyric was delivered during a celebration for the city, not Constantine's *dies imperii* a week or two earlier.⁷² A more detailed speech focused on Constantine's offerings to the shrines at Granum, perhaps as part of a larger discussion of his *pietas*, would have been more appropriate for that occasion. Judgements that the panegyrist's account of the vision is vague because he is ignorant of the details, making it up, or sacrificing clarity are only valid so long as the vision narrative is removed from its proper context.

⁷¹ An example of intentional misrepresentation is the discussion of the siege of Massalia, at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).19.4-20.2. It seems clear that the siege ladders were too short to successfully scale the walls, but the orator insists that it was out of mercy that Constantine ordered a retreat in order to give the rebellious soldiers a chance to recant and spare Maximian's life.

⁷² The panegyrist does state, at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).1.1, that he has been urged to introduce his speech with a salutary nod to the city, but that a man of his age has no business improvising or presenting anything that has not been laboriously prepared. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 31, take this to mean that the panegyrist, "while put on the program by the emperor, did not know until the last moment upon what day he was scheduled to perform", and later repeat [at 218 (n. 1)] that, "[i]t is clear that the speaker had little advance notice"; cf. de Beer, 'Panegyric Inventio', 298, that the panegyric was initially scheduled for Constantine's *dies imperii*, but that it was postponed because the dynastic themes might have offended attending officials and Tetrarchic representatives. It is equally plausible, however, that when the speaker was commissioned for a panegyric about the emperor, he was informed that he would be performing on the city's anniversary. His introductory comment, then, was part of the original composition and intended to gently excuse himself from talking about the city. Enenkel, 'Geschichtsmythologisierung', 96-101, with 99-100 (n. 20), shows that the panegyrist would have had weeks to adjust his speech, presuming he was originally scheduled to perform at Constantine's *dies imperii*. Nevertheless, his speech is still somewhat "last moment" in the sense that the revolt of Maximian, which he discusses at length, occurred only a month or so earlier. As to orations on other topics, one need only mention Warmington's often cited reminder ('Constantinian Propaganda', 372) that there were several occasions for panegyrics every year.

The specific contention that the panegyrist “builds up his account ... at the cost of clarity” complicates the matter somewhat further. Although directed at the narrative, it is inherently a comment on the speaker’s competence as an orator as well.⁷³ How justified is this implication? To be sure, we do not know the identity of the speaker, but to his credit this panegyric only survives today because in its time it was considered to be exemplary.⁷⁴ He does, nevertheless, provide considerable insight into his background and experience: by his own words, he is a middle-aged man and an accomplished orator.⁷⁵ He was trained for private practice, but at some point was employed in the imperial court, which suggests an impressive reputation and possibly scholastic pedigree; it also helps to account for his comfort and confidence in addressing both the audience and the emperor, even on delicate subjects.⁷⁶ Now, however, he has resumed a private role as a teacher of rhetoric in his home town of Autun (Augustodunum); the ease with which he incorporates elements found in previous panegyrics and his borrowings from Virgil, Cicero, and others support this.⁷⁷ As a

⁷³ Mause, *Darstellung*, 47, to my mind states the matter well: panegyrists performing for the emperor needed to be worthy of the honour; they were expected to have a certain reputation and a demonstrably high degree of skill.

⁷⁴ Enenkel, ‘Geschichtsmythologisierung’, 93; de Beer, ‘Panegyric Inventio’, 314-6, propose that the speaker of panegyric 6(7) also delivered panegyric 5(8) a year later at Autun for Constantine. The identity of the latter panegyrist remains nevertheless unknown and offers nothing for the present discussion.

⁷⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).1.1, *mediae aetatis*. He is possibly more mature: at 22.7, the panegyrist expresses hope that Constantine’s patronage of Autun will happen in his lifetime; and, at 23.2, his claim to have had numerous students suggests a long career. Cf. Galletier, *Panegyriques latins*, 2.31, that he is forty-five or fifty; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 211, in his fifties.

⁷⁶ Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 212, observe that “he exudes the confidence of a practiced orator with a considerable reputation”; cf. 251 (n. 96). The panegyrist’s ability to spin delicate issues is evidence of his experience at imperial court (as a forensic orator?), but perhaps also a reason why he was asked to speak: at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).14.1, he comments that the revolt of Maximian is a sensitive topic and requests a nod from the emperor to continue, and at the end of the oration (at 23.3) he reminds Constantine of the discretion (*prudencia*) he has exercised.

⁷⁷ Instructor: *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).23.2-3. Autun: 22.4, with Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 252 (n. 97). Regarding textual borrowings, see A. Klotz, ‘Studien zu den Panegyrici Latini’, *RhM* 66 (1911) 513-72, at 551-59 (cf. E. Vereeke, ‘Le Corpus des *Panegyriques latins* de l’époque tardive: problèmes d’imitation’, *AC* 44 (1975) 141-

testament to his reputation, he mentions that one of his sons was appointed the imperial fisc's head legal representative (*summa fisci patrocinia tractantem*), and that his numerous students serve as private advocates (*tutelam fori*), hold offices at court (*officia palatii*), and even govern provinces (*multi sectatores mei etiam prouincias tuas administrant*); these he recommends to the emperor for court employment, as well as himself.⁷⁸ There is ample evidence here to suggest that the panegyrist, anonymous though he may be, is competent, talented, and esteemed.

This designation should, by extension, be applied to the perceived lack of clarity in the vision passage itself. Weiss' reinterpretation of the passage rests in particular on the premise that the panegyrist (intentionally or unwittingly) distorts the chronology. This simply is not supported for the reasons given above, but also because in general the panegyrist appears to be very attentive to chronology: it provides the essential structure of the panegyric, as even a cursory treatment demonstrates. The panegyric opens with the customary references to the subject – namely, Constantine – and is accompanied by the usual self-deprecating remarks about the panegyrist's meager oratory skill and inability to do his subject justice (1). The topic immediately turns to Constantine's ancestor, Claudius II Gothicus and his defense of Gaul (2-3), and then to Constantius Chlorus (4-7.3), whose highlighted exploits are recounted from earliest – the capture of Bononia (Boulogne) in 293 – to latest – Constantius' final campaigns in Britain. At 7.5-8.1 there is a brief flashback to Constantine's sudden arrival in 305 to join his father's expedition in Britain, but it is clearly marked as such and acts as the orator's segue to Constantine's accession (8.2-9). When the

60, at 152-3, on the inaccuracy of some of Klotz's parallels); B.S. Rodgers, 'Constantine's Pagan Vision', *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 259-78; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 218-53 *passim*.

⁷⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).23.2-3. Nixon, 'Latin Panegyric', 94, notes this as demonstrative of his confidence and ease in speaking before emperors.

orator embarks on Constantine's activities since mid 306 (10-20), he once again narrates them from earliest – the Frankish invasion in 306 – to most recent – the conflict with Maximian. In none of the events described by the panegyrist is there any fumbling of chronology. However tempting, it is unreasonable to infer from the seemingly confusing account of the vision that the orator is incapable of conveying his meaning.

Let us now look again at that problematic passage and review the story, as we have it. The account of the vision fits within the chronological structure of the panegyric: it is on Constantine's journey back to the Rhine frontier (or possibly Trier) that the vision occurs. Weiss is correct that the panegyrist "builds up his account with flashback": the events are stylistically framed using three successive flashbacks, in the pluperfect, with flash-forwards, in the perfect, probably intended to create vividness. First, there had been a Frankish uprising (*quibus se terroribus barbarorum perfidia iactauerat*), but when they heard Constantine was returning they dispersed (*concoiderunt*). Second, Constantine had begun a forced march (*geminatum itineris laborem susceperas*), but the next day learnt (*didicisti*) that order was restored on the frontier. Third, after Constantine had turned aside to the temple (*deflexisses*), he saw Apollo (*uidisti*).⁷⁹

This is not "gradual revelation", nor is it even progressive action, but three separate sequences describing two temporal perspectives – the Franks' and Constantine's – which overlap in the first two sequences. This would have been more apparent when spoken with the panegyrist's emphasis, as opposed to our dry reading.⁸⁰ We can reconstruct the full

⁷⁹ There is the additional pluperfect *uoueras* after *deflexisses*, but it appears in a relative clause. It is also unclear when this vow was made or what it constituted, but the grammar and context definitively place it before *deflexisses*.

⁸⁰ Ceremonial panegyric was largely a performance art; cf. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 9-10.

sequence as such: the Franks rebelled and Constantine quickened his pace – the Franks withdrew and Constantine learnt – Constantine turned to the temple and saw Apollo.

In order to accept Weiss' argument we have to assume, as he does, that the actions in this passage are muddled; that the orator states in the pluperfect that Constantine turned aside to the temple, but then corrects himself and says instead in the perfect that it was to the manifest Apollo (*ad praesentem, ut uidisti, deum*), and only once he returned to the point of his detour learnt of peace on the frontier. By this reckoning, *ut uidisti* is in the perfect tense, rather than the expected pluperfect, because the *deus* is described as *praesens*, and *didicisti* is given before both *deflexisses* and *ut uidisti* so that the panegyrist can save the best for last, as it were.⁸¹

There is certainly a mixture of tenses in this passage, but nothing that complicates comprehension or seriously distorts the reading. We must proceed from the (in my opinion, reasonable) assumptions laid out in this section; if the panegyrist wanted to describe the events as Weiss chooses to read them, he would have stated them that way. As it stands, the grammar and meaning are clear: there is no causal relation, and *deflexisses* places the action before *ut uidisti*, regardless of *praesens*.⁸² When the panegyrist says, *deflexisses ad templum ... immo ad praesentem, ut uidisti, deum*, it is to create a contrast: Constantine thought he was taking a detour to the temple, but as it turns out he was actually heading to see the god in person.⁸³

⁸¹ Regarding *ut uidisti* with *praesens*, see Weiss, 'Vision', 258 (n. 70), in response to G. Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (Stuttgart, 2000) 281-2 (n. 210). Cf. Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', 493 (n. 27), in support of Weber. Admittedly, Weiss' proposal is tantalising, but not so much because of *praesens*. With respect to the oral presentation aspect of the panegyric, the sudden switch from a pluperfect narrative to the perfect tense brings the listener into the moment, as it were; it offers a degree of vividness in a past-tense description. The overall structure of the narrative, however, does not support Weiss' reconstruction.

⁸² Weber, *Kaiser*, 281-2 (n. 210); Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', 493 (n. 27).

⁸³ Lietzmann, 'Glaube', 190, alludes to this reading.

The Nature of the Vision

What then can we say about the nature of the vision? The panegyrist does provide the essential information: Constantine saw Apollo, with Victoria, offering laurel wreaths. Moreover, Constantine is said to have recognised himself *in illius specie ... cui totius mundi regna deberi uatum carmina diuina cecinerunt*. It is possible that Constantine saw a solar halo after he had turned off the road or after he had arrived at the temple, but these details make it all the more likely that this is not what the panegyrist is describing.⁸⁴ Granted, a double halo-system would have concentrations of light on each ring that one might describe as laurel wreaths (*laureae coronae*), as Weiss contends. Additionally, the light refracted through the ice crystals as they were falling may have created the illusion of movement, of a living presence in the sky.⁸⁵ The panegyrist's description, however, is anthropomorphic: Apollo, at least, was visibly present, an appearance which does not easily lend itself to a system of crosses, rings or Xs.⁸⁶ Moreover, one certainly does not recognise facial features, or even abstract similarities, in a rainbow.

Constantine could have recognised himself in a statue of Apollo in the sanctuary, but this is unlikely as well.⁸⁷ The language of this passage alludes to a much more intimate

⁸⁴ B. Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg, 2003) 64, compromises between Weiss' theory and the grammar of the passage; he places the solar-halo after Constantine turned off of the main road, but before he arrived at the temple.

⁸⁵ Weiss, 'The Vision', 250 (n. 40): "One must bear in mind, in particular, that its shape would have been liable to change while they were watching it".

⁸⁶ Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', 494, notes that these are not abstract descriptions or metaphors; the panegyrist emphasises "explicitly the anthropomorphic aspect of this Apollo".

⁸⁷ Various explanations of this sort have been offered. For example, Lietzmann, 'Glaube', 190, suggests that Constantine was greeted at the temple by statues of Apollo and Victoria, each holding laurel crowns; J.J. Hatt, 'La vision de Constantin au sanctuaire de Grand et l'origine celtique du labarum', *Latomus* 9 (1950) 427-36, at 432, proposes that Constantine saw statues of various gods at the sanctuary and that this played with his imagination; C. Ligota, 'Constantiniana', *JWI* 26 (1963) 178-92, at 182, argues Constantine probably saw a statue of himself as Apollo or a statue of Apollo with Constantine's head. Cf. J. Zeiller, 'Quelques remarques

situation: the action of laurel wreaths being offered specifically to Constantine (*coronas tibi laureas offerentem*) and the significance of this for him (*quae tricenum singulae ferunt omen annorum*) suggest that he did not simply see statues of Apollo and Victoria, or other gods.⁸⁸ The implication rather is that this was a very personal experience with an appropriately unique interpretation.

There are additional personalised elements in this passage that support this. The panegyrist refers to the god as “your Apollo” (*Apollinem tuum*).⁸⁹ This is reminiscent of the line *tuus iam regnat Apollo* (“now your own Apollo reigns”) in Virgil’s Fourth *Eclogue*, referring to the ‘Golden Age’, but similar references can be found in previous panegyrics to the patron deities of the Tetrarchy.⁹⁰ For instance, a panegyrist in 289 tells Maximian that his accession is very much like the timely assistance “your Hercules” (*tuus Hercules*) gave “your Jupiter” (*Iouem uestrum*) in the battle against the Giants.⁹¹ Later in the same panegyric, the speaker alludes again to the patron deity of the absent Diocletian, this time as “his Jupiter” (*Iouis sui*).⁹²

Additionally, the panegyrist states that Constantine saw the *praesentem ... deum*. Nixon and Rodgers translate this as “the deity made manifest”, but the literal meaning is simply ‘the god who was present’ or ‘is present’, that is, at the temple. However, it is also a

sur la ‘vision’ de Constantin’, *Byzantion* 14 (1939) 329-39, at 338-9, that the panegyrist was trying to give voice to a statue (*prosopopoeia*).

⁸⁸ Hatt, ‘La vision de Constantin’, 429-33, suggests that Constantine recognised himself in a Gallic deity, perhaps (at 432-3) a statue of Jupiter as a Celtic rider with a winged genius (Victoria).

⁸⁹ Cf. Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 276; Weber, *Kaiser*, 279.

⁹⁰ Virg. *Ecl.* 4.10. Cf. Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 270-4.

⁹¹ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).4.2.

⁹² *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).7.5. The emperors could also be called simply by the names of their patron deities. So, for example, at *Pan. Lat.* 7(6).12.6 the panegyrist refers to Diocletian simply as *Iouem ipsum* and *Iuppiter*.

play on words: it is a reference both to Apollo, who manifested, and to ‘the god who is present’ for the panegyric, namely, Constantine. From the reign of Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) onward *praesens deus* comes into use within the context of the Roman imperial cult to identify the emperor as something akin to a living god, the equivalent of the Hellenistic θεὸς ἐπιφανής – a concept which dates back to the eighth century BCE.⁹³ In this sense, Constantine is the mortal and evident representation of his divine patron, Apollo-Sol, just as another panegyrist in 291 is able to describe Diocletian as “a visible and present Jupiter” (*conspicuus et praesens Iuppiter*).⁹⁴ If the panegyrist’s terminology seems ambiguous here, it is certainly not in the section that follows where he refers to Constantine explicitly as “this most manifestly present god” (*praesentissimus hic deus*).⁹⁵

⁹³ K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton, 1996) 315-8; M.M. McGowan, *Ovid in Exile* (Leiden, 2009) 63-92, especially at 84-92. On θεὸς ἐπιφανής, see A.D. Nock, ‘Notes on Ruler-Cult, I-IV’, *JHS* 48 (1928) 21-43, at 38-41. Under Augustus and the Julio-Claudians, see M. Clauss, ‘*Deus praesens*. Der römische Kaisers als Gott’, *Klio* 78 (1996) 400-33, who argues also that the phenomenon begins under the Republic. Under the Tetrarchy and the Christian emperors of the fourth century, see F. Kolb, ‘*Praesens Deus*: Kaiser und Gott unter der Tetrarchie’, in A. Demandt et al. (eds.), *Diokletian und die Tetrarchie* (Berlin, 2004) 27-37.

⁹⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).10.5.

⁹⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).22.1. Throughout the rest of the panegyric the speaker uses various phrases to refer to Constantine’s divine identity. J. Béranger, ‘L’expression de la divinité dans les Panégyriques latins’, *MH* 27 (1970) 242-54, at 249, observes that there are few variations in divine terminology. However, Rodgers, ‘Divine Insinuation’, 83-5 and 100-4; and L’Huillier, *L’Empire des mots*, 363, show that there is a higher frequency of references to divinity compared to other panegyrics in the *corpus*. Cf. R. Seager, ‘Some Imperial Virtues in the Latin Prose Panegyrics: The Demands of Propaganda and the Dynamics of Literary Composition’, in F. Cairns, *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar. Fourth Volume* (Liverpool, 1984) 129-65, at 163, that although the divine terms are common in the *Panegyrici Latini*, each panegyric uses them differently for various effects. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change*, 238-41, argues that, although the religious language of the panegyrics addresses the emperors as divinities, it was realised that they were not in fact gods, but earthly representatives. More recent studies show that the fine line between mortal and god for emperors in Late Antiquity was quite blurry. For example, Clauss, ‘*Deus praesens*’, 400-3, is quite frank in his argument that the emperor was always perceived as a living god and not simply as a representative; cf. Kolb, ‘*Praesens Deus*’, 29-33, that this particular association was only systematised under Diocletian. While it is difficult to reconcile the emperor’s mortality with such strong language as *praesens deus*, the panegyrist does appear to consistently distinguish between Constantine the god and Constantine the man who is subject to the will and favour of the gods. On the solar and light references that permeate the entire panegyric, see R. Turcan, ‘Images solaires dans le Panégyrique VI’, in *Hommages à Jean Bayet* (Brussels, 1964) 697-706. Note also the astute comment of Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, 65, that the inflation of Constantine’s divinity in the panegyric must be considered, but the vision story itself cannot be denounced as a fabrication.

We can conclude then that the panegyrist is describing neither a solar halo nor a statue. A suggestion made by Grégoire that seems especially promising is that in the sanctuary Constantine had a vision in a dream.⁹⁶ Camille Jullian's identification of "the most beautiful temple in the whole world" (*templum toto orbe pulcherrimum*) as that of Apollo Grannus at Granum remains relatively uncontested.⁹⁷ Investigations have uncovered evidence, most notably an inscription discovered in 1935 that reads [GR]ANNO CONSI[N]IVS [TRI]BVNVS SOMNO IVSSVS, which suggests that incubation rituals were conducted there.⁹⁸ Judging from the details provided by the panegyrist, if Constantine did have (or only claimed to have had) an experience in which one or two deities appeared to him that was (a) private, (b) in a cultic space, and (c) subject to interpretation, and furthermore accounts for Constantine 'rightly' (*merito*) honouring the shrines with lavish votives (a customary practice for successful incubation rituals), an incubation dream presents a very plausible scenario.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Grégoire, 'La vision', 348-9.

⁹⁷ Jullian, *Histoire*, 7:107 (n. 2); cf. M.-O. Greffe, 'La vision apollinienne de Constantin à Grand', *Annales de l'Est* 35 (1983) 49-61, at 52-4, who makes a strong argument in favour of Granum. This conclusion is becoming more accepted with continued investigations at the site; see Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 339-50; and M. Colardelle et al., *Grand (Les dossiers d'archéologie* 162, 1991) 1-88. On other possible locations, see, for example, Lietzmann, 'Glaube', 190, for Vindobona (Vienne); P. Orgels, 'La première vision de Constantin (310) et le temple d'Apollon à Nîmes', *BAB* 34 (1948) 176-208, for Nîmes (Colonia Augusta Nemausus); F. Corsaro, 'Sogni e visioni nella teologia della Vittoria di Costantino e Licinio', *Augustinianum* 29 (1989) 333-49, at 335, for Autun.

⁹⁸ *AE* 1937.55; cf. A. Grenier, 'Inscription votive de Grand', *BSAF* (1936) 180-7.

⁹⁹ J. Amat, *Songes et visions* (Paris, 1985) 204-6, assumes incubation, but does not rule out waking hallucination; Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 346-7 (with references and examples), deems this scenario 'natural'; Lieu (in his introduction to Vermes, 'Constantine's 'Pagan Vision' ', 76) states that it was likely an incubation experience; G. Woolf, 'Seeing Apollo in Roman Gaul and Germany', in S. Scott and J. Webster (eds.), *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art* (Cambridge, 2003) 139-52, at 139, assumes as much without debate; A. Demandt, 'Wenn Kaiser träumen – Die Visionen Konstantins des Großen', in A. Demandt and J. Engemann (eds.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Trier, 2006) 49-59, at 53, also assumes without debate that it was a dream. Cf. M.J.R. Gervás, 'Los sueños de Constantino en autores paganos y cristianos', *A&Cr* 7 (1990) 143-50, at 145, who notes that incubation is plausible, but purely conjecture; and Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', 492 (n. 19), who argues that the incubation element makes the vision of Apollo in a dream "rather possible" (though he does

The panegyrist focuses less on the vision itself and more on the interpretation – perhaps just one of several possible interpretations. Nevertheless, he clearly states what elements are under consideration: Constantine is stated to have seen Apollo with Victoria, and also to have noticed a physical resemblance in the one “to whom the divine songs of the bards had prophesied that rule over the whole world was due” (*cui totius mundi regna deberi uatum carmina diuina cecinerunt*).¹⁰⁰ In an innovative article Rodgers notes parallels in the panegyric with Virgil’s prophetic ‘Golden Age’ and the long-awaited ruler, Augustus.¹⁰¹ As she argues, the relative clause introduced by *cui* is governed by *illius*, which makes sense except that Apollo is not the fated world-ruler that will usher in the Golden Age, but Augustus.¹⁰² “Had he [i.e. the panegyrist] wanted to equate Constantine with Apollo, he

not repeat this opinion in *Dreams and Experiences*). On incubation dreams and rituals with discussion of some literary sources, see N. Lewis, *The Interpretation of Dreams & Portents in Antiquity* (Wauconda, 1976) 35-47.

¹⁰⁰ For example, H. Dörries, *Constantine the Great*, trans. H. Mattingly (New York, 1972) 24: “With this reference to Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue ... Constantine was hailed as the one who would fulfill all the aspirations of that present age”; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 36: “Constantine recognized himself in Apollo ... the world ruler whose advent Virgil foretold”; see now, Barnes, *Constantine*, 79, for Constantine as Augustus. Warmington, ‘Constantinian Propaganda’, 378, contends that, without *Apollo tuus* or the panegyrist’s elaboration on Apollo of Autun, the “religious language” is vague enough to refer to any number of deities.

¹⁰¹ To summarise the observations of Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 272-4: the panegyrist’s description of Britain (at 9.1-2) uses terms associated with the Golden Age [cf. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 231 (n. 40) and 232 (n. 41-2), that these are borrowings from Tacitus]; Constantine is likened to Julius Caesar in his siege of Massalia (at 19.3); Constantine displays the same *pietas* following the siege of Massalia that Augustus showed following the Battle of Actium (BCE 31); the adjectives *iuuenis*, *laetus*, *salutifer* and *pulcherrimus* are terms used by Virgil (and Horace) to describe Augustus (though they could also be applied to Apollo; cf. Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 285-6). Cf. H. von Schoenebeck, *Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius und Constantin* (Leipzig, 1939) 59, that not only is the propaganda of the panegyric Augustan, but that Constantine actively imitated Augustus; and Béranger, ‘L’expression de la divinité’, 249, that the divine terminology in the panegyric, though determined by the values of classical tradition, is nonetheless Augustan.

¹⁰² See Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 270, who observes that the panegyrist is obviously a literary man. We can assume that these literary references were not missed by the audience. Cf. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 3-4: “Long study of the classics had given [panegyrist] an impressive reserve of images and turns of phrase which were hallowed by usage and were the common property of every member of their audience”; and Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 270-1 (n. 22), that of the Augustan-era poets Virgil would have been the most commonplace for the audience. See also Ligota, ‘Constantiniana’, 181-2, that the Virgilian context is not accidental, nor “too adventurous”; and Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 280-5, in strong support of *ille* as referring to Apollo.

would have stopped after *recognouisti*, and the message Apollo=*ille*=Constantine would have been clear”.¹⁰³

One thing that the panegyrist readily demonstrates here is that he is less concerned with the details of the vision than he is with the interpretation, the climax of this passage; if the description is in reference to Augustus, not Apollo, it seems counter-intuitive. Rodgers proposes that Constantine recognised himself in the dream: a combination of his youthful portraiture and relationship with Apollo allowed both emperor and panegyrist to make the connection with the first Roman emperor tenable.¹⁰⁴ The orator is quite explicit, however: ‘and you recognised yourself in his likeness’ (*teque in illius specie recognouisti*) does not suggest that Constantine is looking upon himself. Even with this in mind, it is nevertheless quite bizarre. On the one hand Constantine sees Apollo, but on the other hand he recognises Augustus. Is the *ille* Apollo or Augustus? And in what way is Constantine supposed to have recognised himself?

Aelius Aristides, the orator and sophist of the second century who kept records of over one-hundred and sixty of his own dreams, believed that he had a personal relationship with the deity Asclepius, who frequently visited him in his dreams and sometimes gave him commands.¹⁰⁵ In his *Sacred Tales* he recounts examples where not only were the identities of dream-figures conflated, but involved gods. On one occasion he dreamt that Asclepius

¹⁰³ Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 268. Cf. H. Singor, ‘The Labarum, Shield Blazons, and Constantine’s caeleste signum’, in L. De Blois et al. (eds.), *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power* (Amsterdam, 2003) 481-500, at 492, who suggests that the dissemination of Constantine’s ‘official’ resemblance to Apollo is the reason for the story’s inclusion in the panegyric.

¹⁰⁴ Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 269-70 and 274-5.

¹⁰⁵ See C.A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and The Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam, 1968) 41-60. Aristides (at *Or.* 48.2) states that Asclepius commanded him to keep a dream diary in his very first vision. Harris, ‘Constantine’s Dream’, 489, contends that “Aelius Aristides is a more trustworthy witness on [ancient dreams] than almost any other Roman imperial writer”; cf. M.A. Holowchak, *Ancient Science and Dreams* (Lanham, MD, 2002) 156-61.

appeared to him in the form of an associate named Asclepiacus.¹⁰⁶ In another instance he was visited by some form of Isis, then later that same night by Serapis and Asclepius, whom he claims bore similarities: “There was also a light from Isis and other unspeakable things which pertained to my salvation. Serapis also appeared on the same night, both he himself and Asclepius. They were marvellous in beauty and magnitude, and in some way like one another”.¹⁰⁷

In an exceptional example he reports that one night Asclepius came to him in his sleep, but with the additional identity of Apollo: “Then when we were in Smyrna, he appeared to me in some such form. He was at the same time Asclepius, and Apollo, both the Clarian, and he who is called the Callitecnus in Pergamum and whose is the first of the three temples”.¹⁰⁸ This last report is particularly indicative of what Sigmund Freud termed ‘composite formation’:¹⁰⁹ two separate identities were combined into one dream-figure, but

¹⁰⁶ Aristid. *Or.* 47.58. In this passage he describes Asclepiacus as a temple-warden, but when later recounting (at *Or.* 48.35) a dream he had had twelve years earlier he states that at the time of the dream he was living in this Asclepiacus’ house. Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 43, suggests that Aelius Aristides knew that the dream-figure, although disguised, was Asclepius because he had the dream in an incubation shrine.

¹⁰⁷ Aristid. *Or.* 49.46: ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ φῶς παρὰ τῆς Ἰσιδος καὶ ἕτερα ἀμύθητα φέροντα εἰς σωτηρίαν. ἐφάνη δὲ καὶ ὁ Σάραπις τῆς αὐτῆς νυκτός, ἅμα αὐτός τε καὶ ὁ Ἀσκληπιός, θαυμαστοὶ τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τινα τρόπον ἀλλήλοις ἐμφερεῖς. It seems clear that Isis, if she did appear, was a separate visitation (cf. Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 65), but Serapis and Asclepius appeared together and are described as being similar in appearance.

¹⁰⁸ Aristid. *Or.* 48.18: ὡς τοίνυν ἐγενόμεθα ἐν τῇ Σμύρνῃ, φαίνεται μοι ἐν τοιῷδέ τινι σχήματι. ἦν ἅμα μὲν Ἀσκληπιός, ἅμα δὲ Ἀπόλλων, τε δὴ Κλάριος καὶ ὁ Καλλίτεκνος καλούμενος ἐν Περγάμῳ, οὗ ὁ πρῶτος τῶν ναῶν τῶν τριῶν ἐστίν. Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 68, notes that dual-identity in this dream is “an interestingly realistic touch”; cf. Holowchak, *Ancient Science*, 159.

¹⁰⁹ S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. J. Crick (Oxford, 1999) 244 (Chapter six, section c): “In composite formations that include persons, the dream-image will already contain features belonging to the figures individually but not shared by them, so that when these features are combined, a new unity, a composite figure, is certain to appear. The composite itself can be brought about in various ways. Either the figure in the dream takes its name from one of the persons it refers to—we know then that such and such a person is intended, rather as we know such things when awake—while its visual appearance belongs to the other person; or the dream-image is composed of visual features which in real life are distributed between both. Instead of being represented by visual features, the second person’s share can also be rendered by the gestures we ascribe to him, the words we have him speak, or the situation we place him in. In this last instance the sharp distinction between identification and the formation of composite figures begins to get blurred”. While I am aware of the

each identity was discernible.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Aristides describes the dream as a visit from Asclepius who appeared “in some such form”, that is, he knew that the figure was Asclepius and credited him solely for the visit, but noted that he had the outward appearance of Apollo.

‘Composite formation’ certainly accounts for the description of Apollo who is also Augustus, and the panegyrist makes a distinction between identities in a way similar to Aelius Aristides. Constantine, he says, was visited by Apollo and that god is to be credited for the vision.¹¹¹ Next he says that Constantine recognised himself *in illius specie*, which the relative clause explains is that of Augustus. The dream-figure is always Apollo, but the panegyrist differentiates between who it is (Apollo) and what he looks like (Augustus): a textbook example of ‘composite formation’. Constantine is said to have recognised himself in the ‘outward appearance’, but we need not take this extremely literally; he did not dream that Augustus was his identical twin. Rather, there were significant similarities in appearance, which the panegyrist elaborates as being “youthful, joyful, a bringer of health and very handsome” (*iuuenis et laetus et salutifer et pulcherrimus*).¹¹²

attitude towards Freud in many streams of academia, his definition of this bizarre dream-element is both well stated and extremely apt for Aristides’ experiences. Cf. Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 9-10 and 65, in support of Freud’s ‘composite formation’ and its existence as a bizarre element in ancient dreaming.

¹¹⁰ Sometimes the identity is supplied by another source. Aristid. *Or.* 50.57: “I dreamed that I saw Plato himself standing in my room, directly across from my bed... And not much later, he disappeared, and I was held in meditation. But someone present said, ‘This man who spoke with you just now as Plato is your Hermes (ὁ σὸς Ἑρμῆς),’ – meaning my guardian deity. ‘But,’ he said, ‘he likened himself to Plato’ ” (τοῦτο μὲν αὐτὸν Πλάτωνα ὁρᾶν ἐδόκουν ἐστῶτα ἐν τῷ δωματίῳ τῷ ἐμῷ ἀπαντικρὺ τῆς τε κλίνης κάμου... καὶ οὐ πολὺ ὕστερον ὁ μὲν ἠφάνιστο, ἐγὼ δὲ συννοίᾳ εἰχόμεν. παρῶν δὲ τις εἶπεν· ‘οὗτος μέντοι ὁ διαλεγόμενός σοι ὡς Πλάτων ἀρτίως ὁ σὸς Ἑρμῆς ἐστίν’ — λέγων δὴ τὸν εἰληχότα τὴν γένεσιν τὴν ἐμήν — ‘Πλάτωνι δ’, ἔφη, εἴκαστο’).

¹¹¹ In the panegyrist’s own words Victoria is relegated to mere accompaniment: *Vidisti ... Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria*. She is not even described as offering laurel crowns; *offerentem* only agrees with Apollo. Cf. Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 277, who notes that Apollo is the one described as offering laurel crowns, but the language leaves the issue open. It is also possible that Victoria is used to denote the precise manifestation of Apollo Grannus, namely, that he was holding a laurel wreath in his hand, as opposed to a *cithara*; see Woolf, ‘Seeing Apollo’, 145-52, for descriptions of cultic images of Apollo Grannus.

¹¹² Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 273-4, demonstrates these as imperial qualities discussed by Virgil; cf. McGowan, *Ovid in Exile*, 86-8, that Augustus as *praesens deus* offers salvation to the world in Virgil and Ovid; and J.

There has been much literature in recent years that suggests ideological similarities between Constantine and Augustus in social innovation and portraiture, among other aspects.¹¹³ Nonetheless, many of Constantine's imperial predecessors portrayed themselves as heralding a new Golden Age or becoming the next Augustus.¹¹⁴ Even if the panegyrist's description goes against a more intricate and learned understanding of the Virgilian prophetic *corpus*, in all likelihood the audience would still walk away with the clear association of Constantine as a new Augustus, or at the very least the begetter of a Golden Age.¹¹⁵ 'Composite formation' would still allow for Constantine to recognise himself in Apollo, to which another dream-report of Aelius Aristides can testify: "I noticed, as if in this vestibule,

Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2012) Chapter Three: The Saving Ruler and the Logos-Nomos, especially at 126-32. These qualities are precisely why the panegyrist interjects with *immo quid dico 'credo'?*: Constantine's similarity to Augustus-Apollo, the evidence of the vision, can be plainly seen by everyone.

¹¹³ For example, J. Evans-Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1995); N. Hannestad, 'The Ruler Image of the Fourth Century: Innovation or Tradition', in J.R. Brandt and O. Steen (eds.), *Imperial Art as Christian Art – Christian Art as Imperial Art* (Rome, 2001) 93-108, at 95-6; U. Eigler, 'Konstantin und die Literatur', in Demandt and Engemann, *Konstantin der Grosse*, 61-7, at 64-6, on Constantine as Augustan patron of the arts, though he cautions that the allusion may not have been intentional; R. Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2007); Bardill, *Divine Emperor*, 11-27, though he shows the themes go further back to Alexander and Hellenistic ruler-philosophy; Potter, *Constantine*, 168-9, that the language of the Arch inscription invokes the image of Augustus. It is difficult to determine whether Constantine actively imitated Augustus or let others make the associations for him; we do know of at least one instance where the head of a statue of Constantine was originally that of Augustus; see A. Giuliano, 'Augustus-Constantinus', *BA* 68-69 (1991) 3-10.

¹¹⁴ On imperial legacies and looking back on previous emperors in general, see H. Chantraine, 'Der tote Herrscher in der Politik der römischen Kaiserzeit', *GWU* 39 (1988) 67-80; regarding portraiture, see Bardill, *Divine Emperor*, 42-68. For the emperor Septimius Severus (193-211) as a specific example of Augustan imitation, see T.D. Barnes, 'Aspects of the Severan Empire, Part I: Severus as a New Augustus', *NECJ* 35 (2008) 251-67.

¹¹⁵ M. Bergmann, 'Konstantin und der Sonnengott. Die Aussagen der Bildzeugnisse', in Demandt and Engemann, *Konstantin der Grosse*, 143-61, at 146-9, notes the Golden Age as a topos of panegyric, which does not demand a clear reference to Augustus; the quality could be conveyed simply by identifying Sol (Apollo) as Constantine's *comes*. See T.G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (The Bronx, 1996) 51, that the inclusion of Augustus makes the vision "more a matter of conventional rhetoric and less a factual description of a religious experience". Rodgers' argument in her article 'Pagan Vision' is entirely in favour for a connection with Augustus, but in a later article [id., 'The Metamorphosis of Constantine', *CQ* 39 (1989) 233-46, at 239] she concedes that this may have been achievable without a strict reference: "Augustus once fostered a connection with Apollo; Constantine's vision of Apollo is part of the same scheme... Whether Constantine be Augustus, Apollo, or some combination thereof ... his fate is foretold in Virgilian terms".

a statue of me. At one time I saw it, as if it were of me, and again it seemed to be a great and fair statue of Asclepius”.¹¹⁶ All of this is perhaps meaningless in the end: it likely would not have mattered whom the dream-figure looked like; if the dream was in a sanctuary of Apollo, whoever appeared would have been Apollo regardless of their appearance.¹¹⁷ And if he looked like Augustus or Constantine, then all the better.

The offering of laurel wreaths is probably a fixed element of the dream report, but *offerentem* is vague in the description: are the wreaths being physically handed to Constantine, possibly in a gesture of crowning; or is Apollo merely showing them to him, perhaps in an elegant arrangement? It is probably the latter, since the former would have been a highly visual device for the panegyrist to exploit, especially with the reference to Victoria. As for the interpretation, as an icon of kingship (*regni corona*) each laurel wreath symbolises a generation’s reign.¹¹⁸ Praying for an emperor’s long life and reign (an expression of *aeternitas*) is a topos in late antique panegyric; the panegyrist’s use of the laurel wreaths to this effect is very efficient, killing two birds with one stone, as it were.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Aristid. *Or.* 47.17: περιεσκόπουν δὲ, ὡς ἐν τῷ προνάῳ δὴ τούτῳ, ἀνδριάντα ἑμαυτοῦ· καὶ τότε μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἑμαυτοῦ ὄντα ἐώρων, πάλιν δὲ ἐδόκει μοι εἶναι αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ μέγας τις καὶ καλός. E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965) 44-5, mentions this dream and adds [at 45 (n.1)], “The closest parallel I know is in Damascius, *Vit. Isidori* ... where Damascius dreams that he is Attis and receives cult instructions from Cybele”.

¹¹⁷ Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 62, comments: “It is after all the part of the essence of an epiphany dream that there should be a pronouncement... Many dream visitants are not gods at all, or at least do not look like them. And once again we need to recall that we are dealing with a *form* of dream-description, not a mere matter of common content”. Harris also notes (at 43) that a particular god can perhaps be identified if the dream takes place in an incubation shrine.

¹¹⁸ Greffe, ‘La vision apollinienne’, 59, points out that thirty years is the longest reign of a monarch; cf. Lietzmann, ‘Glaube’, 190. It is unclear from the description whether *quae tricenum singulae ferunt omen annorum* is simply the interpretation or if each laurel wreath in the vision had some sort of symbol inside them. Also, these are not *omina tricena* (pace Weiss, ‘Vision’, 249), but *omina annorum tricenum*.

¹¹⁹ M. Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott* (München, 1999) 198-9, argues that the speaker uses the vision in order to allow a god to convey the commonplace platitude. Weber, *Kaiser*, 280, equates the sentiment with *Invictus*. The number of wreaths is not mentioned (again, simply a detail to which we are not privy); we can only estimate from the panegyrist’s comment that the total years is ‘beyond the old age of a Nestor’, that is, at least ninety years. Rodgers, ‘Pagan Vision’, 267 (n. 18), suggests that *singulae* indicates at least three wreaths, since two

An alternate, or indeed additional, interpretation is certainly warranted by the context: the experience is in the immediate aftermath of two victories, Maximian at Massalia and the Franks on the Rhine, and Victoria's presence emphasises the significance of laurel wreaths as 'crowns of victory'.¹²⁰ The two interpretations – diadem and victory – are not incompatible; Constantine's vision is a reward for his recent victories, but also a promise of future victories and an extremely long reign.¹²¹ That the panegyrist emphasises one aspect above the other(s) is merely an executive decision.

Conclusion

We can concede that the panegyrist is indeed vague in his account of the vision, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this is not a failing. Rather, the vision is not the focus of the panegyric and the speaker's primary interest is in the interpretation of what was seen. This strongly implies that he could presume, as can we, that his audience was knowledgeable of the emperor's experience at Granum. To be sure, the story is neither the invention of the panegyrist nor an attempt to introduce the vision.

would be rendered *utraque*. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 301 (n. 71), and *Constantine*, 78, argues four wreaths, for a total of one hundred and twenty years, the maximum life-span believed possible in antiquity. Assuming that Constantine was born between 270 and 275 (cf. Barnes, *Constantine*, 38, that Constantine was born 27 February 273), he was at least thirty-one when he became emperor, and around thirty-five at the time of the vision and Panegyric 6; three wreaths would have been sufficient to satisfy both conditions. However, this involves the further assumption that the 'youthful' emperor's age was both known and being accurately represented.

¹²⁰ A.D. Nock, 'The Emperor's Divine *comes*', *JRS* 37 (1947) 102-16, at 114: "Victory is no stage-property... She was a real power, to whom you could address prayer". Cf. M. Franzi, 'La propaganda costantiniana e le teorie di legittimazione del potere nei *Panegyrici Latini*', *AAT* 115 (1980) 25-37, at 33, that Victoria is a material benefit from Apollo's divine protection.

¹²¹ Gervás, 'Los sueños', 145-6, that the connection with triumph and Victoria are clear, and that the laurels signify future glory; and Weber, *Kaiser*, 281, that the vision signifies a long life, divine protection and victories. Cf. Weiss, 'The Vision', 252.

Working backwards from his interpretation, there are unfortunately few details that we can say with any certainty pertain to the actual experience. They are, nevertheless, still very useful. If we remove the attending interpretations, the following elements are obvious: Apollo appeared to Constantine and presented him laurel wreaths. There are numerous other details that we could perhaps include, for example, that Victoria was present, that Apollo was a composite dream-figure, or even that there were three (or possibly four) wreaths. However, only those two aspects are explicit. The dream may have been more complex or more bizarre, but in typical fashion the panegyrist has broken the experience down into a digestible and comprehensible episode.

Also explicit is the chronology of the vision. While on a forced march back to the Rhine frontier following the suppression and death of Maximian, Constantine learned that the Franks had been quelled. He turned off the main road towards the nearest cult centre, in this case Granum. After the vision he bestowed considerable votive offerings and, having completed his visit to the temple, returned to the main road and continued on his way. Somewhat less overt though are the circumstances of the vision, but the context suggests it was a dream. Constantine turned to a known incubation sanctuary, very likely stayed the night (for all we know numerous nights) and before departing ‘honored those most venerable shrines with such great treasures’.

Although it would be nice to know whether or not Constantine actually had the dream, it is perhaps wishful thinking to assume we ever will. It is more than likely that, real or not, the panegyrist was not discussing anything with which the audience was not already familiar. It may not be a description of a solar halo or a cross in the sky, but there is very little reason to doubt that it does contribute in some way to the formation of the Vision legend.

CHAPTER TWO: LACTANTIUS AND THE DREAM AT THE MILVIAN BRIDGE

“I say als me thynkes,
That hede es of holy kirke I hope he be there,
Alle ferse to the fighte with the folke that he ledis.”
Unknown author, *Wynnere and Wastour*, lines 146-148.¹²²

In the grand scheme of Western history, the Battle of Milvian Bridge has been considered a turning point in the religious trajectory of the Roman world. It was not merely a contest of who would control the ancient and illustrious seat of the empire that was Rome, but – in the terms of Christian tradition – the triumph of true religion over false superstition. Constantine, having adopted the Christian god as his protector, overthrew the ‘pagan’ usurper Maxentius (306-312), thus gaining control of the entire Western empire and ushering in an age of Christian prosperity.

Concerning the battle, Lactantius’ pamphlet, *De mortibus persecutorum*, is an important source for one main reason: it is the earliest reference we have for Constantine acknowledging the Christian god.¹²³ The night before the battle, Constantine saw a dream in

¹²² W. Ginsberg (ed.), *Wynnere and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages* (Middle English Texts; Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992) 17.

¹²³ Lact. *DMP* 44.5-9. At least, this is how Lactantius seems to represent the episode. There is no explicit mention of a conversion, despite how some would choose to read into the episode. For instance, J. Amat, *Songes et visions* (Paris, 1985) 206, considers this a conversion story; whereas B.F. von Dörnberg, *Traum und*

which he was instructed to place a divine symbol on his soldiers' shields for protection. He did as he was told and, with Christ marked on the shields, marched into battle. While the armies clashed outside, Maxentius remained within the city to celebrate his *dies imperii*, but a mixture of riots and public acclamation for Constantine forced him to make the bold move of leaving the safety of the walls to command his own army. He ordered the Milvian Bridge cut down behind him and joined the fray, but at the sight of him the struggle intensified, the Hand of God influencing the battle. Maxentius and his troops fled to the bridge, now destroyed, and the stampeding horde tumbled the pretender headlong into the Tiber.

The dream is similar in some respects to the one reported by Eusebius many years later in *De vita Constantini*: Constantine has a dream in which he receives a divine promise of victory by means of a symbol that has Christian significance.¹²⁴ There are, however, fundamental differences. Lactantius reports no vision in the sky and situates the dream on the night before the battle, whereas Eusebius locates it sometime prior to the Italian campaign; and the description of the symbol that Constantine derives from the dream does not match Eusebius' Chi-Rho.¹²⁵ Moreover, Eusebius reports that he heard the story directly from Constantine himself, who amplified his tale with oaths and assurances as to its authenticity, while Lactantius does not boast such a valuable source.¹²⁶ This last point has been especially

Traumdeutung in der Alten Kirche (Leipzig, 2008) 278, sees neither a conversion, nor acknowledgement of the Christian god.

¹²⁴ Eus. *VC* 1.28-32; Eusebius' version will be explored in detail in Chapter Three.

¹²⁵ I have opted to discuss the symbols of Lactantius and Eusebius together in Chapter Four.

¹²⁶ Although Lactantius does not provide a source for his knowledge of the battle, it is often assumed that he was still a member of the court in Trier (either during the civil war and its immediate aftermath or while writing *De mortibus persecutorum*) and therefore in some way close to the emperor and privy to official pronouncements. See T.D. Barnes, 'Lactantius and Constantine', *JRS* 63 (1973) 29-46, at 39-41; T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981) 13-4; E.D. Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire* (Ithaca, 2000) 135; E. Heck, 'Constantin und Lactanz in Trier – Chronologisches', *Historia* 58 (2009) 118-30;

instrumental in concluding that Lactantius' value for the vision is minimal, the traditional approach favouring Eusebius' narrative.¹²⁷

Some influential scholars, albeit not many, have contended that Lactantius should not be so quickly dismissed. Andreas Alföldi describes Lactantius' account as "a much better attested version ... which partly completes, partly corrects, that of Eusebius".¹²⁸ Ramsey MacMullen argues that the dream explains in part Constantine's change of faith and further that, "if Lactantius' account had not survived, something like it would have had to be assumed".¹²⁹ Robin Lane Fox states that he regards the dream as "entirely credible", though he strives to harmonise the two versions, ceding complete accuracy to neither source.¹³⁰

T.D. Barnes, *Constantine* (Malden, MA, 2011) 176-8; R. Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge, 2011) 115-6.

¹²⁷ That is, Eusebius' account reflects what may be construed as the 'official version' of the Vision. See, for instance, A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948) 94-6, that Lactantius attests to the use of the divine sign at the battle, but that Eusebius' account "rests on the best of authority"; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1986) 619: "Eusebius ... cited the vision on the Emperor's own testimony, backed by an oath. No other event in the *Life* was presented on such authority"; Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, 56, who, although the accuracy of Constantine's memory and Eusebius' reporting is a concern for him, nevertheless states well that "[t]he redeeming factor of his account of the vision and the dream was the declaration that he had heard it directly from Constantine himself. Eusebius claimed to be recording the memories of an eyewitness".

¹²⁸ A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (trans. H. Mattingly; Oxford, 1948) 17-8. Barnes has argued in a number of publications that, at least on the issue of Constantine's legislation of Christianity in Gaul and Britain, Lactantius "deserves to be believed" (*Constantine and Eusebius*, 14; cf. id., 'Lactantius', 44-5, and *Constantine*, 65-6). With respect to the vision, however, he does not consider Lactantius reliable, arguing instead that he is simply reporting a popular belief created to explain the use of Christian symbols in the battle [*Constantine and Eusebius*, 43; cf. id., 'The Conversion of Constantine', *Classical Views* 29 (1985) 371-93, at 384], and more recently that the dream he describes is the same as the dream in Eusebius' *Vita* [id., 'Constantine and Christianity: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretation', *ZAC* 2 (1998) 274-94, at 287-9; and *Constantine*, 74-80, following P. Weiss, 'The Vision of Constantine', (trans. A.R. Birley), *JRA* 16 (2003) 237-59].

¹²⁹ R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (New York, 1969) 75. Despite MacMullen's support for Lactantius, I rather disagree: if *De mortibus persecutorum* had not survived, Eusebius' *Vita* would more than suffice.

¹³⁰ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 616-7, proposes that Lactantius' chronology is incorrect, while Eusebius confuses the divine sign on the shields with the *labarum*; cf. J.N. Bremmer, 'The Vision of Constantine', in

More recently, Jan Bremmer, whose article ‘The Vision of Constantine’ gives more weight to Lactantius’ testimony, gently corrects the traditional approach:

A methodologically more responsible analysis must always take into account the nature and chronology of the material and begin with the contemporary sources. Later versions should be analyzed subsequently, and differences with earlier versions should be noted and, if possible, explained.¹³¹

This last point is especially pertinent. The protocol of historical inquiry suggests that narratives closer to the event in question should, at least initially, be taken as superior. Lactantius certainly fits the bill: general consensus places the composition of the text ca. 315, more than twenty years before the circulation of Eusebius’ *Vita*.¹³² With respect to

A.P.M.H. Lardinois et al. (eds.), *Land of Dreams* (Leiden, 2006) 57-79, at 65, who contends that Lane Fox’s “approach is arbitrary”.

¹³¹ Bremmer, ‘Vision’, 65. This is the view taken also by T.G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (Scranton, 1996) 61-2, who argues not only that is Lactantius more authoritative, but that both vision and dream occurred in the days prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge. J. Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2012) 168, contends that Lactantius “comes closer to describing what Constantine originally said he saw”, but by this he means that he is a more accurate source for the symbol (a staurogram, he concludes) as it appeared in 312 than Eusebius’ later Chi-Rho, to which point he states also (at 171) that “if we want to get as close as possible to the thinking of Constantine and his court, I suspect we should put more faith in the early text of Lactantius”.

¹³² The date is not in dispute; see, for instance, Barnes, ‘Lactantius’, 29-32; J.L. Creed, *Lactantius* (Oxford, 1984) xxxiii-v; Digeser, *Christian Empire*, 34. On the basis of internal evidence the date is likely correct: the narrative ends not just with the death of Maximin in July/August 313, but with the recovery and execution of Diocletian’s daughter, Valeria, fifteen months later (that is, in late 314). Alföldi, *Conversion*, 45-6, proposes that there may have been more than one edition of the text, or more specifically that the text was completed in 313, but that the aftermath of the war against Maximin (Lact. *DMP* 50-51) was added later. However, the death of Valeria is not an afterthought. The obliteration of the families of Diocletian, Galerius and Maximin are part of Lactantius’ formula to demonstrate that the Christian god has completely eliminated the persecutors [Severus’ son, Severianus, is included also (at *DMP* 50.4), even though he is not described as one of the persecuting emperors]; cf. *DMP* 50.1: “In this way God vanquished all the persecutors of His name, so that no stem or root of theirs remained”; *Hoc modo deus universes persecutors nominis sui debellavit, ut eorum nec stirps nec radix ulla remaneret*. This is in keeping with the introduction to the text (at *DMP* 1-6), which provides a broader, albeit briefer, discussion of other persecutors throughout Christian history – Nero, Domitian, Decius, Valerian, and Aurelian – who also suffered such treatment: Nero, Decius, and Valerian are denied proper burial, Domitian’s reign was erased (*damnatio memoriae*), and Aurelian was murdered by his companions. Nevertheless, the reasonably favourable treatment of Licinius suggests that the text was not written during the first civil war with Constantine. Although this has led some scholars, such as J. Moreau [*Lactance* (Paris, 1954) 36], to posit a date no earlier than 318 for the text, Patrick Bruun’s accepted re-dating

Constantine's vision, Lactantius should be given priority. However, the larger context in which he situates the dream-vision, namely, the Battle of Milvian Bridge, must be considered as well and, inasmuch as *De mortibus persecutorum* was written relatively soon after Constantine's victory over Maxentius, he is not the earliest source for this historical event. A panegyric delivered at Trier in August 313 describes extensively not only the Battle of Milvian Bridge, but Constantine's progress from northern Italy to Rome.¹³³ In his narrative of the events leading up to the famous battle the panegyrist mentions neither dreams nor visions; rather, he refers vaguely to 'divine inspiration' in connection to the entire campaign.¹³⁴ This version is similar to two other sources in close chronological proximity to Lactantius. Eusebius, in the first edition of his *Historia ecclesiastica* (ca. 313), writes that Constantine procured the assistance of "God who is in heaven, and His Word, even Jesus Christ the Saviour of all" prior to the Italian campaign,¹³⁵ and in a panegyric delivered at Rome in 321 the Gallic orator Nazarius claims that a heavenly army led by the deified

of the Battle of Cibalae (8 October 316) renders 313 to 315 for the composition extremely agreeable; see P. Bruun, *The Constantinian Coinage of Arelate* (Helsinki, 1953) 17-21.

¹³³ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9) *passim*.

¹³⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.4, 2.5, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 13.2, 16.2, 22.1, and 26.1. More explicitly, the panegyrist states (at 3.3) that Constantine ventured over the Alps seeking "no doubtful victory, but one divinely promised". No overt references to visions appear on the coinage of the time, though divine representations continued.

¹³⁵ Eus. *HE* 9.9.2. Regarding the date, see R.W. Burgess, 'The Dates and Editions of Eusebius' *Chronici Canones* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *JTS* 48 (1997) 471-504. A recent argument has been made for a single edition ca. 325; see M. Cassin et al., 'La question des éditions de l'*Histoire ecclésiastique* et le livre X', in S. Morlet and L. Perrone (eds.), *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique* (Paris, 2012) 185-206. Cf. R.K. Bholá, 'Dating Eusebius' *Quaestiones ad Stephanum*', in M.-P. Bussières (ed.), *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l'Antiquité profane et chrétienne* (Turnhout, 2013) 153-76, at 166-76, in support of Burgess' dating, on the basis that Eusebius' *Quaestiones ad Stephanum* was likely composed ca. 314 and could not have preceded his *Historia ecclesiastica*.

Constantius I descended from the sky while the emperor was still in Gaul.¹³⁶ Lactantius, it would seem, is a lonely voice.

Nevertheless, he is seldom denied his kernel of truth. Whether one concludes, as Timothy Barnes formerly had, that the propitious dream began as merely a rumour to explain the sudden appearance of Christian symbols on the soldiers' shields, or following Peter Weiss that the dream disclosed the true identity of the god that manifested in the sky in 310, or more skeptically that Constantine concocted the dream in order to bolster the morale of his troops on the morning of the battle, the story is nonetheless considered evidence that by the time the emperor made his triumphant entry into Rome he had already, or was well on his way to being, converted to Christianity.¹³⁷ If not the dream, then at least the implementation of the divine sign in the battle represents his adoption of the Christian god as his divine protector in a somewhat public demonstration.¹³⁸

Lactantius is not altogether an unreliable source. The dream-vision is likely based on an experience claimed by Constantine, though not necessarily in the context that Lactantius

¹³⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).14.

¹³⁷ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 43, has previously argued that the story began as a rumour to explain "the unusual appearance" of Constantine's army, that is, their bearing of a Christian symbol, stating further, "[t]hat belief is probably no more than an attempt to give Constantine's unexpected action a conventional religious explanation". In his reinterpretation of the Vision legend, Weiss proposes that Lactantius' account is accurate; the night before the battle, Constantine saw a Christian dream and through it he realised that it was Christ who had manifested in the sky in Gaul; cf. Barnes, 'Constantine and Christianity', 287-9, and *Constantine* 74-80, in support. W.V. Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', *Klio* 87 (2005) 488-94, at 490, contends that Constantine very possibly claimed to have had such a dream, but that its convenience betrays its untruth; rather, he says, "it is overwhelmingly likely that he either made it up or adapted an actual dream" [cf. W.V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 2009) 115-6].

¹³⁸ Thus, for instance, N. Lenski, 'The Reign of Constantine', in N. Lenski (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006) 59-90, at 71: "Constantine's decision or perhaps revelation that the sign stood for Christ", as well as its implementation, signifies that "[h]e had converted to Christianity"; P.J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove, IL, 2010) 69: bearing the divine sign, "Constantine entered Rome as a *Christian* conqueror" (emphasis in the original).

gives. As I argue in this chapter, the version he reports is the product of two main factors. Firstly, although *De mortibus persecutorum* was written shortly after the events of 312, Lactantius' knowledge of the war was actually quite slight. His placement of the experience on the eve of the battle is a chronological error resulting from a combination of his lack of information and indistinct post-war references to 'divine inspiration'. Secondly, the dream-vision may not have originally been a Christian one: Lactantius' own dream theory, as discussed in his *De opificio Dei*, suggests that the Christian character of the nocturnal vision is actually part of his particular interpretation. This leads to a couple of conclusions important for the overall Vision debate: the dream that Lactantius describes actually took place sometime prior to the Italian campaign, and it is not *de facto* evidence that Constantine publicly professed his Christianity as early as his conquest of the West.

Lactantius and the Civil War of 312

Although Lactantius presents Constantine's divine dream in the context of the Battle of Milvian Bridge, our scope should be broadened to consider also the civil war against Maxentius. As already stated, *De mortibus persecutorum* is the only contemporary source to claim a vision experience on the eve of the battle or during the course of the war, for which reason it is essential to examine Lactantius' account of the entire Italian campaign in order to assess his authority as a source.

Civil war had already started between them. Although Maxentius confined himself to Rome on the strength of an oracular reply that he would perish if he went outside its gates, his campaign was being conducted for him by capable commanders. Maxentius had the larger forces, with both his father's army, recovered from Severus, and his own, which he had recently brought over from the Mauri and the Gaetuli. Fighting took place in which Maxentius' troops held the advantage until Constantine at a later stage, his courage renewed and 'ready for either success

or death', moved all his forces nearer to the city of Rome and based himself in the region of the Milvian bridge.¹³⁹

Immediately noticeable is that the entire Italian campaign is glossed over – the only locations named are Rome and the Milvian Bridge – and emphasis is placed on military strength, even if only a relative description.¹⁴⁰ Compared to the earlier panegyric of 313 and even the later panegyric of 321, which are both fairly specific, Lactantius' description is quite cryptic. Where precisely did the fighting take place and in what way did Maxentius' forces have the advantage? The two panegyrics largely agree on the progression of the campaign and provide some possibilities as to Lactantius' meaning.¹⁴¹

Entering Italy from the north-west, Constantine's first encounter with enemy troops was at Segusio (modern Susa).¹⁴² The city fell rather quickly and Constantine moved on to

¹³⁹ Lact. *DMP* 44.1-3: *Iam mota inter eos fuerant arma civilia. Et quamvis se Maxentius Romae contineret, quod responsum acceperat periturum esse, si extra portas urbis exisset, tamen bellum per idoneos duces gerebatur. Plus virium Maxentio erat, quod et patris sui exercitum receperat a Severo et suum proprium de Mauris atque Gaetulis nuper extraxerat. Dimicatum, et Maxentiani milites praevalebant, donec postea confirmato animo Constantinus et ad utrumque paratus copias omnes ad urbem propius admovit et e regione pontis Mulvii consedit.* Despite the brevity of his account, Lactantius offers information about Maxentius' army that is unmentioned in other contemporary sources, namely, the inclusion of the North African tribes, the Mauri and Gaetuli. Interestingly, however, he mentions the absorption of Severus/Maximian's army, but not those of Galerius. As concerns Constantine and Maxentius, Lactantius' relative description of their respective armies is likely to be correct; the panegyrist of 313 [*Pan. Lat.* 12(9).5.1-2] states that it was less than 40,000. A "compact crack force" (Lenski, 'Reign', 69) would have been easier to manage in a blitz campaign through Northern Italy and left the Rhine frontier reasonably well defended; cf. E. James, *Constantine the Great* (Barnsley, 2012) 50-1 and 58, that the size of Constantine's force would have offered better manoeuvrability and required fewer supplies, which they could then obtain locally. Maxentius' force, on the other hand, is supposed to have been 100,000 strong, according to the same panegyrist (at 3.3), though Zosimus (*HN* 2.15.1-2) claims that he had nearly 200,000 soldiers and Constantine 98,000. While both estimates of Maxentius' numbers are likely exaggerated in order to make Constantine's victory appear more momentous, the panegyrist's numbers are certainly to be preferred.

¹⁴⁰ H.J. Lawlor, *Eusebiana* (Oxford, 1912) 240, suggests that this is for the sake of brevity.

¹⁴¹ Constantine's invasion of Northern Italy is discussed at *Pan. Lat.* 12(9). 5.4- 15 and 4(10).19-26.

¹⁴² Rather than attempt to besiege, Constantine's troops set fire to the city gates and scaled the walls with ladders. This "non-standard sledge hammer approach" (James, *Constantine*, 49) was not, however, a "gamble", as James terms it, to compensate for a lack of siege equipment, but likely part of Constantine's blitz strategy; once over the Alps he had to move quickly to secure the region west of Verona, which meant not only

Taurinorum (modern Turin), where another military detachment was waiting. After a victory outside the walls, Constantine entered the city and, while there, received embassies and supplies from various North Italian cities. From there he marched unimpeded to Mediolanum (modern Milan), which celebrated his arrival, and stayed ‘for some days’.¹⁴³ Verona, a strategic strongpoint, was occupied by a larger Maxentian force; the River Athesis (Adige) provided a natural barrier, which checked a direct approach.¹⁴⁴ Divisions were sent north to cross the river safely, which then approached from the other side of the city and forced the enemy to seek refuge behind the walls. Completely surrounded and their supply lines cut off, the enemy decided to make a stand, which proved unsuccessful, though the commander, the Praetorian Prefect Ruricius Pompeianus, managed to escape. The siege of Verona continued, even when Pompeianus returned with reinforcements sometime later. A smaller force broke off to engage the new enemy, and although the reinforcements arrived late in the day, battle

travelling light (i.e. the lack of equipment was intentional), but also dispatching the enemy fortifications swiftly and by any means possible. Setting the gate ablaze and scaling the walls was not an impromptu innovation; the scaling ladders had to be prepared in advance, but that was not enough – the height of the walls needed to be taken into account. We already know, thanks to the description of the siege of Massalia in Panegyric 6 (at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).19.5), that errors could occur in calculating the height of walls to be scaled, even when standing right in front of them.

¹⁴³ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).7.8, states that Constantine paused in Milan in order to let the cities he had not yet reached reflect on the success of his campaign thus far, but he is vague as to how long he stayed, saying only “for some days”.

¹⁴⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).25.1-4: the panegyrist Nazarius states that, while en route to Verona, Constantine encountered heavy infantry at Brixia (Brescia), which fled to Verona upon the first assault, and their report had a psychological impact on the entire Maxentian force there, who became ‘infected’ and ‘corrupted’ by dread and fear, hence the decision to endure a siege – for Nazarius, at least, the battle for Verona was largely won before Constantine’s arrival. The panegyrist of 313 [at *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).8.1-3] does not give these conditions for the siege, but rather seems to suggest that the Maxentian forces were hoping the Athesis would sufficiently stall Constantine until reinforcements could arrive.

was joined and carried on throughout most of the night.¹⁴⁵ Pompeianus was killed in the conflict, which resulted also in the surrender of the besieged army. Afterward, Constantine was welcomed into the city, where he remained for an unspecified length of time.¹⁴⁶ Presumably he then marched east (to Aquileia) to secure his capture of Northern Italy, and when he was confident that his army would not defect and were eager to continue the war, he departed for Rome.¹⁴⁷

This allows only a couple of possibilities for Lactantius' description. It would make sense if he is referring to the entire northern campaign, since there were numerous conflicts and Maxentius' forces held a number of key cities. In Eusebius' brief narrative of the war in *Historia ecclesiastica*, he states that "the emperor ... attacked the first, second and third of the tyrant's armies, and capturing them all with ease advanced over a large part of Italy, actually coming very near to Rome itself".¹⁴⁸ From this we can surmise that the basic details were known in the East around the time that Lactantius was writing, so it is less likely that he

¹⁴⁵ Both panegyrist attest to Constantine personally fighting in this engagement [*Pan. Lat.* 12(9).9.3-6; and 4(10).25.7- 26]. Only Nazarius, however, states that the battle continued after sundown and through the night, which becomes a point of emphasis in his overall portrayal of Constantine's character in this civil war.

¹⁴⁶ There is a sense that the panegyrist of 313 is responding to an accusation of inaction for not immediately marching to Rome once Northern Italy was secure; he offers two-fold praise for Constantine's prudent delay in the north and lack of hesitation in marching south, saying [at *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).15.3] that any delay was not based on indecision, and later (at 15.6) that Constantine, while pausing to assess the situation, did not pass up a favourable opportunity. Constantine certainly paused at Mediolanum, and possibly at Verona, but the panegyrist's relative chronology suggests that he delayed after the capture of Aquileia.

¹⁴⁷ This is the reason given by the panegyrist of 313, at *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).15.2-3. However, both *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).11.1 and 4(10).27.1 state that after the capture of Verona Constantine besieged other cities in Northern Italy, including Mutina and possibly Aquileia, whereas the panegyrist of 313 seems to suggest that Constantine simply received an embassy from Aquileia while at Verona.

¹⁴⁸ Eus. *HE* 9.9.3: ὁ ... βασιλεὺς ἐπιῶν πρώτη καὶ δευτέρα καὶ τρίτη τοῦ τυράννου παρατάξει εὖ μάλα τε πάσας ἐλών, πρόεισιν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ὅσον τῆς Ἰταλίας ἤδη τε αὐτῆς Ῥώμης ἄγχιστα ἦν. Which three conflicts these were is not clear, though if Eusebius was following something akin to the earliest account we have of the Italian campaign – namely, the panegyric of 313 – he may mean Segusio, Taurinorum, and Verona.

is making a general reference to the Italian campaign. His specific contention that the enemy held some advantage perhaps better fits the situation at Verona, where Constantine met his greatest opposition and may have delayed before continuing either east (to Aquileia) or south (to Rome).

Less likely are two other suppositions that require going beyond the contemporary source material. In his reconstruction of the war, MacMullen proposes that Constantine's advance guard engaged in an unsuccessful skirmish near the outskirts of Rome, which later regrouped with the main force and advanced to the Milvian Bridge.¹⁴⁹ While this can be neither substantiated nor disproven, the emphasis of Lactantius' description indicates he is not referring to a skirmish. The other possibility supposes an initial encounter at the ninth milestone between Rome and Veii, at Saxa Rubra, in which Maxentius' forces were forced back to the Milvian Bridge. The so-called Battle of Saxa Rubra had been effectively disproved by Jacques Moreau in 1952, but in recent years it has come to be stated matter-of-factly by numerous scholars.¹⁵⁰ Our only source for Saxa Rubra is Aurelius Victor, writing in the early 360s, who, as Moreau has shown, was likely confusing Constantine's battle against Maxentius with that of Didius Julianus and Septimius Severus in 193.¹⁵¹ Excluding

¹⁴⁹ MacMullen, *Constantine*, 72

¹⁵⁰ J. Moreau, 'Pont Milvius ou Saxa Rubra?', *Nouvelle Clio* 4 (1952) 369-73. For recent reconstructions in favor of Saxa Rubra, see, for instance, W. Kuhoff, 'Ein Mythos in der römischen Geschichte: Der Sieg Konstantins des Großen über Maxentius vor den Toren Roms am 28. Oktober 312 n. Chr.', *Chiron* 21 (1991) 127-74, at 147-62; Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', *passim*, who consistently refers to the "Battle of Saxa Rubra"; Lenski, 'Reign', 70; Bardill, *Constantine*, 92. Some recent reconstructions that omit Saxa Rubra: C.M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London, 2004) 107-8 and 320-1 (n. 16); James, *Constantine*, 61-72; Barnes, *Constantine*, 82-3; Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, 187; D.S. Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford, 2013) 141-4.

¹⁵¹ Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.23. It should be noted, however, that the region where Saxa Rubra is located was at some point, perhaps in the middle ages, renamed 'Labaro' – clearly inspired by the mythology of the origins of Constantine's *Labarum* –, and that in 1912 Pope Pius X erected the following inscription to commemorate the 1600th anniversary of Constantine's victory: *Constantinus magnus imperator / V kal. Novemb. a. CCCXII heic*

Lactantius' indistinct description, none of the contemporary material posits any conflicts between the capture of the north and the Battle of Milvian Bridge. The panegyrist of 313 and 321 are particular that Maxentius intended to withstand a siege and refrained from sending out more troops, preferring to consolidate his forces at Rome, and that his participation in a battle (and the battle itself) outside the city was somewhat sudden.¹⁵²

It is significant that, despite the Western panegyrics and Eusebius' demonstrated, albeit limited, knowledge in the East, Lactantius is exceedingly vague about the details of the campaign. While vagueness and ambiguity are generally hints that an account is not entirely authoritative, errors should be considered more noteworthy. For this reason it ought not to be taken lightly that Lactantius states in the following section: "The anniversary was at hand of the day on which Maxentius had taken imperial power, 27 October, and his *quinquennalia* were coming to an end".¹⁵³ There are two substantial mistakes in this sentence alone. According to Lactantius the Battle of Milvian Bridge was fought on Maxentius' *dies imperii*, which he states as being 27 October (*a.d.sexum kalendas nouembres*).¹⁵⁴ The *Fasti*

ad Saxa Rubra / divinitus debellato Maxentio / vexillum Christi nomine insigne in urbem intulit / aevi felicioris auctor generi humano / XVI post saecula auspice Pio X pontifice maximo / orbis catholicus solemnem rei commemorationem egit / locum titulo honestavit [text in Kuhoff, 'Ein Mythos', 157 (n. 80)].

¹⁵² *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).16.3-6; and 4(10).28. Both sources describe Maxentius as arranging his men himself in front of the Tiber, which cut off any line of retreat. Lenski, 'Reign', 86 (n. 59), in support of an engagement at Saxa Rubra, comments, "[t]actically this makes no sense". This, however, is to presuppose Maxentius' competency as a general, an image that both panegyrists attack; cf., for example, 12(9).14.4, and 4(10).28.1. By using Maxentius as a foil, the panegyrists could highlight Constantine's military prowess. However, not only do both panegyrists include this detail about the irresponsible battle arrangement, they also agree on the only 'logical' explanation for it, which does not necessarily pertain to Maxentius' competence – they state that he had no expectation of winning and had resolved to die.

¹⁵³ Lact. *DMP* 44.4: *Imminebat dies quo Maxentius imperium ceperat, qui est a.d.sexum kalendas nouembres, et quinquennalia terminabantur.*

¹⁵⁴ Lact. *DMP* 44.4: Lactantius states that the *dies imperii* was approaching, and (at 46.8) that Licinius intended the Battle of Campus Egerius for 1 May, so that "in this way Maximin would be overcome on his own accession day just as Maxentius had been at Rome".

Philocali, however, indicates that Maxentius was defeated on 28 October: the entry for *a.d. quintum kalendas nouembres* states EVICTIO·TYRANNI, and for the following day (*a.d. quartum*) ADVENT·DIVI·CM·XXIII, commemorating Constantine's triumphant entrance into Rome.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, Lactantius claims that it was the end of Maxentius' fifth year of rule (*quinquennalia terminabantur*), whereas the panegyrics of 313 and 321 both agree that it was the end of his sixth year, the former noting specifically that the tyrant was prevented from sullyng a seventh.¹⁵⁶ These errors, as egregious as they may be, do not mean that Lactantius' entire account is worthless.¹⁵⁷ However, it should serve as an indicator that care must be exercised in evaluating his knowledge of Western events around this time.

It is between the start of the civil war and the definitive battle that Lactantius situates Constantine's divine dream, and much like his description of the Italian campaign it is not unproblematic.

Constantine was advised in a dream to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers and then engage in battle. He did as he was commanded and by means of a slanted letter X with the top of its head bent round, he marked Christ on their shields. Armed with this sign, the army took up its weapons.¹⁵⁸

Since we are concerned with the general narrative of the war here, a more detailed discussion of the content and significance of the vision itself will be put aside for the moment. There are

¹⁵⁵ *CIL* 1².21 (page 274).

¹⁵⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).16.2, 19.2, 20.3; 4(10).33.6. Preference must go to the contemporary Western panegyrics. See, however, P. Bruun, 'The Battle of the Milvian Bridge: The Date Reconsidered', *Hermes* 88 (1960) 361-70, at 361-5, and P. Bruun, *Studies in Constantinian Chronology* (New York, 1961) 3-9, in favour of Lactantius' dating.

¹⁵⁷ M. DiMaio Jr. et al., 'Ambiguitas Constantiniana: The *caeleste signum dei* of Constantine the Great', *Byzantion* 58 (1988) 333-60, at 344-6, argue that Lactantius gives 27 October as the date for the vision, not the battle, and that the reference to Maxentius' *quinquennalia* has been misunderstood by modern scholars, since Maxentius did not immediately declare himself *imperator*, but *princeps*, upon coming to power in late 306.

¹⁵⁸ *Lact. DMP* 44.5-6. I have left *caeleste signum dei* translated as 'heavenly sign of God' for the moment; this traditional rendering will be addressed in Chapter Four.

two fundamental issues with this passage. First, the dream that Lactantius describes, traditionally interpreted as taking place on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge, does not appear in any of the other contemporary accounts, nor do the panegyrics make mention of any talisman. Second, an undertaking such as marking symbols on all of the soldiers' shields would have been a logistical nightmare. It need not be assumed that the symbol constituted a new shield blazon: not only would this have been reckless, since blazons were essential for differentiating contingents on the battlefield, there also appears to be no historical record of any such shield designs.¹⁵⁹ Supposing even, as is suggested by Joseph Vogt, that the symbol was (hastily?) drawn with temporary paint, if the estimation is correct that Constantine's army was around 40,000 strong, it is implausible that this would have been completed on the morning of the battle.¹⁶⁰ Depending on how prominently the symbol was to be displayed on the shields, even paint would have interfered with the blazons.¹⁶¹

There are limited interpretations of Lactantius' description here. Although neither dream nor shields are attested by other sources, the nature of the claim is too bold for Lactantius to have invented and not impossible: he is either mistaken about the sign being placed on all of the shields or he is mistaken about the chronology.¹⁶² We can imagine, then, that if the soldiers' shields were altered on the day of the battle, it was not those of the entire

¹⁵⁹ H. Signor, 'The Labarum, Shield Blazons, and Constantine's Caeleste Signum', in L. de Blois et al. (eds.), *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power* (Amsterdam, 2003) 481-500, at 488-90; Bardill, *Constantine*, 220.

¹⁶⁰ J. Vogt, 'Die Bedeutung des Jahres 312 für die Religionspolitik Konstantins des Grossen', *ZKG* 61 (1942) 171-90. Cf. Kuhoff, 'Ein Mythos', 172-3 (n. 124); Signor, 'Labarum', 489, against the plausibility of this scenario.

¹⁶¹ Signor, 'Labarum', 488-9 (n. 24).

¹⁶² Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', 490: "It is, I suppose, unlikely that such a public event as inscribing a sign on numerous shields can have been invented – though it may well have been misrepresented – by a writer in Lactantius' situation and so soon after the event".

army, but perhaps only the emperor's protective guard.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, this is not what Lactantius insinuates and we can suppose that for the talisman to have the desired effect it would need to be represented in some way by the entire army, and so the misunderstanding is probably with respect to the chronology. There were two much more plausible occasions for Constantine to have claimed a divine dream and prepared the shields. While still in the north, either at Verona or perhaps Aquileia, Constantine did not depart for Rome until he was confident in his troops and believed the conditions to be favourable; a dream and symbol may have provided the necessary inspiration and access to the resources of whichever city he was occupying at that time would have facilitated swifter alterations to the soldiers' equipment. Alternately, if the dream occurred in Gaul prior to his invasion of Italy, it would have provided an explanation for Constantine's decision to embark on the campaign even though, as we are told by the panegyrist of 313, the haruspices were against it.¹⁶⁴

Finally, there is the description of the battle itself, which I summarised at the beginning of this chapter, but we will examine more closely now. Lactantius' account of the battle is much more detailed than his narrative of the entire civil war, though in many respects it is still in disagreement with other contemporary sources, both Western and Eastern, of some of which he must surely have been aware.

¹⁶³ MacMullen, *Constantine*, 72, considers it unreasonable to suppose that Constantine equipped all forty-thousand of his troops with the divine sign. Bardill, *Constantine*, 221, suggests that the symbol would have been limited to the protective guard, so as not to risk the loyalty of his troops at large by employing a Christian symbol.

¹⁶⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.1-5. The panegyrist emphasises Constantine's apparent disregard of certain ill omens when he decided to embark on the invasion of Italy, which in light of the victory over Maxentius reveals the emperor's connection to a powerful divine force. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 41, argues that Constantine was more concerned with seizing the opportunity – with Licinius making his own preparations for the recovery of Italy, Constantine needed to act. Signor, 'Labarum', 489, however, argues that the placement of the symbol probably did not occur even while making preparations in Gaul in 311.

The enemy came to meet them without their emperor and crossed the bridge. The lines clashed, their fronts of equal length, and both sides fought with the most extreme ferocity; ‘no flight was marked on one side or the other’. In the city there was a riot, and the emperor was reviled for betraying the safety of the state; then suddenly, while Maxentius was giving the games to celebrate his anniversary, the people shouted with one voice: ‘Constantine cannot be conquered’. Shattered by this utterance, Maxentius tore himself away, and after calling together some of the senators, he ordered the Sibylline books to be inspected; in these it was discovered that ‘on that day the enemy of the Romans would perish’. Led by this reply to hope for victory, Maxentius marched out to battle. The bridge was cut down behind him. At the sight of this, the fighting became tougher, and the Hand of God was over the battle-line. The army of Maxentius was seized with terror, and he himself fled in haste to the bridge which had been broken down; pressed by the mass of fugitives, he was hurtled into the Tiber.¹⁶⁵

There are a number of inconsistencies with the contemporary, Western accounts of the battle.

The panegyrics of 313 and 321 agree more or less with Lactantius that Maxentius’ decision to leave his protective position inside the city was sudden, but differ in that they claim that he led out his own army and arranged them himself in front of the Tiber. The reason for this suddenness varies as well. The panegyrist of 313 claims that out of fear Maxentius refused to go even as far as the *Campus Martius*, but that “the divine spirit and the eternal majesty of the City itself robbed the accursed man of good sense, and made him suddenly rush out, after his inveterate sloth and shameful hiding”.¹⁶⁶ This element is perhaps repeated by the later panegyrist of 321:

¹⁶⁵ Lact. *DMP* 44.6-9: *Procedit hostis obviam sine imperatore pontemque transgreditur. Acies pari fronte concurrunt, summa vi utrimque pugnatur; neque his fuga nota neque illis. Fit in urbe seditio et dux increpatur velut desertor salutis publicae. Tumque repente populous – circenses enim natali suo edebat – una voce subclamat Constantinum vinci non posse. Qua voce consternates proripit se ac vocatis quibusdam senatoribus libros Sibyllinos inspici iubet, in quibus repertum est illo die hostem Romanorum esse peritutum. Quo responso in spem victoriae inductus procedit, in aciem venit. Pons a tergo eius scinditur. Eo viso pugna crudescit et manus dei supererat aciei. Maxentianus proterretur, ipse in fugam versus properat ad pontem, qui interruptus erat, ac multitudine fugientium pressus in Tiberim deturbatur.* Obviously, Lactantius cannot mean to say that a long-standing stone bridge, which was wide enough to accommodate heavy traffic coming into the city from the Via Flaminia, was destroyed at a moment’s notice. Rather, a section of the bridge had already been demolished and the gap replaced by a temporary wooden bridge that could be quickly dismantled – as seen, for example, in the portrayal of the battle by engraver Gérard Audran (1666) for Charles Le Brun.

¹⁶⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).16.2: *diuina mens et ipsius Vrbs aeterna maiestas nefario homini eripere consilium, ut ex inueterato illo torpore ac foedissimis latebris subito prorumperet.*

Therefore, when Italy had been recovered, this was the first step toward liberating the City and an easy ascent to victory, that the force of divinity drove him out from his habitual hiding places, he who always clung fast to the bowels of the City which he would devour. And this added so much to the ease with which you accomplished the task that your valor ought not to pride itself so much, most excellent Emperor, that you conquered him as your felicity ought to be congratulated that you were able to call him forth to battle. Let us not think that it happened by chance or in confidence, that he led out his army voluntarily against him [i.e. Constantine] when he had a horror of the very clamor of his arrival, unless a hostile god and the ripeness of his demise had compelled him when his mind was already mad with fear.¹⁶⁷

By contrast, Lactantius' actual depiction of Maxentius is relatively mild: he remained in the city to attend the celebrations of his anniversary, but decided to join the battle after a public demonstration of support for Constantine – a decision finalised only after a favourable interpretation of the Sibylline oracles. Although the image of Maxentius as a fearful coward in the two panegyrics may simply be a propagandistic construction, intended to be juxtaposed with the portrayal of Constantine as a courageous general who preferred to fight alongside his soldiers, it nevertheless reveals a cleft between the version of events being perpetuated at Trier and Rome, which may well indicate a general Western tradition (if not court-approved propaganda), and Lactantius' rendition, which can be found in no other contemporary source.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).27.5-28.1: *Recuperata igitur Italia hic primus fuit liberandae Urbis gradus et ad uictoriam facilis ascensus, quod illum semper exedendae Urbis uisceribus inhaerentem ex aduersis latebris uis diuinitatis excussit. In quo quidem tantum momenti fuit ad perficiendae rei facilitatem, ut non tam gloriandum sit uirtuti tuae, praestantissime imperator, quod eum uiceris quam gratulandum felicitati quod ad pugnam potueris euocare. Non emin casu, non fiducia factum putemus ut ultro etiam exercitum educeret aduersum eum cuius aduentus stridorem ipsum perhorresceret, nisi animum iam metu deuium infestior deus et pereundi maturitas perpulisset.* (Constantine is referred to in the third-person here because he was not present for the panegyric.) The accounts of the panegyrists are possibly reflected in the dedication on the Arch of Constantine, which N. Lenski, 'Evoking the Pagan Past: *Instinctu diuinitatis* and Constantine's Capture of Rome', *JLA* 1 (2008) 204-57, has convincingly demonstrated correlates with known *evocatio* formularies; that is, the tradition following the battle may likely have been that Constantine had successfully convinced the protective deity of the city to abandon Maxentius and instead work in his interest.

¹⁶⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).9-10, mentions that Constantine personally participated in the battle against Ruricius Pompeianus outside Verona, for which he chastises him. Constantine's participation in the battle is discussed by Nazarius [at *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).26.1-5] as well, but as an occasion for praise rather than reproach. The story about the Sibylline books is mentioned also by Zosimus (*HN* 2.16.1), writing in the fifth century, though no

Eusebius puts forward in *Historia ecclesiastica* a claim similar to the Western sources, namely, that Maxentius refused to leave the city,¹⁶⁹ but that “God himself dragged the tyrant far away from the gates”.¹⁷⁰ However, in addition to Maxentius’ many crimes as a tyrant, Eusebius emphasises his reliance on ‘witchcraft’, citing the dissection of pregnant women and newborns to inspect their entrails, amongst other abhorrent practices intended to avert war and procure victory.¹⁷¹ While Eusebius makes no mention of the Sibylline books or oracular utterances in either this text or *Vita*, he nonetheless portrays Maxentius as being obsessed with various forms of divination, drenched in the polemical descriptors often found in Christian references to cultic practices (real or imagined). Even so, it would seem that Lactantius was as far removed from the exaggerated context of Eusebius as he was from the propagandistic Western portrayal of the panegyrists.

Quite notable, however, is that neither panegyric indicates that the Milvian Bridge was destroyed. The panegyric of 313 even refers to the bridge as if it were still intact at the end of the battle.

Then at the first sight of your majesty and at the first attack of your army so often victorious, the enemy was terrified, routed, hindered by the narrowness of the Milvian Bridge, and with the exception of the first instigators of that usurpation who in despair of pardon covered with their bodies the place which they had chosen for combat, all the rest went headlong into the

fourth-century sources mention it – most significantly Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and the *Historia Augustae*, suggesting that it was not included in the (now fragmented) histories of Eunapius and Olympiodorus, nor in the postulated *Kaisergeschichte*.

¹⁶⁹ Eus. *HE* 9.8.3.

¹⁷⁰ Eus. *HE* 9.9.4: θεὸς αὐτὸς δεσμοῖς τισιν ὥσπερ τὸν τύραννον πορρωτάτῳ πυλῶν ἐξέλκει.

¹⁷¹ Eus. *HE* 8.14.5; cf. *VC* 1.36.1. Despite expectations, these practices do not define Maxentius as a ‘pagan’, so much as a deranged individual; such magical practices would have been abhorred by ‘pagans’ as well. Cf. *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).4.4.

river ... After the Tiber had swallowed the impious, the same Tiber also snatched up their leader himself in its whirlpool and devoured him.¹⁷²

The panegyrist seems to suggest that the bridge remained, but nonetheless incorporates the drowning of Maxentius and his troops, which he attributes to the ‘narrowness’ of the bridge. This reconstruction, however, comes off as being a little absurd; it posits that, with the exception of the Praetorians who stood their ground and died on the spot, nobody made it over the bridge – it is unlikely that he means to say the bridge was so very narrow that everybody toppled over the sides. Rather, the translation of *angustiae* as ‘narrowness’ here should probably not be taken to mean that the bridge was lacking in width, but in length – that is, Maxentius’ troops got to the point where the bridge had been demolished and, finding themselves ‘cut off’ (*exclusi*), were either pressed or jumped into the river. This version of events is perhaps supported by the Arch of Constantine. The relief of the battle on the Arch is somewhat difficult to decipher, but judging from the rise of the bridge on the left side of the relief and the cavalry riding it over fifty percent of the way across, we can assume that it was only partially demolished, perhaps at one of the central spans with the break then extending to the far bank.¹⁷³ This would make the most sense since, although the ancient bridge no longer survives, it was likely to have been approximately 400 feet long.

¹⁷² 12(9).17.1-2: *Ad primum igitur adspectum maiestatis tuae primumque impetum toties tui uictoris exercitus hostes territi fugatique et angustiis Muluii pontis exclusi, exceptis latrocinii illius primis auctoribus qui desperate uenia locum quem pugnae sumpserant texere corporibus, ceteri omnes in fluuim abiere praecipites... Cum impios Tiberis hausisset ... idem Tiberis correptum gurgite deuorauit.*

¹⁷³ H.P. L’Orange and A. von Gerkan, *Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstaninsbogen* (Berlin, 1939) 65, note that the river can be seen flowing under a support arch on the left side and that the left side of the bridge has a defined curve showing the rise from the bank, but that it is unclear at what point the bridge ends. On the far right, they observe, immediately before the opposite bank, there can be seen the prow of a ship; though the dimensions of the ship are indefinable, it clearly stands in the path of the bridge. Although L’Orange and von Gerkan indicate that the bridge is only partially demolished, many scholars – when considering the testimonies of the panegyrist and Lactantius with Eusebius’ later description – have concluded that the bridge was completely demolished. For instance, Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 42, not only accepts that the Milvian Bridge was “cut”, but suggests that all bridges leading over the Tiber were as well (cf. Barnes, *Constantine*,

Regardless, for the purpose of determining the transmission of the story of the battle, the state of the bridge is a particularly telling feature. Eusebius, who includes the story in *Historia ecclesiastica*, describes a pontoon bridge that gave way as Maxentius and his army were retreating, and years later in *Vita* he elaborates that it was rigged to collapse underneath Constantine, but backfired against Maxentius.¹⁷⁴ According to the ninth-century patriarch Photius, Praxagoras, who was writing in Athens in the 320s, referred to a trench that Maxentius had ordered dug as part of a trap for Constantine, which he fell into instead.¹⁷⁵ It would appear then that the story of Maxentius' death being specifically the result of some failed machination originated in the East.¹⁷⁶ As such, Lactantius' account can be located within a tradition that developed not only over time, but between West and East: his version agrees with the Western sources that Maxentius' actions resulted in his own death, but contrary to at least the earlier panegyric of 313 he seems to imply that the bridge was completely destroyed. With regard to the later Eastern sources, Lactantius accords with Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica* that the bridge was destroyed, but disagrees, firstly, with that account in that it was done during the battle and nothing replaced it, and secondly with both Praxagoras and Eusebius' *Vita* that it was part of any trap.

As is clear, Lactantius' account of the civil war diverges from the earlier (and more authoritative) panegyric of 313, much of which is substantiated by the panegyric of 321.

82); Kuhoff, 'Ein Mythos', 154-62. The prevalent belief that the Milvian Bridge was completely destroyed and replaced with a temporary pontoon bridge derives from the testimony of Eusebius, who should be considered unreliable on this detail (see below).

¹⁷⁴ Eus. *HE* 9.9.5-7; *VC* 1.38.2-3.

¹⁷⁵ *FGrHist* 2B.219.4. This 'trench' (διῶρυξ) is not overly farfetched, since the *Chronica urbis Romae* (at 148) states that Maxentius began construction of a 'ditch' (*fossatum*), which was never completed.

¹⁷⁶ Kuhoff, 'Ein Mythos', 158-9 (n. 81), suggests that the particular story of Maxentius being caught in his own trap ought to be understood as a later addition to the story of the battle.

Over half of Lactantius' narrative is devoted to the battle, and whatever description of the campaign from Gaul to the Milvian Bridge that may be given is difficult to interpret. In comparison, Lactantius' description of Licinius' civil war against Maximin Daia is, unlike his vague rendition of Constantine's war, considerably detailed. The narrative of the war – from Maximin's invasion of Licinius' territory in early 313 to his death ca. August 313, not including the text of the so-called 'Edict of Milan' – is three times longer than that of the Italian campaign, a factor that is well reflected in the content: Lactantius provides not only a concise chronology of that civil war, but also itineraries for both Licinius and Maximin that frequently include distances.¹⁷⁷ The entirety of Lactantius' report is too lengthy to reproduce here, but a representative passage will suffice.

Maximin did not delay within his own territories; he crossed the straits at once and approached the gates of Byzantium under arms. There were garrison troops in the city, stationed there by Licinius to meet emergencies of this kind. Maximin first tried to win these over with gifts and promises, and then to intimidate them by an armed attack. But neither force nor promises had any effect. Eleven days had already been spent, during which there had been time to send messengers and letters to Licinius, when the soldiers gave themselves up, not through any lack of loyalty but through lack of confidence in their numbers. From there Maximin went on to Heraclia, where he lost several days by being held up in the same way. By now Licinius had made a hurried journey and arrived with a few troops at Adrianople, while Maximin, after receiving the surrender of Perinthus and stopping there for a time, advanced to a staging-post eighteen miles further on; he could not advance any further since Licinius was occupying the next staging-post which was the same distance from there.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ It is worth noting here that I use the term 'Edict of Milan' simply for the sake of convenience, though it is not an edict nor was it drawn up in Milan – and furthermore it was not issued by Constantine; cf. O. Seeck, 'Das sogenannte Edikt von Mailand', *ZKG* 10 (1891) 381-86; and, more recently, Barnes, *Constantine*, 93-7.

¹⁷⁸ *DMP* 45.4-6: *Nec ipse intra fines suos moratus est, sed transiecto protinus freto ad Byzantii portas accessit armatus. Erant ibi milites praesidiarii, ad huius modi casus a Licinio conlocati. Hos primum muneribus et promissis inlicere temptavit, postea vi et oppugnatione terrere, nec tamen quicquam vis aut promissa valuerunt. Iam consumpti erant dies undecim, per quos fuit spatium nuntios litterasque mittendi ad imperatorem, cum milites non fide, sed paucitate diffisi se ipsos dederunt. Hinc promovit Heracliam et illic eadem ratione detentus aliquot dierum tempus amisit. Et iam Licinius festinato itinere cum paucis Hadrianopolim venerat, cum ille accepta in deditionem. Perintho aliquantum moratus processit ad mansionem milia decem et octo; nec enim poterat ulterius, Licinio iam secundam mansionem tenente distantem milibus totidem.*

The breadth of this account and Lactantius' attentiveness to detail, as opposed to his description of Constantine's civil war, suggests that he was much better informed about the East in 313 than he was the West in 312. More to the point, however, the brevity and vagueness of his Constantinian narrative, as well as his departure from the Western contemporary sources, implies further that he possessed only a superficial understanding of the Italian campaign. The accepted date of composition (ca. 315) renders the text, as one scholar has phrased it, "extremely recent by ancient standards". This may indeed be the case, but 'extremely recent' is not synonymous with 'accurate'. When we consider, for instance, the panegyrists' proximity to the Constantinian court, monumental recollections (images and inscriptions), and local historical memory, the question then becomes, was Lactantius in a position to acquire reliable information about Constantine's war against Maxentius and, by extension, his propitious dream?

Lactantius on the Move

Scholarly consensus postulates two possible locations for the composition of *De mortibus persecutorum*, Nicomedia or Trier, but in general Lactantius' travels and residences from the start of the Great Persecution to his death ca. 325 are still matters of contention. Barnes in particular has argued in a number of publications that Lactantius departed Nicomedia ca. 305, resided in North Africa until 308/309, arrived in Gaul ca. 309/310, and finally returned to Nicomedia after the defeat of Maximin Daia in 313, where he composed the text a year or so later.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, Eberhard Heck has argued that Lactantius resided in Nicomedia during the entire persecution and did not arrive in Gaul until ca. 314, where he

¹⁷⁹ See Barnes, 'Lactantius', 39-43; id., *Constantine and Eusebius*, 13-4 and 291 (n. 96); and id., *Constantine*, 176-8.

stayed for the remainder of his life.¹⁸⁰ There are other proposals for Lactantius' travels, but they tend to adhere generally to one of these chronologies.¹⁸¹ The matter itself and the significance of our conclusions are straightforward: if Lactantius was in the West at least sometime between 312 and 315, then we must regard his narrative of events as highly accurate.

Lactantius' presence at Trier in the court of Constantine is reasonably assumed on the basis of two comments made by Jerome in the late fourth century. In his *Chronicle* entry for the promotion of Crispus, Constantine II, and Licinius II to the rank of Caesar (1 March 317), Jerome notes, "Lactantius instructed Crispus in Latin letters".¹⁸² Additionally, in his summary of Lactantius' career in the *De viris illustribus*, Jerome states, "In extreme old age he was the teacher of the Caesar Crispus, the son of Constantine, in Gaul".¹⁸³ The combination of this information has led to the prevalent *non sequitur* that Lactantius was teaching Crispus in Gaul ca. 317, when in actuality the young man was probably between seventeen and twenty-two years of age at that time, his primary instruction having been completed by 312 at the latest.¹⁸⁴ Although the chronological details are ambiguous, these

¹⁸⁰ E. Heck, *Die dualistischen Zusätze und die Kaiseranreden bei Lactantius* (Heidelberg, 1972) 144 and 158-60; and more recently, id., 'Constantin und Lactanz', 118-130.

¹⁸¹ For instance, A. Bowen and P. Garnsey, *Lactantius* (Liverpool, 2003) 3 and (n. 11), maintain Barnes' chronology, but suggest Lactantius resided in Italy between Nicomedia and Trier.

¹⁸² Jer. *Chron.* 230e: *Crispum Lactantius Latinis litteris erudiuit* (translation Barnes, *Constantine*, 177).

¹⁸³ Jer. *De vir. ill.* 80: *extrema senectute magister Caesaris Crispi filii Constantini in Gallia fuit*. Barnes, *Constantine*, 177, takes issue with Jerome's claim that Lactantius was elderly, commenting that, "his statement ... need rest on nothing more than a mere guess". Although this certainly must be the case in light of the general agreement that Lactantius died ca. 325, it should also be considered that, since Jerome is our only source for the tutoring of Crispus and residence at Trier, his mistakeness may not be limited merely to Lactantius' age.

¹⁸⁴ It is generally held that Crispus was born between 300 and 305, though Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 44, has reasonably suggested 295-300; cf. id., *Constantine*, 48. Crispus' presumed age in 317 is supported also by the fact that in the following year he was credited for a military expedition and led subsequent campaigns in 320 and 323. Cf. Barnes, *New Empire*, 83; Van Dam,

references nevertheless effectively situate Lactantius in the court of Constantine when he was still residing in the West, while we can perhaps infer that he arrived sometime before 313.

Following the start of the persecution in Nicomedia (24 February 303), until which time Lactantius presumably held the chair of Latin rhetoric there, his movements become somewhat hazy.¹⁸⁵ Determining his travels is a matter of resolving considerable indirect evidence preserved in his works, much of which is admittedly subject to interpretation, but nonetheless indicative. There are two references in book five of his *Divinae institutiones* that situate him in Nicomedia until early 305 at least: he states initially that he was teaching there when the persecution began, and in a later passage that he personally witnessed the governor rejoicing because a Christian who had stayed strong for two years finally appeared to be breaking.¹⁸⁶ Lactantius' wording in both passages suggests that he was not in Nicomedia when he composed book five and that it was written after February 305.¹⁸⁷

The text itself was probably completed no later than mid 309. On two occasions in book five Lactantius refers to the persecutors in such a way that we can assume all were still

Remembering Constantine, 111-2. It has been offered that his age can be further extrapolated from his appointment as consul for 318 (Digeser, *Christian Empire*, 135), but this unfortunately offers no real proof, considering, for instance, that his half-brother, Constantine II, was a consul for 320 even though he was only four years old!

¹⁸⁵ We are informed by Jerome (*De vir. ill.* 80) that Lactantius was appointed to that position by Diocletian, and it is often assumed that this was ca. 290. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 13, proposes that Lactantius either resigned or was removed from his position at the start of the persecution (February 303).

¹⁸⁶ Lact. *DI* 5.2.2 and 5.11.15, respectively.

¹⁸⁷ Lactantius actually indicates more generally Bithynia, rather than Nicomedia specifically – though Nicomedia is to be understood. Lact. *DI* 5.2.2: “I quote my experience in Bithynia, where I had been invited to teach rhetoric”; *ego cum in Bithynia oratorias litteras accitus docerem*. And, at 5.11.15: “I have seen a governor in Bithynia myself”; *uidi ego in Bithynia praesidem*.

alive.¹⁸⁸ Early on he refers to the cruelty of the ‘great beast’, that is, Galerius, who is raging with “ferrous teeth ... throughout the world”,¹⁸⁹ and the entirety of the concluding chapter is dedicated to explaining why God is refraining from punishing “the wicked and godless”, and allowing the righteous to suffer.¹⁹⁰ The clearest indicator appears in this closing to book five, where Lactantius assures his readers that God will one day exact vengeance against the persecuting emperors:

All the contrivances against us of evil princes, therefore, take place with God’s permission. Even so, those wicked persecutors who rail at God’s name and mock it are not to think that they will get away with having been the instruments of his wrath against us. God will judge and punish those who took his power and abused it without human limit, insulting even God in their arrogance, and subjecting his eternal name to the wicked and godless trampling of their own footsteps. Besides, *his promise is to be avenged* upon them swiftly and to ‘drive out evil beasts from the land’. Despite his custom of avenging the torments of his people, however, even here in this world, nevertheless he bids us await with endurance the day of divine judgement when he himself will reward or punish each man according to his deserts.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ This is of course assuming that my re-dating of Panegyric 6 is acceptable. For 308/309, with Maximian’s death still in 310, see S. Prete, ‘Der geschichtliche Hintergrund zu den Werken des Laktanz’, *Gymnasium* 63 (1956) 365-82 and 486-509, at 498-9; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 291 (n. 96); id., *Constantine*, 178. Heck, *Die dualistischen Zusätze*, 143-50, proposes conservatively that the entire ‘first edition’ of *Divinae institutiones* was circulated before 311. For an alternate view, see Bardill, *Constantine*, 140.

¹⁸⁹ Lact. *DI* 5.11.6: *per totum orbem ferreis dentibus*.

¹⁹⁰ Lactantius refers to Galerius and other persecutors as ‘beasts’ as well in *De mortibus persecutorum*; cf., for example, *DMP* 2.1 (Nero), 16.1 (Diocletian, Maximian, and Galerius), and 25.1 and 32.4 (Galerius). Galerius must be the one intended at *DI* 5.11.6, since the reference to ‘the world’ brings to mind his unfavourable policies of taxation and harsh penalties applied throughout the empire, including Italy, which was one of the reasons that Maxentius was so strongly backed at Rome; cf. *DMP* 31.

¹⁹¹ Lact. *DI* 5.23.1-3: *Quidquid ergo aduersus nos mali principes moliuntur, fieri ipse permittit. et tamen iniustissimi persecutores, quibus dei nomen contumeliae ac ludibrio fuit, non se putent impune laturos, quia indignationis aduersus nos eius quasi ministri fuerunt. punientur enim iudicio dei qui accepta potestate supra humanum modum fuerint abusi et insultauerint etiam deo superbius eiusque nomen aeternum uestigiis suis subiecerint impie nefarieque calcandum. propterea ‘uindicaturum se in eos celeriter’ pollicetur et ‘exterminaturum bestias malas de terra’. sed idem quamuis populi sui uexationes et hic in praesenti soleat uindicare, tamen iubet nos expectare patienter illum caelestis iudicii diem, quo ipse pro suis quemque meritis aut honoret aut puniat.* Emphasis indicates my correction of a typographical error in Bowen and Garnsey’s translation, “it is his promise is to be avenged” for *uindicaturum se ... pollicetur*.

This passage neatly places the composition of book five at a time when it could only be wondered at what point the Christian god would decide to intervene on behalf of the persecuted. The plausible conclusion is that *Divinae institutiones* not only pre-dates the death of Galerius (May 311), but also that of Maximian Herculus (mid 309), the first of the persecutors to die. Furthermore, the description of Galerius as raging ‘throughout the world’ allows us to posit his promotion to senior Augustus (1 May 305) as the earliest date for the commencement of book five. From the evidence of this book alone we can draw two firm conclusions: firstly, books five, six, and seven of *Divinae institutiones* were composed between 1 May 305 and July 309; and, secondly, Lactantius did not write them in Nicomedia.¹⁹²

From Nicomedia ca. 305 Lactantius presumably travelled to the West. Three destinations have generally been considered plausible: North Africa, Gaul, and Italy. The last, at the very least, can be summarily eliminated on the basis of *De mortibus persecutorum*: as discussed above, in his description of the Battle of Milvian Bridge Lactantius notes incorrectly that the final conflict took place on 27 October and that Maxentius’ *quinquennalia* was coming to an end. Although the grand ceremonies for Maxentius’ anniversary would have been limited to Rome, symbolic gestures honoring his *dies imperii* would have been offered throughout his territories. One error in hindsight is possible, but it is unlikely that Lactantius would be doubly mistaken had he resided in Maxentius’ territory between 28 October 306 and 312.

¹⁹² This may very well be the case for the entire text. However, I prefer to conclude on the side of caution. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 291 (n. 96), has suggested that other passages in the earlier books (Lact. *DI* 2.12.15, 3.3.14, 3.14.10, 4.9.1, and 4.27) imply Western composition. They are, unfortunately, inconclusive.

It is possible, as Barnes has suggested, that Lactantius returned for a short time to his home province of Africa Proconsularis, presumably to Carthage where he had taught prior to his appointment at Nicomedia. The same reason for discounting Italy, however, could be applied to Proconsularis, unless Lactantius resided there during the usurpation of L. Domitius Alexander, the timeframe for which is unsecure. The situation is discussed by only two sources, neither being contemporary. Aurelius Victor gives a very concise, but ambiguous, chronology, stating that Alexander usurped power at a critical time when Constantine, having learned of the failed campaigns of Severus and Galerius, consolidated his power in Gaul and invaded Italy.¹⁹³ While this might suggest the usurpation occurred in late 311 or early 312, the reference to attacks on Rome by Severus and Galerius requires a more conservative range, that is, sometime after late 307. Victor actively refrains from giving a fuller account of what he deems to be a minor historical episode, preferring instead to proceed directly to Alexander's downfall: the praetorian prefect of Africa, Rufius Volusianus, was dispatched with a small military force and Alexander was defeated with little effort.¹⁹⁴

The much later, and oftentimes highly inaccurate, Zosimus provides additional details of the usurpation.¹⁹⁵ He states that, upon coming to power in Rome, Maxentius pressed his interests in Africa, but that the soldiers at Carthage, under the command of Alexander,

¹⁹³ Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.16-17.

¹⁹⁴ The entire account of Aurelius Victor is confined to *Caes.* 40.17-19; although he does state later (at 40.28) that Cirta in Numidia was destroyed when Alexander was besieged there, he does not situate this within the chronology of the usurpation.

¹⁹⁵ Chief among his inaccuracies is his tendency to confuse the emperors Maximian, Galerius (whose name was also Maximian), and Maximin. For instance, at Zos. *HN* 2.11, he clearly confuses the three similarly-named emperors, stating that Maximian – following his failed revolt against Constantine – became ill and died at Tarsus, which was the fate of Maximin.

professed their allegiance to Galerius. Sometime later, after an embassy requesting Alexander's son as a hostage in order to ensure his loyalty was rejected and an initial attempt to reclaim Africa failed, the soldiers proclaimed Alexander emperor.¹⁹⁶ Eventually, while Maxentius was preparing for war with Constantine, that is, after the death of Maximian, Rufius Volusianus was enlisted to finally deal with the situation: Alexander's troops offered hardly any resistance and the usurpation was ended in a single assault.¹⁹⁷

In addition to the descriptions by Victor and Zosimus, epigraphic evidence suggests that the refusal to recognise Maxentius and the usurpation of Alexander were locally restricted. An inscription from the neighbouring province of Numidia demonstrates allegiance to Maxentius as early as May 308, and, as Barnes cautiously notes, there is no "explicit evidence that Alexander controlled the Mauritania as well as Tripolitania, Africa proper, and Numidia".¹⁹⁸ A milestone of unknown date from Africa Proconsularis shows Alexander styling himself Augustus alongside Constantine;¹⁹⁹ though it is certainly possible

¹⁹⁶ Zos. *HN* 2.12, states that after the soldiers initially refused Maxentius they travelled to Alexandria. However, they encountered a strong military presence there and returned to Carthage. At that point, Maxentius was planning to travel to Africa to personally deal with the situation, but the auspices were against it, so instead he requested Alexander's son as collateral.

¹⁹⁷ Zos. *HN* 2.14.

¹⁹⁸ Barnes, *New Empire*, 14-5. Cf. P. Salama, 'À propos de l'usurpateur africain L. Domitius Alexander', *BVAB* 29 (1954) 67-74, at 69, however, that an inscription in which Maxentius' is represented as being the 'liberator' of Mauritania Tripolitana (*AE* 1946.149) suggests that Alexander had at some point taken control of that province.

¹⁹⁹ *CIL* 8.22183: *impp / d d n n / l domi/tio alexa/ndro et / fl const/antino / augg*. On the possibility, or likelihood rather, of an alliance between Constantine and Alexander, see Bruun, 'The Battle of the Milvian Bridge', 367; Bruun, *Constantinian Chronology*, 4-5; T. Kotula, 'En marge de l'usurpation africaine de L. Domitius Alexander', *Klio* 40 (1962) 159-77, at 159; H.G. Pflaum, 'L'alliance entre Constantin et Lucius Domitius Alexander', *Bulletin d'archéologie Algérienne* 1 (1962-1965) 159-61; C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage* 6 (London, 1967) 18; Potter, *Constantine*, 123. Unfortunately such an arrangement cannot be substantiated, despite the African milestone. Cf. R. Andreotti, 'Problemi di epigrafia Costantiniana I: La presunta alleanza con l'usurpatore Lucio Domizio Alessandro', *Epigraphica* 31 (1969) 144-80, at 163; Barnes, *New Empire*, 14. Nevertheless, it is significant that Constantine is named at all on the milestone, while the other

that he was following Constantine's self-representation in giving him the title Augustus, there are two complications in establishing an accurate dating. First, Constantine did not begin advertising himself as Augustus until late 307, as can be gleaned primarily from the coinage coming from the mint at Trier; how soon Alexander would have gained this knowledge is uncertain.²⁰⁰ Second, Galerius only openly recognised Constantine as Augustus after mid 310, which admittedly is only relevant if we follow Zosimus that Alexander's troops resisted Maxentius out of loyalty to Galerius. On this matter Zosimus should be taken lightly, since he seems to suggest that Maxentius was only recognised at Carthage after Alexander's downfall, which is simply not supported by harder evidence: numerous coins

Augusti remain unnamed – particularly if the revolt took place prior to mid 310, when Constantine was finally formally recognised as an Augustus outside of Gaul. Cf. Salama, 'À propos', 70, who concedes that – though it cannot be confirmed – it is not unlikely that direct communication existed between Gaul and Africa; and Andreotti, 'Problemi', 165, who proposes that Alexander's occupation of Sardinia would have allowed him to intercept communications from Southern Gaul. On the other hand, see Y. Le Bohec, '“L'usurpation” au IV^e siècle: le risque de l'exclusion', in C. Wolff (ed.), *Les exclus dans l'antiquité* (Lyon, 2007) 95-105, at 97-8, who contends that Alexander's Cirta inscription (*CIL* 8.7004) implies that he did not regard Constantine as a legitimate emperor, since he styles himself *Restitutor publicae libertatis ac Propagator totius generis humani nominisque Romani*. Le Bohec, however, does not reconcile *CIL* 8.22183, which recognises Constantine as Augustus.

²⁰⁰ The same as well with the mints under Maxentius' control: Constantine's title shifts from Caesar to Augustus following the marriage to Fausta in 307, but then he disappears from the coinage altogether in spring 308, following Maxentius' break with Maximian. Based on Lactantius' claim that Constantine rescinded the persecution in Britain, Gaul, and Spain upon his accession, Barnes has argued that he was styling himself Augustus since July 306, since only senior Augusti were permitted to issue legislation. Unfortunately, this title is not reflected in the coinage. Rather, it is only after his marriage to Fausta, which constituted his alliance with Maximian, that Constantine adopted that title. It may then be the case that from July 306 to autumn 307 Constantine merely refused to enforce the persecution, but that was after his 'official' proclamation via marriage between July and September 307 that he formally nullified it. This, however, supposes that at some point after the marriage Constantine and his court claimed an earlier date for the legislation, which would certainly not be surprising in view of his later tendency to represent himself as being younger than he was when the persecution began, in order to avoid uncomfortable accusations of impotence; cf. Eus. *VC* 2.51.1.

were struck at the Carthage mint between November 306 and mid to late 307 styling Maxentius as Caesar, Princeps Invictus, and Augustus.²⁰¹

The role of Rufius Volusianus is also particularly telling. We know that he was appointed to a one year term from 28 October 310 to 311 as *Praefectus urbi* by Maxentius, which offers us two possible date ranges for his post as praetorian prefect of Africa: on the one hand, a potential *terminus ante quem* of 28 October 310; and, on the other hand, a *terminus post quem* of 28 October 311. Volusianus had previously served as governor (305/306) of Africa and Barnes has suggested that his promotion to Prefect of Rome was a reward for ending Alexander's usurpation in 309 or early 310.²⁰² However, there is also evidence that, after his proclamation, Alexander took control of Sardinia for a short time.²⁰³ Since that province, in addition to Africa, was a major supplier of grain to Rome, this may have resulted in the 'famine' described by the contemporary sources – in preparation for a lengthy siege, Maxentius is said to have been stockpiling supplies, taken specifically from "Africa ... and all the islands", and providing limited rations to the people of Rome.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ *RIC* 6 Carthage.47, 48a, and 51a (Caesar); 53 (*Princeps Invictus*); 54, 57, and 60 (Augustus) These were minted alongside coins naming Maximian Augustus, and Constantine and Maximin Caesars.

²⁰² T.D. Barnes, 'Two Senators under Constantine', *JRS* 64 (1975) 40-49, at 46.

²⁰³ See, G. Sotgiu, *Iscrizioni latine della Sardegna* (Padova, 1961) 241-2 (no. 372); and, for further discussion, G. Sotgiu, 'Un miliario sardo di L. Domitius Alexander e l'ampiezza della sua rivolta', *ASSard* 29 (1964) 149-58. The mention of the otherwise unknown Papius Pacatianus as governor of Sardinia in the inscription situates Alexander's occupation of the province sometime after spring 308 at the earliest. Cf. Sotgiu, *Iscrizioni*, 242; Sotgiu, 'Un miliario sardo', 157-8.

²⁰⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).16.1: "There was still this one fear, that in absolute terror, gravely smitten by your power and backed into a corner, he might consult his best interests and put off by enduring a siege the penalty owed the republic, since after all of Africa, which he had decided to destroy, had been exhausted, and all the islands had been emptied, he had amassed provisions for an unlimited length of time"; *Itaque unum iam illud timebatur, ne ille conterritus, his uiribus grauius adflictus et in artum redactus, boni consulere et debitas rei publicae poenas obsidione differret. Quippe omni Africa quam delere statuerat exhausta, omnibus insulis exinanitis, infiniti temporis annonam congesserat.* The panegyrist includes also (at 4.4) "the Roman plebs destroyed by famine" (*plebis Romanae fame necatae*) in a list of Maxentius' many crimes as tyrant; cf. Eus. *HE*

Although after the Battle of Milvian Bridge this grain ration was propagandistically labelled as yet another aspect of Maxentius' tyrannical behaviour, in reality it would appear that it was the result of Alexander frustrating his siege preparations. Although we do not have an accurate chronology for these preparations, at least in this respect Zosimus' narrative may be helpful, since he states that Volusianus was sent to deal with Alexander when Maxentius was already planning to send troops north to take control of Raetia, Dalmatia, and Illyricum. If these were the troops that Constantine found stationed throughout Northern Italy in early to mid 312, it is possible that Alexander was only defeated in late 311.²⁰⁵

Nevertheless, the prevailing opinion is that Alexander came to power in late 307 or shortly afterward and that his usurpation ended at least as early as late 309. We can perhaps safely conclude that, had Lactantius indeed travelled to Carthage after leaving Nicomedia, it was after Alexander's proclamation, which roughly agrees with the *terminus post quem* offered by book five of the *Divinae institutiones*.²⁰⁶ Additionally, Lactantius' relatively neutral treatment of Maxentius in the *De mortibus persecutorum* suggests that he was not

8.14.6. See Salama, 'À propos', 71-2, for the economics of the African grain supply as the primary motivation for Alexander's revolt; cf. Andreotti, 'Problemi', 165-6.

²⁰⁵ Against this supposition, see L. Laffranchi, 'L'usurpazione di Domizio Alessandro nei documenti numismatici di Aquileia e delle altre zecche massenziane', *Numismatica* 13 (1947) 17-20 [= *Aquileia Nostra* 9 (1938) 123-5, but with the addition of two new coin types], that the rareness of the Alexander issues suggests a reign of only a few months, and that the style of the coins bear strong similarities to Maxentius issues for the second half of 309. However, see Sutherland, *RIC* 6, 419, that "the revolt may have been preceded by a period of gathering discontent, in which Maxentius thought it wise to close the mint and remove all bullion" as a possible reason for the rarity of Alexander's coinage. Something of the sort is likely to have occurred: the last issues to come from the Carthage mint prior to the revolt of Alexander grant Constantine the title of Caesar, whereas the other mints under Maxentius' control switched to recognise him as Augustus beginning in autumn 307.

²⁰⁶ That is, the two year period he mentions in regard to the Christian being interrogated offers only a date of mid 305 for his departure from Nicomedia if, firstly, the Christian being interrogated was apprehended immediately in February 303 and, secondly, Lactantius left immediately following what he witnessed.

there to witness the aftermath of Alexander's defeat, which both the contemporary and later sources describe as being particularly brutal.²⁰⁷

Lactantius may have travelled directly from Nicomedia to Gaul, but we can only reasonably locate him as a subject of Constantine between late 309 and late 312. Firstly, certain MSS of the *Divinae institutiones* contain dedications to Constantine in the introduction and conclusion to the text, which Heck has convincingly argued belong to a second edition.²⁰⁸ In both passages, Lactantius praises Constantine's religious policy, particularly his repeal of the persecution, and his acknowledgment of the *deus summus*, who elevated him to be a guardian on earth.²⁰⁹ In addition to these dedications, several separate invocations can be found in all or some of the 'second edition' MSS, consisting simply of a vocative address (*Constantine imperator*) in the openings of books two through six, which are not found in any of the undedicated MSS.²¹⁰ As Barnes has noted, it is significant that the main dedications were not included in the 'first edition'; we must suppose that the absence of even the smallest of token dedications to Constantine means that Lactantius did not compose

²⁰⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).32.6, states that Maxentius' head was sent to Africa to reassure the populace there that he was indeed dead. Cf. *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 40.19, who states that, after the defeat of Alexander, Maxentius pillaged and destroyed Carthage and a number of other prominent African cities, and (at 40.28) that the town of Cirta was destroyed when Alexander was besieged there. *Zos. HN* 2.14, on the other hand, claims that 'informers' used the opportunity to accuse wealthy land-owners of being supporters of Alexander, some of whom were put to death. See now J.G. Cook, 'Maxentius's Crosses: CIL VIII, 18261', *VC* 68 (2014) 192-205, who has demonstrated that, following the downfall of Alexander, Maxentius had been dispensing general sentences of crucifixion – a punishment traditionally reserved for the lowest orders of Roman society.

²⁰⁸ Heck, *Die dualistischen Zusätze*; in support of a dedicated second edition, see, M. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford, 1978) 2; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 291 (n. 96); E.D. Digeser, 'Casinensis 595, Parisinus Lat. 1664, Palatino-Vaticanus 161 and the "Divine Institutes" Second Edition', *Hermes* 127 (1999) 75-98. Somewhat less convincing, however, is Heck's argument (134-70) that the 'second edition' must date to ca. 324, though his estimation that the 'first edition' was completed before 311 is likely to be correct based on the context.

²⁰⁹ *Lact. DI* 1.1.13-16 and 7.26-11-17; see Appendix B.

²¹⁰ *Lact. DI* 2.1.2, 3.1.1, 4.1.1, 5.1.1, and 6.3.1.

or complete the text in Gaul.²¹¹ Secondly, in *De mortibus persecutorum*, Lactantius records two pre-312 stories about Constantine – the ‘escape’ and Maximian’s revolt – which most likely constituted part of the emperor’s propaganda program ca. 311.²¹²

Constantine’s ‘escape’ from the court of Galerius is a well-known and highly-dramatised account of a pre-Milvian Bridge event, albeit not exclusively Western in its context, for which Lactantius is our first contemporary source.²¹³ He reports that shortly after Constantius was promoted to senior Augustus (1 May 305), he sent a request to Galerius for the return of his son. In order to avoid a civil war and because Constantine was popular with the army, Galerius abstained from outright refusal and simply ignored the request. In the meantime, he submitted Constantine to various perils, “exposing him under the pretence of exercise and sport to wild beasts – but with no success”.²¹⁴ After several more requests had been received, avoidance was clearly no longer an option; he reluctantly granted Constantine’s leave, but intended to either hinder his departure or instruct Severus to

²¹¹ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 291 (n. 96), *contra* V. Loi, ‘Il libro quarto delle *Divinae Institutiones* fu da Lattanzio composto in Gallia?’, in *Mélanges Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht, 1973) 61-79, at 70-9, and Ogilvie, *Library*, 2.

²¹² Barnes, ‘Lactantius’, 41-3, convincingly argues that Lactantius was not simply regurgitating propaganda or playing the role of a court propagandist. In the discussion that follows here, I hope that this conclusion is strengthened.

²¹³ Lact. *DMP* 24.1-8.

²¹⁴ Lact. *DMP* 24.4: *sub obtentu exercitii ac lusis feris illum obiecerat, sed frustra*. Whether this aspect of the story was intended literally or as metaphorical hyperbole is uncertain. Praxagoras, for instance, claimed (according to Photius: *FGrHist* 2B.219) that Galerius pitted the young Constantine against a ferocious lion, which is mentioned also by Zonaras (*Epit. hist.* 12.33). Eusebius mentions the ‘escape’ only in *Vita* (at *VC* 1.20.1-2), but does not elaborate on the nature of Galerius’ plotting. On the other hand, the *Origo Constantini* (at Anon. Val. *Origo* 2-3) states that Galerius compromised Constantine’s safety during a campaign against the Sarmatians, on one occasion even ordering him to clear a path for the army through a swamp. It is possible that, had Lactantius heard this tale in a declamatory context, he took ‘wild beasts’ literally, rather than as a defamatory reference to ‘barbarians’. Nevertheless, the undertone of this element of Lactantius’ version is tacit: Constantine is subjected to ‘wild beasts’ by one of the persecuting emperors, much the same as many Christians had been during past and present persecutions.

intercept him. Anticipating this, Constantine left secretly during the night and either killed or maimed all of the post-horses on his journey. When Galerius discovered the next day that Constantine had already departed, he attempted to have him recalled, but to no avail. “Meanwhile Constantine, traveling at amazing speed, reached his already dying father, who commended him to the troops and transmitted the imperial authority to him with his own hands”.²¹⁵ The notification of Constantine’s appointment was received by Galerius a short time after and, in response, he conceded the title of Caesar.²¹⁶

This episode is generally regarded as the product of Constantinian propaganda, though it would not have appeared very early in his reign. The only other roughly contemporaneous source to describe a similar sequence of events is Panegyric 6, albeit in a considerably less detailed and embellished fashion.

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, and your sudden arrival illuminated the fleet which was already making sail, so that you seemed not to have been conveyed by the public post, but to have flown in some divine chariot.²¹⁷

This earlier version supports at least three of the later contentions made by Lactantius: Constantine’s arrival was expected, that is, his presence was either requested or offered; he used the public post; and the journey was extremely swift. There is, however, no mention of plots against his safety. The panegyrist then states that Constantine met his father “as he was about to depart this earth”, which may be taken to mean that he arrived at Constantius’ death-bed, but appears to be a deliberate distortion to emphasise the divine providence of his timely

²¹⁵ Lact. *DMP* 24.8: *At ille incredibili celeritate usus pervenit ad patrem iam deficientem, qui ei militibus commendato imperium per manus tradidit.*

²¹⁶ Lact. *DMP* 24.9.

²¹⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).7.5: *Iam tunc enim caelestibus suffragiis ad salutem rei publicae uocabaris, cum ad tempus ipsum quo pater in Britanniam transfretabat classi iam uela facienti repentinus tuus aduentus inluxit, ut non aduectus cursu publico sed diuino quodam aduolasse curriculo uidereris.*

arrival.²¹⁸ It only insinuates that there was not a great length of time between Constantine's arrival and his father's death, and may even confirm that Constantius' health was indeed declining.²¹⁹

Constantine was presumably joining his father's campaign against the Picts:²²⁰ the panegyrist situates his arrival before the fleet sailed from Gaul, which the *Origo Constantini* notes as departing from Bononia (Boulogne);²²¹ Galerius and Constantius jointly declared themselves BRITANNICVS MAXIMVS II in January 306, which suggests a campaign in 305;²²² and later chronographic material and sources place Constantine's succession at Eboracum (York) on 25 July 306.²²³ Lactantius' version, if it indeed reflects Constantinian

²¹⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).8.1: "For no Persian or Cydonian weapons ever hit their targets with such sure blows as you, when you reached your father's side as he was about to depart this earth, a most timely companion, and assuaged by the security of your presence all those cares which preoccupied his silent, foreboding mind; *Non enim ulla Persarum Cydonumue tela tam certis iactibus destinata fixerunt quam tempestiuus patri tuo terras relicturo comes adfuisti omnesque illius curas quas praesaga et tacita mente uoluebat praesentiae tuae securitate laxasti.*

²¹⁹ This is the idea expressed by the panegyrist prior to his description of Constantine's arrival; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).7.1-2. Lact. *DMP* 20.1-2, however, states that the poor state of Constantius' health was well known to Galerius, who was eagerly awaiting his death. This is likely not the case, but nonetheless necessary for Lactantius to demonstrate the breadth Galerius' ambitions; cf. C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994) 229 (n. 32).

²²⁰ Anon. Val. *Origo* 4, states that Constantine met Constantius at Bononia (see note below) and, after their victory over the Picts, died at York, and that the soldiers named Constantine 'Caesar'. Present knowledge of the events of the years 305 and 306 would suggest that this is probably a more accurate sequence of events, though Constantine's army probably proclaimed him Augustus, while 'Caesar' is the official title that he was granted by Galerius.

²²¹ Anon. Val. *Origo* 4. Previously called Gesoriacum by the Gauls, that is, Bononia in Northern Gallia; the location is in general agreement.

²²² *AE* 1961.240. Cf. T.D. Barnes, 'Imperial Campaigns, A.D. 285-311', *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 174-93, at 191 and Table 3; Barnes, *New Empire*, 61.

²²³ The *Fasti Philocali* [*CIL* 1².21 (page 268)] indicates 25 July 306 for Constantine's accession; the *Descriptio consulum* (*Desc. cons.* 235.306) and the Church historian Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* 1.2.1) do so as well, but also identify it specifically as the date of Constantius' death. The location, Eboracum, is supplied by Anon. Val. *Origo* 4 (Constantius' death and Constantine's accession), *Eutr. Brev.* 10.1.3 (Constantius' death) and 10.2 (Constantine's accession), and *Jer. Chron.* 228g (Constantius' death and Constantine's accession).

propaganda, makes clear and obvious adjustments to both the earlier panegyric account and the historical realities of the situation: it completely demonises Galerius, compresses the events of mid 305 to July 306 into one small episode in mid 306, and obscures the locations of both Constantine's destination and Constantius' death (Bononia or Eboracum).

The story has all the hallmarks of propaganda, though Lactantius is the only contemporary source who reports it. Constantine's 'escape' goes unmentioned by the panegyrists of 307, 311, 313, and 321, and Eusebius does not mention it in any of the three editions of his *Historia ecclesiastica*. Praxagoras apparently noted that Galerius' intentions toward Constantine were hostile, but seems to have suggested that the young man fled the Eastern court of his own accord once he sensed that his life was in danger.²²⁴ Eusebius does offer a similar account in *Vita*, stating that Constantine fled the Eastern court once he recognised the constant plots against his life.²²⁵ As such, Lactantius is the only contemporary source that explicitly reports Constantius' request, and Galerius' plotting and delaying as the reasons for the 'escape', as well as the killing/maiming of the post-horses.²²⁶

The second propagandistic retelling of a pre-Milvian Bridge event, the revolt of Maximian, also makes significant departures from the account described by the panegyrist. According to Lactantius, once Maximian had returned from the Conference at Carnuntum

²²⁴ *FGrHist* 2B.219.2.

²²⁵ Eus. *VC* 20.2. Eusebius' entire account of the 'escape' (20.1-21.1), though at variance with the earlier accounts, does concur, firstly, with Lactantius that covert attempts were made on Constantine's life, and secondly, with both Lactantius and Panegyric 6 that the journey was propitiously swift.

²²⁶ Anon. Val. *Origo* 2-4, seems to support many points of Lactantius' narrative. The anonymous author states that: Constantius requested the return of his son; Constantine was exposed to dangers; Galerius permitted him to leave; and that Constantine not only travelled over the Alps to avoid Severus, but also killed the post-horses along his route. However, I have not included the *Origo Constantini* here as a contemporary text: it may have been originally composed by a 'pagan' historian ca. 337, but its present form shows that it was augmented by a Christian editor sometime after 417. See, I. König, *Origo Constantini* (Trier, 1987) 23-6; cf. T.D. Barnes, 'The Lost Kaisergeschichte and the Latin Historical Tradition', *BHAC* 1968/1969 (Bonn, 1970) 13-43, at 24-7.

(11 November 308), he abdicated for the second time. This, however, was simply a ruse to put Constantine at ease: Maximian intended to orchestrate his son-in-law's death and assume control of his provinces. The Franks were rebelling on the Rhine frontier and Maximian persuaded Constantine to take a meagre force against them, hoping that he would be overpowered and killed. Once it could be safely assumed that Constantine was in enemy territory, Maximian declared himself emperor, invaded a treasury (presumably at Arelate) and dispensed large donatives to the soldiers for their complicity. When Constantine heard what had happened, he rushed south to Arelate, catching Maximian unprepared. The soldiers there returned to Constantine's command and Maximian fled to Massalia. Attempts to talk him down proved fruitless, but then suddenly the gates were opened from the inside. Maximian was apprehended, but subsequently pardoned.

As briefly shown in the previous chapter, Panegyric 6 describes the revolt at some length, which agrees for the most part with Lactantius' narrative. Constantine proceeded from the frontier region to the Saône/Rhône, disembarked at Arelate, and continued to Massalia, which he besieged until the terms of Maximian's surrender were negotiated. It is in the events immediately following, however, that the two contemporary sources disagree. The panegyrist states that Maximian deemed himself unworthy to live and took his own life; this outcome, he makes the point of emphasising, was divinely proscribed and unavoidable. Lactantius, on the other hand, describes a far different situation. Humiliated by the failed revolt, Maximian devised a new plot to assassinate Constantine as he slept. He summoned his daughter Fausta and attempted to secure her assistance, but she promptly revealed the plan to her husband. A eunuch was placed in Constantine's stead and Maximian, caught in the act of murdering the body-double, was compelled to hang himself.

Both versions of the failed revolt were likely confined to Gaul. At the very least, however, the panegyrist's account appears to have been carefully constructed to give Constantine an 'out': any references to Maximian are more-or-less respectful, and the revolt is explained away as a combination of fate and senility. Regardless, we can suppose that neither story would have circulated well in the regions under Maxentius' control, though the details were probably not well known in the East either. Eusebius, writing a year or so after the Battle of Milvian Bridge, says only that, "[a]t this time he who had resumed office again after his abdication, as we have shown, was discovered devising a plot to secure the death of Constantine, and died a most shameful death".²²⁷ This 'plot' (μηχανή) is not necessarily referring to Maximian's attempt to kill Constantine in his sleep; Lactantius frames the revolt as a plot as well, stating that Maximian returned to Gaul "full of evil and criminal plans" (*plenus malae cogitationis ac sceleris*) and hoping to trap Constantine "in a malicious plot" (*dolo malo*), that is, by convincing him to take insufficient troops to the frontier.²²⁸ Nevertheless, there is no description of a revolt or an assassination attempt specifically, and Eusebius is also ambiguous as to the circumstances of Maximian's death.

That the two versions would figure little in the East is not terribly surprising: in the West they enjoyed a very short life-span. After the capture of Rome in October 312, the image of Maximian was steadily rehabilitated in order for Constantine to adopt him as a deified imperial ancestor. This effort was perhaps achieved straightaway through the claim that Maxentius was not the biological son of Maximian, but the illegitimate product of his mother's affair with a Syrian, the first instance of which appears in the panegyric of 313 as a

²²⁷ Eus. *HE* 8.13.15: ἐν τούτῳ δὲ Κωνσταντίνῳ μηχανὴν θανάτου συρράπτων ἀλοῦς ὁ μετὰ τὴν ἀπόθεσιν ἐπανηρῆσθαι δεδηλωμένος αἰσχίστῳ καταστρέφει θανάτῳ.

²²⁸ Lact. *DMP* 29.3.

mere matter of fact, suggesting an already established tradition in Gaul.²²⁹ The appearance of Maximian on the Arch of Constantine, erected in 315, and Constantine's DIVVS MAXIMIANVS coinage, beginning ca. 317, would have been intended to reinforce this propaganda.

The additional story of the assassination attempt would have been featured within an even briefer window; it likely appeared as an element of Constantinian propaganda ca. 311, when hostilities with Maxentius were intensifying and Constantine apparently issued a *damnatio memoriae* of Maximian. The timeframe is convincing: the need for a *damnatio* would have resulted from Maxentius' commemoration of his father as DIVVS on his coinage, which may have begun to appear in 310.²³⁰ In his narrative Lactantius situates the *damnatio* after the death of Galerius and it was probably preceded by the propagandised 'double-plot' version in order to manufacture justification. While Lactantius' version of the revolt suits well the political climate of Gaul from early 311 onward, both the story he produces and his general vilification of Maximian are not in accord with Constantine's post-war propaganda in the West.

Similar circumstances can be applied to the elaborate tale of Constantine's 'escape': the more congenial version in Panegyric 6 gives us a plausible *terminus post quem* for the story, but the fiendish portrayal of Galerius – a recognised and legitimate member of the Tetrarchy – by Constantine or his court could not have emerged prior to Western knowledge

²²⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).3.4 and 4.4. The panegyrist's comments on Maxentius' illegitimate parentage are not only confidently stated and sweeping, but occur before he even begins to describe the civil war, which suggests that this was not new information for the audience at Trier. Cf. Anon. Val. *Origo* 12, who states that, after the battle Maxentius' mother was interrogated and confessed to the affair; and also *Epit. de Caes.* 40.13. Barnes, 'Lactantius', 43, suggests that this propaganda emerged to disassociate Constantine's wife, Fausta, from her biological brother, Maxentius.

²³⁰ *RIC* 6 Roma.Group IV (v).

of his terminal illness or death, or possibly even the *damnatio* of Maximian. As such, it is apt to have appeared in 311 as well, when Galerius was either dead or certain to die and the story of Maximian's assassination attempt was already in circulation. Since even the bare elements of this story as well are late to appear in the East, the tale was likely confined to Gaul and all but completely abandoned after the civil war of 312: Lactantius probably heard both stories in early to mid 311 and retained them even after they were discarded in late 312.

Aside from the rehabilitation of Maximian, Lactantius also neglects other elements of Constantinian propaganda that were introduced in the West immediately following the Battle of Milvian Bridge. For instance, he does not include the assertion that Maximian was not the father of Maxentius, even though it was likely to have been circulated at Rome as early as November 312 and soon thereafter at Trier.²³¹ Rather than simply being unaware of this development, it is possible that Lactantius intentionally omitted it because it was tangential to the theme of the text and/or he knew it to be a falsehood. This, however, does not satisfactorily explain why the imagery of Maxentius as a tyrant is distinctly lacking from his narrative. The panegyrist of 313 gives a very strong idea of precisely how Constantine and his court represented Maxentius after the war, namely, as a cruel and cowardly tyrant, who

²³¹ Barnes, *New Empire*, 34, accepts November 312 for the date for the story at Rome, based on the relative chronology given by the *Origo Constantini*. With respect to Trier, it stands to reason that communications would have been sent back to Constantine's principal residence, including propaganda, beginning in November 312, but most certainly after his return in spring 313. We have to consider also the possibility that, following the battle, a public panegyric may have been delivered for Constantine *in absentia*, by instruction of the court, though very likely there was one during his stay at Trier ca. June 313, before he began his next campaign (cf. Barnes, *New Empire*, 71, that Constantine was at Trier from May 28 to June 16), which has not survived. At the very least, however, based on what would seem to be the panegyrist's expectation of the audience's foreknowledge, the report was known in Trier by the time Panegyric 12(9) was delivered, ca. August 313. The month and year should be considered accurate: August would have been the first occasion to celebrate Constantine's victory on the lower Rhine and the panegyrist makes remarks [at *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).24.1] on, for example, the ease of defeating Easterners, who "if they ever get into danger forget freedom and beg to be slaves" (*si quando in periculum uenerint, libertatis immemores, ut seruire liceat orantes*), which is likely to be a reference to the aftermath of the Battle of Campus Egenus (30 April 313), where Maximian is said to have dressed as a slave to make his escape; cf. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 289-90.

relied on magic and terrorised the people of Rome. In such a light, Constantine is portrayed not just as the defeater of a usurper, but the liberator of the city.²³² This is the same sort of imagery that we find on the Arch of Constantine,²³³ as well as in the narratives of the panegyric of 321,²³⁴ Praxagoras (via Photius),²³⁵ and Eusebius,²³⁶ that is, every subsequent contemporary source that addresses Constantine's conflict with Maxentius.

Lactantius, on the other hand, describes a different motivation; he states that Maxentius "had already declared war on Constantine, claiming that he was going to avenge his father's murder", a detail which is dismissed in later works, if mentioned at all.²³⁷ Lactantius' scenario is certainly plausible when we consider how Maxentius, despite the

²³² See *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.3, 4.4, 14.2-3, and 15.1.

²³³ The main inscription describes Constantine as '[avenging] the State against the tyrant', and the reused Trajanic friezes on the inside of the Arch describe Constantine as the 'Liberator of the City' and 'Founder of Peace'.

²³⁴ This is a consistent theme in *Pan. Lat.* 4(10), but particularly in the following passages: 3.3, 6.2, 6.4-5, 8.3, 9.1, 11.1, 13.1-2, 19.3, 30.1, 31.1-3, 32.6-8, 33.2, and 33.6.

²³⁵ *FGrHist* 2B.219.4.

²³⁶ Eus. *HE* 8.14.1: Maxentius feigned piety by ending the persecution; 14.2: indulged in any abhorrent behaviour, including adultery and rape of women forcibly taken from their husbands (both plebeians and aristocrats); 14.3: had his praetorian guards kill innocent civilians; 14.4: had senators executed under false charges in order to appropriate their wealth; 14.5: relied on witchcraft and magic, practicing rituals which required the butchering of pregnant women and babies, and summoning demons. Also, at 14.16-17, Eusebius relates the story of an aristocratic Christian woman who committed suicide – with a dagger to the chest, à la Lucretia in the early sixth century BCE – after her husband fearfully gave Maxentius' henchmen permission to take away his wife; cf. 14.15-16, where Eusebius gives a similar story about Maximin. Ruf. *HE* 8.14.16, gives Eusebius' unnamed Roman wife the name Sophronia, which may simply have been a detail later applied in light of her actions, that is, from σὼφρων, 'chaste'. Cf. Eus. *VC* 1.33-6, for these same accusations, taken almost completely verbatim from *HE*. Regarding Constantine's motivations, Eus. *HE* 9.9.2, states that Constantine was the first to take pity on the citizens of Rome and sought to obtain their liberty; cf. Eus. *VC* 1.26, where this portrayal is developed more fully to include Constantine's private thoughts.

²³⁷ Lact. *DMP* 43.4: *bellum Constantino indixeras quasi necem patris sui vindicaturus*. No other contemporary source gives this reasoning. Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.20, states that Maxentius was indifferent about his father's death. Zos. *HN* 2.14.1, however, does say that Maxentius claimed this reason for his declaration of war, but that it was only a pretense.

falling out with his father, sought to deify and re-establish in the public eye a filial relationship through his DIVVS MAXIMIANVS coinage. However, this particular reason for the looming civil war was probably only the official position, if that is indeed what it was, in Gaul until 311 to characterise Maxentius as a viable aggressor: in order to justify his attack on Italy and Rome it would have been preferable for Constantine to portray himself as serving the interests of the State. As such, the condemnation of Maxentius as a tyrant may have preceded Constantine's invasion of Italy, rather than followed the Battle of Milvian Bridge – even if the precise details of his 'crimes' were augmented later.

Although tyrannical imagery was largely par for the course when deposing Roman rulers, legitimate or not, and thus might not have been accepted wholesale by astute individuals like Lactantius, Constantine's propaganda, such as we find in the panegyric of 313, was cleverly rendered plausible by the inclusion of two aspects firmly rooted in reality, namely, the strict rationing of food supplies at Rome prior to the Italian campaign and the devastation of Africa following the overthrow of Alexander.²³⁸ It may then be significant then that there is a complete absence in *De mortibus persecutorum* of both tyrant and liberator imagery, particularly the latter, since it would have appreciably reinforced the character of Constantine that Lactantius was trying to establish – and by extension the theme of the work.²³⁹

²³⁸ None of the contemporary sources mention anything about Maxentius persecuting Christians. Eusebius does include one story about the Christian wife of a *Praefectus urbi* who committed suicide when Maxentius' 'procurers' came to take her, but it appears to mimic a story that Eusebius relates in the same chapter regarding similar practices by Maximin (see above). Cf. T. Christensen, *Rufinus of Aquileia and the Historia Ecclesiastica, Lib. VIII-IX, of Eusebius* (Copenhagen, 1989) 168-9, that the story originated at Rome and was developed independently of the one about Maximin; see also *ibid.*, 170-2, regarding Rufinus' difficulty in relating certain details of this story in his translation of Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*.

²³⁹ At best, Lact. *DMP* 44.7, mentions only that while the battle was being waged outside the city walls, the citizens rioted inside the city, claiming that Maxentius was endangering the safety of the State and voicing support for Constantine.

Even so, the lack of those propagandistic elements found in the panegyric delivered at Trier ca. August 313 does not definitively remove Lactantius from a Western context at that time. On the other hand, had he arrived in Gaul anytime after mid 313 – *pace* Heck – his narrative would contain a considerably different sequence of the events leading up to the capture of Rome, and especially the revolt of Maximian. In this respect, the chronology offered by Barnes seems preferable, namely, that Lactantius was reporting propaganda he had heard first-hand in Gaul sometime in 311, which he retained even after it was abandoned beginning in November 312. Whether he in fact retained it or was simply unaware of the shift, however, needs to be explored; Barnes’ suggestion that Lactantius did not depart Gaul until after the ‘Edict of Milan’ was published in Nicomedia (13 June 313) is problematic.²⁴⁰ There is enough reason to conclude that, if he was indeed in Gaul, he may very well have left for Nicomedia in mid to late 311.

Firstly, Lactantius’ erroneous statements that Maxentius’ *dies imperii* (and therefore the date of the battle) was 27 October and that his *quinquennalia* was ending are cause for suspicion. Why Lactantius is mistaken on both counts is unclear, but it would seem to suggest that he was not in the West in late 312. If we postulate a panegyric in Constantine’s honour during his stay at Trier ca. June 313 – which to my mind is not unreasonable – this would push the *terminus ante quem* for Lactantius’ residence there to late spring 313.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ According to Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 13, this would have been because the ‘Edict’ prescribed “the full restoration of rights and property of Christians” in the East, entitling Lactantius “to resume the chair which he had forfeited ten years earlier”. Although here Barnes leaves room for possibility, stating that Lactantius was “probably entitled” under the edict, in his recent publication this has become pure fact; cf. id. *Constantine*, 178.

²⁴¹ It does not follow that the first public speech discussing Constantine’s acquisition of the entire West would only be presented almost a whole year after the fact, especially when there is evidence that he had visited his principal residence before then. Certain elements of Constantinian propaganda contained in the panegyric of 313 are discussed almost in passing, such as Maxentius’ paternity, as though they had been mentioned before or were common knowledge. Although not a smoking-gun, the panegyrist at Trier in August 313 [*Pan. Lat.*

Lacking that, as we are, we must nevertheless assume that the residents of Trier were not completely in the dark about Constantine's victory at Rome until the panegyric delivered ca. August 313; the date 28 October was probably being celebrated at Trier as early as November 312 and, if the panegyrics of 313 and 321 (the latter delivered eight and a half years after the battle!) are any indication, Maxentius' six year term as 'tyrant' was a consistent point of emphasis in Western accounts of the civil war. This information, however, was probably paid the briefest of lip-service in the East under Maximin and even Licinius, if he was indeed perturbed, to put it mildly, about Constantine's interference in Italy.²⁴² This would sufficiently explain as well the sparseness and ambiguity of Lactantius' description of the Italian campaign, particularly in comparison with the meticulous accounts of Constantine's 'escape' and the revolt of Maximian: Lactantius was not in the West in late 312 or early 313 to hear first-hand about the civil war, nor was he in a position to receive detailed or reliable information about the Western events of 312 at the time that he was writing *De mortibus persecutorum*.

Secondly, a date of mid 313 assumes that Lactantius was motivated to return to Nicomedia because, "[w]hen the persecution of the Christians ended in 313, he probably

12(9).2.1] begins by saying: "And first I shall take up a topic which I believe no one up to now has ventured upon, to speak of your resolution in making the expedition before I praise the victory"; *Ac primum illud adripiam quod credo adhuc neminem ausum fuisse, ut ante de constantia expeditionis tuae dicam quam de laude uictoriae*. To me this suggests that other orators have spoken on the topic at Trier since November 312, perhaps even one or two for the emperor *in absentia*, much like Nazarius' panegyric at Rome in 321. More explicitly, however, the same panegyrist opens his speech with the statement (at 1.1) that Constantine has heard numerous orators speak about the liberation of Rome and the restoration of the republic both in Rome and upon his return to Gaul, adding also (at 1.3) that he is but one of many to offer an account on the topic.

²⁴² Although acknowledgements of other emperors were customary in public presentations, as is evident in the introduction of Panegyric 6, it was not required that much be said about them. Quite telling is that, even though Constantine and Licinius were on good terms when the panegyric of 313 was delivered, not only are the details of the civil war against Maximin unmentioned, but the victory at Campus Egerius is derided to such an extent that, in the words of Nixon and Rodgers [*In Praise*, 330 (n. 148)], it "counted, therefore, for nothing".

became entitled to resume the chair which he had forfeited ten years earlier”, since the ‘Edict of Milan’ extended “to the Roman Empire east of Italy the full restoration of the rights and property of Christians of which they had been deprived in 303... Since Lactantius was a poor man ... he surely availed himself of the opportunity to recover a secure income”.²⁴³ However, for Lactantius residing in Gaul ca. 311, the end of the persecution would have come with Galerius’ ‘Edict of Toleration’ (30 April 311), and he states as much after he records the imperial letter: “Then the prisons were opened, and you, most dear Donatus, along with all the other confessors, were freed from imprisonment after the gaol had been your home for six years”.²⁴⁴ In truth, Galerius’ ‘Edict’ only offered a respite from persecution, but this is from the perspective of hindsight. The spirit of the letter matches closely the ideas expressed later in the first part of the ‘Edict of Milan’, namely, that being a Christian is no longer a punishable crime and that Christians are to be allowed to openly practice their religion.²⁴⁵ In the letter Galerius states that another notice will be sent ‘to officials/magistrates’ (*iudicibus*; τοῖς δικασταῖς) with specific instructions for observing the ‘Edict’, but presumably he died before this could be enacted – this was subsequently taken up by Maximin, albeit with fewer

²⁴³ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 13, and id., *Constantine*, 178, respectively. Despite the persecution, we cannot confirm that Lactantius was either forced to or willingly quit his position in 303. Rather, there is at least one piece of evidence that suggests that he may still have been a member of the court ca. 305: in the *Divinae institutiones* (at Lact. *DI* 5.11.15), he relates seeing the governor of Bithynia at the time (spring 305 at the earliest) rejoicing because a stout Christian showed signs of breaking. Lactantius does not say in what context he witnessed this, but his wording suggests that it was not openly in public, but a semi-private setting where the governor could let his guard down.

²⁴⁴ Lact. *DMP* 35.2: *Tunc apertis carceribus, Donate carissime, cum ceteris confessoribus e custodia liberatus es, cum tibi carcer sex annis pro domicilio fuerit.* Lactantius did not have to be in the East personally in order to report either the ‘Edict’ or Donatus’ release. See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 291 (n. 96); Creed, *Lactantius*, xxvii; Digeser, *Christian Empire*, 171. Cf. Lawlor, *Eusebiana*, 238-9; J. Stevenson, ‘The Life and Literary Activity of Lactantius’, *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957) 661-77, at 664-5; Heck, *Die dualistischen Zusätze*, 144 (n. 31), who contend that Lactantius was an eye-witness.

²⁴⁵ The second part of the letter addresses an issue lacking in Galerius’ ‘Edict’, namely, the return of property (land, funds, et cetera) confiscated during the persecution.

explicit references to Christians or Christianity.²⁴⁶ Even so, as Eusebius reports, provincial and municipal officials understood this to mean that Christianity and its public practice were legal,²⁴⁷ with the following result:

And when these things had thus been carried into effect, as though some light shined forth all at once out of a gloomy night, one might see churches thronged in every city, and crowded assemblies, and the rites performed thereat in the customary manner... Of our own people, those who had faithfully and bravely contended throughout the conflict of persecutions once more resumed their confident bearing in the sight of all; ... And then also the noble champions of godliness, freed from their evil plight in the mines, returned to their own homes. Proudly and joyously they went through every city, full of unspeakable mirth and a boldness that cannot even be expressed in words. Yea, thronging crowds of men went on their journey, praising God in the midst of thoroughfares and market-places with songs and psalms; and you might see those who shortly before had been prisoners undergoing the harshest punishment and driven from their native lands, now regaining with gay and joyful countenances their own hearths so that even those who formerly were thirsting for our blood, seeing the wondrous thing contrary to all expectation, rejoiced with us at what had happened.²⁴⁸

Had Lactantius known that the persecution would resume before the year was out, he most surely would have waited until after the defeat of Maximin before returning to East. However, through communication with Donatus, or perhaps another associate, not only would he have learned of the captives' release, but perhaps also received a report similar to

²⁴⁶ Lact. *DMP* 34; Eus. *HE* 8.17.3-11, provides the Greek version. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 159, deems Maximin's edict "less straightforward" and considers its purpose limited to the requirement for Christians to sacrifice, while "not explicitly" permitting public worship. The testimony of Eusebius (see below), however, suggests that Christians and magistrates regarded the edict differently.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Eus. *HE* 9.1.7, who notes that the freeing of Christians from jail and the mines (in reality, a drawn-out death sentence) was a misunderstanding of Maximin's intent on the part of the magistrates.

²⁴⁸ Eus. *HE* 9.1.8-11: καὶ δὴ τούτων οὕτως ἐπιτελεσθέντων, ἀθρόως οἷόν τι φῶς ἐκ ζοφερᾶς νυκτὸς ἐκλάμψαν, κατὰ πᾶσαν πόλιν συγκροτουμένας παρῆν ὄραν ἐκκλησίας συνόδους τε παμπληθεῖς καὶ τὰς ἐπὶ τούτων ἐξ ἔθους ἐπιτελουμένας ἀγωγὰς... τῶν δ' ἡμετέρων οἱ μὲν τὸν τῶν διωγμῶν ἀγῶνα πιστῶς καὶ ἀνδρικῶς διηθληκότες τὴν πρὸς ἅπαντας αὐθις ἀπελάμβανον παρρησίαν... 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 εὐφροσύνης τε ἀλέκτου καὶ ἦν οὐδὲ λόγῳ δυνατὸν ἐρμηνεῦσαι παρρησίας ἔμπλοιοι. στίφη δ' οὖν πολυάνθρωπα κατὰ μέσας λεωφόρους καὶ ἀγορὰς ῥῥαῖς καὶ ψαλμοῖς τὸν θεὸν ἀνυμνοῦντα τὰ τῆς πορείας ἤνουν, καὶ τοὺς μετὰ τιμωρίας ἀπνηεστάτης 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.

Eusebius' description – though, we can imagine, not as flamboyant. Because Eusebius had been residing in the East during the persecution, he was able to provide a fuller account of the events that gradually and systematically led to the resumption of the persecution in late-November. Lactantius, on the other hand, proceeds directly from Galerius' 'Edict' to renewed measures against Christians, which is how the situation may have seemed to him if he arrived in Nicomedia ca. autumn 311.²⁴⁹

Additionally, although Lactantius may have been entitled to reclaim his position as chair following the 'Edict of Milan', or possibly even the 'Edict of Toleration', his reasons for returning to the East must have been something other than merely concerns over personal finances. If he was indeed as hard-pressed for money as Jerome asserts, we have to wonder why he did not pursue opportunities in the West.²⁵⁰ His prior teaching experience – especially as the tutor to the son of an emperor, a position which he attained for no slight reason – would have significantly contributed to his chances of employment at one of the many schools of rhetoric in Gaul and Italy, if not a standing court appointment, any of which would have allowed him to remain within the dominion of the emperor that had shown consistent and continual sympathy for Christianity ever since his accession. Whatever Lactantius' motivation was for quitting Gaul for Nicomedia, which must be the case since he

²⁴⁹ I cannot agree with Lawlor, Stevenson, and Heck, among others, that Lactantius demonstrates extensive knowledge of the persecution under Maximin; as stated, he proceeds quite directly from Donatus' freedom to the resumption of persecution noting only anti-Christian petitions from cities, whereas Eusebius is able to recount very specific gradations of intolerance in the six or seven months following Galerius' 'Edict'. Creed, *Lactantius*, xxxv, on the other hand, argues that the theme of the work is less concerned with the persecution than with the persecutors themselves.

²⁵⁰ Jer. *Chron.* 230e: "Lactantius was so much a pauper in this life, that for the most part he was in need of even the [basic] necessities"; *adeo in hac vita pauper, ut plerumque etiam necessariis indiguerit*. This statement is taken quite at face value, for example, by Barnes, *Constantine*, 178. Additionally, if Lactantius had abandoned his position, would he have been entitled to reclaim it and, if so, even at the expense of the presiding chair at that time?

certainly did not take up residence elsewhere in the West, it would have been the same in mid 313 as it was in mid 311.

At the very least, however, Lactantius was in the East after 313, which is evident from the relatively high detail of his narrative of Licinius' civil war against Maximin, as pointed out in the previous section and emphasised by Heck, as well as his consistent use of *hic* ('here') when describing Diocletian's building projects in Nicomedia.²⁵¹ Furthermore, the contexts of his post-315 works, *De ira Dei* (*On the Anger of God*) and *Epitome divinarum institutionum* (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes*), suggest that he spent the remainder of his writing career in Nicomedia.²⁵² It would seem then that *De mortibus persecutorum* was composed in the East and that Lactantius did not reside in the West prior to his death ca. 324.

Preliminary Conclusions

The matter seems fairly clear. From the evidence presented in this section it is more reasonable to assume that Lactantius arrived in Gaul sometime after the death of Maximian, perhaps as early as autumn 309, and departed for the East before the persecution was renewed in late-November 311, than to assume that he resided in Nicomedia for the entirety of the persecution and afterward lived out the rest of his days in Gaul. This would provide a

²⁵¹ Lact. *DMP* 7.9: "Here he built basilicas, there a circus, a mint, an arms-factory, here he built a house for his wife, there one for his daughter"; *Hic basilicae, hic circus, hic moneta, hic armorum fabrica, hic uxori domus, hic filiae.*

²⁵² This level of detail cannot be juxtaposed with the description of Galerius' illness and death to show that Lactantius was in Nicomedia from ca. March 310 to ca. May 311. Since both Lactantius and Eusebius give an eerily similar, and clearly exaggerated, account of Galerius' illness and death, they seem to have received their information from a common source, probably in the form of Licinian propaganda. Regarding *De ira Dei* and *Epitome*, I follow here the observations and conclusions of Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* 292 (n. 99), that, firstly, *De ira Dei* was written in response to the unfavourable reception by Donatus' associates of the concept of divine anger in *De mortibus persecutorum* and, secondly, that Lactantius assumes in the *Epitome*, though not the *Divinae institutiones*, that crucifixion is still a viable punishment for *humiliores* in the West.

natural explanation for the apparent inconsistencies in *De mortibus persecutorum* and the transition in the text from the very detailed reproduction of Constantine's ca. 311 Gallic-centric propaganda to the meagre account of the Italian campaign, followed by a return to a detailed narrative of Licinius' civil war.²⁵³

It is quite unreasonable, however, to suppose such a brief period of residence, particularly if Lactantius was providing Crispus' primary education. The difficulty in reconstructing this element of what is already a complex itinerary lies squarely with Jerome's assertion not that Lactantius was Crispus' tutor, but that this tutelage took place in Gaul. To be sure, we have no direct or indirect evidence for Crispus' location between 305 and 317. Presumably he was in Gaul when Constantine named him Caesar in March 317 and thereafter took up residence at Trier, but his presence goes unmentioned in earlier sources and the later sources (where mentions do survive, a consequence of the *damnatio memoriae* following Crispus' execution in 326) are equally unhelpful. A likely scenario is that Crispus remained in the court of Galerius when Constantine hastily departed for Gaul in 305 and remained in the East as an imperial ward (or hostage), much the same as Constantine himself was until 305, after Galerius approved Constantine's entry into the imperial college in 306.²⁵⁴

If Crispus was born as early as 295, as Barnes has suggested, his primary education could

²⁵³ Alternatively, Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, 115-6, comments that Lactantius seems to be much more familiar with the activities of Maxentius leading up to the war than he is with Constantine's campaigns in Gaul. Though this would certainly seem to be the case, this opinion does not take into account the theme of the work (that is, divine retribution against the persecutors) as the reason that Constantine's Gallic campaigns go unmentioned.

²⁵⁴ Odahl, *Constantine*, 123-4 and 326-7 (n. 6), proposes that both Crispus and Helena, Constantine's mother, remained in the East as imperial hostages and were only reunited with Constantine after Licinius took control of Nicomedia from Maximin in 313. Cf. T.D. Barnes, 'Constantine after Seventeen Hundred Years: The Cambridge Companion, the York Exhibition and a Recent Biography', *IJCT* 14 (2007) 185-220, at 218-9, who argues (*contra* Odahl) that, if this was indeed the case, Galerius presumably would have removed them from Nicomedia to one of his principal residences, either Serdica or Thessalonica, though he notes that we simply do not have any evidence, direct or indirect, for the location of Crispus and Helena during these years.

have been concluded before Lactantius departed Nicomedia in 305.²⁵⁵ Jerome, drawing from some unknown source, could thus be correct that Lactantius tutored Crispus, but wrong that this took place in Gaul. In such a scenario the nature of Lactantius' Constantinian narrative makes more sense – he was not reporting on matters he had heard or witnessed personally, but relating descriptions that he had obtained from Gallic sources ca. 311, most likely copies of panegyrics. As to his specific travels between 305 and 313, this remains something of a mystery, though perhaps there is much more to be read into his neutral – favourable, even – treatment of Maxentius, since he not only omits all 'tyrant' imagery, which is found in every other contemporary source, but refrains also from declaring Maxentius a persecutor.²⁵⁶

This also helps to explain why Lactantius is the only source to place a dream on the night before the Battle of Milvian Bridge: he was familiar only with the loose details of the Italian campaign, and used a combination of Eastern rumour and his own judgement to fill the gaps in his knowledge. He had heard that Constantine claimed divine inspiration and assistance against Maxentius, such as is related by the panegyrists of 313 and 321, as well as Eusebius ca. 313, but did not realise that the event to which these other sources refer – and of which he had only heard inaccurate or partial accounts at the time he was writing – was supposed to have preceded the Italian campaign. Therefore, he situated the divine encounter in a way that made the most sense to him: at a critical moment, that is, immediately before the battle.

²⁵⁵ See, more recently, Barnes, *Constantine*, 48.

²⁵⁶ Lact. *DMP* 43. Just prior to his description of the civil war of 312, Lactantius states that he will recount the fall and demise of the last persecuting emperor, by which he means Maximin. The war between Constantine and Maxentius, Lactantius claims, was on account of the death of Maximian, and so Maxentius' only connection to the persecution is an alliance made with the persecuting emperor Maximin as a response to the alliance between Constantine and Licinius.

What's in a Dream?

It is not insignificant that Lactantius gives a very similar context for Licinius' divine experience during his civil war against Maximin. He states that a few nights (or perhaps the very night) before the Battle of Campus Erganus Licinius saw in a dream an angel, who provided him a prayer for the army to invoke the aid of God on the battlefield.

The next night, when Licinius was asleep, 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. He dreamt that after these words he got up and that the same angel who was giving the advice stood over him instructing him how and with what words the prayer was to be made. Licinius then shook off his sleep, ordered a secretary to be summoned, and dictated the following words just as he had heard them: 'Supreme God, we beseech Thee; holy God, we beseech Thee. We commend all justice to Thee, we commend our safety to Thee, we commend our empire to thee. Through Thee we live, through Thee we emerge victorious and fortunate. Supreme, holy God, hear our prayers; we stretch our arms to Thee; hearken, holy, supreme God'.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Lact. *DMP* 46.3-6: *Tunc proxima nocte Licinio quiescenti adsistit angelus dei monens, ut ocius surgeret atque oraret deum summum cum omni exercitu suo; illius fore victoriam, si fecisset. Post has voces cum surgere sibi visus esset et cum ipse qui monebat adstaret, tunc docebat eum quomodo et quibus verbis esset orandum. Discusso deinde somno notarium iussit acciri et sicut audierat, haec verba dictavit: 'Summe deus, te rogamus; sancte deus, te rogamus. Omnem iustitiam tibi commendamus, salutem nostram tibi commendamus, imperium nostrum tibi commendamus. Per te vivimus, per te victores et felices existimus. Summe, sancte deus, preces nostras exaudi; brachia nostra ad te tendimus; exaudi sancte, summe deus'. The dream, Lactantius claims (at 46.2), was in response to Maximin vowing to Jupiter, "that if he won the victory, he would obliterate and utterly destroy the Christian name" (*ut si victoriam cepisset, Christianorum nomen extingueret funditusque deleteret*). Thus, unlike the circumstances of Constantine's dream, Licinius' dream is a response to a direct threat against Christianity, which puts it firmly in the context of a religious conflict. The format of Lactantius' description concurs largely with the schema of the 'ancient dream-vision report', as outlined in J.S. Hanson, 'Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman and Early Christianity', *ANRW* 2.23.2 (Berlin, 1980) 1395-1427, at 1409-13; cf. Bovon, 'These Christians Who Dream: The Authority of Dreams in the First Centuries of Christianity', (trans. L. Nasrallah), in id., *Studies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 2003) 144-62, at 148-9, in support of Hanson's observations. A similar schema is offered by E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951) 104-6. Amat, *Songes et visions*, 203-4, notes that Licinius' dream and prayer have strong overtones of solar cultic practice, but "la scène était aisément christianisable". As Creed, *Lactantius*, 121, observes, neither the dream nor the prayer are explicitly Christian or even monotheistic. Cf. B. Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, 2nd ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2003) 77-8; G. Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (Stuttgart, 2000), 295. Von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 268, questions the historicity of the scenario, noting that it is quite un-'pagan' to rely on a plain prayer, and credits this detail to Lactantius' religious background and interests, namely, that the episode exemplifies the Christian view of the active power of prayers. A similar prayer is credited to Constantine for his soldiers by Eusebius (at Eus. *VC* 4.19-20); they are not entirely alike, the most essential difference being that the soldiers are made to say that there is only one god.*

On the morning of the battle Licinius' soldiers, in full view of Maximin's forces, recited in unison the prayer they had been given and, emboldened, prepared for combat. With the assistance of God, the enemy army was massacred and Maximin fled to Nicomedia incognito. A few days later, when Licinius arrived there, "he gave thanks to God, by Whose help he had been victorious", and a month later publicly posted the 'Edict of Milan'.²⁵⁸

Despite the general sense of historiographical integrity in this work, the reason why Lactantius records very similar experiences for both emperors is difficult to reconcile. It is often assumed that, historically, Licinius was imitating Constantine by claiming to have had a divine dream before the battle, in this case emerging with a prayer rather than a symbol, but nevertheless a guarantee of victory from the Christian god. Furthermore, the prayer refers to the *summus deus*, the same sort of quasi-monotheistic reference already employed by the panegyrist of 313 to describe Constantine's protector.²⁵⁹ While it may in fact be the case that Licinius was following Constantine's lead in claiming divine assistance, perhaps to bolster troop morale or simply as post-war propaganda, we need not assume that this applies to the context of the dream as well. Lactantius' more elaborate (and probably more accurate) description of both the civil war of 313 and Licinius' dream – in comparison to his circumspect and minimal description of Constantine's campaign and dream – increases the

²⁵⁸ Lact. *DMP* 46.10-48.1 (quote at 48.1: *ingressus gratiam deo, cuius auxilio vicerat*).

²⁵⁹ A. Piganiol, *L'empereur Constantin* (Paris, 1932) 76-8, proposes that the prayer was devised by Constantine and Licinius at Milan; cf. Weber, *Kaiser*, 295-6, that an agreement on the prayer is inconclusive, but that they probably settled on the religiously ambiguous terminology of *summa divinitas*. MacMullen, *Constantine*, 95, draws a parallel between what he considers to be an ambiguously worded prayer and the wording of the 'Edict of Milan', though he contends that Lactantius did not regard either of these to be in any way ambiguous.

likelihood that it was instead the context of Licinius' experience which was applied to that of Constantine.²⁶⁰

Regarding the authority and authenticity of these dreams, Lactantius himself could not have been ignorant of the sorts of implications we tend to infer, having placed both experiences in close proximity to each other in his narrative as he does. There are, however, significant differences between the two accounts that render an apparent redundancy superficial. Aside from the most obvious dissimilarity, namely, that one nocturnal vision results in a symbol and the other a prayer, Constantine's dream would seem to be unprompted, whereas Licinius' dream emerges in the context of a religious conflict, since Lactantius reports that, during a parley on the day before the Battle of Campus Egerius, Maximin vowed to stamp out Christianity and that very night Licinius received the dream promising victory. Constantine's dream, on the other hand, is not given such an overt context; Lactantius reports that Maxentius consulted the Sibylline Oracles, but this was not only while the battle was already raging at the Milvian Bridge, but well after the dream. Regardless, at this point in time many Christian writers had been using the oracles for various apologetic proofs; Lactantius probably did not intend it as a display of Maxentius'

²⁶⁰ Weber, *Kaiser*, 294, observes that there are clear points of contact in the contexts of the two dreams, though (at 296) he ascribes to the typical 'unavoidable conclusion' in that he concludes that the dream of Licinius was influenced by Constantine's. Von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 273, however, contends that neither dream has priority – both are part of the same presentation. Cf. Hanson, 'Dreams and Visions', 1414-9, that one of the many possible elaborations of a dream report in antiquity was the "double dream-vision report", that is, paired dreams which create a "circumstance of mutuality" between the dreamers; see A. Wikenhauser, 'Doppelträume', *Biblica* 29 (1948) 100-11. The examples that Hanson provides (such as, Dionysius of Halicarnassus' report of the dreams of Aeneas and Latinus on the night before their mythological battle) show two dreamers having independent, but parallel, dreams, which contain individual, yet related, messages that are not always conveyed by the same dream figure(s). Although there is a significant chronological gap between dreams of Constantine and Licinius in Lactantius' narrative, they are not far removed contextually – a distinct parallelism exists between the two dreams in both content and context, even though they are not part of the same episode. It is understandable, then, that it would have made sense to Lactantius, when considering both dreams together, to align the chronologies of the dreams to occur before their respective battles.

‘paganism’, but rather to show that Constantine’s victory had been foretold.²⁶¹ Additionally, Maxentius was not persecuting,²⁶² while the post-war accusations that he practiced deviant forms of magic did not so much label him a ‘pagan’ as it did a severely superstitious and disturbed individual.²⁶³

Another notable dissimilarity is the identity of the dream figure in the two cases. Licinius, we are told, is visited by an angel of God, while Constantine’s dream visitor goes entirely unmentioned. We can perhaps posit that the visitor is intended to be Christ, since he is the one signified on the shields, that is, *caeleste signum dei = Christus in scutis*, and indeed there seems to be a need to supply something that is not explicitly stated.²⁶⁴ However, I believe Lactantius conveys this detail – to a presumably Christian audience – through his syntax. In the New Testament there are only a small handful of nocturnal vision descriptions, most of which appear in the *Gospel of Matthew*. Of the five explicit divine dreams in *Matthew* there are two distinct types: two (at 2:12 and 2:22) are warnings/instructions where the dream figure is not mentioned; and the other three (at 1:20, 2:13, and 2:19-20) are

²⁶¹ It should be noted that Constantine (or his speech writer) used the Sibylline Oracles extensively in his *Oration to the Saints*; cf. A. Kurfess, ‘Kaiser Konstantin und die Erythräische Sibylle’, *ZRGG* 4 (1952) 42-57, who proposes that Lactantius prompted Constantine to familiarise himself with the Oracles. Regarding the Oracles in Christian apologetics, see B. Thompson, ‘Patristic Use of Sibylline Oracles’, *RR* 16 (1952) 115-36; B.D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery* (Oxford, 2013) 508-19.

²⁶² Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 38-9, allows that Maxentius granted tolerance, though he suggests that the exiles of the bishops Marcellus, Eusebius, and Heraclius may have been perceived as persecutory. MacMullen, *Constantine*, 75, does not see the battle as a contest between Christianity and Paganism, but a test of gods.

²⁶³ See, for instance, MacMullen, *Constantine*, 75, that it is magic “that may be termed the Maxentian element. The essence of it ... was a sort of crudeness”. Von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 274-6, nevertheless places both dreams in the context of religious conflict, arguing that Maxentius’ alliance with the persecuting emperor Maximin made him complicit as an enemy of God, in addition to his use, and misuse, of the Sibylline Oracles – the result being that Maxentius becomes a foil for the Christian victor.

²⁶⁴ von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 266, observes that – in the absence of a description of the dream-figure and divine sign as they appear in the dream – it is only the detail *Christum in scutis notat* that ensures the interpretation of dream-vision and symbol as Christian.

warnings/instructions given in the dream by an angel. Additionally, each type employs a particular syntactic formula: in the first type, which seems to correspond to Constantine's experience, the nocturnal visions are introduced by a passive participle, followed by a reference to the dream state, and, at least in the case of *Mt* 2:12, an indirect command.

Although the Greek text is only marginally helpful in this regard, pre-Vulgate Itala manuscripts tend to employ a form of (*ad*)*monitus* for the passive participle, followed immediately by *in somnis*, and then, in the case of *Mt* 2:12, *ne* (standing for *ut non*) to introduce the command.²⁶⁵ As such, Codex Vercellensis (Beuron number 3), which dates to ca. 350, translates *Mt* 2:12 as, *admoniti in somnis ne redirent ad Herodem* (the Magi, “having been advised in [their] sleep/a dream not to return to Herod”), and *Mt* 2:22 as, *admonitus in somnis* (Joseph, “having been advised in [his] sleep/a dream”).²⁶⁶ Lactantius may have been using his own translation of a Greek text rather than one of the Itala, but these instances show that there was a common syntactic style in place. When Lactantius states, *Commonitus est in quiete Constantinus, ut caeleste signum dei notaret in scutis atque ita proelium committeret*, the syntactic formula is reminiscent of the first type of divine dream in *Matthew*. Lactantius' *commonitus est* is not only a passive participle that introduces the vision, but also related in meaning to *admonitus*, in the sense that both verbs mean ‘to advise’, ‘remind’, or ‘put an idea in someone's mind’;²⁶⁷ it is followed immediately by *in*

²⁶⁵ *Mt* 2:12: καὶ χρηματισθέντες κατ' ὄναρ μὴ ἀνακάμψαι πρὸς Ἡρώδη; 2:22: χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ' ὄναρ.

²⁶⁶ I allow here for the possibility that the ablative plural *somnis* may derive from either the neuter *somnium* (‘a dream’) or the masculine *somnus* (‘sleep’), which in the context of these passages are virtually interchangeable.

²⁶⁷ The only instance of which I am aware where the passive participle *commonitus* is used is Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' quotation of *Mt* 2:22 (at *HE* 1.8.16), where he states, *Commonitus autem in somnis* – a verb that he uses also in his translation of Eusebius' description of the dream at *Mt* 2:13 (at *HE* 1.8.2), stating, *Sed praevent regis insidias puer abductus in Aegyptum, parentibus de dolo regis angelo praenuntiante commonitis* (‘But the boy, being taken to Egypt, anticipated the plot of the king, [his] parents having been warned about the anger of the king by a prophesying angel’; translation mine).

quiete, which is virtually identical in meaning to *in somnis*, since it can refer to both ‘sleep’ and ‘a dream’; and the dream instruction is an indirect command introduced by *ut* and two imperfect subjunctives.

On account of the fact that these two divine dreams in *Matthew* occur before Christ’s ascension and the dream figure is not explicitly mentioned, ancient commentators, such as Jerome, were inclined to conclude, “[n]ow the response ... does not happen through an angel but through the Lord himself”.²⁶⁸ By imitating the syntactic formula of these particular nocturnal visions found in *Matthew*, we can deduce that Lactantius was not only attempting to draw a distinguishable parallel with a characteristically Christian divine dream, but also to imply that it was not simply an angel that gave the instruction, but a pre-resurrection *ipse Dominus*.²⁶⁹

Licinius, on the other hand, is visited by an ‘angel of God’, which would appear to refer to the second type of vision in *Matthew* (at 1:20, 2:13, and 2:19-20).²⁷⁰ There is some variation between the formulae of the three ‘angel’ dreams, but in general the Itala manuscripts tend to clearly state that the dream figure is an ‘angel of the Lord’ (*angelus Domini*); that the angel is physically present, usually through the verb *apparuit* (‘he appeared’); and that the episode is taking place ‘in [one’s] sleep/a dream’ (*in somnis*). Further, they introduce the dream-instruction with a participle, *dicens* (‘saying’); and, at least

²⁶⁸ Jer. *Comm. Mt.* 1.13.151: *responsum autem ... non per angelum fit sed per ipsum Dominum.*

²⁶⁹ The idea that Constantine was in contact with the *summus deus* is likely what the panegyrist of 313 is alluding to when he states [at *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.5]: “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”; *Habes profecto aliquod cum illa mente diuina, Constantine, secretum, quae delegata nostri diis minoribus cura uni se tibi dignatur ostendere.*

²⁷⁰ *Mt* 1:20: ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ’ ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων; 2:13: ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ λέγων, Ἐγερθεῖς; 2:19-20: ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγων, Ἐγερθεῖς.

in the case of *Mt* 2:13 and 2:19-20, give an initial command to ‘awake’ or ‘get up’ by means of the imperative *Surge!*. So, for instance, the Codex Vercellensis translates *Mt* 1:20 as, *Angelus Domini apparuit ei in somnis dicens* (‘an angel of the Lord appeared to him [i.e. Joseph] in [his] sleep/a dream, saying...’); 2:13 as, *angelus Domini apparuit in somnis Joseph, dicens: Surge* (‘an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in [his] sleep/a dream, saying: Arise!’); and 2:19-20 as, *Angelus Domini apparuit in somnis Joseph in Aegypto [...]**ns: Surge* (‘an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in [his] sleep/a dream in Egypt, saying: Arise!’).

Lactantius’ report of Licinius’ dream employs similar aspects as the angel dreams in *Matthew*, stating, *Licinio quiescenti adsistit angelus dei monens, ut ocius surgeret* (‘when Licinius was asleep, an angel of God stood over him, telling him to arise quickly’). It is not precisely the same formula, but the general sense is present. He uses *Dei* as opposed to *Dominus*, *adsistit* instead of *apparuit*, the participle *quiescenti* instead of the prepositional *in somnis* (or *in quiete*), and *monens* instead of *dicens*. Additionally, he places the verb before *angelus* rather than after and refrains from the imperative *Surge!* in favour of *ut ... surgeret*. On the surface these would appear to be significant discontinuities, but certain variants in Latin translation were warranted. So, for instance, the Latin translation of Irenaeus’ description of *Mt* 1:20 in book three of his *Adversus haereses* states, *Adsistentem ei angelum Dei et dicentem* (‘an angel of God which was standing next to him and saying’).²⁷¹

Additionally, the participle *monens* with *ut* and an imperfect subjunctive puts it in relative agreement with his description of Constantine’s experience, which it seems was influenced by the dreams in *Matthew*. Rather than an outright syntactic formula in the

²⁷¹ Ir. *AH* 3.9.2. Cf. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 104-6; Hanson, ‘Dreams and Visions’, 1410, who notes that it is quite formulaic for Greco-Roman dream reports to note the physical position of the dream figure in relation to the dreamer, whether standing over or beside.

description of Licinius' dream, it is the subtle commonalities of the elements shared with the 'angel' dreams specifically, and the divine dreams in *Matthew* generally, which make it clear that Lactantius was attempting to draw another recognisable parallel.²⁷²

Through these dreams Lactantius certainly intended to demonstrate that Constantine and Licinius are recipients of divine aid, specifically from the Christian god, whom they presumably acknowledge, since they employ respectively the symbol and prayer that they are given in their visions. With respect to Constantine this does not seem odd at all, since it is a staple of Western historical tradition that Constantine converted to Christianity in response to a dream and utilised the divine sign he received in a military context. It is, however, curious that Lactantius relates a very similar experience for Licinius, who, so far as can be told, never represented himself as a Christian, either prior to the civil war of 313 or anytime after the Battle of Campus Egerius. He was certainly sympathetic to Christianity, that much is apparent from the 'Edict of Milan', yet all of our evidence – save Lactantius here – seems to show him as firmly 'pagan'.

At a glance, Licinius' experience appears to be distinctly Christian: he is visited by an 'angel of God' (*angelus dei*); in the battle against Maximin he is aided by the *deus summus*,²⁷³ at Nicomedia he repays this god for the victory at Campus Egerius; and shortly after he posts the 'Edict of Milan'. To contrast the seemingly unambiguous Christian character of this episode, the prayer that he receives in the dream does not invoke the Christian god by name; rather, it appeals to the *summus deus* and *sanctus deus*, which are

²⁷² While I am inclined, on the basis of Lactantius' skills as a rhetorician, to conclude that these parallels were intentional in order to make an intellectual or emotional impact on his audience, it is possible also that his descriptions reflect how he was personally inclined to frame and understand them, perhaps as a terminological or hermeneutical expression of his Christian worldview.

²⁷³ Lact. *DMP* 47.1-4.

neither explicitly Christian nor necessarily monotheistic phrases.²⁷⁴ Lactantius certainly preferred this sort of terminology, since it represented a conscious recognition that there is a ‘single highest God’ – one of the requirements he outlines in his conceptualisation of conversion to Christianity as a form of philosophical enlightenment – and he employs it frequently in his writings, including the present text, stating that the angel instructed Licinius to ‘pray to the supreme God’ (*oraret deum summum*), then later that ‘the supreme God’ (*deus summus*) aided him in the battle.²⁷⁵

The terminology used in the prayer to refer to its own function, namely, *preces*, can be distinguished from Lactantius’ use of *oratio* to specifically denote Christian prayer in *De mortibus persecutorum*. He only uses the word on three occasions in the text, once to refer to the prayer that Licinius and his soldiers recite before the battle,²⁷⁶ but also in the introduction to the text in reference to the dedicatee’s prayers to the Lord,²⁷⁷ and later to describe the practices of the Christians servants of Maximian’s mother.²⁷⁸ The word *prex* occurs far more frequently in the text, though over half of those instances are used in the plural to denote appeals/pleas in the context of the persecutors; thus, for instance, Lactantius states that Maximian tried to convince Fausta to aid him in his plot “with a mixture of entreaty and

²⁷⁴ Creed, *Lactantius*, xlv (n. 168).

²⁷⁵ Lact. *DMP* 46.3 and 47.3, respectively. Regarding Lactantius’ beliefs on conversion to Christianity, see Digeser, *Christian Empire*, 78-84.

²⁷⁶ Lact. *DMP* 46.11: *oratione ter dicta* (“After reciting the prayer three times”).

²⁷⁷ Lact. *DMP* 1.1: *Audivit dominus orationes tuas, Donate carissime* (“The Lord has heard *your* prayers, most dear Donatus”; emphasis indicates my adjustment of Creed’s translation to compensate for my excision of this passage from its context).

²⁷⁸ Lact. *DMP* 11.1: *Christiani ... ieiuniis hi et orationibus insistebant* (“The Christians ... would persevere with their fasts and prayers”). It is significant that in the *Divinae institutiones*, *Epitome divinarum institutionum*, and *De ira Dei* the word *oratio* is only used to mean ‘rhetoric’ or signify something rhetorical, such as a ‘speech’ or ‘debate’, sometimes also a ‘remark’ or an ‘utterance’. Cf. Barnes, ‘Lactantius’, 41 (n. 137), that *oratio* meaning ‘prayer’, as it is found in *De mortibus persecutorum*, is avoided in Lactantius’ other works.

cajolery”,²⁷⁹ and that Maximin “treated Maximian’s prayers and instructions with contempt”.²⁸⁰ Aside from the occurrence in the dream-prayer, Lactantius uses *prex*, in the singular, to designate the prayer recited by Licinius and his army.²⁸¹

This conflation of ideas and terminologies in the description of Licinius’ experience, in addition to our limited knowledge of the emperor’s religious representation, presents an interesting puzzle. Lactantius, it would seem, may very well have attributed a Christian vision to a non-Christian individual. It should be beyond doubt, however, that Licinius or his court claimed such a dream occurred. Much like Constantine’s dream, the nature of the claim is too bold for Lactantius to have simply invented, which is further suggested by the level of

²⁷⁹ Lact. *DMP* 30.2: *nunc precibus nunc blandimentis*.

²⁸⁰ Lact. *DMP* 32.3: *preces eius et mandata contempsit*. Other instances of this sort: at *DMP* 32.4, Maximin ‘was shamelessly resisting his [Galerius’] wishes and entreaties’ (*oblitus voluntati ac precibus suis impie repugnaret*); at 41.3, referring to Diocletian’s failed efforts to obtain his daughter Valeria from Maximin (*Is quoque imperfecta legatione irritas preces renuntiat*); and at 47.2, when describing Maximin’s attempts to seduce Licinius’ soldiers (*Maximinus aciem circumire ac milites Licinianos nunc precibus sollicitare, nunc donis*).

²⁸¹ Lact. *DMP* 46.10: “... the Licinian soldiers ... followed their emperor in reciting the prayer”; *Liciniani ... post imperatorem precem dicunt*. There are two other instances of *preces* in the text, which are clearly used in a Christian context. However, I find that they are questionable. Creed prefers to insert *precibus* in a lacuna at *DMP* 1.4, following the anonymous edition Oxford 1680, to describe prayers to the Christian god, whereas it would be expected that *orationibus* is more appropriate. In the second case, the word *precibus* appears at the end of the text (at 52.4) in reference to prayers to God to celebrate His triumph over the persecutors, but the spiritedness of this passage seems removed from Lactantius’ style elsewhere in this text: “Assuredly the Lord has destroyed them and erased them from the earth. Let us then celebrate the triumph of God with exultation, let us through the victory of the Lord with praises, let us celebrate it with prayers day and night, let us celebrate it so that He may confirm for ever the peace which He has granted to His people after ten years”; *Celebremus igitur triumphum dei cum exultatione, victoriam domini cum laudibus frequentemus, diurnis nocturnisque precibus celebremus, celebremus, ut pacem post annos decem plebi suae datam confirmet in saeculum*. Although he ends his *Divinae institutiones* (at *DI* 7.27.16), for example, with a similar series of hortatory subjunctives urging worship of God, this passage is the only instance that I know of in any of Lactantius’ surviving works to ascribe ‘triumph’ (whether *triumphus* or *triumphare*) directly to God. Rather, he appears to always use it with respect to individuals or humanity in general. Cf. *DI* 1.10.8, 11.1-2, 4.26.28, 6.23.39, and 7.24.4; *DMP* 5.4, 5.6, and 16.5-7; and *Epit. DI* 7.4, 41.7, 46.8, and 61.5.

detail, that is, the quotation of the prayer.²⁸² Can we say that it is more likely that Lactantius adapted a ‘pagan’ vision to suit some purpose or other?²⁸³

A God by Any Other Name

Lactantius discusses his beliefs on dreams in only one work, *De opificio Dei* (ca. 303), which is modelled on Cicero’s *De natura deorum* and is a treatise to not only prove the existence of God, but also contextualise His influence on humankind.²⁸⁴ According to Lactantius, when God created all forms of life he engineered a ‘system of dreaming’ for the purpose of sleeping,²⁸⁵ by which the mind creates images for itself in order to distract it from controlling the body, thus allowing the physical form to rest.

But when the mind has been brought from [its] effort to observing images, then at last the entire body relaxes into sleep... For, just as the mind is distracted by true sights during the day, in order not to fall asleep, so [it is distracted] by false [sights], in order not to be woken; for, if it should see no images, it would be required that it is either awake or asleep in perpetual death.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Creed, *Lactantius*, xlv, states that the prayer “can scarcely be a complete invention”, but nevertheless says further that the source for the dream story, “whether ... Licinius or ... an optimistic Christian interpretation, ... is impossible to judge”; and later, at 120-1: “Presumably this story will have emanated at least from the entourage of Licinius; the prayer itself must have been public knowledge”. Harris, ‘Constantine’s Dream’, 492-3, considers this to be a complete invention on the part of Constantine before the battle, who knew well the manipulative power of dreams. Weber, *Kaiser*, *passim*, on the other hand, suggests that many such dream reports were exaggerations after the fact to promote the divine providence of certain events. Cf. von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 272, in support of Weber over Harris. On the cultural trope of pre-battle visions, see Harris, ‘Constantine’s Dream’, 491-3; von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 270-3.

²⁸³ Weber, *Kaiser*, 295-6, for instance, suggests that Lactantius intended to represent Licinius as a ‘second Christian emperor’.

²⁸⁴ On the overall structure and import of the text, see M. Perrin, *Lactance* (Paris, 1974); and P.A. Roots, ‘The *De Opificio Dei*: The Workmanship of God and Lactantius’, *CQ* 37 (1987) 466-86. As a note, all translations of passages from Lactantius’ *De opificio Dei* here are by the present author.

²⁸⁵ Lact. *OD* 18.9: *ratio somniandi*.

²⁸⁶ Lact. *OD* 18.6-8: *Sed postquam mens ad contemplantas imagines ab intentione traducta est, tunc demum corpus omne resoluitur in quietem... Nam sicut mens per diem ueris uisionibus auocatur, ne obdormiat, ita falsis, ne excitetur: nam si nullas imagines cernat, aut uigilare illam necesse erit aut perpetua morte sopiri*.

These images, Lactantius admits, are naturally false, since real images can only be perceived when awake. However, he asserts that when God bestowed this ‘system’ on mankind specifically, he reserved for himself a ‘backdoor’ in order to give instruction.

[W]hen God gave this system for the purpose of sleep, he left Himself the means to show mankind the future through a dream. Indeed, stories often attest that there have been dreams whose result has been propitious and astonishing, and the messages of our prophets had partly consisted of dreams... But those [images] which are false are seen for the purpose of sleeping, [and] those which are true are sent by God, in order that by this revelation we may learn about an impending good or ill.²⁸⁷

As such, while most dreams are a meaningless series of images constructed by the ‘system’ in order to facilitate restful sleep, those dreams which can be considered ‘true’ or ‘revelatory’ have been sent directly by God. Lactantius singles out two particular examples for elucidation: dreams of the prophets and, something that is more applicable for the present topic, those dreams which have ‘a propitious and astonishing result’, that is, dreams which prove themselves as being ‘true’ because they subsequently become reality.

This particular dream theory, albeit brief, is reminiscent of that expounded more thoroughly by the North African father Tertullian, with whose work Lactantius was very familiar.²⁸⁸ In his discourse *De anima* (*On the Soul*; ca. early 210s), Tertullian dedicates several chapters to what he deems to be the Christian understanding of the nature, function, and source of sleep and dreams.²⁸⁹ Although a loosely similar perspective on ‘true dreams’

²⁸⁷ Lact. *OD* 18.9-11: *cum eam rationem deus quietis causa daret, facultatem sibi reliquit docendi hominem futura per somnium. Nam et historiae saepe testantur extitisse somnia quorum praesens et admirabilis fuerit euentus, et responsa uatum nostrorum ex parte somniis constiterunt... Sed quae falsa sunt, dormiendi causa uidentur, quae uera, inmittuntur a deo, ut imminens bonum aut malum hac reuelatione discamus.*

²⁸⁸ See Amat, *Songes et visions*, 200-2, that Lactantius’ dream theory is deeply indebted to Tertullian, though she notes that, in contrast to Tertullian’s ‘universality’, Lactantius’ interests are largely political; cf. von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 254 and 262-3.

²⁸⁹ For a more general treatment of *De anima*, see Amat, *Songes et visions*, 93-9; P.C. Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1994) 66-70; von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 39-67.

can be seen in a number of early-Christian works, in both Latin and Greek, Lactantius' dream theory appears to have been influenced by this treatise in particular.²⁹⁰ For instance, Tertullian, much the same as Lactantius, argues that sleep is a natural and rational bodily function created by God.

Sleep is by no means a supernatural thing, as certain philosophers believe... For, it should not be believed that sleep is a lassitude, rather it is the opposite of the lassitude which it obviously takes away, since a man is more refreshed by sleep than fatigued. Furthermore, sleep is not always conceived out of fatigue, nevertheless when it is from that, [the fatigue] no longer exists.²⁹¹

This discourse on sleep and dreams comes about as part of a larger argument on the immortality and divine nature of the human soul, to which purpose Tertullian contends that dreams are proof that, although the body rests, the soul “shows itself to be constantly in motion”.²⁹² This then exemplifies one form of sleeping/dreaming for Tertullian: the ecstatic condition of the soul, which he states is similar to a state of madness in that it limits mental acuity. The result then is dreams that emotionally affect the dreamer, though those images should be considered pure fantasy.

Indeed, we are delighted, saddened, and frightened in dreams, so deeply and anxiously, [albeit] passively, even though we would in no way be excited by obviously worthless images, if we were in control while dreaming. Accordingly, in dreams good deeds are not rewarded and

²⁹⁰ For most Christian writers prior to Lactantius, ‘true dreams’ only came before martyrdom, though they sometimes resulted in conversions – consider, for instance, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, *The Passion of Perpetua*, *The Life of Cyprian*, and *The Passion of Marianus and James*. As to conversions, although reported later by Jerome (*Chron.* 231g), Arnobius in the early fourth century is supposed to have been converted by a dream-vision, and Cyprian of Carthage (*Ep.* 33.1) praises a certain Celerinus, who was similarly converted. Cf. Bovon, ‘These Christians Who Dream’, 155-7. As a note, all of the English translations of passages from Tertullian’s *De anima* here are by the present author.

²⁹¹ Tert. *DA* 43.1-2: *Non utique extranaturale est somnus, ut quibusdam philosophis placet... Neque enim credendum est defetiscentiam esse somnum, contrarium potius defetiscentiae, quam scilicet tollit, siquidem homo somno magis reficitur quam fatigatur. Porro nec semper ex fatigatione concipitur somnus, et tamen cum ex illa est, illa iam non est.* The word *extranaturale* is purely Tertullian’s and only appears in his works; cf. J.H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima*, (Leiden, 2010) 461.

²⁹² Tert. *DA* 43.12: *Probat se mobilem semper.*

offences [are] of no concern; for, we will no more be condemned for a vision of indecency than we will be crowned for one of martyrdom.²⁹³

In general Tertullian's opinion is that all dreams come from an outside source, the only naturally occurring dreams being described as a peculiarity of the ecstatic condition.²⁹⁴ Though he acknowledges that dreams are fantastical and meaningless, he nevertheless inquires, "But who, indeed, is such a stranger of human nature that he has never noticed a true dream?"²⁹⁵ After giving a few secular examples, such as Cicero's prophecy of Octavius/Augustus, he continues to explain that images of future goods and ills are mainly the product of demons, who are helpful only in order to distract the dreamer from the search for the 'true God'.²⁹⁶ Such dreams, even if they appear favourable, reflect the nature of their source, that is, they are "vain, deceptive, confusing, scornful, and impure".²⁹⁷ Conversely, the character of legitimate nocturnal visions – and this is where the dream theories of Tertullian and Lactantius once again unite – reveals that they derive directly from God.

From God, however, having of course promised *the grace of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh and that just as His servants and handmaidens will prophesy so [will they] see dreams*, will those [dreams] be considered, which will be comparable to His grace, if [they are] in any way honest, holy, prophetic, revelatory, constructive, [or] vocational, the beneficence of which is accustomed to trickle down even on the profane, likewise *God renders the just and unjust*

²⁹³ Tert. *DA* 45.4: *Denique et oblectamur et contristamur et conterremur in somniis, quam affecte et anxie, passibiliter, cum in nullo permoveremur, a vacuis scilicet imaginibus, si compotes somniaremus. Denique et bona facta gratuita sunt in somnis et delicta secreta; non magis enim ob stupri visionem damnabimur quam ob martyrii coronabimur.*

²⁹⁴ Tert. *DA* 47.4.

²⁹⁵ Tert. *DA* 46.3: *Quis autem tam extraneus humanitatis, ut non aliquam aliquando visionem fidelem senserit?* Tertullian clearly means *visio* as 'dream' here.

²⁹⁶ Tert. *DA* 46.12: *vera divinitas*. Although Lactantius does not discuss this particular aspect of dreams in *De opificio Dei*, arguing instead that they come from the mind itself and God, in the *Divinae institutiones* (at Lact. *DI* 2.14.14) he does allow that 'demons' (i.e. 'pagan' gods) do have the ability to negatively affect people through dreams, which he claims is done in order to create a need to seek those very same demons for succour.

²⁹⁷ Tert. *DA* 47.1: *vana et frustratoria et turbida et ludibriosa et immunda.*

equals by means of his rain and sunshine, since indeed even by divine inspiration did Nebuchadnezzar dream and nearly the greater number of men learn about God from dreams.²⁹⁸

In what is a pivotal section of Tertullian's dream theory we find that he believes that not only are certain auspicious dreams bestowed by the Christian god, but also that such nocturnal visions are not limited to the faithful. Drawing from both *Joel 2:28* and *Matthew 5:45* – the italicised passages, respectively – he makes clear that, in accordance with the philanthropic essence of the Christian god, 'pagans' are just as prone to experience Christian visions (understood, 'true dreams') as Christians themselves.²⁹⁹

In *De opificio Dei* Lactantius is not as explicit as Tertullian regarding his thoughts on this matter. The spirit of his description of 'true dreams', however, would suggest that he is of the same opinion: the Christian god created a particular 'system of dreaming' for all of mankind, and therefore reserved the means of inserting himself into the mind of any sleeping person. Moreover, a dream that, because of its holy nature – or, as Lactantius states, has a 'propitious and astonishing result', are revelatory or instructive – ought to be regarded as 'true', and therefore emanating from the Christian god. How those dreamers then receive or understand such visions, we can surmise, matters little for the nature of their divine origin.

Turning back to *De mortibus persecutorum*, it seems perfectly plausible that Licinius' nocturnal vision was originally presented as a 'pagan' experience, but that Lactantius adapted it to reflect what he considered to be the veritable nature of its source, namely, the

²⁹⁸ Tert. *DA* 47.2: *A deo autem, pollicito scilicet et gratiam spiritus sancti in omnem carnem et sicut prophetaturos, ita et somniaturos servos suos et ancillas suas, ea deputabuntur quae ipsi gratiae comparabuntur, si qua honesta sancta prophetica revelatoria aedificatoria vocatoria, quorum liberalitas soleat et in profanes destillare, imbres etiam et soles suos peraequante deo iustis et iniustis, siquidem et Nabuchodonosor divinitus somniat et maior paene vis hominum ex visionibus deum discunt*. Again, 'dreams' is intended here for *visiones*.

²⁹⁹ Miller, *Dreams*, 207: "he read scriptural stories like those in the book of Daniel about Nebuchadnezzar's dreams as affirmations of the view that pagans and sinners as well as morally upright people can receive true dreams, although understanding them is the province of saints".

Christian god. He clearly regarded the dream as being ‘true’, otherwise he would not have included it in the narrative nor given it such attention. In addition, the verity of the dream and the proof of its source become evident in the outcome of the battle: after reciting the prayer as instructed, Licinius’ army – outnumbered 70,000 to 30,000 – completely overwhelm the enemy, what one might label a ‘propitious and astonishing result’.

We need not accept Lactantius at face value, then, that Licinius’ visitor was an ‘angel of God’; the vision story may have originally featured Mercury or another common envoy of premonitory dreams in contemporary culture.³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, whoever was given credit for the vision, Lactantius understood this ‘true dream’ as having been sent by the Christian god. This is not a deliberate deception on Lactantius’ part. Rather, it is an associative characterisation with no attending explanation for the conceptual leap, which is evident since he likely maintained the original wording of the prayer and incorporated some of its terminology into his description, even though it subtly betrays its non-Christian framework: despite what Lactantius thought about the nature and source of the dream, he still needed to present it in a way that was moderately faithful to the official version.³⁰¹

The same circumstances can be applied to the case of Constantine before the Battle of Milvian Bridge. Once again, since Lactantius records the dream, he must have regarded it as being ‘true’, and even the narrative of the campaign against Maxentius bears certain similarities to Licinius’ civil war: Constantine is supposed to have been greatly outnumbered, yet after employing the divine symbol as instructed, his army swiftly and brutally defeated

³⁰⁰ See, for instance, Odahl, *Constantine*, 176; Barnes, *Constantine*, 18; and Bardill, *Constantine*, 225-6, who note that Licinius likely believed that Jupiter was his tutelary deity.

³⁰¹ von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 269, argues that Lactantius did not actually view Licinius as a Christian, and furthermore: “Lactanz ist nicht an der persönlichen Religiosität der beiden Christenfreunde interessiert, sondern einzig an ihrer Funktion als (gehorsame) Werkzeuge Gottes”. This comes down to von Dörnberg’s particular attempt to divorce the historicity of Lactantius’ narrative from his literary contribution.

Maxentius. As for the nocturnal vision, its Christian character is readily inferred from both the *caeleste signum dei*, which Lactantius says signified Christ, and the syntactic formula of the dream-narrative.³⁰² However, as we have just seen, Constantine did not have to see a Christian dream-vision for Lactantius to report one. We have to allow for the possibility that Constantine or his court claimed that the emperor had a divine experience that was either distinctly ‘pagan’ or presented somewhat ambiguously, which Lactantius then interpreted as a ‘true dream’/Christian vision.

As we have already concluded, this experience was supposed to have occurred prior to the Italian campaign: in describing the divine assistance that Constantine received, the panegyrist of 313 refers vaguely to the ‘divinity’, while Eusebius states that he called upon “God, and His Word, even Jesus Christ the Saviour of all”. It would stand to reason, then, that in the reports of his contact with divine powers Constantine preferred the use of terms such as *summus deus*, *summa divinitas*, or even, as we find on the Arch of Constantine, simply *divinitas*, which terminology would have easily lent itself to the Christian interpretations of Lactantius and Eusebius without misrepresenting the emperor’s religious position. For Lactantius at least this language would have been well-received and easily transferrable.³⁰³

³⁰² von Dörnberg, *Traum und Traumdeutung*, 265, contends that the reference to Christ makes it clear that Lactantius believed the dream was sent by the Christian god and that the account of the vision itself is a nod to biblical tradition, arguing further that Lactantius and his audience would have known the official version of the dream, and so Lactantius here is offering a literary-theological interpretation.

³⁰³ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 74, finds that several passages of the *Oration to the Saints* have strong similarities to Lactantius’ *Divinae institutiones*. Digeser, *Christian Empire*, 134-43, has elaborated on this, arguing that Lactantius’ residence in Gaul was instructive not just for Crispus, but Constantine as well, who, through numerous and involved conversations, was deeply influenced by the Christian philosophy of his son’s tutor. Bowen and Garnsey, *Lactantius*, 3, tentatively support Digeser, allowing that Lactantius “was in theory in a position to make an impact on the emperor and his legislation”. It is possible then that the *summus deus/summa divinitas* terminology may be attributed to Lactantius’ influence. J. Rougé, ‘Questions d’époque

It must also be taken into account that nowhere in *De mortibus persecutorum* does Lactantius actually claim that Constantine was a Christian,³⁰⁴ nor does he claim that the emperor was converted as a result of his dream, even though he may have been inclined to believe such a thing was plausible, despite his apparent understanding of conversion as a gradual process in *De ira Dei*.³⁰⁵ Rather, his portrayal of Constantine in *De mortibus persecutorum* is as a sympathiser of Christianity, but nevertheless an unwitting agent of the Christian god and recipient of his assistance: God elevated Constantine (and Licinius) in order to end the persecution and depose the persecutors, and offered divine protection in battle in return for token representation on the soldiers' shields (and a prayer by Licinius' army). Licinius, for his part, is said to have thanked God for his victory over Maximin after he entered Nicomedia and then issued the 'Edict of Milan', whereas Lactantius does not describe any sort of reciprocation following Constantine's victory over Maxentius. Putting aside for the moment the heavy burden of Western historical tradition, if we were to assess Lactantius' testimony purely by the content of his narrative, he actually gives more 'evidence' for Licinius being a Christian than he does Constantine.

All things considered, it becomes highly probable that Lactantius adapted a nocturnal vision for Constantine that was not explicitly Christian because he regarded it as being 'true'

constantinienne', in E. Frézouls (ed.), *Crise et redressement dans les provinces européennes de l'empire* (Strasbourg, 1983) 113-25, at 116, on the other hand, sees little to no influence on Constantine.

³⁰⁴ The cessation of persecution at the beginning of Constantine's reign is not *de facto* proof that he was Christian, merely that he was sympathetic to Christianity; otherwise, Maxentius must therefore be declared a Christian as well.

³⁰⁵ One of Lactantius' influences, Cyprian of Carthage, who is one of the only Latin apologists highlighted in the *Divinae institutiones*, praises a certain Celerinus in a letter because he was converted to Christianity through a dream-vision; see Cyp. *Ep.* 33.1. Additionally, Lactantius' former mentor, Arnobius of Sicca, is said to have been converted through a dream-vision (cf. Jer. *Chron.* 231g). See Digeser, *Christian Empire*, 78-84, regarding Lactantius' thoughts on Christian conversion in *De ira Dei*.

and therefore the product of the Christian god; since he was writing for a Christian audience, he presumably felt free to represent it according to his interpretation. Although he already had this reasoning set out in his much earlier *De opificio Dei*, it is not at all surprising that he chose not to explain the conceptual shift from ‘pagan’ dream to Christian vision in *De mortibus persecutorum*. Such a discussion would have detracted from not only the nature and flow of the work, but also the pervading triumphal-Christian/anti-‘pagan’ theme, in which Constantine and Licinius as agents of God are juxtaposed with the despicable persecutors of late. Any mention of the ‘paganism’ of the heroes of this text, even if it could be rationalised, would thus undermine the central theme. We also have to wonder if such a connection would have required elucidation: a contemporary Christian reader might not have pondered the associations heavily, especially if they were familiar with the official versions of the visions, and certainly not, we have to imagine, if Lactantius’ dream theory represents something that was commonplace.

Conclusion

Although we can isolate numerous features at work in Lactantius’ *De mortibus persecutorum*, apologetic and otherwise, historiography would appear to be the dominant element of this text. It comprises the narrative structure, forming not only its foundation, but its skeletal framework as well. It is within this framework, then, that we encounter the dream-visions of Constantine and Licinius, and there is no reason to doubt that Lactantius means to present these episodes as historical realities.

As with the evaluation of any ancient historical writing, a principal question is, of course, how does the author know what they claim to know? On the face of it, this seems a silly question in the case of a contemporary. However, the fact that there can be so much

speculation and debate on the main points, let alone the finer details, of Lactantius' movements and residences between February 303 and the composition of *De mortibus persecutorum* ca. 315 serves as an indicator that very little is straightforward here. From the diverse set of evidence presented in this chapter, the reconstruction I have proposed situates Lactantius in Nicomedia before 305 and after mid or late 311. While his travels in the interim cannot be firmly established, it is unlikely that he ever actually resided in Gaul; rather, his knowledge of Western events derived from Gallic pre-war sources. Such a reconstruction seems to best satisfy the peculiarities of his narrative as he progresses from West to East, from Constantine/Maxentius to Licinius/Maximin.

The implication of this reconstruction for Lactantius' report of the dream-visions of Constantine and Licinius should be readily apparent. Following Licinius' triumphant entry into the imperial city of Nicomedia, Lactantius most likely would have heard first-hand from court panegyrists, lauding the emperor's heroic struggle against tyranny and the divine providence of his victory, the elaborate details of not only the progress of the civil war, but also Licinius' auspicious encounter with a heavenly power that gave him the means to overcome the enemy. Had he resumed his position as the chair of Latin rhetoric in Nicomedia at that time, it may have even been required that he deliver a panegyric himself. By contrast, Lactantius was not able to offer as much for Constantine's war against Maxentius, his level of detail being limited to the events on the day of the decisive battle outside of Rome.

Regarding the dream-visions of Constantine and Licinius, there is a logical fallacy that seems to pervade modern assessments. The similarities between the two dreams are striking, but there is a tendency to observe linear causality in what is, in essence, a product of retrospective. This is to say, in writing *De mortibus persecutorum* Lactantius was looking

back on a particular course of events: although he presents his narrative in a chronological manner, this does not mean that his conceptualisation of those events was equally linear. When we read the text, we encounter Constantine's dream-vision first, because it occurs first in the chronological sequence, but the tendency to conclude that his dream-vision must therefore provide the primary framework for Licinius' dream-vision is problematic. Reliable, or at least thorough, reports of Constantine's civil war would have been hard to come by in the East, and if by chance some token mention were to be made, it most certainly (and most appropriately) would have been overshadowed by commentaries on Licinius' accomplishments. We see this in the West as well: next to no references to Licinius' activities can be found in the Gallic panegyrics, save an odd reference to the ease of defeating Easterners.³⁰⁶

Lactantius certainly could not help but hear that Constantine had received a divine promise of victory during the course of his war effort, perhaps even more explicitly in the form of a dream-vision, but there were still blanks that he needed to fill. The similarities between the two dreams are thus easier to understand: Lactantius used loosely the template of Licinius' dream-vision to construct his account of Constantine's dream-vision, so as to render a scenario that to him seemed culturally appropriate – that is, a divine promise of victory in a vision before a decisive battle. It is not so difficult to reason, then, why a battle vision is completely absent in the panegyrics of 313 and 321, which both claim that Constantine received divine assistance before he launched his Italian campaign, and why both panegyrists would completely pass over such a rhetorically useful motif – neither Constantine nor his court asserted a dream-vision on the night before the Battle of Milvian

³⁰⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).24.1.

Bridge. The chronology of the dream-vision is an aspect that Lactantius supplied to create a further parallel with the experience of Licinius.

The chronology, however, is not the only aspect that Lactantius supplied in the construction of his ‘historical reality’; we have to acknowledge his own contribution, through his selection of information, his wording, and his stylistic depictions – but above all, the incorporation of his personal ideology. There is no explicit indication in his narrative that either Constantine or Licinius recognised their visions, or even their missions, as deriving from the Christian god, but based on his own beliefs on the nature and source of dreams this is how Lactantius interpreted their experiences. Ultimately, Lactantius included both episodes in his narrative because he considered them to be ‘true dreams’, which – regardless of the religious persuasion of the dreamer – he believed must originate from the Christian god. Lactantius further alludes to this point of origin through his linguistic allusions to the dream-visions in the *Gospel of Matthew*. In the absence of an explicit statement of the personal beliefs of the emperors, Lactantius could, through the skilled employment of language, imbed a desired interpretation within the bare description of the visions themselves by building these accounts on what is essentially a Christian dream-vision formula. An audience familiar with these prototypes would no doubt have found it remarkable to hear how their emperors dreamed like Joseph or the Magi. In relating Constantine and Licinius’ proximity to and interaction with divine powers, Lactantius framed these episodes in a way that conformed to his own ideology and was acceptable to his Christian audience.

When assessing Constantine’s Christian dream on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge, once the layers of Lactantius’ influence are peeled away from the narrative, we are left with a rather ambiguous episode. What should be clear, however, is that Lactantius’

testimony is not necessarily the earliest account of Constantine's Christian vision – rather, it may simply be the earliest account of Constantine's vision by a Christian.

CHAPTER THREE: EUSEBIUS AND THE VISION OF CHRIST

“... in real life, the number of actual stories—those with beginnings, middles, and ends—are slim and none. But if you can give your readers just one unknown thing (two at the very outside), and then kick in ... a *musta-been*, your reader will tell *himself* a story.”

Stephen King, *The Colorado Kid* (New York, 2005) 46

When Constantine’s self-proclaimed biographer Eusebius of Caesarea wrote *De vita Constantini*, he presented the ‘vision’ as a pivotal moment in the emperor’s long career. Following an extremely panegyric introduction to the significance of the reign of Constantine, as well as the details of his propitious accession, Eusebius glides over the emperor’s early achievements in order to reach what he clearly regarded as being the most important and formative event of his life; the event which would shape the course of his imperial career and favourably alter the status of Christianity in the Empire.³⁰⁷

The account of the ‘vision’ in *Vita* is familiar and iconic. While marching with his army and contemplating civil war against the ‘tyrant’ Maxentius, a cross of light appeared in the sky with the words ‘By this conquer!’ beneath it. That night Constantine was visited by

³⁰⁷ With respect to *Vita* there is an overwhelming tendency in Constantinian scholarship to use the term ‘vision’ solely in reference to the waking, celestial manifestation of the cross in the sky and to refer to the dream as simply ‘dream’. However, both should be regarded as visions in modern discourse. Hence, in this chapter I regularly differentiate between the celestial-vision and the dream-vision, and use the term ‘vision’ (in apostrophes) to refer to the episode as a whole.

Christ in his sleep, who instructed him to reproduce the symbol in the sky and use it for protection against the attacks of his enemies. When the emperor awoke, he thus commanded the construction of the *Labarum*, the well-known military standard that featured the Chi-Rho – the monogram signifying Christ. The story would be difficult to believe, Eusebius tells us, except that Constantine himself swore oaths on the verity of the tale and, he adds, permitted his biographer to view the *Labarum* with his own eyes.

There should be no doubt that the celestial vision, at least, actually occurred. Eusebius' description would suggest that Constantine and his army witnessed a solar halo phenomenon: ice crystals in the upper atmosphere refracting and reflecting sunlight to create patterns and images in the sky and across the sun, which would have been understood at the time as a divine manifestation, seems to be the most convincing scientific explanation for what the emperor is supposed to have seen.³⁰⁸ What is more, we have examples from Cassius

³⁰⁸ A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948), 96, as suggested to him by Edward Andrade (see the mention in Jones' introduction, at xiv). More recently argued, with significant scientific documentation, by P. Weiss, 'The Vision of Constantine', (trans. A.R. Birley), *JRS* 16 (2003) 237-59, *passim*. In support of Eusebius describing solar halo, see, J.H. Smith, *Constantine the Great* (London, 1971) 105; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1986) 616; O. Nicholson, 'Constantine's Vision of the Cross', *VChr* 54 (2000) 309-23, at 311 (n. 9); N. Lenski, 'The Reign of Constantine', in N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006) 59-60, at 71; J.W. Drijvers, 'Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of the Image of Maxentius', in H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople* (Leuven, 2007) 11-27, at 13 (n. 6); K.M. Girardet, *Der Kaiser und sein Gott* (Berlin, 2010) 35-40; T.D. Barnes, *Constantine* (Malden, MA, 2011) 74-80. Independent of the Constantinian debate, specialists of meteorological phenomena have concluded that this is what Constantine must have seen; see the references in T.D. Barnes, 'Constantine and Christianity: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations', *ZAC* 2 (1998) 274-94, at 289 (n. 55 and 56). There are also unrelated accounts from the *Times* (1929/1930) referenced by N.H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London, 1972) 58 (n. 31); see also E. Whymper, *Scrambles amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-69* (London, 1871) 324-35; Nicholson, 'Vision', 311 (n. 10), who reproduces an observer testimony from the *Bemidji Pioneer* (23rd December, 1992); C.M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London, 2004) 320 (n. 15), reports seeing two solar halos himself. Other scenarios have also been proposed. In an effort to align the celestial-vision of Eusebius and the staurogram of Lactantius, F. Heiland, *Die astronomische Deutung der Vision Kaiser Konstantins* (Jena, 1948), puts forward the hypothesis that what Constantine and his army actually saw a week before the Battle of Milvian Bridge was the alignment of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, which – with the incorporation of certain constellations and stars – would have produced a staurogram-type shape in the sky. In support, see M. DiMaio Jr. et al., 'Ambiguitas Constantiniana: The caeleste signum dei of

Dio, including a first-hand account, that such phenomena were known to occur during times of civil war, and interpreted as foreshadowing victory for one of the contenders, which would perhaps account for the prevalent association of the ‘vision’ with the civil war of 312 and Constantine’s victory over Maxentius.³⁰⁹ The celestial vision, however, was a very real occurrence that Constantine viewed, regardless of the context(s) later constructed around it, and there should be doubt either that this is what he described to his biographical bishop years later.

The *Vita* ‘vision’, then, as Arnold H.M. Jones so eloquently states it, “rests on the best of authority”, that is, the emperor himself who related the story to Eusebius and whose life, it is supposed, was profoundly affected by the experience.³¹⁰ Despite attempts to discredit Eusebius and *Vita*, there is no just reason to reject the bishop’s testimony wholesale.³¹¹ To be sure, it is generally accepted that Eusebius was not the imperial

Constantine the Great’, *Byzantion* 58 (1988) 333-60, but favouring Lactantius’ 27 October 312. Against Heiland’s hypothesis, see T.D. Barnes, ‘The Conversion of Constantine’, *CV* 29 (1985) 371-93, at 386. Against astronomical theories in general, R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (New York, 1969) 77-8.

³⁰⁹ Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 45.4.4 and 45.17.5 (44 BCE); 47.40.1-2 (42 BCE); 74.14.3-5 (193 CE).

³¹⁰ Jones, *Constantine*, 95. S.G. Hall, ‘Eusebian and Other Sources in *Vita Constantini* I’, in H.C. Brennecke et al. (eds.), *Logos* (Berlin, 1993) 239-63, at 244, contends that Eusebius heard the tale from Constantine directly, “however much the stories have improved in the telling”.

³¹¹ Most notably, J. Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great* (London, 1949) 292-335; H. Grégoire, ‘Eusèbe n’est pas l’auteur de la “*Vita Constantini*” dans sa forme actuelle et Constantin ne s’est pas “converti” en 312’, *Byzantion* 13 (1938) 561-83, and ‘L’authenticité et l’historicité de la *Vita Constantini* attribuée à Eusèbe de Césarée’, *BAB* 39 (1953) 462-79. Several scholars since Grégoire have made less grandiose attempts to highlight ‘deliberate’ falsities in other areas of the text as well. See, in particular, T.G. Elliott, ‘Eusebian Frauds in the *Vita Constantini*’, *Phoenix* 45 (1991) 162-71; other criticisms from Elliott’s publications are reproduced in id., *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (Scranton, 1996). Cf. G. Downey, ‘The Builder of the Original Church of the Apostles at Constantinople: A Contribution to the Criticism of the *Vita Constantini* attributed to Eusebius’, *DOP* 6 (1951) 53-80; J. Moreau, ‘Zum Problem der *Vita Constantini*’, *Historia* 4 (1955) 234-45. *Vita* is now generally accepted as authentic and Eusebius as an accurate reporter, largely thanks to the discovery of a London papyrus that corresponds roughly to Eus. *VC* 2.26-29; see A.H.M. Jones and T.C. Skeat, ‘Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine*’, *JEH* 5 (1954) 196-200. See also F. Vittinghoff, ‘Eusebius als Verfasser der ‘*Vita Constantini*’’, *RhM.* 96 (1953) 330-73; F. Winkelmann, ‘Zur Geschichte des Authentizitätsproblem der *Vita Constantini*’, *Klio* 40 (1962) 187-243;

confidant he styles himself as being; we can only detect a few opportunities where the two might have interacted,³¹² the most likely scenario being that Eusebius heard the story as a member of an audience, though it cannot definitively be said in what context.³¹³ Nevertheless, Eusebius' bid to authority is a strong assertion and far from implausible, since hearing it as an audience member would still render the element of truth present in his statement.

There are so few surviving sources from Constantine's reign that it is no surprise that other contemporary texts with similar claims, written possibly by others that heard the story at the same time as Eusebius, do not exist.³¹⁴ Even though Eusebius is neither the only nor the earliest contemporary source to describe a Christian vision, by virtue of the long-standing Western tradition of a celestial manifestation, the level of detail in Eusebius' account, and his claim to authority, the *Vita* 'vision' has almost universally been regarded as the canonical narrative in modern scholarship. As a result, the earlier (and seemingly alternative) narrative

Av. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Eusebius* (Oxford, 1999), 4-9; T.D. Barnes, 'Panegyric, History and Hagiography in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*', in R. Williams (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy* (Cambridge, 1989); id., 'The Two Drafts of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*', in id., *From Eusebius to Augustine* (Aldershot, 1994) 1-11 (= Chapter XII).

³¹² T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 266, proposes four possible encounters: ca. July 325 (Council of Nicaea); December 327 (Council of Nicomedia); November 335; July 336 (*tricennalia* celebrations in Constantinople). This is in general agreement. Cf. R.H. Storch, 'The "Eusebian Constantine"', *ChHist* 40 (1971) 145-55, at 149-50, who not only argues that Eusebius was a confidant, but also that Constantine had a hand in constructing his image in *Vita*.

³¹³ For a public or semi-public report, see, for example, Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 266; id., 'Conversion', 384: "Eusebius neither states nor to my mind implies that Constantine told him alone or in secret", and (at 385-6) that it was most likely told to bishops at a dinner party following the Council of Nicaea; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 614. Cf. Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 206, who acknowledge that it is possible that the story was not told to Eusebius alone.

³¹⁴ Aside from Lactantius, the only other contemporary source to explicitly describe a vision is Nazarius [*Pan. Lat.* 4(10).14.1-7]. The now-lost two-volume history by Praxagoras of Athens may have mentioned a vision, but the patriarch Photius who summarises it mentions nothing. The only other text about Constantine that survives from that era, albeit not a contemporary work, is the *Origo Constantini*, which says nothing about a vision.

of Lactantius is more often than not treated as substandard to the account in *Vita*, at best utilised as a supplement or contrast to the later, more accurate version of Eusebius.

The hypothesis of Peter Weiss clarifies somewhat the divergence in the sources by positing that the celestial manifestation and the Christian interpretation of it did not occur in the strict temporal sequence put forward by Eusebius. Specifically, he argues that the dream-vision of Christ before the Battle of Milvian Bridge inspired a new perspective on the celestial-vision some years prior. Even if one is not entirely convinced by his argument, there is still an important element to take away; a main aspect of Weiss' Constantine is that, in the emperor's willingness to re-evaluate previous experiences based on new knowledge/realisations, he appears less legendary and more human.³¹⁵ The idea that new life experience can prompt the re-interpretation of previous experiences adds a solemn dimension to our understanding of the 'vision', best observed in the undoubtedly related narratives of Lactantius and Eusebius.³¹⁶ Both sources describe a dream-vision in the context of the civil war against Maxentius, in which Constantine is given a divine symbol signifying Christ to ensure protection from his enemies, but in the twenty-five years between *De mortibus persecutorum* and *Vita* the story evolved to incorporate an additional context for the 'vision', namely, the conversion of Constantine to Christianity. It could be argued that the central reason for the shift is that Eusebius, unlike Lactantius, heard the story directly from the emperor. However, preconceptions such as this substantially detract from the fundamental

³¹⁵ See also the comment in R. Van Dam, 'The Many Conversions of the Emperor Constantine', in K. Mills and A. Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Rochester, 2003) 127-51, at 137: "Despite his evident patronage of Christianity, his life included changes of mind, uncertainties, contradictions, and ambiguities. In other words, it was a normal life".

³¹⁶ On the reconstruction of personal biography, see, for example, G.H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, ed. A.E. Murphy (Chicago, 1959); K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, 1965); P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, 1966).

‘humanity’ of Constantine by assuming – not that the ‘vision’ story was static and unchanging across the decades, but worse – that the emperor was static and unchanging.³¹⁷

Robin Lane Fox makes the astute comment that, “[t]he interest lies less in the vision’s occurrence than in the way in which it was understood”, by which he means that Constantine’s Christian interpretation of the ‘vision’ and his resulting conversion demonstrate a pre-existing affinity, since, “[a] man only sees in the sky what he is predisposed to notice or recall”.³¹⁸ Yet these comments ought to be combined with another made by him only pages earlier that the *Vita* account, which Eusebius heard “[a]t least thirteen years after the event”, “gives us the way in which Constantine himself had come to remember the event”.³¹⁹ But why should these two approaches be somewhat exclusive? Weiss’ hypothesis of re-interpretation would suggest that we should perhaps speak instead of *the way in which Constantine had come to understand the event*, which need not have been solidified as early as 312.³²⁰ If the ‘vision’ narrative in *Vita* is indeed Constantine’s personal story, as it is commonly considered to be, this means that the substance of that story is the memory of the event having been filtered through Constantine – not just his perception or

³¹⁷ H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops* (Baltimore, 2000) 204: “By the time he told the story to Eusebius, Constantine had many years to ponder this experience and to refract it through the lens of the Christian community”.

³¹⁸ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 617. Cf. Nicholson, ‘Vision’, 311: “What is important is not what the emperor saw but what he thought he saw”; Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 184: “the real issue is not what he actually saw but what Constantine and others made of it”.

³¹⁹ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 614.

³²⁰ Drijvers, ‘Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*’, 13 and (n. 6), does not deny outright the possibility that Constantine saw a solar halo, but contends that the emperor elaborated and reconstructed the episode over the years in the interest of manufacturing a preferred self-representation for posterity.

understanding of the experience at the time, but also the alteration of that perception/understanding as it (and he) developed over the course of decades.³²¹

It would be a mistake, however, to consider Constantine to be the only filter in this process. Thomas Elliott notably argues in a number of publications that Constantine did not convert to Christianity because he was raised as a Christian.³²² The aim of the story that Eusebius heard many years after the event, Elliott contends, was the origin of the *Labarum*, which the bishop then deliberately tailored as a conversion narrative for his biography.³²³ This is a novel, yet extreme, attempt to divorce the Constantinian element of the account from the Eusebian – one which has not received further support –, but it is less important here for its conclusion than its methodological contribution: as opposed to arguments that the ‘vision’ was a complete fabrication by Eusebius, Elliott instead isolates and highlights the biographical bishop as yet another filter.³²⁴ I would have to agree; although we do not know

³²¹ The methodology of R. Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge, 2011), is evocative. He takes into account Constantine’s own ‘memory’ of the campaign against Maxentius, but builds his study around the fact that the emperor’s recollection was not impervious to the outside influences that constantly surrounded him – not just oral and written accounts, but also collective consciousness – which time and again caused him to reframe and reconstruct his experiences. Cf. P. Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations* 26 (1989) 7-24.

³²² T.G. Elliott, ‘Constantine’s Conversion: Do We Really Need It?’, *Phoenix* 41 (1987) 420-38; id., ‘Constantine’s Early Religious Development’, *JRH* 15 (1989) 283-91; id., ‘The Language of Constantine’s Propaganda’, *TAPhA* 120 (1990) 349-53; id., ‘Constantine’s Conversion’ Revisited’, *AHB* 6 (1992) 59-62; id., ‘Constantine’s Explanation of His Career’, *Byzantion* 62 (1992) 212-34; id., *Christianity*, 29-38 and 61-72. This would go against Constantine’s own statement in his *Oration to the Saints* that he had not been raised as a Christian; see *OC* 11.1. Cf. Barnes, ‘Conversion’, that Constantine was at least sympathetic to Christianity prior to his ‘conversion’; H. Singor, ‘The Labarum, Shield Blazons, and Constantine’s Caeleste Signum’, in L. de Blois et al. (eds.), *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power* (Amsterdam, 2003) 481-500, that he converted prior to the Italian campaign.

³²³ Van Dam, ‘Many Conversions’, 138-41, suggests potential contexts other than religious conversion as well; in particular, “a military turning point”, the “early transformation into the equivalent of a bishop”, a justification of his patronage of Christianity, and self-identification with Christ.

³²⁴ To be sure, Elliott, *Christianity*, 67, states, “I think that Eusebius invented the conversion while he found himself trapped between the Christianity of Constantius and the later victorious career of Constantine”; his argument is not that Eusebius fabricated it outright, but that the *Vita* account is based on an actual story told by

precisely the conditions under which Eusebius heard the tale, we can be sure that the narrative in *Vita* is not ‘Constantine’s story’; rather, it is Eusebius’ retelling of Constantine’s story.

In his recent *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, Raymond Van Dam makes the valuable assessment that, as we historians continue to interpret and reinterpret the reign of Constantine, we are Eusebius’ true heirs.³²⁵ Although this comment might be perceived as inflammatory, perhaps calling into question the critical capabilities of academics, the statement should nonetheless give pause – it is simply a more emphatic observation that has been made by, for example, Jan Bremmer, who states more diplomatically that historians often construct, rather than reproduce, facts and their interrelationship.³²⁶ Constantine may have told Eusebius or an entire audience about his ‘vision’, but ultimately it was Eusebius who possessed control over how it would be (re)presented, in what context(s), with what language, and within what framework.³²⁷

Not unlike his *Chronicon*, *Historia ecclesiastica*, or *Quaestiones ad Stephanum et Marinum*, Eusebius’ *Vita* is yet another example of his ability to temper and manipulate genres, or aspects of genres, in order to produce works that are not only evocative, but trend-

Constantine about the creation of the *Labarum*, which was then broken up and retooled as a conversion narrative.

³²⁵ Van Dam, *Roman Revolution*, 15.

³²⁶ J.N. Bremmer, ‘The Vision of Constantine’, in A.P.M.H. Lardinois et al. (eds.), *Land of Dreams* (Leiden, 2006) 57-79, at 57.

³²⁷ Nicholson, ‘Vision’, 322, notes that “the Vision of Constantine appears as a revelation of a characteristically Christian character”, but without differentiating between Constantine’s version of events and the interests of his reporters.

setting.³²⁸ *Vita* is properly a panegyric biography, but it is now being increasingly recognised as Christian apology and proto-hagiography as well, and it is instrumental to acknowledge the distinction.³²⁹ As eulogistic portraiture, Eusebius' focus is simply those elements that, in his opinion, made Constantine a laudable emperor. To this end, anything less than praiseworthy, such as the executions of Crispus and Fausta, is decisively omitted. However, the message that permeates the entire text is not simply that Constantine was a great emperor, but a great Christian emperor. As *Christian* eulogy the main focus of *Vita* is how Constantine's actions – Christian or not – benefited the Church.³³⁰ As Harold Drake aptly cautions in his *Constantine and the Bishops*:

Here, just as in the Church History, Eusebius will only be interested in the way Christians understood Constantine; how pagans reacted was not his concern. Readers who do not keep this purpose in mind therefore run the risk of assuming that the examples of Constantine's

³²⁸ Or, as Av. Cameron, 'Form and Meaning: *The Vita Constantini and the Vita Antonii*', in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000) 72-88, at 72, succinctly declares him, "a literary pioneer". For an overview, see T.D. Barnes, 'Eusebius of Caesarea', in P. Foster (ed.), *Early Christian Thinkers* (Downers Grove, IL, 2010) 173-93, at 178-89.

³²⁹ On the various dimensions of *Vita* and Eusebius' writings in general, see, for example, Storch, 'Eusebian Constantine', especially at 153-5; Av. Cameron, 'Eusebius of Caesarea and the Rethinking of History', in E. Gabba (ed.), *Tria corda* (Como, 1983) 71-88; Barnes, 'Panegyric, History, and Historiography'; M.J. Hollerich, 'Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius: Reassessing the First "Court Theologian"', *ChHist* 59 (1990) 309-25; C. Kannengiesser, 'Eusebius of Caesarea, Origenist', in H.W. Attridge and G. Hata (eds.), *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Leiden, 1992) 435-66; Av. Cameron, 'Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine', in M.J. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits* (Oxford, 1997) 145-74; Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 1-53; M. Frede, 'Eusebius' Apologetic Writings', in M. Edwards et al. (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1999) 223-50; Av. Cameron, 'Form and Meaning'; M.S. Williams, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography* (Cambridge, 2008) 25-57. See also, Av. Cameron, 'Constantinus Christianus', against the heavy dependence on *Vita* as a historiographical source in Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*; the same comments there could be applied as well to Odahl, *Constantine.. On Vita* as a 'hybrid work' of imperial panegyric, ancient biography, historiography, apologetic, hagiography, and *speculum principis*, see Van Dam, 'Many Conversions', 141-4; Drijvers, 'Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*', 14-6. See also P.L. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1983) *passim*; one will be quite struck by the obvious parallels that can be made with the Constantine of *Vita* in Cox's discussion (at 69-101) of Eusebius' *Life of Origen* as a biographical portrait of the Hellenistic holy man.

³³⁰ Drijvers, 'Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*', 13, that Eusebius' purpose is "to portray Constantine as the ideal and exemplary Christian ruler".

piety Eusebius provides have an exclusively Christian meaning when in fact pagans would have found many of them just as praiseworthy.³³¹

As important a note as this already is, I believe that there is an equally valuable caveat to consider, namely, that in *Vita* Eusebius is only interested in how Constantine *helped* Christians – how he helped ‘pagans’ is not his concern.³³² I certainly do not mean to attack the usefulness of Eusebius as a potential source, but the influence of his personal bias on the material in *Vita* is not always duly acknowledged.³³³ Any author, historian or otherwise, approaches their material with a particular agenda and mode of delivery in mind, and Eusebius is no different. As a writer he was first and foremost a theologian and an apologist, and only after a historian.³³⁴

Eusebius is not coy about his intentions with *Vita*. He opens the text with a general discussion of the piety, longevity, and significance of Constantine’s contributions, as well as

³³¹ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 367. Cf. Storch, ‘Eusebian Constantine’, 155, that Eusebius’ *Vita* does not portray Constantine as a “genuine Christian”; rather, he is depicted as a Christian “only to the same extent that the former emperors were pagan”.

³³² So, for example, Drjivers, ‘Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*’, 27, says that Eusebius’ “main purpose was to serve the cause of Christianity and that of the first Christian emperor and his memory”; M. Humphries, ‘From Usurper to Emperor: The Politics of Legitimation in the Age of Constantine’, *JLA* 1 (2008) 82-100, at 84, comments that, for Lactantius and Eusebius (and, as a result, much modern scholarship), the Christian dimension of Constantine is “the only one that mattered”. Without delving into the issue of the historical reality of Constantine’s marginalisation of ‘paganism’, it should be noted that for Eusebius the suppression of traditional worship is one of the ways in which the emperor helped Christianity.

³³³ In addition to Av. Cameron’s numerous publications on the literary qualities of *Vita*, see in particular the conclusion of Av. Cameron, ‘Form and Meaning’, 86, that *Vita* should be considered a “text”, not simply a “source”.

³³⁴ Cf. J. Stevenson, *Studies in Eusebius* (Cambridge, 1929) 35; G. Rinaldi, ‘Tracce di controversie tra pagani e cristiani nella letteratura patristica delle ‘quaestiones et responsiones’’, *AnnSE* 6 (1989) 99-124, at 104; A.J. Droge, ‘The Apologetic Dimensions of the *Ecclesiastical History*’, in Attridge and Hata, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, 492-509; L. Perrone, ‘Eusebius of Caesarea as a Christian Writer’, in A. Raban and K.G. Holum (eds.), *Caesarea Maritima* (Leiden, 1996) 515-30, at 520; R.W. Burgess, ‘The Dates and Editions of Eusebius’ *Chronici Canones* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*’, *JThS* 48 (1997) 471-504, at 489-7; R.K. Bhola, ‘Dating Eusebius’ *Quaestiones ad Stephanum*’, in M.-P. Bussières (ed.), *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l’Antiquité profane et chrétienne* (Turnhout, 2013) 153-76, at 170-2.

his mutually beneficial relationship with the Christian god, who favoured him alone of the Roman emperors – all of which he clearly composed and inserted after the emperor’s death – and even includes a statement of his intent in the biography:

My purpose in the present work is to put into words and write down what relates to the life which is dear to God. Since even these events are innumerable, I shall pick out from those which have reached us the most significant and worth recording for those who come after us, and even of these I shall set out the narrative as briefly as possible, since the occasion demands that I offer unrestrained praises in varied words of the truly Blessed One.³³⁵

From the start there is every indication that the reader should tread lightly, but even so there should be no doubt that Eusebius did indeed hear the story of the ‘vision’ from Constantine himself. What is essential to keep in mind, however, is that he does not provide the emperor’s tale verbatim. Once the story left Constantine’s lips it became subject to how Eusebius perceived and understood it at the time he heard it, how he perceived/understood it when it came time to write *Vita*, and finally the editorial control he exercised when retelling it.³³⁶

In the present chapter, I will attempt to work through the various filters to arrive at a better understanding of this stage of the Vision legend, beginning first with a detailed outline and analysis of the *Vita* account, before proceeding to the issue of chronology – not only for the ‘vision’ itself, but also Constantine’s report to Eusebius. Properly assessing the chronology, I believe, is essential for contextualising the *Vita* ‘vision’, since it stands to reason that the greater the length of time between the event and the report, the greater the

³³⁵ Eus. *VC* 1.11: τοῦ τῆς προκειμένης ἡμῖν πραγματείας σκοποῦ μόνα τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεοφιλῆ συντείνοντα βίον λέγειν τε καὶ γράφειν ὑποβάλλοντος. μυρίων δ’ ὄσων ὄντων καὶ τούτων, τὰ καιριώτατα καὶ τοῖς μεθ’ ἡμᾶς ἀξιομνημόνευτα τῶν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐλθόντων ἀναλεξάμενος, τούτων αὐτῶν ὡς οἶόν τε διὰ βραχυτάτων ἐκθήσομαι τὴν ὑφήγησιν, τοῦ καιροῦ λοιπὸν ἐπιτρέποντος ἀκωλύτως παντοίαις φωναῖς τὸν ὡς ἀληθῶς μακάριον ἀνυμνεῖν.

³³⁶ Singor, ‘*Labarum*’, 500, comments that, while we may not know what Constantine actually said to Eusebius, we can be sure that the *Vita* ‘vision’ is the bishop’s “interpretation of the emperor’s words”.

opportunities for Constantine to reinvent the experience, to influence others in the telling of it, and to engage in further reconstruction based on what others were in turn reporting back to him. Even though my focus in this study is neither the sincerity of Constantine's Christianity nor the mapping of his religious development, because of the prevailing tendency in modern scholarship to treat the *Vita* 'vision' as a conversion narrative – which, I will argue, is what Eusebius was indeed striving to achieve – the context of conversion is unavoidable. As such, a large portion of this chapter is dedicated to examining how Eusebius crafted the *Vita* 'vision' as a conversion narrative through thematic connections with St. Paul, with respect to both the experience on the road to Damascus as related in *Acts* and references to his 'conversion' in the Pauline epistles, which is then further examined in light of recent developments in the modern study of religious conversion. In short, I conclude that Constantine's story of his miraculous 'vision' was not intended as a description of his conversion to Christianity, but that such an interpretation was reached by Eusebius, who ultimately possessed the power – as the writer of *Vita* and reporter of the 'vision' – to represent it this way. By addressing Eusebius' account on its own terms, much as I have already done for Panegyric 6 and Lactantius, a clearer picture of how the *Vita* 'vision' is constructed and how it fits into the evolution of the 'Vision' legend will emerge.

The Vita Narrative

The 'vision' is one of the first topics that Eusebius treats in Book One of *Vita* and, although the insertion of chapter headings by a later editor appears to delineate the discourse,³³⁷ much of the content that comes before it contains narrative elements that are relevant to the 'vision'

³³⁷ F. Winkelmann, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantins* (Berlin, 1975) xlix.

account and should be considered a broader lead-up to it. Following a laudatory introduction praising the immortal supremacy of Constantine and the Christian god, and indicating his purpose in composing *Vita*, Eusebius proceeds to describe Constantine's upbringing (including his time spent in the company of the 'tyrants', that is, Diocletian, Maximian Herculius, and Galerius), the moral and religious character of Constantius (with particular emphasis on his worship of the Christian god and refusal to persecute Christians), Constantine's 'escape' from the court of Galerius and accession in Britain, and the pacification of his Western territories.³³⁸ The latter two topics especially receive somewhat brisk treatment, and so the first substantial description of an event in the early years of Constantine's reign is the 'vision', which is situated explicitly in context of the civil war against Maxentius – something that constitutes a central narrative element.³³⁹

According to Eusebius, after Constantine had conciliated his territories from 'barbarian' threats, he then turned his attention to Rome, which remained firmly within the grip of the tyrant Maxentius, and determined to be its liberator.

When he then perceived that the whole earthly element was like a great body, and next became aware that the head of the whole, the imperial city of the Roman Empire, lay oppressed by bondage to a tyrant, he first gave opportunity for those who governed the other parts to rescue it, inasmuch as they were senior in years; but when none of these was able to give aid, and even those who did make the attempt had met a shameful end, he declared that his life was not worth living if he were to allow the imperial city to remain in such a plight, and began preparations to overthrow the tyranny.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Eus. *VC* 1.1-9 (general praise of Constantine and God); 10-11 (statement of purpose); 12 (Constantine's childhood); 13-18 (the Christianity of Constantius); 19-21 (Constantine's 'escape'); 22-24 (Constantine's accession); 25 (consolidation of Constantine's territory).

³³⁹ Eusebius' swift narration from the death of Constantius to the 'vision' prompts Van Dam, 'Many Conversions', 132, to comment: "Seven years had vanished from his narrative".

³⁴⁰ Eus. *VC* 1.26: Εἶθ' ὡςπερ μέγα σῶμα τὸ πᾶν τῆς γῆς ἐννοήσας στοιχεῖον, κάπειτα τὴν τοῦ παντὸς κεφαλὴν, τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς τὴν βασιλεύουσαν πόλιν, τυραννικῆ δουλείᾳ συνιδῶν καθυπηγμένην, παρεχώρει μὲν τὰ πρῶτα τὴν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ἄμυναν τοῖς τῶν λοιπῶν κρατοῦσι μερῶν ἅτε δὴ χρόνῳ προάγουσιν, ἐπεὶ δὲ τούτων οὐδεὶς οἶός τ' ἦν ἐπικουρεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ πεῖραν λαβεῖν ἐθελήσαντες αἰσχροῦν

In this rendition of events the significance and legacy of Rome are the primary factors in Constantine's decision to 'liberate' the city. Initially, we are told, he left that responsibility to his imperial colleagues, namely, Severus in early to mid 307 and Galerius in late 307, from whose failures he arrived at a very climactic conclusion.³⁴¹

Knowing well that he would need more powerful aid than an army can supply because of the mischievous magical devices practised by the tyrant, he sought a god to aid him. He regarded the resources of soldiers and military numbers as secondary, for he thought that without the aid of a god these could achieve nothing; and he said that what comes from a god's assistance is irresistible and invincible. He therefore considered what kind of god he should adopt to aid him, and, while he thought, a clear impression came to him, that of the many who had in the past aspired to government, those who had attached their personal hopes to many gods, and had cultivated them with drink-offerings, sacrifices and dedications, had first been deceived by favourable predictions and oracles which promised welcome things, but then met an unwelcome end, nor did any god stand at their side to protect them from divinely directed disaster; only his own father had taken the opposite course to theirs by condemning their error, while he himself had throughout his life honoured the God who transcends the universe, and had found him a saviour and guardian of his Empire and a provider of everything good.³⁴²

This report of Constantine's thought process leading up to the 'vision' seems to have come from the emperor himself, which is evident not only from the psychical intrusiveness of the

ὑπέμειναν τέλος, οὐδὲ βιωτὸν αὐτῶ τὴν ζωὴν εἶναι εἰπὼν, εἰ τὴν βασιλίδα πόλιν οὕτω κάμνουσαν παρίδοι, παρεσκευάζετο τὰ πρὸς τὴν καθαίρεσιν τῆς τυραννίδος.

³⁴¹ The literary sources for the failed campaigns of Severus and Galerius, as well as the death of Severus, are at the same time fairly similar, yet considerably different; see the discussion of B. Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian* (London, 2009) 187-9 and 193-7.

³⁴² Eus. *VC* 1.27.1-2: Εὐ δ' ἐννοήσας ὡς κρείττονος ἢ κατὰ στρατιωτικὴν δέοι αὐτῶ βοηθείας διὰ τὰς κακοτέχνους καὶ γοητικὰς μαγγανείας τὰς παρὰ τῶ τυράννω σπουδαζομένας, θεὸν ἀνεζήτηει βοηθόν, τὰ μὲν ἐξ ὀπλιτῶν καὶ στρατιωτικοῦ πλήθους δεύτερα τιθέμενος (τῆς γὰρ παρὰ θεοῦ βοηθείας ἀπούσης τὸ μὴτὲν ταῦτα δύνασθαι ἠγεῖτο), τὰ δ' ἐκ θεοῦ συνεργίας ἄμαχα εἶναι καὶ ἀήττητα λέγων. ἐννοεῖ δὴτὰ ὅποιον δέοι θεὸν βοηθὸν ἐπιγράψασθαι, ζητοῦντι δ' αὐτῶ ἐννοία τις ὑπεισηλθεν, ὡς πλείονων πρότερον τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐφαψαμένων οἱ μὲν πλείοσι θεοῖς τὰς σφῶν αὐτῶν ἀναρτήσαντες ἐλπίδας, λοιβαῖς τε καὶ θυσίαις καὶ ἀναθήμασι τούτους θεραπεύσαντες, ἀπατηθέντες τὰ πρῶτα διὰ μαντείων κεχαρισμένων χρησμῶν τε τὰ αἴσια ἀπαγγελλομένων αὐτοῖς τέλος οὐκ αἴσιον εὔραντο, οὐδέ τις θεῶν πρὸς τὸ μὴ θεηλάτοις ὑποβληθῆναι καταστροφαῖς δεξιὸς αὐτοῖς παρέστη, μόνον δὲ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ πατέρα τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐκείνοις τραπέντα τῶν μὲν πλάνην καταγνῶναι, αὐτὸν δὲ τὸν ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὄλων θεόν, διὰ πάσης τιμήσαντα ζωῆς, σωτῆρα καὶ φύλακα τῆς βασιλείας ἀγαθοῦ τε παντὸς χορηγὸν εὔρασθαι.

description, but also because, at least at one point, Eusebius notes, ‘he said’. This passage also introduces a new narrative element, the Christianity of Constantius.

He judiciously considered these things for himself, and weighed well how those who had confided in a multitude of gods had run into multiple destruction, so that neither offspring nor shoot was left in them, no root, neither name nor memorial among mankind, whereas his father’s God had bestowed on his father manifest and numerous tokens of his power. He also pondered carefully those who had already campaigned against the tyrant. They had assembled their forces with a multitude of gods and had come to a dismal end: one of them had retreated in disgrace without striking a blow, while the other had met a casual death by assassination in his own camp. He marshalled these arguments in his mind, and concluded that it was folly to go on with the vanity of the gods which do not exist, and to persist in error in the face of so much evidence, and he decided he should venerate his father’s God alone.³⁴³

This passage alone reveals several remarkable signs of later revision in Constantine’s recollection of the circumstances that led to his conclusion and by extension the ‘vision’. Constantius, we are told, differed from his imperial colleagues in that he worshiped the Christian god and Eusebius even tells a colourful story about how at the start of the persecution he honoured, rather than persecuted, those palace employees who remained steadfast in their faith.³⁴⁴ On the other hand, Lactantius, writing twenty-five years earlier, reports that Constantius did participate in the persecution of the Christians, but that, contrary to the vigour of his colleagues, he performed only the minimum level of commitment: he destroyed churches (and burned scripture?), but refrained from executions.³⁴⁵ This was,

³⁴³ Eus. *VC* 1.27.3: ταῦτα παρ’ ἑαυτῷ διακρίνας εὖ τε λογισάμενος, ὡς οἱ μὲν πλήθει θεῶν ἐπιθαρρήσαντες καὶ πλείοσιν ἐπιπεπτώκασιν ὀλέθροις, ὡς μηδὲ γένος μηδὲ φυὴν μὴ ρίζαν αὐτοῖς, μηδ’ ὄνομα μηδὲ μνήμην ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀπολειφθῆναι, ὁ δὲ πατρῷος αὐτῷ θεὸς τῆς αὐτοῦ δυνάμεως ἐναργῆ καὶ πάμπολλα δείγματα εἶη δεδωκῶς τῷ αὐτοῦ πατρί, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἤδη καταστρατεύσαντας πρότερον τοῦ τυράννου διασκεψάμενος σὺν πλήθει μὲν θεῶν τὴν παράταξιν πεποιημένους αἰσχρὸν δὲ τέλος ὑπομείναντας· ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν σὺν αἰσχύνῃ τῆς συμβολῆς ἄπρακτος ἀνεχώρει, ὁ δὲ καὶ μέσοις αὐτοῖς τοῖς στρατεύμασι κατασφαγεῖς πάρεργον ἐγένετο θανάτου· ταῦτ’ οὖν πάντα συναγαγὼν τῇ διανοίᾳ, τὸ μὲν περὶ τοὺς μηθὲν ὄντας θεοὺς ματαιιάζειν καὶ μετὰ τοσοῦτον ἔλεγχον ἀποπλανᾶσθαι μωρίας ἔργον ὑπελάμβανε, τὸν δὲ πατρῶον τιμᾶν μόνον ᾤετο δεῖν θεόν.

³⁴⁴ Eus. *VC* 1.16.

³⁴⁵ Lact. *DMP* 15.7. Only the first persecution edict (February 303) was promulgated in the West, which ordered the demolition of Christian meeting places, the burning of scripture, confiscation of communal

however, not on account of some personal Christianity, but an expression of his clemency, a quality which Lactantius claims caused him to be despised by his colleague Galerius.³⁴⁶

Other sources, both literary and monumental, remembered Constantius as a pious ‘pagan’, but a ‘pagan’ nonetheless.³⁴⁷ The reinvention of Constantius as a Christian seems to have stemmed from Constantine himself: in *Vita* Eusebius produces a Greek translation of a Latin letter to the Eastern provincials circulated in late 324 or 325, in which Constantine says, “I held the previous Emperors as exceedingly harsh because of their savage ways, and only my father engaged in gentle deeds, with wonderful reverence calling upon the Saviour God [τὸν σωτῆρα θεόν] in all his actions”.³⁴⁸ This letter may have undergone some slight transformation in its rendering into Greek, perhaps in the specific reference to the ‘god’ that Constantius worshiped, but the fact that the reinvention of his character, in order to absolve him of any involvement in the persecution, was initiated by his own son is clear.³⁴⁹

Christian property, and mandatory demonstrations of worship; cf. T.D. Barnes, ‘From Toleration to Repression: The Evolution of Constantine’s Religious Policies’, *SCI* 21 (2002) 189-207, at 192-4.

³⁴⁶ Lact. *DMP* 20.1-2.

³⁴⁷ The panegyrist of 307, 310, 313, and 321, of course, who depict him as being a god or in the company of gods, but also the solar and sacrificial representations of Constantius on the Arch of Constantine. Cf. M.D. Smith, ‘The Religion of Constantius I’, *GRBS* 38 (1997) 187-208; M.D. Smith, ‘The Religious Coinage of Constantius I’, *Byzantion* 70 (2000) 474-90; K.M. Girardet, *Die konstantinische Wende* (Darmstadt, 2006) 27-32; D.S. Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford, 2013) 155-6.

³⁴⁸ Eus. *VC* 2.49.1: “Ἐσχον ἔγωγε τοὺς πρὸ τούτου γενομένους αὐτοκράτορας διὰ τὸ τῶν τρόπων ἄγριον ἀποσκήρους, μόνος δ’ ὁ πατήρ ὁ ἐμὸς ἡμερότητος ἔργα μετεχειρίζετο, μετὰ θαυμαστῆς εὐλαβείας ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἑαυτοῦ πράξεσι τὸν σωτῆρα θεὸν ἐπικαλούμενος.

³⁴⁹ J. Vogt, ‘Pagans and Christians in the Family of Constantine the Great’, in A.D. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963) 38-55, at 44, argues that Constantius was not a Christian, but that Constantine wanted him to be remembered as one; Storch, ‘Eusebian Constantine’, 147, contends that the piety of the imperial family was essential to the image of Constantine, but does not elaborate on the likelihood of Constantius’ Christianity; Av. Cameron, ‘The Reign of Constantine, A.D. 306-337’, in A. Bowman et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. Volume 12*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2005) 90-109, at 91. On Constantius as a ‘pagan’ monotheist: J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979) 241-2; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 610-5. Cf. A. Piganiol,

Constantine's deified progenitor is not, however, the only individual that undergoes change in this letter. Diocletian is described as a "fearful coward..., his mind deceived by error", while Constantine himself engages in a most accomplished sleight-of-hand, namely, purporting that he was "still just a boy" at the time the persecution began, when in fact he had been in his early thirties.³⁵⁰ The reinvention of Constantius as not only refusing to persecute Christians, but as a Christian himself – a claim that is not found in any other contemporary source – would seem to have derived from some piece of Constantinian propaganda that was refined over time.³⁵¹

Secondly, in this passage Eusebius (or Constantine) elaborates on the fortunes of the persecutors, who as a result of their erroneous worship suffered a fate worse than death: complete erasure, "so that neither offspring nor shoot was left in them, no root, neither name nor memorial among mankind".³⁵² As to the first part of this argument, even if we suppose that it refers only to the Tetrarchs that instigated the persecution – Diocletian, Maximian, and

L'empereur Constantin (Paris, 1932) 31-6, that Constantius was anti-Christian. In defence of Constantius' Christianity, see Elliott, *Christianity*, 20-7.

³⁵⁰ Eus. *VC* 2.51.1: "I heard then, when I was still just a boy, how he who at that time held first rank among the Roman Emperors [i.e. Diocletian], fearful coward that he was, his mind deceived by error, anxiously enquired of his guards who the 'righteous on earth' might be"; ἡκροώμην τότε κοιμιδῆ παῖς ἔτι ὑπάρχων, πῶς ὁ κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ παρὰ τοῖς Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτορσιν ἔχων τὰ πρωτεῖα, δειλῖος, ἀληθῶς δειλῖος, πλάνη τὴν ψυχὴν ἠπατημένος, παρὰ τῶν δορυφορούντων αὐτόν, τίνες ἄρα εἶεν οἱ πρὸς τῇ γῆ δίκαιοι, πολυπραγμονῶν ἐπυθάνετο. Cf. Barnes, *Constantine*, 3. See, however, *Pan. Lat.* 7(6).5.3, delivered in 307, where the panegyrist refers to Constantine as a "youthful emperor", and 6(7).21.6, where Constantine's youthfulness is compared to Apollo (and possibly, Augustus). B.S. Rodgers, 'The Metamorphosis of Constantine', *CQ* 39 (1989) 233-46, at 235 (n. 8), notes that the claim to boyhood as reproduced in *Vita* should not be taken as an intended deception, but a long-standing preference in Constantine's self-representation, adding (at 238-9) that the theme of his youthfulness occurs in every Constantinian panegyric, save the *gratiarum actio* delivered in 311.

³⁵¹ It would otherwise be quite strange for Eusebius to elaborate on the Christianity of Constantius in the opening chapters of *Vita* and include it so casually in the 'vision' account.

³⁵² Although not in reference to *Vita* or Christianity specifically, Rodgers, 'Metamorphosis', 240, comments that the cessation of existence was "the fate reserved for incompetents".

Galerius – there is a huge discrepancy in the chronology, which can only be accounted for if Constantine constructed this rationale much later in life.³⁵³ Not only did Maxentius, the son of Maximian, die in October 312, but Candidianus, the son of Galerius, was executed at Nicomedia in late 313, and Valeria, the much-coveted daughter of Diocletian, and her mother were not executed until late 314 at the earliest.³⁵⁴ Should we be extremely literal and include all of the Tetrarchs that persecuted Christians, Maximin Daia died in autumn 313, followed shortly after by the executions of his wife, daughter, and son, Maximus, at around the same time that Severianus, the son of Severus, was also executed.

With respect to the second part of the argument, that the memories of the Tetrarchs do not survive, it is more than just a bending of the truth, but an outright manipulation of it. Constantine did witness the obliteration of references, monumental and otherwise, of the senior Tetrarchs prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge, but only in his territories and at his

³⁵³ Indeed, we can tell that he did: this rationale is mentioned in the same letter in *Vita* where Constantine declares Constantius was Christian; at Eus. *VC* 2.54: “Gone now are the very authors of the abomination [i.e. the persecution], devoted to everlasting punishment in the pits of Acheron, after a shameful death; they became embroiled in fratricidal wars and have left themselves neither name nor progeny” (οἴχονται λοιπόν καὶ ἐκεῖνοι οἱ τοῦ μύσου ἀυθένται, πρὸς διηνεκῆ κόλασιν τοῖς Ἀχέροντος βαράθροισ ἐκδοθέντες, σὺν αἰσχυρῶ τέλει. πολέμοις γὰρ ἐμφυλίοις καταμιγέντες οὔτ’ ὄνομα οὔτε γένος αὐτῶν καταλελοίπασιν). The only persecuting emperor mentioned explicitly in this letter is Diocletian, albeit by title only (at 51.1), but the reference to “authors” must indicate Maximian and Galerius as well, and possibly Maximin. See also, Eus. *LC* 9.13: “Not even a brief time passed for them [i.e. the persecutors], but with one blast of a heaven-sent squall He eradicated them, so that neither family, nor offspring, nor any relic of their memory was left behind among mankind, but in a brief time the whole lot, although widely separated, were utterly extinguished, punished by the scourge of God”; οὔπω δ’ οὖν αὐτοῖς βραχὺς διήει χρόνος, καὶ μιᾶ ῥιπῆ θεηλάτου καταιγίδος ἀφανεῖς ἐποίει, ὡς μὴ γένος, μὴ σπέρμα, μηδέ τι λείψανον τῆς αὐτῶν μνήμης ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀπολειφθῆναι ἄρδην δ’ ἐν βραχεῖ τοὺς πάντας καίπερ εἰς πλῆθος ἀφωρισμένους θεηλάτοις μάστιγι τιμωρουμένους ἀποσβῆναι. Cf. H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine* (Berkeley, 1976) 170, that this likely refers to the usual suspects, Diocletian, Maximian, and Galerius, as well as Maximin and Maxentius.

³⁵⁴ Lact. *DMP* 50-51. If we wish to be very technical, Fausta, the daughter of Maximian, did not die until ca. 326 [cf. D. Woods, ‘On the Death of the Empress Fausta’, *G&R* Ser. 2 45 (1998) 70-86]. Lactantius (at 50.1) uses language similar to Eusebius to describe the fates of the persecutors, stating that “neither root nor stem” remain, but the most recent imperial death that he considers to justify this statement is that of Valeria, ca. late 314, some fifteen months after the death of Maximin. Interestingly, Nazarius employs this sort of language also to describe, presumably, the deaths of Maxentius and his son; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).6.6.

behest. The *de facto damnatio memoriae* of Maximian following his failed usurpation in Gaul had the added effect, Lactantius tells us, of removing images of Diocletian as well, since the two were commonly portrayed together.³⁵⁵ However, this policy would have only affected Constantine's regions – Gaul, Britain, and Spain.³⁵⁶ There is nothing to suggest that similar policies were in place elsewhere prior to Constantine's conquest of Rome. If the names and memorials of the persecuting emperors were condemned across the Roman world, it was only at the initiative of Constantine (and perhaps also Licinius) and after October 312 – with the exception of Maximian, of course, whose memory was gradually rehabilitated by Constantine in order to propagandise him as a deified imperial ancestor.³⁵⁷

Constantius' closet Christianity and Constantine's desire to liberate Rome, combined with doubts in traditional worship, culminate in the 'vision' experience. Once the emperor had reached the conscious decision to dedicate himself to his father's unknown god, the only obstacle was the knowledge of his identity, the revelation of which Constantine then prompted.

This God he began to invoke in prayer, beseeching and imploring him to show him who he was, and to stretch out his right hand to assist him in his plans. As he made these prayers and earnest supplications there appeared to the Emperor a most remarkable divine sign. If someone else had reported it, it would perhaps not be easy to accept; but since the victorious Emperor himself told the story to the present writer a long while after, when I was privileged with his acquaintance and company, and confirmed it with oaths, who could hesitate to believe the account, especially when the time which followed provided evidence for the truth of what he said? About the time of the midday sun, when day was just turning, he said he saw with his

³⁵⁵ Lact. *DMP* 42.1. Lactantius situates this development shortly after the death of Galerius (April 311), but before the renewed persecution in the East (late 311).

³⁵⁶ In the years leading up to the civil war, Maxentius issued memorial coinage for Maximian, and Galerius (*RIC* 6 Roma.243-4, 246-8, 250-1, 253-5, and 271; Ostia.24-6 and 30-1), so they certainly had not been erased from memory. Additionally, issues for Maximian were still being produced out of the Constantinian mints between 310 and 312, likely to maintain Constantine's standing in the imperial college.

³⁵⁷ Barnes, *Constantine*, 4.

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’. Amazement at the spectacle seized both him and the whole company of soldiers which was then accompanying him on a campaign he was conducting somewhere, and witnessed the miracle. He was, he said, wondering to himself what the manifestation might mean; then, while he meditated, and thought long and hard, night overtook him. Thereupon, as he slept, the Christ of God appeared to him with the sign which had 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 as protection against the attacks of the enemy. When day came he arose and recounted the mysterious communication to his friends. Then he summoned goldsmiths and jewellers, sat down among them, and explained the shape of the sign, and gave them instructions about copying it in gold and precious stones. This was something which the Emperor himself once saw fit to let me also set eyes on, God vouchsafing even this.³⁵⁸

There is a slight break in the account of the ‘vision’ as Eusebius provides a detailed description of the *Labarum*, its form and appearance as he saw it years later, before continuing his narration of the experience.

At the time in question, stunned by the amazing vision, and determined to worship no other god than the one who had appeared, he summoned those expert in his words, and enquired who this god was, and what was the explanation of the vision which had appeared of the sign. They said that the god was the Onlybegotten Son of the one and only God, and that the sign which

³⁵⁸ Eus. *VC* 1.28-30: Ἀνεκαλείτο δῆτα ἐν εὐχαῖς τοῦτον, ἀντιβολῶν καὶ ποτνιώμενος φῆναι αὐτῷ ἑαυτὸν ὅστις εἶη καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δεξιὰν χεῖρα τοῖς προκειμένοις ἐπορέξει. εὐχομένῳ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ λιπαρῶς ἰκετεύοντι τῷ βασιλεῖ θεοσημεία τις ἐπιφαίνεται παραδοξοτάτη, ἣν τάχα μὲν ἄλλου λέγοντος οὐ ῥάδιον ἦν ἀποδέξασθαι, αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ νικητοῦ βασιλέως τοῖς τὴν γραφὴν διηγουμένοις ἡμῖν μακροῖς ὕστερον χρόνοις, ὅτε ἤξιώθημεν τῆς αὐτοῦ γνώσεώς τε καὶ ὁμιλίας, ἐξαγγείλαντος ὄρκους τε πιστωσαμένου τὸν λόγον, τίς ἂν ἀμφιβάλῃ μὴ οὐχὶ πιστεῦσαι τῷ διηγῆματι; μάλισθ’ ὅτε καὶ ὁ μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνος ἀληθῆ τῷ λόγῳ παρέσχε τὴν μαρτυρίαν. ἀμφὶ μεσημβρινὰς ἡλίου ὥρας, ἤδη τῆς ἡμέρας ἀποκλινούσης, αὐτοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν ἔφη ἐν αὐτῷ οὐρανῷ ὑπερκειμένον τοῦ ἡλίου σταυροῦ τρόπαιον ἐκ φωτὸς συνιστάμενον, γραφὴν τε αὐτῷ συνῆφθαι λέγουσαν· τούτῳ νίκα. θάμβος δ’ ἐπὶ τῷ θεάματι κρατῆσαι αὐτόν τε καὶ τὸ στρατιωτικὸν ἅπαν, ὃ δὴ στελλομένῳ ποι πορείαν συνεπέτο τε καὶ θεωρὸν ἐγένετο τοῦ θαύματος. καὶ δὴ διαπορεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἔλεγε, τί ποτε εἶη τὸ φάσμα. ἐνθυμουμένῳ δ’ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ λογιζομένῳ νύξ ἐπήει καταλαβοῦσα. ἔνθα δὲ ὑπνοῦντι αὐτῷ τὸν Χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σὺν τῷ φανέντι κατ’ οὐρανὸν σημεῖω ὀφθῆναι τε καὶ παρακελεύεσθαι, μίμημα ποιησάμενον τοῦ κατ’ οὐρανὸν ὀφθέντος σημείου τούτῳ πρὸς τὰς τῶν πολεμίων συμβολὰς ἀλεξήματα χρῆσθαι. ἅμα δ’ ἡμέρα διαναστὰς τοῖς φίλοις ἐξηγόρευε τὸ ἀπόρρητον. κάπειτα χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν δημιουργοὺς συγκαλέσας μέσος αὐτὸς καθίζανει καὶ τοῦ σημείου τὴν εἰκόνα φράζει, ἀπομιμῆσθαι τε αὐτὴν χρυσοῦ καὶ πολυτελέσι λίθοις διεκελεύετο. ὃ δὲ καὶ ἡμᾶς ὀφθαλμοῖς ποτε παραλαβεῖν αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς, θεοῦ καὶ τοῦτο χαρισσάμενος, ἠξίωσεν. Weiss, ‘Vision’, 247, argues that γραφὴν τε αὐτῷ συνῆφθαι λέγουσαν· τούτῳ νίκα does not actually refer to sky-writing, but that the ‘cross-shaped trophy’ itself was a pictogram (γραφὴ) meaning ‘By this conquer’. Unfortunately, the grammar seems to be fairly straight-forward here: τε marks γραφὴ as a new element, that is, not the symbol; and συνῆφθαι (συνάπτω being one of those verbs that is almost always intransitive in the middle voice) must mean ‘lying next to’ or ‘connected with’.

appeared was a token of immortality, and was an abiding trophy of the victory over death, which he had once won when he was present on earth. They began to teach him the reasons for his coming, explaining to him in detail the story of his self-accommodation to human conditions. He listened attentively to these accounts too, while he marvelled at the divine manifestation which had been granted to his eyes; comparing the heavenly vision with the meaning of what was being said, he made up his mind, convinced that it was as God's own teaching that the knowledge of these things had come to him. He now decided personally to apply himself to the divinely inspired writings. Taking the priests of God as his advisers, he also deemed it right to honour the God who had appeared to him with all due rites. Thereafter, fortified by good hopes in him, he finally set about extinguishing the menacing flames of tyranny.³⁵⁹

Eusebius thus presents the 'vision' as occurring in a strict series of movements: Constantine prays to his father's god; there is (immediately) a divine manifestation in the sky; that night Christ visits him in his sleep; upon waking he commissions the *Labarum*; and he then receives Christian instruction. Eusebius' rich description of the experience as a whole – in addition to his claim to authority and persistent 'he said' – supports the notion that some, if not much, of this story actually derives from Constantine. However, it is also evident that story had undergone some revision between the event and *Vita*. This is easiest to detect in the description of the dream-vision: Eusebius states that Christ appeared to Constantine in his sleep, but according to the narrative the identity of the dream visitor was only determined after consulting "those expert in his words". In the retelling of the story this detail could thus

³⁵⁹ Eus. *VC* 1.32: κατὰ δὲ τὸν δηλωθέντα χρόνον τὴν παράδοξον καταπλαγεῖς ὄψιν, οὐδ' ἕτερον θεὸν ἢ τὸν ὀφθέντα δοκιμάσας σέβειν, τοὺς τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων μύστας ἀνεκαλεῖτο, καὶ τίς εἶη θεὸς 'οὗτος' ἠρώτα τίς τε ὁ τῆς ὀφθείσης ὄψεως τοῦ σημείου λόγος. οἱ δὲ τὸν μὲν εἶναι θεὸν ἔφασαν θεοῦ τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ μόνου μονογενῆ παῖδα, τὸ δὲ σημεῖον τὸ φανέν σύμβολον μὲν ἀθανασίας εἶναι, τρόπαιον δ' ὑπάρχειν τῆς κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου νίκης, ἣν ἐποιήσατό ποτε παρελθῶν ἐπὶ γῆς, ἐδίδασκόν τε τὰς τῆς παρόδου αἰτίας, τὸν ἀκριβῆ λόγον αὐτῷ τῆς κατ' ἀνθρώπους οἰκονομίας ὑποτιθέμενοι. ὁ δὲ καὶ τούτοις μὲν ἐμαθητεύετο τοῖς λόγοις, θαῦμα δ' εἶχε τῆς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτῷ παραδοθείσης θεοφανείας, συμβάλλων τε τὴν οὐράνιον ὄψιν τῇ τῶν λεγομένων ἐρμηνείᾳ τὴν διάνοιαν ἐστηρίζετο, θεοδίδακτον αὐτῷ τὴν τούτων γνῶσιν παρεῖναι πειθόμενος. καὶ αὐτὸς δ' ἤδη τοῖς ἐνθέοις ἀναγνώσμασι προσέχειν ἤξιον. καὶ δὴ τοὺς τοῦ θεοῦ ἱερέας παρέδρους αὐτῷ ποιησάμενος τὸν ὀφθέντα θεὸν πάσαις δεῖν ᾤετο θεραπείαις τιμᾶν. κάπειτα φραξάμενος ταῖς εἰς αὐτὸν ἀγαθαῖς ἐλπίσιν ὥρμητο λοιπὸν τοῦ τυραννικοῦ πυρὸς τὴν ἀπειλὴν κατασβέσων.

be retroactively applied, but it is nevertheless an alteration of the sequence of events in hindsight.

There are, however, some fundamental ‘plot-holes’ that do not seem to conform to the narrative or the historical situation, most notably Constantine’s ignorance of the identity of his father’s god – a curious detail that would seem to detract from the plausibility of the experience.³⁶⁰ If one were to attempt to rationalise this detail on the *Vita* narrative alone, Constantine was not raised as a Christian and had spent so much time away from his father, having been a ward in the Eastern court since youth, that he was presumably unaware of his father’s religious inclinations. This is, however, hard to fathom considering Eusebius’ description of Constantius’ openly Christian conduct earlier in the narrative and we know it anyway not to be the case. Constantine spent almost an entire year campaigning in Britain with Constantius before his death; that he should not have come to know his father’s religious leanings in that time is truly odd.³⁶¹ A further point of confusion is that Constantine

³⁶⁰ Elliott, *Christianity*, 67; Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 179. Eusebius may have intended to draw a parallel with the ‘burning bush’ episode at *Exodus* 3, in which Moses – being ignorant of his religious heritage – is told “I am the God of your father” (3:6) and later inquires the name of the god that has appeared to him (3:13). Cf. Wilson, ‘Biographical Models’, 116, who finds a connection between the *Labarum* and the rod of Moses; Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 203 and 205, on the other hand, draw a parallel between the making of the *Labarum* and the construction of the Ark of the Covenant (*Ex* 25); Av. Cameron, ‘Construction’, 158-61. Considering the other Mosaic allusions that Eusebius makes in both this work and the *Historia ecclesiastica*, it is not inconceivable. It would mean, then, that this is an obvious Eusebian addition to the story. Although this would support a good portion of my argument, I do not think it is necessarily the case, on the basis that, unlike the other instances, he does not underline this Mosaic allusion with a reference to scripture. There are certainly similarities between the ‘burning bush’ episode and Constantine’s ‘vision’, but so too Paul. As to the *Ark/Labarum*, the episodes differ considerably in content and context. Van Dam, ‘Many Conversions’, 131, suggests that this element was intended by Eusebius, so as not to make Constantine simply an inheritor of his father’s religion. It is possible that Constantine’s hesitation in crediting a particular divinity is a distinctly ‘pagan’ element of the story, being a formulaic *topos* in ancient reports of portents and visions; cf. J. Alvar, ‘Matériaux pour l’étude de la formule siue deus, siue dea’, *Numen* 32 (1985) 236-73.

³⁶¹ Drijvers, ‘Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*’, 12. Cf. Elliott, ‘Constantine’s Conversion’, 427, who rather aggressively proposes that, for this to be the case, Constantine must have been “an ignoramus or moron”. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change*, 279, on the other hand, regards the sheer “oddness” of this element as lending plausibility to Constantine’s account. While this element of the story is indeed odd according to

is described as not only seeking out Christian interpreters for a ‘vision’ that he does not initially realise was Christian, but keeping Christian advisors as well.³⁶² In a situation like this we have to consider that some revisions may have resulted in omissions; so, for instance, the ‘Christian experts’ need not have been the only religious authorities that Constantine consulted. For the sake of the polished story, however, they are the only ones that matter.

As noted above, Lane Fox observes that individuals are prone to interpret the mystifying according to their predispositions. In this vein it has been suggested that Constantine must have recalled the sorts of symbols that were brought to light during the trials of Christians in the East and perhaps even remembered how such symbols were alleged to have disrupted ‘pagan’ rituals.³⁶³ What Constantine may have recalled or remembered in that moment cannot be determined, but we can be sure that his initial perception was likely not Christian. Constantine’s cultural inclination as a ‘pagan’ – not necessarily as a solar monotheist – would probably have led him to recognise Apollo or possibly even the deified Constantius, who according to the panegyrist of 307 was carried to heaven by a chariot driven by the Sun.³⁶⁴ More pointedly perhaps, Constantine’s present situation would have

historical reality, one must align it rather with the literary depiction of Constantine’s timely arrival at his father’s deathbed. This aspect of Constantinian propaganda appears as early as 309 [*Pan. Lat.* 6(7).7.5- 8.2], but there does not seem to be a clear purpose behind it other than divine providence.

³⁶² Nicholson, ‘Vision’, 312, contends that the presence of Christian advisors only indicates Constantine’s pre-‘vision’ sympathy for Christianity. Cf. Odahl, *Constantine*, 112-4, regarding bishops in the emperor’s entourage.

³⁶³ Odahl, *Constantine*, 106. Cf. Smith, *Constantine*, 104, who notes that – should this be the case – Constantine’s ignorance of the meaning of the cross is “the most damning” inconsistency in this story. Nicholson, ‘Vision’, 312-7, even goes so far as to suggest that Constantine recognised the eschatological significance of the cross in the sky as the sign of the Son of Man, which Christians since the late first century anticipated to indicate the second coming of Christ.

³⁶⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 7(6).14.3. Also, Nazarius [4(10).14.1-7] seems to have had no issue equating a celestial-vision with Constantius. H.A. Drake, ‘The Impact of Constantine on Christianity’, in Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 111-36, at 114, makes the valuable point that “cultural conditions”

prompted another context for the ‘vision’ entirely, which does make its way into Eusebius’ narrative: why would he debate the substance and meaning of the ‘vision’ when his predisposition as a military man – as both an accomplished soldier and general – would lead him to see a ‘cross-shaped trophy’ in the sky as precisely that, ‘a trophy’?³⁶⁵

For instance, in his *Octavius Minucius Felix*, writing in the third century, has the Christian protagonist Octavius Ianuarius make the argument to the ‘pagan’ antagonist Caecilius Natalis, who declares that Christians worship an instrument of death, that ‘pagans’ worship the very same symbol, with emphasis on a military context.

You, indeed, who consecrate gods of wood, adore wooden crosses perhaps as parts of your gods. For your very standards, as well as your banners; and flags of your camp, what else are they but crosses gilded and adorned? Your victorious trophies not only imitate the appearance of a simple cross, but also that of a man affixed to it. We assuredly see the sign of a cross, naturally, in the ship when it is carried along with swelling sails, when it glides forward with expanded oars; and when the military yoke is lifted up, it is the sign of a cross; and when a man adores God with a pure mind, with hands outstretched. Thus the sign of the cross either is sustained by a natural reason, or your own religion is formed with respect to it.³⁶⁶

Standards, banners, and flags, as well as victorious trophies that bear the likeness of a man – that is, a large, wooden cross supporting the helmet, breastplate, and shield of a defeated

determine interpretations; cf. H.A. Drake, ‘Solar Power in Late Antiquity’, in A. Cain and N.E. Lenski (eds.), *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, 2009) 215-26.

³⁶⁵ Storch, ‘Eusebian Constantine’, 148-9, proposes that Eusebius’ is being an innovator here by referring to a Roman military standard as a ‘trophy’, as in, the “triumphant symbol of Christ’s victory over death”, adding also that there is no precedent for an army carrying a *tropaeum* into battle; cf. R.H. Storch, ‘The Trophy and the Cross: Pagan and Christian Symbolism in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries’, *Byzantion* 40 (1970) 105-18, at 113-4, that Eusebius’ use of the term ‘trophy’ is intended to convey a particular sentiment, namely, that Constantine’s victory was achieved before the battle itself.

³⁶⁶ Min. Fel. *Oct.* 29.6-8: *vos plane, qui ligneos deos consecratis, cruces ligneas ut deorum vestrorum partes forsitan adoratis. nam et signa ipsa et cantabra et vexilla castrorum quid aliud quam inauratae cruces sunt et ornatae? tropaea vestra victricia non tantum simplicis crucis faciem, verum et adfixi hominis imitantur. signum sane crucis naturaliter visimus in navi, cum velis tumentibus vehitur, cum expansis palmulis labitur; et cum erigitur iugum, crucis signum est, et cum homo porrectis manibus deum pura mente veneratur. ita signo crucis aut ratio naturalis innititur aut vestra religio formatur.* Cf. Storch, ‘Trophy’; J. Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2012), 173.

enemy, thus resembling a soldier. Despite Eusebius' insistence that Constantine was predisposed to Christianity prior to the 'vision', it is a wonder indeed that, since he is said to have been at that time deliberating martial action against Maxentius, he did not immediately correlate any of these images of military might with the symbol in the sky. Rather, he is depicted as wholly ignorant of the symbol's import, jumping instead at the conclusion of others that it signified the resurrection and immortality of Christ.

It is difficult to say how much of this story was elucidated in hindsight, or how much is based on Constantine's later interpretation and how much Eusebius'. There are, however, some fundamental details in the story that would be more removed from retrospective, which can allow us to properly locate and temporally contextualise the *Vita* 'vision'.

Chronology: 'Vision' and Report

Although in hindsight Constantine may have conflated the factors that he took into consideration before seeking his father's god with later deliberations and developments, there are a number of chronological elements in the narrative that should be considered accurate place-markers in his memory of the event. For instance, Eusebius states that the 'vision' occurred at a time when Constantine was contemplating liberating Rome himself, while he was marching somewhere with his army, and after the failures of Severus and Galerius to depose Maxentius, but before the Battle of Milvian Bridge. Eusebius places emphasis on the connection between the 'vision' and Constantine's victory, but this is not a singular conjecture. When telling the story years later, Constantine likely combined the two events, since he perceived that one directly resulted in the other, perhaps partially in response to how others were framing the victory, such as the panegyrist of 313 and Nazarius in 321, who both claimed divine intervention and assistance in the civil war. Thus, this solidified a

mnemonic association, as if by cause-and-effect the ‘vision’ resulted in that particular victory – to be certain, the most ambitious military operation and successful victory of his early reign. It is highly probable, then, that the chronology of events, as opposed to his recollection of the precise mental processes at the time in question, serves as a better indicator for dating the ‘vision’.

Based on the extremities, a broad chronology can be posited, that is, between Maxentius’ rise to power (28 October 306) and the Battle of Milvian Bridge (28 October 312). Regarding the ‘tyranny’ at Rome, the *Vita* narrative states that Constantine “first gave opportunity for those who governed the other parts [of the empire] to rescue it, inasmuch as they were senior in years”, undoubtedly referring to the failed campaigns of Severus and Galerius, which offers a plausible place-marker within the time-frame. Regardless of the precise chronology of his death, Severus was thwarted in his attempt to take Rome in early 307, as was Galerius later that same year. However, it was around this time (ca. September 307) that Constantine married Fausta and, by virtue of this familial connection, entered into an agreement, however loose, with Maxentius.³⁶⁷ Token expressions of this arrangement are visible in the coinage coming from their respective mints until around the time of Maximian’s expulsion from the imperial city in April or May 308, at which point issues cease to be struck in Maxentius’ territory for both Constantine and Maximian, and for Maxentius in Constantine’s territory.³⁶⁸ Despite the implication in *Vita* that Constantine had

³⁶⁷ Hence the occasion for *Pan. Lat.* 7(6). On the date, see, C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994) 179-85.

³⁶⁸ Since his accession in October 306, Maxentius had continued issuing coins for Constantine as Caesar at Ticinum, Aquileia, Rome, and Carthage, which changes to Augustus in autumn 307 (with the exception of the Carthage mint, which was closed by Maxentius in mid 307); issues for Constantine and Maximian cease altogether beginning ca. May 308. Constantine, on the other hand, only began issuing coins for Maxentius (as

desired to depose Maxentius as early as late 306, the numismatic evidence suggests otherwise.

Following his brusque dismissal from Rome, Maximian then began to reside in Gaul, so it is not a leap to assume that the break between Constantine and Maxentius coincided with that development and reasonable to suppose that any serious contemplation of civil war on the part of Constantine must have begun to form after spring 308. This is not to say that such plans took shape immediately, since Constantine was likely preoccupied at the time with his campaign against the Bructeri across the Rhine.³⁶⁹ However, given his historical ‘arrangement’ with Maxentius, the failed attempts of Severus and Galerius would appear to be a persistent temporal element in his recollection of the events preceding the ‘vision’, from which we can derive a *terminus post quem* of spring 308, to coincide with the expulsion of Maximian.

This provides one chronological bookend for the ‘vision’, but there is some confusion as to the opposing one. Because of the strong connection with the Battle of Milvian Bridge, as well as the earlier account of Constantine’s dream-vision in *De mortibus persecutorum*, numerous scholars continue to maintain that Eusebius describes both the celestial-vision and the dream-vision as taking place during the Italian campaign or even on the night before the decisive battle.³⁷⁰ Rather, what Eusebius actually states is that the ‘vision’ occurred at a time

Augustus) in autumn 307, and only out of Trier (one type) and Lyon (two types). These were probably discontinued in spring 308 as well.

³⁶⁹ T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 70.

³⁷⁰ See, for instance, M. Edwards, ‘Pagan and Christian Monotheism in the Age of Constantine’, in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2004) 211-34, at 226. Av. Cameron, ‘Form and Meaning’, 77, places it during a march in Italy, but before Rome, while in ead., ‘Reign of Constantine’, 92, she states more cautiously “at some point on the southward march”, both of which are at odds with Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 204, that the ‘vision’ “is located before the Italian campaign is launched”, and (at 206) that “it takes place earlier ... even before Constantine’s campaign against Maxentius began”. Cf. Van Dam, ‘Many

when Constantine began to seriously consider marching against Maxentius and that only afterward, “fortified by good hopes in him [i.e. Christ], he finally set about extinguishing the menacing flames of tyranny” – the Italian campaign had not yet begun!³⁷¹ In this way, the *Vita* narrative agrees with the testimonies of the panegyrists of 313 and 321, as well as Eusebius’ own previous statement in the *Historia ecclesiastica* (despite his limited knowledge at that time), that Constantine received divine support prior to launching his invasion of Italy.³⁷² This fact is further driven home shortly later in *Vita* in the description of events leading up to the historic battle; after describing the tyrannical behaviour of Maxentius and his dabbling in offensive magic, Eusebius states:

Constantine meanwhile was moved to pity by all these things, and began making every armed preparation against the tyranny. So taking as his patron God who is over all, and invoking his Christ as saviour and succour, and having set the victorious trophy, the truly salutary sign, at the head of his escorting soldiers and guards, he led them in full force, claiming for the Romans their ancestral liberties. Maxentius put his confidence more in the devices of sorcery than in the loyalty of his subjects, and did not even dare to go beyond the gates of the city, but fortified every place and territory and city which was under his dominion with an immense number of soldiers and countless military units. But the Emperor who relied upon the support of God attacked the first, second, and third formations of the tyrant, overcame them all quite

Conversions’, who consistently refers to the ‘visions in 312’; Odahl, *Constantine*, 104-6, on the eve of battle; James, *Constantine*, 64, on the final march to Rome.

³⁷¹ I can state the matter no better than W.V. Harris, ‘Constantine’s Dream’, *Klio* 87 (2005) 488-94, at 491 (n. 15): “Innumerable pages have been wasted by scholars who have ignored this”. Cf. F. Corsaro, ‘Sogni e visioni nella teologia della Vittoria di Costantino e Licinio’, *Augustinianum* 29 (1989) 333-49, at 335; Elliott, *Christianity*, 68; P. Barceló, ‘Constantins Visionen: zwischen Apollo und Christus’, in P. Barceló et al. (eds.), *Humanitas* (Munich, 2001) 45-61, at 47; B. Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, 2nd ed. (Rowohlt, 2003), 64; Girardet, *Kaiser und sein Gott*, 46-7; Potter, *Constantine*, 150, who does not assign a date, but makes clear that the ‘vision’ is described as taking place in “southern France”, that is, before the launch of the campaign. See, however, Bremmer, ‘Vision’, 59, who argues that the original vision took place in 312, but (at 67) that in his later report to Eusebius Constantine adjusted the chronology to before the Italian campaign so as not to overlap that tradition.

³⁷² *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.1-5; the panegyrist reports that Constantine secured some form of divine favour before advancing into Italy, since the haruspices were against the campaign, adding (at 2.5) that he “must share some secret with that divine mind” (i.e. *mens divina*). Nazarius [at 4(10).14.1-7] describes a heavenly army, led by Constantius, descending from the sky to aid Constantine, noting (at 14.1) that “it is the talk of all the Gauls” (*In ore ... est omnium Galliarum*). See also Eus. *HE* 9.9.2.

easily at the very first onslaught, and advanced to occupy most of the land of Italy. He was now very near to Rome itself.³⁷³

The three formations of Maxentius here must refer to the three main fortified outposts that are emphasised in the panegyric accounts of the Italian campaign: Segusio, Taurinorum, and Verona. Even if these are not the precise engagements he has in mind, Eusebius nevertheless situates the ‘vision’ before the preparations for the invasion and Constantine’s occupation of ‘most of the land of Italy’, that is, Northern Italy. We can thus assign a relatively late *terminus ante quem* for the ‘vision’ of late 311, in order to account not only for the inception of the Italian campaign in spring 312, but also to a small degree the ‘preparations’ for it.³⁷⁴ The result, then, based on the details provided in *Vita*, is a broad time-frame of spring 308 to late 311 – admittedly, a rather generous estimate, but one that nonetheless serves to provide a neat and plausible chronology that complies with the narrative.

There is, however, an additional matter of chronology that needs to be taken into account, namely, the point at which Constantine told his story of the ‘vision’ to Eusebius or,

³⁷³ Eus. *VC* 1.37- 38.1: Ἀλλὰ γὰρ τούτων ἀπάντων οἶκτον ἀναλαβὼν Κωνσταντῖνος πάσαις παρασκευαῖς ὠπλίζετο κατὰ τῆς τυραννίδος. προστησάμενος δῆτα ἑαυτοῦ θεὸν τὸν ἐπὶ πάντων σωτήρᾳ τε καὶ βοηθὸν ἀνακαλεσάμενος τὸν Χριστόν, αὐτοῦ ‘τε τὸ’ νικητικὸν τρόπαιον τὸ δὴ σωτήριον σημεῖον τῶν ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν ὀπλιτῶν τε καὶ δορυφόρων προτάξας ἠγεῖτο πανστρατιᾶ, Ῥωμαίοις τὰ τῆς ἐκ προγόνων ἐλευθερίας προμνύμενος. Μαξεντίου δῆτα μᾶλλον ταῖς κατὰ γοητείαν μηχαναῖς ἢ τῆ τῶν ὑπηκόων ἐπιθαρροῦντος εὐνοίᾳ, προελθεῖν δ’ οὐδ’ ὅσον πυλῶν τοῦ ἄστεος ἐπιτολμῶντος, ὀπλιτῶν δ’ ἀναρίθμῳ πλήθει καὶ στρατοπέδων λόχοις μυρίοις πάντα τόπον καὶ χώραν καὶ πόλιν ὅση τις ὑπ’ αὐτῷ δεδούλωτο φραξαμένου, ὁ τῆς ἐκ θεοῦ συμμαχίας ἀνημμένος βασιλεὺς ἐπιὼν πρώτη καὶ δευτέρα καὶ τρίτη τοῦ τυράννου παρατάξει εὖ μάλα τε πάσας ἐξ αὐτῆς πρώτης ὁρμῆς χειρῶσάμενος, πρόεισιν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ὅσον τῆς Ἰταλῶν χώρας. Ἦδη δ’ αὐτῆς Ῥώμης ἄγχιστα ἦν. Much of this description is adapted from *HE* 9.9.2-3. Worthy of particular note is that Eusebius states (at 9.2) that Constantine was the first to march against Maxentius; he seems not to have been aware, even in ca. 313, of the failed campaigns of Severus and Galerius in 307.

³⁷⁴ Singor, ‘Labarum’, 491-2, notes that the Italian campaign would have required significant preparation, “perhaps a few years”. I would venture to say that this is probably accurate, considering that Constantine not only had to assemble his ‘crack-team’, but also train them to implement the particular ‘sledgehammer’ tactics that would win him Northern Italy. I will nonetheless exercise caution here.

more probably, in his presence. It stands to reason that the passage of time would be an important factor, since the opportunities for Constantine to adapt or expand his recollection of the experience would increase the greater the duration of time between the event and his report. We have already seen one firm example of this in the statement that a crucial element of Constantine's pre-'vision' contemplation was the destruction of the families of the polytheistic Tetrarchs, which is not very plausible prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge and indicates, at least, post-314 revision.³⁷⁵ Whether this revision was conscious (yet another attempt to reinvent his past) or unconscious (a cognitive association with the 'vision' that seemed logical in retrospect), the historical sequence of events bars that particular state of mind from preceding the 'vision'. Determining when Constantine reported the story that Eusebius claims to reproduce would therefore assist in accounting for some of the details contained in the story.

Eusebius writes that he heard Constantine's story in person, "a long while after, when I was privileged with his acquaintance and company".³⁷⁶ This meeting is highly unlikely

³⁷⁵ We can imagine that at the time the destruction of the imperial families would have served to reinforce his conviction that he had exercised good judgement in his choice of patron deity. However, it would have only been at some later point that he would have incorporated that development into the memory of how he ultimately reached the decision to seek out his father's god.

³⁷⁶ At the very least, most scholars agree that Eusebius is describing the *Labarum* as it appeared after 326, based on the description that he gives at Eus. *VC* 1.31; specifically, the mention of the head-and-shoulders portrait of Constantine and his sons in some relation to the tapestry hanging from the transverse bar. A Constantinople *Spes Publica* issue of 326/327 (*RIC* 7 Constantinople.19) depicts what appears to be a military standard surmounted by a Chi-Rho, presumably the *Labarum*, and on the tapestry hanging from the crosspiece are three medallions, which are generally interpreted as representing the busts of Constantine's three sons, Constantius II, Constantine II, and Constans. Thus, according to the *communis opinio*, if Eusebius observed the *Labarum* in that form, his viewing (and therefore the telling of the 'vision' story) must post-date the execution and *damnatio memoriae* of Crispus in 326. Cf., for example, MacMullen, *Constantine*, 73; Bremmer, 'Vision', 67. H. Dörries, *Constantine the Great* (New York, 1972) 35, however, suggests that the portraits that Eusebius describes may have been Constantine, Constantine II, and Crispus. Regardless, Eusebius could not have viewed the *Labarum* personally until after Constantine's conquest of the East. The issue is perhaps moot; as is discussed in the next chapter, the tapestry-medallions on the Constantinople coin are probably not representing imperial busts.

before the defeat of Licinius in September 324 and, although Eusebius insinuates that the emperor spoke to him in confidence, the inclusion of ‘oaths’ seems more appropriate for a public presentation.³⁷⁷ The earliest such occasion would have been the Council of Nicaea in spring 325, which Constantine attended and had a hand in convening; it would not have been out of place for him to make some sort of speech at that event.³⁷⁸ However, Constantine does not seem to have been accustomed to speaking about his ‘vision’ or, for that matter, a miraculous conversion; the closest source for either of these that can perhaps be attributed to the emperor is the *Vita* account – the emperor does not even speak of it in his so-called *Oration to the Saints*.³⁷⁹ Supposing that Eusebius did hear the story at the Council of Nicaea or even, as Elliott argues, that the purpose of Constantine’s story was the creation of the *Labarum* and that Eusebius could only incorporate the conversion aspect once “the emperor was safely dead”, it is extremely surprising that there is no indication that the bishop was familiar with either the ‘vision’ or the origin of the *Labarum* in either of the two speeches he delivered for the emperor in Constantinople, *De sepulchre Christi* in late 335 and *De laudibus Constantini* around 25 July 336.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 614; Nicholson, ‘Vision’, 310 (n. 42).

³⁷⁸ Barnes, ‘Conversion’, 385-6, suggests that Constantine told the story to bishops at a dinner party following the Council of Nicaea. Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, endorse 336, but add that Nicaea in 325 cannot be discounted. R. Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus* (Berlin, 1992) 138-9, suggests either 327 (Council of Antioch) or 335 (Constantine’s *tricennalia*).

³⁷⁹ The day of delivery has been generally assumed to be Good Friday, against which see H.A. Drake, ‘Policy and Belief in Constantine’s “Oration to the Saints”’, *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989) 43-51, at 48. As to the location and year, see the discussion, with references, by M.J. Edwards, *Constantine and Christendom* (Liverpool, 2003), xxiii-xxix, and id., ‘Notes on the Date and Venue of the *Oration to the Saints* (CPG 3497)’, *Byzantion* 77 (2007) 149-69, at 149-51, who places the speech in Rome in 315, contrary to the *communis opinio* which situates it in the East after 325.

³⁸⁰ Quote: Elliott, ‘Eusebian Frauds’, 163; and Elliott, *Christianity*, 68. Eusebius does not express knowledge of an exceptional vision in particular, the creation of the *Labarum*, or a miraculous conversion; he seems to aware of some tradition or other in 335, but glosses the topic by saying simply (at *SC* 18.1): “You yourself, my

This chance opportunity with Constantine, however, is referred to once again in *Vita*, specifically in Eusebius' description of the demonstration of the power of the *Labarum* during the civil war against Licinius in 324.³⁸¹ He highlights the function and efficacy of the *Labarum* in battle, emphasising also the prestige of those chosen to safeguard the miraculous standard. "These things", Eusebius writes, "the Emperor himself recounted to the present writer in a moment of leisure long after the events, adding a noteworthy miracle to his account", namely, an extraordinary tale of how the *Labarum* offered protection from projectiles in battle, which would strike the slender pole of the standard, but never its faithful bearer.³⁸² Eusebius makes the point that this story of the *Labarum* was told 'long after the

Emperor, should leisure permit, could tell us if you wished of the countless manifestations of your Savior and His countless personal visits during sleep"; οὐ γὰρ ἡμῖν αὐτός, βασιλεῦ, σχολῆς δοθείσης εἶποις ἂν βουλευθείς μυρίας τοῦ σοῦ σωτῆρος θεοφανείας, μυρίας καθ' ὕπνου παρουσίας. Cf. *VC* 1.47.3. See also MacMullen, *Constantine*, 72-3. Regarding the dates, see, Drake, 'When Was the *De laudibus Constantini* Delivered?', *Historia* 24 (1975) 345-56; T.D. Barnes, 'Two Speeches by Eusebius', *GRBS* 18 (1977) 341-5. The later editor of *Vita* appears to have attached the two speeches together as *De laudibus Constantini*, but it is clear that chapters 1-10 belong to the tricennial oration and that chapters 11-18 are part of a speech delivered for Constantine commemorating the construction of the Holy Sepulchre.

³⁸¹ There is some debate as to whether Eusebius has conflated the entirety of the struggle between the 'first civil war' in 316 and the 'second civil war' in 324. However, he makes clear at the end of Book One that he is passing over the first war entirely, summarising it by simply noting that following Constantine's *decennalia* (25 July 315 to 25 July 316) there was conflict, oaths were given, received, and subsequently broken, and that Licinius then plotted against Constantine (Eus. *VC* 1.49-50). Eusebius then states (at the end of 50.2), "in his mindless folly he [Licinius] finally began a campaign against the very God whom he knew the Emperor worshipped" (ἀπονοία τε λογισμοῦ κατ' αὐτοῦ λοιπὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ὃν ἠπίστατο σέβειν τὸν βασιλέα παρατάττεσθαι ὠρμάτο). This and the narrative that follows can only refer to the events leading up to the second war in 324. The reason for glossing over the entire first civil war, then, is because it would have detracted from the attention that Eusebius wanted to devote to Constantine's liberation of the Christians from yet another persecutor.

³⁸² Eus. *VC* 2.8.2- 9.3 (quote at 8.2: ταῦτα βασιλεὺς αὐτὸς τοῖς τὴν γραφὴν ποιούμενος ἡμῖν ἐπὶ καιροῦ σχολῆς μακρῶ τῶν πραγμάτων ὕστερον ὑφηγεῖτο, προστιθείς θαῦμα μνημονευθῆναι ἄξιον τῶ διηγήματι). Eusebius makes the interesting note (at 9.3) that "the story comes not from us, but once again from the Emperor himself, who in our hearing reported this too in addition to other matters" (οὐχ ἡμέτερος δ' ὁ λόγος ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ πάλιν βασιλέως εἰς ἡμετέρας ἀκοὰς πρὸς ἑτέροις καὶ τοῦτον ἀπομνημονεύσαντος). The implication from the narrative that follows is that 'other matters' refers to Constantine's conduct in the war against Licinius, but it nevertheless might confirm, firstly, that other stories about the *Labarum* (such as its

events’ and so this ‘moment of leisure’ – the occasion for which is not specified – was certainly not a year later at the Council of Nicaea. It should not be put past Eusebius, who tries to create the perception that he had special standing with Constantine, to identify every opportunity offered him to enjoy the emperor’s personal company. There is only one instance in *Vita* where Eusebius provides a specific context for being in the emperor’s company that can be construed as a ‘moment of leisure’ – a dinner party immediately following the *tricennalia* celebrations (July 336), at which Eusebius delivered his panegyric.

In due course, after the present book is finished, we shall publish that work [i.e. *De sepulchro Christi*], joining to it the speech on the thirtieth anniversary. The latter we delivered a little later, having made the journey to the city named after the Emperor, in the Emperor’s own hearing, thus having a second opportunity to praise God, the universal Emperor, in the imperial palace. The friend of God, while he listened to it, was like a man overjoyed; he said so himself after the hearing, when he dined with the bishops present and received them with every kind of honour.³⁸³

Judging from Eusebius’ description of the occasion on which he heard the story, his window of opportunity for meeting with the emperor, and his apparent unawareness of the details of the ‘vision’ and the origin of the *Labarum* as late as tricennial oration, in addition to our supposition that he exaggerated his relationship with the emperor and was part of a group when he heard the tale, this post-festivities dinner party best satisfied the conditions for

origin, perhaps) were probably told at the same time and, secondly, that Eusebius did not hear such stories in private.

³⁸³ Eus. *VC* 4.46: ὃν δὴ λόγον κατὰ καιρὸν μετὰ τὴν παροῦσαν τῆς γραφῆς ὑπόθεσιν ἐκθησόμεθα, ὁμοῦ καὶ τὸν τριακονταετηρικὸν αὐτῷ συζευγνύντες, ὃν μικρὸν ὕστερον, ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλέως ἐπωνύμου πόλεως τὴν πορείαν στειλάμενοι, εἰς ἐπήκοον αὐτοῦ βασιλέως διήλθομεν, τοῦτο δεύτερον ἐν αὐτοῖς βασιλείοις τὸν ἐπὶ πάντων βασιλέα θεὸν δοξάσαντες, οὗ δὴ κατακροώμενος ὁ τῷ θεῷ φίλος γαν{ν}υμένῳ ἐώκει. τοῦτο δ’ οὖν αὐτὸ μετὰ τὴν ἀκρόασιν ἐξέφηνε, συμποσιάζων {μὲν} παροῦσι τοῖς ἐπισκόποις παντοῖα τ’ αὐτοῦς τιμῇ φιλοφρονούμενος.

Constantine's report to him.³⁸⁴ At this time Eusebius may have already been writing *Vita*, or at least conceptualising it, so the 'vision' story would have made a welcome addition.

As to his personal viewing of the *Labarum*, the presentation of the standard may have accompanied Constantine's report, but Eusebius seems to indicate that the hearing of the story and examination of the *Labarum* occurred on two separate occasions, stating that he was permitted to see it ποτέ, 'at some point' or 'once'. If this is not simply an attempt to overstate his personal contact with Constantine by alluding to several meetings, then it is possible that the *Labarum* was placed on display as early as the Council of Nicaea. Should a number of the bishops at the dinner party, in addition to Eusebius, have also attended the Council, their reminiscing of the special standard or inquiries about its import may have been what prompted Constantine to tell his story. It is more likely, however, that a private viewing of the *Labarum* attended the emperor's report of the 'vision' to his dinner guests.³⁸⁵

From the chronology set out here, there is at least a twenty-five year span between the 'vision' experience and Constantine's report of it to Eusebius. The evolution of Constantinian propaganda alone shows that the emperor was not averse to reinventing and reconstructing aspects of his personal history, and the 'vision' story itself appears no different. Whether deliberately or as the result of the limitations of precision in human memory, a number of processes were conflated or in some way adapted to provide richness, thoroughness, and heightened significance for the experience in hindsight, despite chronological inaccuracy. Needless to say, there is immeasurable potential for Constantine's

³⁸⁴ Bremmer, 'Vision', 64-5, places the report in late 335 instead, following the delivery of *De sepulchre Christi*, supposing that the relationship between Constantine and Eusebius started to become more intimate around that time and that they spoke privately about the matter.

³⁸⁵ Hall, 'Eusebian and Other Sources', 244, considers it plausible that the report was given at the time Eusebius viewed the *Labarum*.

reinterpretation of the event over the course of twenty-five years. Anything that might have caused him to reflect on the divine patronage he enjoyed – perhaps a conclusion drawn from an affair that transpired or even simply a reaction to a panegyric portrayal of his relationship with the divine – would have prompted him to look back on some aspect of his experience with a somewhat fresh perspective.

What is curious in this regard is that in *Vita* it appears as though the main emphasis of Constantine's report was the power of the *Labarum* and its divine origin, but Eusebius' account comes across as being the narrative of a miraculous conversion to Christianity. Eusebius' role should not go unrecognised here, since it would seem that he split Constantine's story into two distinct episodes, the first explaining the origin of the *Labarum* and the second illustrating its powers. The 'vision' story in *Vita* is not simply the emperor's recollection of the experience, but also Eusebius' testimony of the significance he took away from the story. As such, we have to wonder just how much of the conversion element in this story is attributable to Constantine's (re)interpretation of the experience and how much Eusebius' (re)interpretation of what he heard from the emperor. Separating the two is no mean task, but there are a number of elements that are likely to have only derived from one or the other.

Context: Inherent and Constructed

The primary context for the 'vision' is the impending civil war against Maxentius, which instigates the experience (or, at least, Constantine's search for his father's god) and constitutes the backdrop for the entire episode.³⁸⁶ The direct correlation here between the

³⁸⁶ Nicholson, 'Vision', 310 (n. 7).

‘vision’ and the struggle for Rome is likely something that Eusebius had appropriated not only from Constantine’s version of events, but also how others had persistently represented the significance of his relationship with the divine. Van Dam has recently made the compelling argument that the collective consciousness of the Battle of Milvian Bridge in later years was as much the product of Constantine’s recollection of the event as it was of how others remembered and represented it, and further that Constantine’s reaction to those accounts influenced his recollection, which in turn affected how others represented it, and so on.³⁸⁷ All of the contemporary sources at our disposal consistently characterise Constantine’s victory over Maxentius as deriving from some form personal relationship with divine powers – regardless of Constantine’s influence, this is an element of the story that took on a life of its own and, by the time Eusebius was writing *Vita*, would have been an established association.

However, the ‘vision’ is placed in an additional, perhaps more significant, context, namely, Constantine’s Christian life. Eusebius does this in two distinct, but essentially unified, ways, which can be summarised as the developments transpiring around Constantine and those precipitated by Constantine. The events around Constantine are initiated by the Christian god, who Eusebius claims watched over him since youth and determined that he would not only become an emperor, but sole ruler of the Roman Empire.³⁸⁸ In his introduction to *Vita* Eusebius constructs an image of a pious and morally righteous Constantine, but ultimately the paragon of virtue that he expounds extends to a divine favour that the emperor has always enjoyed. Aside from the element of Christianity, this depiction is

³⁸⁷ See also, Singor, ‘Labarum’, 486, who suggests that the inclusion of the dream-vision in Constantine’s report to Eusebius may be the result of his recollection being influenced by the earlier account of Lactantius.

³⁸⁸ In particular, Eus. *VC* 1.4-6, 12, 18.2, and 20-24.

not so different from non-Christian panegyric claims, such as we find, for instance, in Panegyric 6 and the panegyric of 313, where the emperor's 'divinity' refers to both him and his tutelary deity.³⁸⁹ This motif in *Vita* serves also to place Constantine on a level with heroes of Christian mythology, such as Moses – a thematic equation that Eusebius continually invokes in Book One, driving the connection home with the application of quotations from *Genesis* and *Exodus* to underscore the significance of events, such as Constantine's 'escape' from the court of Galerius and the drowning of Maxentius.³⁹⁰

The second element of this particular context, the developments precipitated by Constantine, pertains directly to the 'vision'. Constantine, we are told, makes the conscious decision to seek out his father's god, whom he knows only by reputation. After praying to the unknown god, Constantine receives a response in the form of, first, a celestial manifestation and, then, a dream-vision. When he awakens he resolves to follow the instructions given to him in the dream and, after consulting Christian advisors, immediately embarks on a quasi-catechetical journey. Eusebius prefaces the 'vision' by stating not only that the emperor swore oaths on the story, but also that 'the time which followed provided

³⁸⁹ Storch, 'Eusebian Constantine', 149, observes that Eusebius' representation of Constantine as a pious humanitarian is not much different from the representations of other good emperors; cf. M.P. Charlesworth, 'Pietas and Victoria: The Emperor and the Citizen', *JRS* 33 (1943) 1-10.

³⁹⁰ The latter example had been used previously at Eus. *HE* 9.9.5-6. The Mosaic allusions in Book One of *Vita*, however, are more numerous than in *Historia ecclesiastica*, but in this dedicated biography Eusebius not only has more material to work with, but also manoeuvrability. Cf. M.J. Hollerich, 'The Comparison of Moses and Constantine in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Life of Constantine*', *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989) 80-5; C. Rapp, 'Imperial Ideology in the Making: Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as 'Bishop'', *JThS* 49 (1998) 685-95; A. Wilson, 'Biographical Models: The Constantinian Period and Beyond', in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine* (London, 1998) 107-35, at 116-9; Hall, 'Eusebian and Other Sources', 259-63; Av. Cameron, 'Construction of Constantine'; Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 34-9; Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 30-42. On 'scriptural models', see É. Patlagean, 'Ancient Byzantine Hagiography and Social History', in S. Wilson (ed.), *Saints and Their Cults* (Cambridge, 1983) 101-21; although applied to hagiography, Patlagean's methodology has wide-ranging applications, which should be apparent here with Constantine and Moses, but will be even more so later when we discuss Constantine and Paul.

evidence for the truth of what he said'. This short comment could be taken to mean that the promise of divine protection is evident in Constantine's streak of victories from West to East, but the revelatory nature of the experience – since in this singular episode he proceeds from ignorance to the acknowledgment of the Christian god by means of a vision – suggests that Eusebius is referring also to the emperor's patronage of Christianity, which are equally treated foci in *Vita*.³⁹¹

It is in the momentum from unawareness to awareness and submission to the Christian god that we reach a semantic impasse. Elliott, who argues that Constantine was raised as a Christian, finds that the 'vision' more aptly describes "action and knowledge"; in the parlance of the modern study of religious conversion we could perhaps relate this as the difference between 'conversion' and 'intensification', the latter referring to a reinvigorated return to one's foundational religious belief structure.³⁹² Timothy Barnes, on the other hand has previously argued that Constantine declared himself a Christian following the 'vision', but that his true conversion is marked by the "moment of psychological conviction" that came about when potency of the divine symbol (and its divine source) was evinced at the Battle of Milvian Bridge.³⁹³ Somewhat similarly, Charles Odahl reasons that the power of the divine symbol was realised immediately following the dream-vision, since the explanations of the Christians he consulted must have made him reflect that such signs had interfered with

³⁹¹ Elliott, 'Constantine's Conversion', 428; and id., *Christianity*, 67, argues that 'later events' refers to Constantine's victories.

³⁹² Elliott, 'Constantine's Conversion', 427; id., *Christianity*, 67. L.R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, 1993) 13: "*Intensification* is the revitalized commitment to a faith with which the convert has had previous affiliation, formal or informal" (emphasis in the original).

³⁹³ Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 43.

‘pagan’ rites in the past and were therefore more powerful, and, “[a]t this moment, Constantine converted to the Christian God”.³⁹⁴

Conversely, drawing on more recent developments in the sociology of religious conversion, Drake proposes instead that, although Constantine may have identified himself as a Christian by 312, his actual conversion was a gradual process that only reached fulfilment after an extended period of searching, questioning, and socialisation – the ‘vision’, then, only became a viable point of conversion in retrospect, once Constantine viewed the entirety of his religious development through the lens of some post-conversion sensibility. One could even argue that Constantine did not truly convert until he was baptised, which did in fact become an essential condition for later Christian writers caught between the Eusebian and *Actus Silvestri* traditions; one such Byzantine biographer, writing in the late ninth century, argues for an early baptism, stating that otherwise Constantine would not have been able to take part in the Council of Nicaea or associate with bishops.³⁹⁵

Determining the ‘moment of psychological conviction’ or attempting to differentiate between Constantine considering himself a Christian and truly converting to Christianity is unfortunately a treacherous enterprise, for the main reason that it requires us to do something impossible, namely, read Constantine’s mind. Alternately, examining Constantine’s behaviour and policy might serve as an indicator of conversion: the majority of scholars have determined that 312 – perhaps largely in connection with the ‘vision’, even if

³⁹⁴ Odahl, *Constantine*, 106.

³⁹⁵ Guidi-*vita* 329.21-330.17 (= Beetham 18-19). Apparently, for some modern scholars as well; for instance, DiMaio et al., ‘Ambiguitas’, 346: “It would appear that Constantine’s religious position was ambiguous at best since he did not become a Christian until he was baptized”. This is, however, somewhat anachronistic: death-bed baptisms were not uncommon in the fourth century, especially among the Christian emperors; cf. D.F. Wright, ‘At What Ages Were People Baptized in the Early Centuries?’, *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997) 389-94.

unacknowledged – demonstrates a turning point in the emperor’s religious policy.³⁹⁶ This approach, however, requires grand assumptions as well. For instance, it first and foremost assumes how a Christian emperor (or an ancient Christian, for that matter) ought to appear and act, let alone be expected to act.³⁹⁷ Is it enough for Constantine to march under a banner of Christ and issue pro-Christian legislation or must he, like Theodosius I later, attend Church services and place himself beneath the feet of a figure like Ambrose of Milan?³⁹⁸ This is not intended as a challenge of Constantine’s sincerity, but rather to make the point that the height or lack of it is purely the realm of the individual.

Additionally, it assumes that we know everything there is to know about Constantine’s imperial policy from July 306 to May 337. Much of his policy is unknown to

³⁹⁶ Baynes, *Constantine*, 10-14; J. Gaudemet, ‘La législation religieuse de Constantin’, *Revue d’Histoire et de l’Église de France* 33 (1947) 25-61; A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (trans. H. Mattingly; Oxford, 1948) 36-81; Jones, *Constantine*, 79-94; Smith, *Constantine*, 113-4; F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977) 580-4; Barnes, ‘Conversion’, 382: “there can be no real doubt that Constantine began to present himself as a worshipper of the Christian God from about the time of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge”, and (at 391) that from the Milvian Bridge onwards, regardless of previous sympathies, “he publicly proclaimed himself God’s servant and the church’s champion”; Edwards, ‘Pagan and Christian Monotheism’, 225-6; Av. Cameron, ‘Reign of Constantine’, *passim*, and especially 108; Girardet, *Die konstantinische Wende*, 43-56; Lenski, ‘Reign of Constantine’, 71-2; N.E. Lenski, ‘Constantine’, in A.A. Barrett (ed.), *Lives of the Caesars* (Oxford, 2008) 255-79, at 262 and 273-6. See, however, K. Bringmann, ‘Die konstantinische Wende: zum Verhältnis von politischer und religiöser Motivation’, *HZ* 260 (1995) 21-47, who intentionally omits the vision(s) and concludes that something happened just prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge that resulted in a drastic shift in Constantine’s religious policy.

³⁹⁷ See, for instance, the insightful discussion by Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 20-32, especially at 20-4.

³⁹⁸ Although the chapter itself no longer survives, the heading for Eus. *VC* 4.57 (“How after receiving Persian embassies he kept the vigil with the others at the Easter festival”; “Ὅπως Περσῶν πρεσβείας δεξάμενος, ἐν τῇ τοῦ πάσχα ἑορτῇ συνδιενυκτέρευσε τοῖς ἄλλοις”) indicates that Constantine attended the Easter vigil shortly before his death. This is the only reference to the emperor attending a church service. Cf. N. McLynn, ‘The Transformation of Imperial Churchgoing in the Fourth Century’, in Swain and Edwards, *Approaching Late Antiquity*, 235-70, especially at 236-242, that Constantine had likely never even been inside a church. The comparison between Constantine and Theodosius that I make above is intentionally anachronistic; as McLynn demonstrates, imperial church attendance was complicated by the emperors’ socio-political position and developed only gradually throughout the fourth century. I use the example nonetheless, because – when evaluating Constantine’s sincerity – a certain amount of anachronism generally exists in the question of what constitutes a sincere expression of faith.

us and what information is available should be considered grossly incomplete.³⁹⁹ A large part of what we have been able to reconstruct derives from Eusebius' *Vita*, which – in his own words – is concerned only with the emperor's contributions to the Church and Christianity.⁴⁰⁰ It is not intended as a faithful representation of his entire imperial policy, but only one aspect of it, and to each element that is not explicitly Christian there is appended an overt Christian interpretation or statement of its Christian significance. Eusebius does not display a detailed knowledge of Constantine's early reign to make a relevant assessment from it and, although we do have some sources from that early period, such as Lactantius and several Latin panegyrics, which do give insight into his activities, they are nothing like the virtually itemised listing of the emperor's policies that we find in *Vita*.⁴⁰¹

On the other hand, non-Christians who were directly influenced by Constantine's policies later in the fourth century speculated that, if he had indeed converted to Christianity, it was at some point after his occupation of the East, possibly having even been inspired by the need for absolution following the executions of his son Crispus and wife Fausta in 326.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ In particular, his pre-Milvian Bridge policies. See Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 189-90; A.D. Lee, 'Traditional Religions', in Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 159-79, at 168-70.

⁴⁰⁰ In fact, Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, not only begin their Preface (at v) by discussing how *Vita* is controversial as a source, but open their Introduction (at 1) with the statement, "The *Life of Constantine* ... is the main source not only for the religious policy of Constantine ... but also for much else about him".

⁴⁰¹ T.D. Barnes, 'Constantine after Seventeen Hundred Years: The Cambridge Companion, the York Exhibition and a Recent Biography', *IJCT* 14 (2007) 185-220, at 194.

⁴⁰² Jul. *Caes.* 336a-b, portrays Constantine as turning to Jesus Christ to receive absolution for murdering his family; Zos. *HN* 2.29, states that Constantine's inability to find 'pagan' forms of absolution led him to Christianity, which promises forgiveness for every sort of wickedness. Vogt, 'Pagans and Christians', 48-9, notes the claim of Zonaras (*Epit. Hist.* 13.1.2) that Fausta urged Constantine to engage in 'pagan' worship', stating that "it might help to explain why Constantine ... devoted himself with increased fervour to works of Christian piety" following her execution. For a discussion of other sources within this tradition, see G. Fowden, 'The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and their Influence', *JRS* 84 (1994) 146-70, at 155-8; Woods, 'Empress Fausta', 70-86.

Lactantius alone mentions that, upon his accession, Constantine repealed the persecution in his territories, something that is acknowledged in neither *Historia ecclesiastica* nor *Vita*.⁴⁰³ We can only speculate, then, on the substance of Constantine's imperial policy when he was in control of only Gaul, Britain, and Spain, and whether 312 denotes a stark change in direction. It is a much more natural conclusion that the reason Constantine's policy appears to take a swift, upward Christian trajectory beginning in the winter of 312/313 is that his acquisition of the West made him much more – for lack of a better term – globally relevant.⁴⁰⁴ The year 312, then, would not necessarily indicate a conversion to Christianity, but the point at which his reach and influence increased so as to be regarded empire-wide. Even so, does this 'shift' in policy, if that is indeed what it was, demand that Constantine be a committed Christian?

Given the disruptive effects of a near decade of persecution and the failure of that persecution to achieve its stated objective, what policy options were open to anyone who became emperor

⁴⁰³ Lact. *DMP* 24.9. This is the only example we possess of a pro-Christian policy prior to 312. T.D. Barnes, 'Lactantius and Constantine', *JRS* 63 (1973) 29-46, at 43-6, extends his interpretation to include the full restoration of property to Christians. Constantinian scholarship is not unanimous on either aspect of the policy.

⁴⁰⁴ Alternate explanations to account for a perceived sudden influx of pro-Christian Constantinian legislation following the victory at Rome have been far from exhausted. It certainly has not been settled whether this post-Milvian Bridge legislation was actually new or simply the steady trickling/elaboration of policies that had been implemented gradually in Gaul between summer 306 and 312. Conversely, is all of the legislation Constantinian or did he – much as he would do after his victory over Licinius [cf. S. Corcoran, 'Hidden from History: the Legislation of Licinius', in J. Harries and I. Wood (eds.), *The Theodosian Code* (London, 1993) 97-119, with a very telling example at 102] – appropriate certain policies from Maxentius, who had tolerated Christianity almost as long as Constantine and, since he ruled from a city that housed an influential bishopric, might well have been faced with more pointed concerns of Church administration at an earlier stage? See *CTh* 15.14.1, regarding the annulment of Licinius' laws; similar edicts were issued in January 313 regarding Maxentius' tenure [*CTh* 15.14.3-4, with O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr.* (Stuttgart, 1919) 64 and 160]. Cf. B. Leadbetter, 'Constantine and the Bishop: The Roman Church in the Early Fourth Century', *JRH* 26 (2002) 1-14, at 2, who notes that, prior to his triumphant entry into Rome and introduction to Pope Miltiades, Constantine had only ever dealt with individual bishops, not a full-fledged Christian community; Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 171. Opt. 1.18, states that Maxentius ended the persecution in his territories; cf. Barnes, 'Conversion', 380, who surmises that this did not include the return of confiscated property, which came later in 311. On the deconstruction of rivals as a means of constructing legitimacy, see Humphries, 'From Usurper to Emperor'.

in 312, no matter what his religious persuasion? The reason so obvious a question has gone unasked for so long is that the primary interest of the scholars who have dealt with this evidence has been to establish or debunk the sincerity of Constantine's conversion and the strength of his commitment to Christianity. For this reason, they assume not only that everything Constantine did was intended but also that a non-Christian would not have had to deal with the Christian issue. These assumptions clearly are not warranted. Thanks to the persecution, any emperor, Christian or not, was going to have to devise a way to deal with the Christian population.⁴⁰⁵

The issue is a slippery one, but – regardless of how modern scholarship might attempt to determine the ‘real’ moment of Constantine's conversion – this is precisely what Eusebius is attempting to describe. The most basic way that he accomplishes this is by positing the ‘vision’ as a before-and-after scenario. Prior to the ‘vision’ Constantine, although depicted as being pious and in every way deserving of the Christian god's favour, does not identify himself as a Christian, whereas after the ‘vision’ he is represented as devoting himself wholly to Christianity. An interesting feature to note here, however, is that the civil war, which partly prompts Constantine's search for God, is not inspired because of any persecution of Christians, but the welfare of Romans in general. The ‘vision’ narrative, in the sense of both the deliberation that preceded it and the experience itself, at the same time informed him about and instilled in him the motivation to honour the Christian god, which then manifested in his pro-Christian policies. Moreover, following the interpretation of the ‘vision’, Constantine not only learns about the significance of Christ, but immerses himself in Christian instruction. This element of the story is so clearly conveyed that a later editor inserted a heading for this chapter making reference to Constantine's catechism, even though Eusebius himself does not employ the term in his narrative.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 184.

⁴⁰⁶ Eus. *VC* 1.32 (heading): “How Constantine *was catechized* and read the divine Scriptures”; Ὅπως κατηχηθεὶς Κωνσταντῖνος τὰς θείας γραφὰς ἀνεγίνωσκεν (emphasis indicates my literal rendering of

Notable also is the absence of any terms by which a conversion would more traditionally be classified, such as ἐπιστρέφω, μετανοέω, or ἀποστρέφω, three terms in particular used in the *New Testament* to refer to conversion to Christianity.⁴⁰⁷ More interesting still with respect to this is the hanging detail of Constantine's ignorance of the identity of his father's god, which appears quite out of place. This a bold conjecture on Eusebius' part, so something like it must have been an aspect of Constantine's later propaganda, much the same as Constantius' transformation into a Christian by 325. Here Eusebius forgoes drawing a connection with the 'burning bush', despite the plethora of Mosaic allusions in *Vita*, which is somewhat uncharacteristic, since he seems inclined to underline his allusions with personal commentary or scriptural references. Rather, it would seem that Eusebius has a different Christian figure in mind for the 'vision' story; I would venture to say that the main reason that the *Vita* account comes across as being a conversion narrative is because the tale itself, combined with other elements in Book One, is implicitly designed to evoke a connection with the perfect conversion of St. Paul.

κατηχηθεις, which Av. Cameron and Hall translate as 'received instruction', though they note the literal translation in a footnote).

⁴⁰⁷ B.R. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light* (Philadelphia, 1986) 82-7 and 96-125; R.V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1999) 346-51. Each verb signifies 'turning' in a new direction or, in the proper sense, in the right direction (i.e. towards God), usually in the context of repentance. ἐπιστρέφω, and sometimes μετανοέω, describe the actual turning (e.g. from Satan to God, darkness to light), though usually μετανοέω refers particularly to 'changing one's mind' – except when both verbs are used together, in which case μετανοέω means looking back to and regretting previous sins, while ἐπιστρέφω indicates the actual turning. Alternately, ἀποστρέφω tends to refer to 'turning back' or 'returning' to God, typically in the form of advocacy and mission work. Cf. A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven, 1990) 19-20, who elaborates that, although both verbs carry the context of repentance, ἐπιστρέφω tends to be used with regard to Gentile conversions, while μετανοέω is used for both Gentile and Jewish conversions.

Constantine on the Road to Damascus

The story of the vision of Paul occurs three times in *Acts of the Apostles*, at 9:1-19, 22:1-21, and 26:9-21, and although the experience is not told in exactly the same way each time, all three versions have strong continuities.⁴⁰⁸ While on the road to Damascus, at around midday, suddenly a bright array of light appears in the sky and flashes around Paul. A voice calls out and addresses Paul personally by his Hebrew name, Saul. When Paul asks to whom the voice belongs, the reply is, “I am Jesus”. All those accompanying him are affected by the experience, either seeing the light but not hearing the voice, or vice versa. Paul, however, having been blinded by the celestial manifestation, is told to go into Damascus and await further instruction. Three days later his sight is returned to him by the disciple Ananias, who was instructed in a vision of his own to meet Paul in Damascus. Paul is informed that he is to preach the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles and then receives baptism. The second account includes another vision, at 22:17-21, which does not appear in the other two versions: some years after the Damascus road event Paul returns to Jerusalem and, while praying at the Temple, he falls into a trance. Jesus appears to him and informs him that he must leave the city forthwith. Paul protests, expressing his feelings of guilt for persecuting Jesus’ followers, but Jesus says to him, “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (22:21).

⁴⁰⁸ For the sake of convenience, the full text of these passages in Greek and English can be found in Appendix C. G. Lohfink, *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Chicago, 1976) 81; J.N. Bremmer, ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind: Heliodorus in the Temple and Paul on the Road to Damascus’, in A. Houtman et al. (eds.), *Empsychoi Logoi—Religious Innovations in Antiquity* (Leiden, 2008) 367-84, at 376-7, emphasises that none of the three versions are authentic: the author of *Acts* knew the basic outline and applied it to different situations. See also, Lohfink, *Conversion of St. Paul*, 8-19, for a structural comparison of the three accounts, and 21-30, for a commentary on the similarities and differences between the three versions; and C.W. Hedrick, ‘Paul’s Conversion/Call: A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts’, *JBL* 100 (1981) 415-32.

Much about this experience has been debated, not least of which is the appropriateness of terming Paul's experience a 'conversion'.⁴⁰⁹ None of the language used elsewhere in the *New Testament* to denote conversion appears in relation to Paul, while in his own writings he refers to his experience as a 'summoning' (καλέω).⁴¹⁰ The distinction largely concerns the significance of Paul's transformation: although there is an obvious shift regarding the acknowledgement of Jesus as the resurrected Christ, there is also much continuity in Paul's religion before and after his vision.⁴¹¹ Even if one is inclined to refer to this experience as a 'conversion' with the commonplace modern understanding of the term, that is, as a complete and seemingly dramatic shift from one set of religious beliefs to another, the post-resurrection miracle that inspires it and the constancy in Paul's religious thinking shows this to be an atypical example.

⁴⁰⁹ For a review of the changing perspectives on Paul's 'conversion', with pertinent bibliography, see B. Corley, 'Interpreting Paul's Conversion — Then and Now', in R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *The Road from Damascus* (Grand Rapids, 1997) 1-17; J.G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) 21-75; J.D.G. Dunn, 'Paul's Conversion: A Light to Twentieth Century Disputes', in *The New Perspective on Paul* (Tübingen, 2005) 341-59; P.T. O'Brien, 'Was Paul Converted?', in D.A. Carson et al. (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 2* (Tübingen, 2001) 361-91.

⁴¹⁰ Gal 1:15-16: "But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεός] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). The verb καλέω, meaning 'to call' or 'summon', is sometimes used to mean 'to order someone to do something', which correlates with ἵνα to express purpose; cf. Dunn, 'Paul's Conversion', 356-8.

⁴¹¹ So, for example, K. Stendahl, *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia, 1976) 7-23, argues that there is no conversion, only a calling; cf. S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, 1981), 56-66. O'Brien, 'Was Paul Converted?', however, argues that the Damascus road event is describing both a conversion and a calling. See also G.W. Hansen, 'Paul's Conversion and His Ethic of Freedom in Galatians', in Longenecker, *The Road from Damascus*, 213-37; Segal, *Paul the Convert*. Both Gaventa (*From Darkness to Light*) and Segal (*Paul the Convert*) characterise Paul's 'conversion' as 'transformation'; Segal, however, argues that, although the term 'conversion' is an etic designation, Paul's own references to 'transformation' should be understood as meaning 'conversion', commenting (at 6): "From the viewpoint of mission Paul is commissioned, but from the viewpoint of religious experience Paul is a convert".

Regarding the Damascus road event, there is a particular sequence of events and elements at play that form the basic structure of the story in all three versions. It is made clear that (1) Paul is travelling and (2) he is accompanied by others; he is on the road with the expressed purpose to seek out and persecute followers of the Christ movement. (3) Around midday,⁴¹² (4) there suddenly appears in the sky (5) a heavenly light that surrounds Paul, (6) which is attended by a form of dialogue, (7) although at first Paul is ignorant as to the identity of the speaker. In addition, (8) the entire group is in some way affected by the vision, either seeing the light or hearing the voice.⁴¹³ Finally, at least in the second account, (9) there is another vision in the Temple of Jerusalem, in which Jesus physically appears to Paul in a dream/trance, there is dialogue, and his mission to the Gentiles is reiterated.

Similar to Paul's experience in *Acts*, Constantine's 'vision' story, which has traditionally been interpreted as a conversion narrative, displays no language of conversion and, though there is the obvious shift to acknowledging the Christian god as a result of his miraculous encounter with the post-resurrection Christ, Eusebius strives in his synopsis of the emperor's pre-'vision' life to show strong continuities in personal character that amounts to an inclination towards Christianity. Further, when we break down the elements of Constantine's 'vision' we see that certain similarities with the common details of Paul's experience in *Acts*. (1) Constantine is also on the road ('somewhere', Eusebius indicates), and (2) accompanied by his army. (3) Around midday, (4) the 'vision' appears in the sky (5) in the form of a dazzling formation of light. (6) There is not only a discernible symbol, but

⁴¹² This specific detail is absent from the first account in *Acts*.

⁴¹³ Lohfink, *Conversion of St. Paul*, 80, observes that Paul's companions "do perceive that an apparition is taking place", but they perceive it differently than Paul does. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 59, argues that the difference in their experience emphasises the importance of the event for Paul.

also a form of dialogue ('By this, conquer!'), (7) although Constantine is unsure as to the identity of the deity. (8) Constantine's entire army become witnesses to the marvel and are struck with amazement together with their emperor.⁴¹⁴ (9) Later, as he sleeps, Christ appears to Constantine in person and reiterates the instruction given in the celestial 'vision'.

Eusebius' description of the 'vision' begins by isolating three elements that correlate directly with the Pauline episode: around midday, in the sky, and formed from light.⁴¹⁵ "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" (ἀμφὶ μεσημβρινὰς ἡλίου ὥρας, ἤδη τῆς ἡμέρας ἀποκλινούσης, αὐτοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν ἔφη ἐν αὐτῷ οὐρανῷ ὑπερκείμενον τοῦ ἡλίου σταυροῦ τρόπαιον ἐκ φωτὸς συνιστάμενον). Only two of the versions in *Acts* contain all three elements. At 22:6, Paul is made to say, "about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me" (περὶ μεσημβρίαν ἑξαίφνης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιεστράψαι φῶς ἰκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ). Worded slightly differently, at 26:13 the same sequence is given: "at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions" (ἡμέρας μέσης κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἶδον, βασιλεῦ, οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμπσαν με φῶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐμοὶ πορευομένους).

⁴¹⁴ Regarding witnesses to a personal vision, see F. Graf, 'Trick of Treat? On Collective Epiphanies in Antiquity', *ICS* 29 (2004) 111-30.

⁴¹⁵ Midday was the traditional time in Antiquity for the appearance of gods and ghosts; this is neither a *New Testament* nor a Late Antique theme exclusively, but goes back to early Hellenistic motifs and sometimes appears in Jewish miracle traditions. Cf. J.N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London, 2002) 185 (n. 5); id., 'Close Encounters', 376-9, with references. For the suddenness of visions in 'pagan' and Jewish traditions, see Lohfink, *Conversion of St. Paul*, 78-80; Bremmer, 'Close Encounters', 377. Not only do the second and third account in *Acts* include the 'midday' detail, but in each successive retelling the vision becomes brighter, which suggests that the author wanted to emphasise just how bright the light was. Cf. Lohfink, at 92-3; Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 71 and 82.

Both *Vita* and *Acts* give these three elements in the same sequence, indicating the time of day (midday), the position of the manifestation (heaven or sky), and the substance of the manifestation (light), using more or less the same language – as is evident from the ‘first-person’ descriptions in *Acts*, there does not appear to be a definite linguistic formula in place aside from the sequence and basic terminology of the elements at play.⁴¹⁶ Some variation is also to be expected in *Vita* simply because certain details needed to be included in order to be somewhat faithful to Constantine’s account. Thus, for instance, in the third Pauline account, a ὑπέρ accusative phrase with τὴν λαμπρότητα, expressing measure, is given with τοῦ ἡλίου, so as to render ‘brighter than the sun’. The Eusebian version uses wordplay on the same idea, employing a compound ὑπέρ verb (ὑπερκείμενον) with τοῦ ἡλίου in case-agreement – instead of ‘brighter than the sun’ it becomes ‘laying over the sun’, thus playing with a pre-existing feature of Constantine’s ‘vision’. Moreover, in both accounts this additional detail of the sun appears between the elements ‘from the sky’ and ‘formed from light’, to create the sequence: time of day; position; relation to the sun; and substance.

At first both men are ignorant as to the identity of the divinity communicating with them and must inquire; this is a main element of both stories. After being addressed by Jesus personally, Paul responds by asking for the identity of the speaker, though he recognises that it is a divine power – “Who are you, Lord?” (Τίς εἶ, κύριε;), to which the deity replies “I am

⁴¹⁶ For instance, *Acts* uses the noun μεσημβρία and, in the third version, ἡμέρα μέση, whereas Eusebius employs the adjective μεσημβρινή; the light in Paul’s vision emanates out of or down from the sky (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; οὐρανόθεν), while for Constantine it stays firmly in the sky (ἐν αὐτῷ οὐρανῷ); also, the light in Paul’s experience is indistinct, whereas in Constantine’s ‘vision’ it forms a specific shape. Regarding the accounts in *Acts*, Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 7, contends that the differences demonstrate that Paul’s ‘conversion’ was “not part of a carefully guarded literary tradition”, and possibly that the details themselves were not well known; cf. Lohfink, *Conversion of St. Paul*, 91-5, that the nature of the differences shows the author’s talent as a writer and historiographer.

Jesus” (Ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς; 9:5; 22:8; 26:15).⁴¹⁷ Similarly, Constantine recognises that it is a divinity that has appeared to him, but he is entirely unaware of His identity. In the absence of a verbal exchange Constantine’s ignorance is resolved by Christians in his company after the dream-vision. The reason for this difference seems two-fold. Firstly, Eusebius had to conform to the ‘official’ version, in which there was no verbal dialogue. Secondly, if Constantine, who is not persecuting Christians, is to make as drastic a shift as Paul seems to have, he must be depicted as wholly ignorant; he cannot recognise the symbol in the sky or the appearance of Christ in his sleep. In this way, when it is finally revealed to him that the ‘vision’ was sent by the Christian god – having already resolved to dedicate himself to the god that appeared – his ‘change’ is characterised as being all the more extreme.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ Potter, *Constantine*, 156, observes that this is indicative of traditional cult practice, namely, requesting knowledge of a god’s identity through entreaty – in particular, Apollo. Cf. A.D. Nock, ‘A Vision of Mandulis Aion’, *HTR* 27 (1934) 53-104, especially at 67-71; G. Mussies, ‘Identification and Self-Identification of Gods in Classical and Hellenistic Times’, in R. van den Broek et al. (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1988) 1-18. The dialogue between Paul and Jesus is indicative also of Judaic apparition traditions; cf. A.D. Nock, *St. Paul* (London, 1938) 64-5; Lohfink, *Conversion of St. Paul*, 61-9. It is curious, however, that this is a prominent feature of the Pauline vision accounts: Paul knows very well that it is God (or a god) that has appeared to him, which is indicated by the address ‘Lord’ (κύριε), but he acknowledges that he is unfamiliar with this god (or, more properly, this aspect of God) – to be sure, the use of κύριε does not mean that Paul recognises the deity as Christ; cf. E. Dickey, ‘ΚΥΡΙΕ, ΔΕΣΠΟΤΑ, DOMINE: Greek Politeness in the Roman Empire’, *JHS* 121 (2001) 1-11. This element of the story perhaps stems from the Hellenised/Hellenistic background of the author of *Acts*, though there is a certain Mosaic ring to it as well; cf. *Ex* 3:13-14. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, consistently translates κύριε as “sir” to reflect this, though she notes (at 57-8) that Paul realises that an “extraordinary event” is taking place, similar to episodes in Hebrew scripture and (at 83) points out that in the third account in *Acts* the author retrospectively inserts ‘the Lord said’ in the response to Paul’s inquiry, as opposed to ‘he said’ in the first two accounts. A parallel can be made here with the retrospective detail in the *Vita* dream-vision that Christ was the dream visitor, which according to the narrative is something that was only clarified the next day.

⁴¹⁸ Elliott, ‘Constantine’s Conversion’, 434, comments that a Pauline association is unwarranted, because Constantine was already behaving like a Christian. Barnes, ‘Conversion’, 391, comments that Constantine is unlike Paul in that he neither persecuted Christians nor was ignorant of Christianity. Regarding the latter, to me it seems at least that the differentiation here should be between the ‘real’ Constantine, for whom this may have been the case, and the ‘literary’ or ‘Eusebian’ Constantine, who is depicted as unfamiliar.

To strengthen the connection between the two episodes, Eusebius includes certain attending circumstances that are essential for the account of Paul's vision. Both men are described as being in the company of others, whether an army or simply 'travelling companions', who become witnesses to the celestial manifestation and are to some degree affected by it. In the first version in *Acts*, Paul's companions hear the voice, but do not see the light; in the second, they see the light, but do not hear (or 'understand') the voice; and in the third, everyone sees the light and falls to the ground, though it is not indicated if anyone other than Paul can hear the voice.⁴¹⁹ Somewhat parallel to the second version in particular, Constantine's entire army sees the light in the sky and, since the dialogue also appears in the sky, the divine instruction, and as a result are struck with amazement. The inclusion of Constantine's 'travelling companions' (i.e. army) not only provides witnesses for the event, but satisfies another condition of the Pauline episode as well – both men are depicted as being in a liminal space that underscores their respective transitions. Paul is on his way to Damascus to apprehend followers of the Christ movement, while Constantine is marching somewhere with his army and contemplating invading Italy. Eusebius' indefinite 'somewhere' (πῶι) is sometimes interpreted as an indication that he is confused about or unaware of the location and chronology of the 'vision', but what it also indicates is that Constantine is in no place in particular.⁴²⁰ Although travelling with implied purpose, he

⁴¹⁹ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 71-2, does not regard the difference in the experiences of the companions as contradictory, but rather that the author of *Acts* changes the detail to reflect the particular point he means to make with Paul's retellings.

⁴²⁰ Bremmer, 'Vision', 65, notes, "Such vagueness never points to authenticity"; cf. Elliott, *Christianity*, 68. Jones, *Constantine*, 96, argues instead that this vagueness makes the account more plausible, since it does not situate the 'vision' "at some dramatic moment, like Lactantius' dream".

inhabits the same liminal position as Paul – Constantine is ‘somewhere’, but in terms of a specific location he is nowhere.

The method of dialogue differs between the two experiences, since in *Acts* Jesus speaks to Paul, while in *Vita* a message is appended to the symbol, but the purpose of the discourse is roughly the same. In the first two versions of Paul’s vision, Jesus tells him to go into Damascus and await further instruction, but in the third version there is an explicit statement of the reason for the revelation.

[F]or I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.⁴²¹

In *Vita* the emperor does not receive such a lengthy message, but what he is given – ‘By this, conquer!’ – is nonetheless a specific divine instruction contained in the celestial vision itself. Constantine’s initial confusion about the divinity, the symbol, and the message is then resolved in a second dream-vision, which serves a purpose similar to Paul’s later vision in the Temple. Although the directives given to Paul and Constantine in their respective dream-visions differ, in both cases Christ appears to them in person and repeats the message of the earlier vision/’vision’: Paul’s mission to the Gentiles is reiterated, while Constantine is again shown the symbol that appeared in the sky and instructed to use it to achieve victory – a reiteration of the sky-writing. Unlike Constantine’s dream, which occurs on the night of the celestial vision, Paul’s dream does not occur immediately after his experience on the road. It

⁴²¹ *Acts* 26:16-18: εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι, προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα ὧν τε εἶδές με ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι, ἐξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν, εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε ἀνοίξαι ὀφθαλμούς αὐτῶν, τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, τοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτοὺς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ κληρὸν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει τῇ εἰς ἐμέ. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 86, notes that ἐπιστρέφω here is consistent with the meaning elsewhere in *Acts* as denoting repentance and conversion.

is stated later, at *Acts* 24:17, that he had been absent from Jerusalem for several years before his dream-vision.⁴²² However, the second version in *Acts* places the dream in strict succession to the Damascus road event without indicating any particular length of time; Paul is made to state simply: “After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance”.⁴²³ Thus, Eusebius could play with the sequence of the narrative, regardless of the actual chronology.⁴²⁴

It is readily apparent that not all of the Damascus road elements are present in the Eusebian account. Most significantly, Constantine is not blinded by the ‘vision’, there is no specific advocate to fill the shoes of Ananias, and he is not baptised shortly afterward. There are, however, considerable similarities not only in the experience itself, but also in the structure of the ‘vision’ to heighten those similarities. Since Eusebius had an official version to which he needed to conform, he does not slavishly reproduce any of the versions in *Acts* and, rather than following one of the accounts alone, he appears to have combined elements from the second and third versions, which the author of *Acts* purports derive from Paul himself. As such, the progression of both narratives correspond roughly in the sequence of events, with the inclusion of certain linguistic similarities, to create, not a purely derivative product, but a nod to the Pauline tradition.

⁴²² And *Gal* 1:18-21, where Paul states that returned to Jerusalem three years after his ‘conversion’.

⁴²³ *Acts* 22:17: Ἐγένετο δέ μοι ὑποστρέψαντι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ προσευχομένου μου ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ γενέσθαι με ἐν ἑκστάσει.

⁴²⁴ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 75, argues that the story of the vision in the Temple is not merely an “appendix” to the ‘conversion’ story, but the “climax” of it. Bremmer, ‘Vision’, 66, mentions several examples of visionary Christian revelations with the comment, “I would not know of any combination of the two in one story”. The second version of Paul’s vision in *Acts*, however, does produce two visions in one story in strict sequence, though we know them to not belong to the same episode temporally.

Although I repeatedly say that Eusebius is responsible for the commonalities – which thus far I believe to be the case, because in *Vita* he is in control of how the ‘vision’ is represented – it could nevertheless be argued that he was merely reproducing the story with the same Pauline emphases that he received from Constantine. I think this to be highly unlikely, for the main reason that, in order for the Pauline connection to be effective, Eusebius employed other devices in *Vita* that were entirely within his realm of control. Specifically, in Book One Eusebius mimics the (pseudo-)psychology, worldview, and mission of Paul in his depiction of Constantine, as well as the emperor’s role within the Christian god’s ‘divine plan’, so as to recreate some of the conditions leading to and resulting from the ‘conversion’ experience.⁴²⁵ To accomplish this Eusebius used not only the general description of Paul in *Acts*, but also material taken from several Pauline epistles that appear to be unique personal expressions.

As noted above, a curious aspect of the Damascus road narratives is the absence of the sort of conversion terminology used elsewhere in the *New Testament* to characterise the phenomenon, which in his epistles Paul does not use himself when discussing the change that his experience inspired. Instead he refers to it as a ‘summoning’ or ‘calling’ (καλέω), which is not a concept unique to Paul.⁴²⁶ It has been argued that Paul is not actually ‘converting’ in the sense of an abrupt about-face as we tend to understand the phenomenon today, but

⁴²⁵ I certainly do not mean here that the ‘real’ Paul can be psychoanalysed: the studies of Stendahl [‘Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West’, *HTR* 56 (1963) 199-215; *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles*, 7-23), Gaventa (*From Darkness to Light*), Segal (*Paul the Convert*), and Z.A. Crook [*Reconceptualising Conversion* (Berlin, 2004)] have demonstrated sufficiently that such an endeavour is, if not futile, at least precarious. See also, P. Fredriksen, ‘Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions and the Retrospective Self’, *JThS* 37 (1986) 3-34. However, Eusebius and others working with the Pauline tradition could arrive at a mindset of the ‘literary’ Paul, which demands neither historical authenticity nor accuracy, but simply – as I demonstrate here – the import of statements that are indicative of a supposed psychology.

⁴²⁶ See, J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (trans. F. Clarke; Atlanta, 1959) 24-33; cf. Hedrick, ‘Paul’s Conversion/Call’, *contra* Munck.

merely realigning his interpretation of the Law.⁴²⁷ The *New Testament* language of conversion is absent in the Eusebian narrative as well, but why ought we to look for traditional terms, such as ἐπιστρέφω, which denotes turning away from sin, regarding Constantine?⁴²⁸ Up to this point in *Vita* Eusebius has not given any reason to suggest that Constantine has anything about which to repent. Rather, he paints the portrait of a pious and blameless figure who has always conducted himself morally and justly according to Christian ideals even prior to his ‘conversion’. There is more continuity in the religious character of Eusebius’ Constantine and, as opposed to an abrupt and dramatic change, an acknowledgement of the Christian god as the ‘highest divinity’.

Eusebius was certainly not averse to oblique descriptions of conversion without reference to sin; there is a ready example in his depiction of Constantius, another character in *Vita* that is openly referred to as a Christian and portrayed as unblemished in piety. When describing Constantine’s pre-‘vision’ contemplation, Eusebius states that the emperor considered how, “only his father had taken the opposite course [τραπέντα] to theirs [i.e. the persecuting Tetrarchs]”.⁴²⁹ Though Eusebius’ choice of verb, τρέπω, is not the sort of terminology we might expect, it nevertheless fittingly denotes a ‘turning’, but without the inherent context of repentance, and this ‘turning’ is further contextualised as a ‘conversion’ by the indication that it is in a direction completely opposite to the traditional system of worship.

⁴²⁷ See, for example, Segal, *Paul the Convert*; and, in particular, Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, who argues that Paul merely adjusted his conceptualisation of the divine so as to incorporate Jesus Christ as the broker of God’s benefactions.

⁴²⁸ Arguably, none of the conversion terminology relates to Paul, who is represented as simply adjusting his attitude towards the Law, rather than rejecting it; cf. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 19-20.

⁴²⁹ Eus. *VC* 1.27.2: μόνον δὲ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ πατέρα τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐκείνοις τραπέντα.

Nowhere in his epistles does Paul provide an account of a miraculous conversion experience of the sort that we find in *Acts*. However, he does at times relate aspects of his overall religious development. So, for instance, in *Galatians* Paul states, “God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles”.⁴³⁰ A similar sentiment is related, albeit more generally, in *Ephesians*, which Eusebius considered to have also been written by Paul:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.⁴³¹

The essence of these passages, particularly the ‘conversion’ reference in *Galatians*, is that even though Paul only came to acknowledge Jesus sometime later, he was nonetheless marked by God prior to his birth. Paul’s task had been determined well in advance and he received divine benefactions even before his ‘conversion’.

⁴³⁰ *Gal* 1:15-16: ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. This would seem to be an intentional parallel to the pre-birth prophetic call in Hebrew scripture, as exemplified, for example, in the figures of Samson, Samuel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; see, for example, *Jer* 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, / and before you were born I consecrated you; / I appointed you a prophet to the nations”. Cf. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 24-33. There is possibly a further parallel here with Constantine: Paul states here that God revealed His son “to me”, however the Greek text explicitly states ‘in me’ (at 1:16, ἐν ἐμοί); cf. M.M. Mitchell, ‘Epiphanic Evolutions in Earliest Christianity’, *ICS* 29 (2004) 183-204, at 187-91. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 64, comments that this is not a simple dative (*contra*, for example, Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 27), but a reference to receiving the Spirit. In their translation of *Eus. VC* 1.32.3, Av. Cameron and Hall render θεοδίδακτον αὐτῷ τὴν τούτων γνῶσιν παρεῖναι πειθόμενος as, Constantine was “convinced that it was as God’s own teaching that the knowledge of these things had come to him”. However, παρεῖναι, from πάρεμι (*sum*), with an object in the dative case also carries the meaning ‘to be present in something’. As a potential nod to the Pauline tradition and the revelatory context that Eusebius is at ends to create, this clause could perhaps be rendered: Constantine was ‘convinced that it was as God’s own teaching that the knowledge of these things was present in him’.

⁴³¹ *Eph* 2:8-10: τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἔσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοιμάσεν ὁ θεὸς ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

Much the same, on numerous occasions in *Vita* Eusebius makes clear that Constantine is ‘dearly beloved to God’, but he goes even further in Book One to point out that this god was with him even before Constantine prayed for his assistance.⁴³² From the outset of the work, Eusebius explains that the Christian god stood at Constantine’s side “at the beginning, the middle and the end of this reign” and put forward “this man as a lesson in the pattern of godliness to the human race”, and was also responsible for the extended length of his life.⁴³³ Even as a youth in the Eastern court Constantine is said to have received the benefit of the Christian god’s support: “yet though still young he did not share the same morality as the godless. With the aid of the divine Spirit a virtuous nature drew him away from that way of life towards one of piety and the favour of God”.⁴³⁴ Furthermore, when

⁴³² Storch, ‘Eusebian Constantine’, 145-6, observes that one of the major elements of Eusebius’ image of Constantine is that “[t]he hand of God is present in all favourable aspects of Constantine’s reign”, but that this began in 312. Rather, Eusebius emphasises that the Christian god aided Constantine prior to 312. Cf. Hollerich, ‘Moses and Constantine’, 81, who observes the depiction of God’s protection of Constantine since birth, but finds a connection with Moses instead. See also id., ‘Religion and Politics’, 316-24.

⁴³³ Eus. *VC* 1.4- 5.1: “This is also what God himself, whom Constantine honoured, by standing at Constantine’s side at the beginning, the middle and the end of his reign, confirmed by his manifest judgement, putting forward this man as a lesson in the pattern of godliness to the human race. As the only one of the widely renowned Emperors of all time whom god set up as a huge luminary and loud-voiced herald of unerring godliness, he is the only one to whom God gave convincing proofs of the religion he practised by the benefits of every kind which were accorded him: he honoured his imperial reign with three complete decades, and circumscribed his human life with twice that number. Making his the model of his own monarchical reign, he appointed him victor over the whole race of tyrants and destroyer of the God-battling giants, who in mental frenzy raised weapons against the Sovereign of the universe himself”; Ταῦτα δὲ καὶ θεὸς αὐτός, ὄν Κωνσταντῖνος ἐγέραιρεν, ἀρχομένῳ καὶ μεσάζοντι καὶ τελευτῶντι τῆς βασιλείας αὐτῷ ‘δεξιὸς’ παραστάς, ἐναργέσι ψήφοις ἐπιστώσατο, διδασκαλίαν θεοσεβοῦς ὑποδείγματος τὸν ἄνδρα τῷ θνητῷ γένει προβεβλημένους· μόνον γοῦν αὐτὸν τῶν ἐξ αἰῶνος ἀκοῆ βοηθέντων αὐτοκρατόρων οἷόν τινα μέγιστον φωστῆρα καὶ κήρυκα μεγαλοφωνότατον τῆς ἀπλανοῦς θεοσεβείας προστησάμενος, μόνῳ τὰ ἐχέγγυα τῆς αὐτοῦ θεοσεβείας διὰ παντοίων τῶν εἰς αὐτὸν κεχορηγημένων ἀγαθῶν ἐνεδείξατο, ‘χρόνον’ μὲν βασιλείας τρισὶ δεκάδων περιόδοις τελείαις {καὶ προσέτι λῶνον} τιμήσας, τούτων δὲ διπλάσιον {τοῦ παντός αὐτῷ βίου} τὴν ἐν ἀνθρώποις περιορίσας ζωὴν τῆς δ’ αὐτοῦ μοναρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὴν εἰκόνα δούσης, νικητὴν ἀπέδειξε παντὸς τυραννικοῦ γένους θεομάχων τ’ ὀλετῆρα γιγάντων, οἱ ψυχῆς ἀπονοίᾳ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἤραντο τὸν παμβασιλέα τῶν ὄλων δυσσεβείας ὄπλα.

⁴³⁴ Eus. *VC* 1.12.2-3: οὐ μὴν καὶ τρόπων τῶν ἴσων, καίπερ νέος ὢν, τοῖς ἀθέοις ἐκοινώνει. Although Eusebius is noting a similarity in the upbringing of Constantine with that of Moses at *VC* 1.12 generally, he is

giving his rendition of Constantine's 'escape' from the East and the ways in which Galerius tried to arrange his death, Eusebius notes that "once and again the plottings were with God-given insight detected by him",⁴³⁵ and that "[i]n the whole affair God was working with him, intending that he should be present to succeed his father".⁴³⁶ Regarding the accession of Constantine, this was apparently the will of the Christian god as well:

But when he [Constantius] was about to complete his mellow old age by paying the debt our common nature exacts and finally departing his life, God once more became for him a doer of marvellous works, by arranging that the first of his sons, Constantine, should be present to take over his empire.⁴³⁷

nevertheless attempting to show that the Christian god has been responsible for his circumstances since childhood. It should not be surprising that Eusebius' narrative in Book One may seem to go back and forth between Moses and Paul: in Eusebius' theology both religious figures were part-and-parcel of the same 'divine plan'. The revelation given to Moses was a veiled Christian doctrine, the full extent of which was realised in Jesus Christ. Thus, in Eusebius' theological and apologetic works Paul is made out to be a 'Hebrew thinker', whose writings demonstrate continuity from *Hebrew Bible* to *New Testament*, from Moses to Jesus. As for Constantine, he becomes another point in Eusebius' theology: the peace of the Church is the fulfillment of prophecy and yet another element in the 'history of salvation'. Cf. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 36-68; J.E. Bruns, 'The "Agreement of Moses and Jesus" in the "Demonstratio Evangelica" of Eusebius', *VC* 31 (1977) 117-25; Hollerich, 'Moses and Constantine'; id., 'Religion and Politics', 316-24; Droge, 'Apologetic Dimensions'; P. Gordray, 'Paul in Eusebius and Other Early Christian Literature', in Attridge and Hata, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, 139-65; F. Bovon, 'Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History* and the History of Salvation', (trans. L. Nasrallah), in id., *Studies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 2003) 271-83. Aside from the allusion to Moses, the image of the young Constantine in the Eastern court is not unique to Eusebius; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).4.5: "In your upbringing, however, best of Emperors, not everything offered you was what you would wish to follow, although as an exceptionally keen observer of proper behavior, if something were done improperly you withdrew your modest gaze from the distress of watching it" (*Iam tibi quidem in erudiendo, imperator optime, non omnia proponebantur quae sequi uelles, nisi quod recte factorum contemplator acerrimus, si quid secus fieret, a spectandi cura pudentes oculos abstrahebas*). Cf. Nixon and Rodger, *In Praise*, 348 (n. 22), on the thematic parallel of this passage with *Vita*.

⁴³⁵ Eus. *VC* 1.20.2: καὶ πρῶτον αὐτῷ καὶ δεύτερον κατάφωρα θεοῦ συμπνεύσει τὰ τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς ἐγίγνετο. Av. Cameron and Hall's translation of θεοῦ συμπνεύσει as "God-given insight" is slightly misleading, on account of the colloquial use and various connotations of the phrase 'God-given' in contemporary English; it should be understood to mean 'by the inspiration of God'.

⁴³⁶ Eus. *VC* 1.20.2: τὸ δὲ πᾶν αὐτῷ συνέπραττεν ὁ θεός, τῇ τοῦ πατρὸς διαδοχῇ προμηθούμενος αὐτὸν παρεῖναι.

⁴³⁷ Eus. *VC* 1.18.2: ἐπειδὴ δὲ πρὸς αὐτῷ λιπαρῷ γήρᾳ τῇ κοινῇ φύσει τὸ χρεῶν ἀποδιδούς λοιπὸν 'τὸν βίον' μεταλλάττειν ἔμελλεν, ἐνταῦθα πάλιν ὁ θεὸς παραδόξων αὐτῷ ποιητῆς ἀνεφαίνετο ἔργων, μέλλουσι τελευτᾶν τὸν πρῶτον τῶν παίδων Κωνσταντῖνον εἰς ὑποδοχὴν τῆς βασιλείας παρεῖναι οἰκονομησάμενος.

In such a way then did God, the President of the whole world, of his own will select Constantine, sprung from such a father, as universal ruler and governor, that no man could claim the precedence which he alone possessed, since the rest owed the rank they held to election by others.⁴³⁸

For Paul and Eusebius' Constantine, God was an ever-present influence in their lives, guiding and protecting them throughout, so as to enable them to fulfill a particular function; it was just a matter of both men reaching that realisation. For Paul this realisation came on the Damascus road, at which point he adjusted his understanding of his relationship with God to incorporate Jesus as the broker of His benefactions, while for Constantine it came with the 'vision', at which point he acknowledged the Christian god as the 'highest divinity' and his divine patron. Their respective experiences, then, do not designate the inception of divine patronage, but the recognition of the source of benefactions that had consistently and continually been bestowed and enjoyed.

According to the *Vita* narrative, Constantine's acknowledgement of the Christian god was largely inspired by his desire to liberate Rome. Despite the deliberation which followed that decision, such as the comparison of his father's successes against the failures of the persecuting emperors, it is the prospect of civil war that provides the momentum for the 'vision' – without the resolution to undertake such an ambitious enterprise the immediacy (or crisis) of the episode evaporates and Constantine's fevered contemplation loses its potency.⁴³⁹ How Constantine comes to the conclusion that he must engage Maxentius is uniquely framed by Eusebius:

⁴³⁸ Eus. *VC* 1.24: Οὕτω δὴ Κωνσταντῖνον, τοιοῦτου φύντα πατρός, ἄρχοντα καὶ καθηγεμόνα τῶν ὄλων θεός ὁ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου πρῦτανις δι' ἑαυτοῦ προεχειρίζετο, ὡς μηδένα ἀνθρώπων μόνου τοῦδε τὴν προαγωγὴν αὐχῆσαι, τῶν ἄλλων ἐξ ἐπικρίσεως ἐτέρων τῆς τιμῆς ἠξιωμένων.

⁴³⁹ Bremmer, 'Vision', 66, separates Constantine's 'vision' from the context of other ancient battle-visions on the basis that he detects no immediate crisis here.

When he then perceived that the whole earthly element was like a great body, and next became aware that the head of the whole, the imperial city of the Roman Empire, lay oppressed by bondage to a tyrant ... he declared that his life was not worth living if he were to allow the imperial city to remain in such a plight, and began preparations to overthrow the tyranny.⁴⁴⁰

Thus, in *Vita* we are granted a glimpse of Constantine's (supposed) worldview, which is conveyed using a body metaphor. Although such metaphors are used by non-Christian authors, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cicero, the particular envisioning of a 'community' as a body with a clearly delineated head that is responsible for the well-being of the whole is a prime aspect of Paul's 'Body of Christ' theology.⁴⁴¹

The longest exposition of this theology, which amounts to a worldview, appears in *I Corinthians* where Paul relates different roles within the Christian community to different elements of the same body, each part performing a different function for the benefit of the whole. There are two instances in this discourse that, when combined, echo in Constantine's consideration of Rome: at 12:12 Paul says, "[f]or just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ"; and shortly after, at 12:26, he says further, "[i]f one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it".⁴⁴² In this particular letter Paul seems to have been addressing a specific concern, namely, that members of the Corinthian Church desired the 'gifts' that had been bestowed on the apostles, prophets, miracle workers, and others.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Eus. *VC* 1.26.

⁴⁴¹ Dion. *Ant. rom.* 6.86.1-5; Cic. *De off.* 3.5.21-22. Body imagery was commonplace in political and philosophical discourse; cf. M.V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (Cambridge, 2006) 29-102.

⁴⁴² *I Cor* 12:12: Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστὶν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἓν ἐστὶν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός. 12:26: καὶ εἴτε πάσχει [ἐν] μέλος, συμπάσχει πάντα τὰ μέλη· εἴτε δοξάζεται ἐν μέλος, συγχαίρει πάντα τὰ μέλη.

⁴⁴³ See the discussion in Lee, *Body of Christ*, 105-52.

The intention behind the body metaphor in *1 Corinthians* is to convey that all parts of the body are equally important. As such, the body as a corporation is unified in Christ, but no part is defined as being central.⁴⁴⁴ In later letters, however, the ‘head’ clearly emerges as the most important element, upon which the rest of the body depends. So, at *Ephesians* 5:23-24 the author states, “[f]or the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands”.⁴⁴⁵ Later, at *Colossians* 2:19, Paul (or someone writing as Paul) elaborates further on the import of Christ as the “head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God”.⁴⁴⁶ As opposed to the metaphor in *1 Corinthians*, which depicts the Church members as the body parts working in concert, in later epistles the health and stability of the entire body is dependent on one part, the ‘head’.

⁴⁴⁴ Of the body parts included in the metaphor, the head is not expressly isolated – Paul mentions the eyes, ears, and nose as representing members of the Church/Body of Christ, but otherwise does not allude to a ‘head’ in any discernible way. Curiously, he states at *1 Cor* 12:22-25: “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the interior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (ἀλλὰ πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὰ δοκοῦντα μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα ὑπάρχειν ἀναγκαῖά ἐστιν, καὶ ἃ δοκοῦμεν ἀτιμότερα εἶναι τοῦ σώματος, τούτοις τιμὴν περισσοτέραν περιτίθεμεν, καὶ τὰ ἀσχήμονα ἡμῶν εὐσχημοσύνην περισσοτέραν ἔχει, τὰ δὲ εὐσχήμονα ἡμῶν οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχει. ἀλλὰ ὁ θεὸς συνεκέρασεν τὸ σῶμα, τῶ ὑστερουμένῳ περισσοτέραν δούς τιμὴν, ἵνα μὴ ἦ σχίσμα ἐν τῷ σώματι, ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν τὰ μέλη). This would seem to be at odds with the later emphasis on Christ as the ‘head’ of the body.

⁴⁴⁵ *Eph* 5:23-24: ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

⁴⁴⁶ *Col* 2:19: τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβασζόμενον αὔξει τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ.

Eusebius does not have Constantine incorporate Christ into his metaphor. However, Rome is presented in the emperor’s pre-‘conversion’ rationale as the seat of power affecting the welfare of the Roman Empire, as ‘head’ to ‘body’. Although occurring later in the historical sequence of events, Eusebius must have had in mind Constantine’s benefaction of the bishopric in Rome and the Church community at large, which he was instrumental in strengthening.⁴⁴⁷ By aligning Paul and Constantine’s associations with Rome, in such a way Eusebius is able to compound the metaphor to refer to ‘imperial city’ in relation to both Empire and Church. It is a superficial affiliation that Eusebius does not labour, but – especially in the case of readers or listeners that would sooner be reminded of Paul’s theology/worldview than, say, Dionysius – it is nonetheless effective in making Constantine appear to *think* like Paul.⁴⁴⁸

Essential also in likening Constantine to Paul is the sense of personal mission, which is presented fairly early in *Vita*. According to Eusebius, Constantine “was established as a clear example to all mankind of the life of godliness”;⁴⁴⁹ and “as a lesson in the pattern of

⁴⁴⁷ A religious connection is surely intended here, because not only did Constantine not reside in Rome, he never returned after 326. Rome’s status as the traditional centre for religion and politics notwithstanding, until Maxentius took power it had been steadily losing its appeal as an imperial residence; cf. Van Dam, *Roman Revolution*, 35-78.

⁴⁴⁸ It is possible that Eusebius appropriated the imagery from Constantine himself, perhaps from some form of *homonoia* speech: body imagery in such speeches typically describe the entire body or a part of the body as suffering from a disease or injury; cf. Lee, *Body of Christ*, 40-2. However, this imagery is usually explicit, describing the form of physical injury, making specific references to ‘affliction’ or ‘disease’, stating the consequences of the malady for the body, noting the difficulty of treatment or cure, and sometimes incorporating the role of the ‘physician’ into the metaphor.

⁴⁴⁹ Eus. *VC* 1.3.4: “This is what ancient oracles of prophets, transmitted in Scripture, predict; this is what lives of Godbeloved men in ancient times illustrious with every kind of virtue attest when they are recounted to the new generation; this is what our own age also has proved to be true, when Constantine, alone among all those who have ruled the Roman Empire, became a friend of the all-sovereign God, and was established as a clear example to all mankind of the life of godliness”; παλαιοὶ ταῦτα χρησιμοὶ προφητῶν γραφῆ παραδοθέντες θεσπίζουσι, ταῦτα βίοι θεοφιλῶν ἀνδρῶν παντοίαις ἀρεταῖς πρόπαλαι διαλαμπάντων τοῖς ὀψιγόνοις μνημονευόμενοι μαρτύρονται, ταῦτα καὶ ὁ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἀληθῆ εἶναι διήλεγξε χρόνος, καθ’ ὃν Κωνσταντῖνος

godliness to the human race” he was intended by God to be “a huge luminary and loud-voiced herald of unerring godliness”.⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore, Eusebius claims that God “set him up as a teacher of true devotion to himself for all nations, testifying with a loud voice for all to hear, that they should know the God who is, and turn from the error of those who do not exist at all”, that is to say, Constantine – like Paul – has been given apostolic authority by God to convert the Empire (understood, Gentiles).⁴⁵¹ To this Eusebius adds that, “[a]s a loyal and good servant (θεράπων), he would perform this and announce it, openly calling himself a slave (δοῦλος) and confessing himself a servant (θεράπων) of the All-sovereign”.⁴⁵²

In his capacity as a ‘servant’, Constantine was ‘chosen’ (or ‘summoned’) and ‘elevated’ by the Christian god to be a ‘herald’ and a ‘teacher’, to ‘testify’ so as to inform the Roman people about ‘the God who is’ and “turn [them] from the error” of traditional worship. Here Eusebius uses the verb ἀποστρέφω to describe this ‘turning’, which in a

θεῶ τῷ παμβασιλεῖ μόνος τῶν πώποτε τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς καθηγησαμένων γεγωνῶς φίλος, ἐναργῆς ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις παράδειγμα θεοσεβοῦς κατέστη βίου.

⁴⁵⁰ Eus. *VC* 1.4. Constantine is identified here as a κήρυξ, a ‘herald’, much the same as Paul is styled at *1 Tim* 2:7 and *2 Tim* 11:32. The noun occurs only once more in the *New Testament* at *2 Pet* 2:5 in reference to Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” (δικαιοσύνης κήρυξ).

⁴⁵¹ Eus. *VC* 1.5.2: εὐσεβείας εἰς αὐτὸν διδάσκαλον πᾶσιν ἔθνεσι κατεστήσατο, μεγάλη βοή ταῖς πάντων ἀκοαῖς μαρτυρούμενον τὸν ὄντα θεὸν εἰδέναι, τὴν δὲ τῶν οὐδαμῶς ὄντων ἀποστρέφουσαν πλάνην.

⁴⁵² Eus. *VC* 1.6: καὶ ὁ μὲν οἷα πιστὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς θεράπων τοῦτ’ ἐπραττε καὶ ἐκήρυττε, δοῦλον ἄντικρυς ἀποκαλῶν καὶ θεράποντα τοῦ παμβασιλέως ὁμολογῶν ἑαυτὸν. Constantine may very well have declared his ‘servitude’ to God, but it is represented here in a particular way. On the one hand, the designation of δοῦλος of God is not uncommon in the *New Testament* epistles: Paul refers to himself personally as δοῦλος on a number of occasions (both on its own and in conjunction with the title ‘apostle’; cf. *Rom* 1:1, *Gal* 1:10, *Phil* 1:1, *Titus* 1:1); as do Timothy (*Phil* 1:1), James (*Jas* 1:1), Peter (*2 Pet* 1:1), Jude (*Jude* 1:1), and John (*Rev* 1:1). The term θεράπων, on the other hand, appears only once in the entire *New Testament* at *Heb* 3:5, which Eusebius believed to have been written by Paul (cf. Eus. *HE* 3.3.4-5 and 3.38.1-2). The term in *Epistle to the Hebrews* is used to denote the ‘servitude’ of Moses, which would appear to be in keeping with Eusebius’ emphasis in Book One (cf. Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 186), but pre- and post-Eusebian authors – such as Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius, respectively – used this term to refer to ‘orthodox’ thinkers and important Christians without any Mosaic allusions; cf. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 645.

Christian context means ‘convert’ and implies repentance, thus depicting Constantine as a missionary. In *Acts* Paul’s mission is expressed most explicitly in the third account of the Damascus road event, in which he is commanded directly by Jesus, “to open their [i.e. the Gentiles] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God”.⁴⁵³ The verb that the author of *Acts* uses here is ἐπιστέφω, which is an acceptable variation for ‘convert’ (and better suited, since it refers to turning away from something *towards* something else, as opposed to Eusebius’ ἀποστρέφω, which is more indicative of aversion).

Aside from his particular mission to the Gentiles, a main element that sets Paul apart from the other apostles (and perhaps also inspired Eusebius to stress the connection) is that he was not an apostle of the living Christ. The substance of his gospel was not acquired through discipleship, but the revelation of the resurrection given to him directly by the risen Christ via the Damascus road vision. Hence, at *Galatians* 1:11-12 he states, “[f]or I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ”.⁴⁵⁴ In *Vita* Constantine’s ‘vision’ is interpreted and Christ’s significance is explained by Christians in his company, but nevertheless Eusebius creates an additional similarity with the ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, saying, “[c]omparing the

⁴⁵³ *Acts* 26:18: ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν.

⁴⁵⁴ *Gal* 1:11-12: Γνωρίζω γὰρ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτό, οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; cf. 1:1: “Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Παῦλος ἀπόστολος, οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν). Although Paul does not discuss any vision experience in his epistles, he does sometimes make references, such as here in verse 12, to an ‘apocalypse of Jesus Christ’. See, for example, *2 Cor* 12:1-4, which may be a personal vision account.

heavenly vision with the meaning of what was being said, he made up his mind, convinced that it was as God's own teaching that the knowledge of these things had come to him". Constantine's acquisition of knowledge is not described overtly here as a 'revelation' (ἀποκάλυψις), but a similar sense is conveyed by having Constantine believe (for Eusebius does not state 'he said') that he had received his instruction directly from the Christian god by means of a post-resurrection vision.⁴⁵⁵

In truth, it is somewhat difficult to determine what elements of the Pauline experience Eusebius would have found most illuminating and worthy of reference; although he makes reference to Paul in a number of his works, he does not offer any thoughts about the account of the miraculous encounter on the Damascus road. Regarding the nature of Paul's 'conversion', he unfortunately says very little. However, what he does say speaks volumes.

In addition to these Paul, the chosen vessel neither of men nor through men but through revelation of Jesus Christ himself and God the Father who raised him from the dead, was appointed an Apostle, being vouchsafed this calling by a vision and the heavenly voice of revelation.⁴⁵⁶

And so Eusebius, just prior to the narrative of the 'vision', in his description of Constantine's divinely prescribed appointment:

In such a way then did God, the President of the whole world, of his own will select Constantine ... as universal ruler and governor, that no man could claim the precedence which he alone possessed, since the rest owed the rank they held to election by others.⁴⁵⁷

Although in retelling Constantine's story Eusebius was sure to include numerous structural similarities with the Damascus road event, his most significant effort in aligning the emperor

⁴⁵⁵ For the 'vision' as 'revelation', see Nicholson, 'Vision', 322; Van Dam, 'Many Conversions', 133.

⁴⁵⁶ Eus. *HE* 2.1.14: ἐπὶ τούτοις Παῦλος, τὸ τῆς ἐκλογῆς σκεῦος, οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπων, δι' ἀποκαλύψεως δ' αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀπόστολος ἀναδείκνυται, δι' ὀπτασίας καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν οὐρανοῦ φωνῆς ἀξιωθεὶς τῆς κλήσεως. Cf. *Gal* 1:1 and 1:11-12.

⁴⁵⁷ Eus. *VC* 1.24.

of the Roman Empire with the Apostle to the Gentiles seems to lie on the periphery – it is in the narrative leading up to the ‘vision’ proper that he frames the lens through which he intended the experience to be viewed. His technique in this regard may come across as somewhat subtle. However, within a culture that was very much living and breathing Pauline mythology and theology, the tradition that Eusebius was attempting to establish would not have been lost on his immediate audience. It certainly was not lost on later Church writers. Thus, for instance, the Church historian Theodoret, who was writing around the mid fifth century and familiar enough with Eusebius to mention him specifically in the prologue of his *Historia ecclesiastica*, refers to Constantine as “the emperor worthy of all praise, who obtained his calling ‘neither from men nor through men’, but from heaven, like the divine Apostle”.⁴⁵⁸ Rufinus, in his translation of Eusebius’ *Historia ecclesiastica* into Latin, incorporated elements from *Vita* to fill out his narrative.⁴⁵⁹ One such element was the ‘vision’, albeit slight altered, regarding which he made the personal observation that Constantine’s experience was not unlike that of Paul on the road to Damascus.⁴⁶⁰ On the other hand, the *Actus Silvestri*, which was set down in the late fifth or early sixth century, abandons the Eusebian version of events, but maintains the Pauline association by depicting

⁴⁵⁸ Theod. *HE* 1.1: ὁ πανεύφημος βασιλεύς, ὃς « οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου » ἀλλ’ οὐρανόθεν κατὰ τὸν θεῖον ἀπόστολον τῆς κλήσεως ταύτης ἔτυχεν (translation mine). Cf. *Gal* 1:1; Eus. *HE* 2.1.14.

⁴⁵⁹ J. Vogt, ‘Berichte über Kreuzeserscheinungen aus dem 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.’, *AIPhO* 9 (1949) 593-606, at 593-5.

⁴⁶⁰ Ruf. *HE* 9.9: “Then, with happiness restored and now unconcerned about the victory, he traced the sign of the cross, which he had seen in the sky, on his forehead. Having thus been invited by heaven into the faith, to me he seems not at all inferior to the one to whom it was similarly said from heaven: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus the Nazarene, except that this man was not a persecutor at the time he was invited, but already a follower” (translation mine); *tum vero laetus redditus et de Victoria iam secures, signum crucis, quod in caelo viderat, in sua fronte designat et ita caelitus invitatus ad fidem, non mihi illo videtur inferior, cui similiter de caelo dictum est: Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris? ego sum Iesus Nazarenus, nisi quia hic non adhuc persequens, sed iam consequens invitatur.*

Constantine as a persecutor prior to his conversion.⁴⁶¹ After being struck by a divine malady (in this case leprosy, as opposed to Paul's blindness), the emperor is instructed by the apostles Peter and Paul in a dream to seek a cure in baptism and thus he converts. In an alternate take on the Vision legend and the association with Paul, the twelfth-century historian Zonaras reports that when Constantine was besieging Licinius at Byzantium (in mid 324), one night he saw a spectacle of light flashing all around the camp as the revelation entered his mind that God was the source of all his victories.⁴⁶²

The pre-existing similarities between Constantine's 'vision' and Paul's vision in *Acts* made it easy for – and likely prompted – Eusebius to render them analogous.⁴⁶³ However, in

⁴⁶¹ *Act. Sil.* 1.5-12. Though late, it is possible that the Silvester legend started as an oral tradition in the late fourth century; cf. W. Pohlkamp, 'Kaiser Konstantin, der heidnische und der christliche Kult in den Actus Silvestri', *FMS* 18 (1984) 357-400, at 370-1; Fowden, 'Last Days', 154-5; S.N.C. Lieu, 'From History to Legend and Legend to History: The Medieval and Byzantine Transformation of Constantine's *Vita*', in Lieu and Montserrat, *Constantine*, 136-76, at 142-3, who suggests that a reference in the sixth-century (Pseudo) *Gesta Liberii* indicates that Pope Liberius (352-366) was aware of a Silvester baptism tradition in the mid fourth century.

⁴⁶² *Zon. Epit. hist.* 13.1.6-7; the verb he uses to describe the light is περισσπράπτω, the same verb used at *Acts* 9:3 and 22:6 to describe the light flashing around Paul. Zonaras (at 13.2.7-9) also includes elements of the *Actus Silvestri* tradition. For a summary of later traditions, see A. Linder, 'The Myth of Constantine the Great in the West: Sources and Hagiographic Commemoration', *StudMed* 16 (1975) 43-95; S.N.C. Lieu, 'Constantine in Legendary Literature', in Lenski, *Age of Constantine*, 298-321; 'From History to Legend'; A. Demandt, 'Wenn Kaiser Träumen – Die Visionen Konstantins des Großen', in A. Demandt and J. Engemann (eds.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Trier, 2006) 49-59.

⁴⁶³ In modern scholarship an association with Paul has often been considered natural. Cf., for example, Baynes, *Constantine*, 9; H. Montgomery, 'Konstantin, Paulus und das Lichtkreuz', *SO* 43 (1968) 84-109, at 90-102; P. Keresztes, 'Constantine: Called by Divine Providence', *Studia Patristica* 18 (1985) 47-53, at 50; 'The Phenomenon of Constantine the Great's Conversion', *Augustinianum* 27 (1987) 85-100; C.M. Odahl, 'God and Constantine: Divine Sanction for Imperial Rule in the First Christian Emperor's Early Letters and Art', *CHR* 81 (1995) 327-52, at 344; Bleckmann, *Konstantin*, 60; R.R. Holloway, *Constantine and Rome* (New Haven, 2004) 3, who acknowledges that the episode bears some resemblance with Paul's experience, with the exception that, he argues, for Constantine it was not a conversion; Odahl, *Constantine*, 270; G. Mordillat and J. Prieur, *Jésus sans Jésus: la Christianisation de l'Empire romain* (Paris, 2008) 163-94; P. Stephenson, *Constantine* (London, 2009) 168; Girardet, *Kaiser und sein Gott*, 50-1; Bardill, *Constantine*, 160. Against a Pauline connection, see Barnes, 'Conversion', 391: "The conversion of Constantine in 312 does not at all resemble the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, with which it has often been compared. Constantine did not change from hostility towards or ignorance of Christianity to sudden adherence". This, however, is from the perspective of Constantine's own words in his *Oration to the Saints*, and not the *Vita* narrative – the distinction, then, is

Book One of *Vita* Eusebius does not merely frame the ‘vision’ to appear similar to Paul’s experience; he frames Constantine to resemble Paul in character as well. Since the Pauline elements in *Vita* well surpass the ‘vision’ narrative, it stands to reason that the creation of this context is Eusebius’ doing alone. The construction of the narrative, its structure and outline; the production of Constantine’s ‘psychology’, worldview, and mission; and the significance of the ‘vision’ for Constantine’s religious trajectory – these were all elements over which Eusebius exercised editorial control. When viewing *Vita* as a whole, it is overwhelmingly clear that Eusebius strove to represent Constantine as ‘chosen’ by the Christian god to be the sole ruler of the Roman Empire and in that capacity to convert the predominantly ‘pagan’ population to Christianity, at various times assuming the guise of Moses, Paul, and Christ, in addition to being equal to the apostles.⁴⁶⁴

While there can be little doubt that Eusebius freely adapted aspects of the (self-) representation of the *New Testament* Paul in order to make Constantine’s ‘vision’ appear to have been a revelatory ‘conversion’, the question still remains: was he merely inventing a

between personal confession and literary representation. For an alternate view, see Singor, ‘Labarum’, 500, who suggests instead that the model for the ‘vision’ is neither Moses nor Paul, but Jesus’ baptism; Leeb (1992) 138, that the episode is a ‘spiritual baptism’. G. Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (Stuttgart, 2000), 289 (n. 254), comments that a connection with *Acts* cannot be ruled out: though the Pauline and Eusebian accounts are not precisely parallel, this is an instance of a ‘double vision’ to enhance importance.

⁴⁶⁴ See Eus. *VC* 4.58-60, regarding Constantine’s construction of and intentions to be buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles. Cf. C. Mango, ‘Constantine’s Mausoleum and the Translation of Relics’, *ByzZ* 83 (1990) 51-62, at 58, that Constantine was declaring himself Christ; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 93-120; H. Leppin, ‘Old Religions Transformed: Religions and Religious Policy from Decius to Constantine’, in J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion* (Malden, MA, 2007) 96-108, at 107, more cautiously; Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 30-48, and at 26: *Vita* “was a partisan and polemical work, and in developing parallels with biblical figures such as Moses and Christ, it anticipates an audience which would recognise and appreciate the rhetorical and literary strategies of the Christian scriptures. This, then, is the context in which Eusebius chose to set the emperor: not as the latest in a long line of imperial predecessors, but as a revival of heroes from the Old and New Testaments”; Bardill, *Constantine*, 338-84.

conversion for Constantine or placing heavier emphasis on what was nonetheless a conversion narrative?⁴⁶⁵

The Modern Study of Religious Conversion

The predominant understanding of conversion in Classical Studies derives largely from much earlier investigations in the field of Religious Psychology, heralded chiefly by William James and applied to the study of Antiquity by Arthur Darby Nock in his ever-influential *Conversion: The Old and the New from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*.⁴⁶⁶ The psychological study of religious conversion has been varied in its perspectives. Many

⁴⁶⁵ So, for instance, Bremmer, 'Vision', 67-8, contends that the purpose of the 'vision' story is a conversion narrative, but that this is a result of Constantine's own 'biographical reconstruction', which Eusebius faithfully reproduces; cf. Elliott, 'Constantine's Conversion', 427, that if Eusebius actually believed that a miraculous conversion occurred, he would have stated it "plainly, fully, and triumphantly". R. Staats, 'Kaiser Konstantin, Apostel Paulus und die deutsche Verfassung', *DtPfrBl* 101 (2001) 118-22, puts forward arguments based on *Vita* and 'historical' developments to show that Constantine considered Paul to be a personal role model. In particular, he isolates: (1) the concept of being appointed directly by God; (2) the 'vision'; (3) Constantine's burial in the Church of the Holy Apostles; (4) Constantine's self-identification as 'bishop for those outside the Church' (cf. Eus. *VC* 4.24) as imitating Paul's mission to the Gentiles; and (5) the executions of Crispus and Fausta as an example of Constantine taking 'excommunication' (cf. *1 Cor* 5:1-5) for sexual misconduct to an extreme level. Cf. Barnes, 'From Toleration to Repression', 205-6; 'Constantine after Seventeen Hundred Years', 208-9, in support. For a similar view, see, Odahl, *Constantine*, 270-1. Staats's conclusions are problematic for a few reasons. The concept of divine appointment was not restricted to Christianity, nor to Constantine, not to mention that in *Vita* it is Eusebius who supplies this commentary. Second, his comparison of Paul's vision is extremely superficial – it is restricted mainly to the light in the sky and the appearance at noon, neither of which are exclusively Christian vision elements – and does not address Eusebius' creative contribution. Third, we do not know why Crispus was executed or what precisely happened to Fausta; we can imagine something severe, since both suffered *damnatio memoriae* and were not rehabilitated in Constantine's lifetime, but it may simply be a coincidence that Constantine's marriage legislation appeared around the same time as their deaths – the story of some illicit affair or other appears later in the fourth century and is clearly a 'tabloid-style' rendering that was intended to be inflammatory. Cf. Montgomery, 'Konstantin, Paulus und das Lichtkreuz', who argues that Eusebius was the one responsible for the Pauline parallels in *Vita* in order to justify Constantine's relationship with and position within the Church. See now R. Staats, 'Kaiser Konstantin der Große und der Apostel Paulus', *VC* 62 (2008) 334-70, in which he examines the language of Constantine's legislation and certain reverse legends that he argues derive from the emperor's personal familiarity with the writings and theology of Paul.

⁴⁶⁶ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in *William James*, ed. B. Kuklick (New York, 1987) 1-477; A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (London, 1933).

theorists see conversion as a normative developmental phenomenon, usually initiated by moral and intellectual crises, and the need for resolution, while others regard it as a means for the convert to rectify their worldview and overcome perceived personal deficiencies.⁴⁶⁷

The theorists of the ‘Clark school’ of psychology in particular characterise conversion as a highly emotional experience, mainly relativistic, and prevalent during times of high emotional excitation, conflict, or crisis – elements found in other foundational theorists as well, including James and George Coe, the latter even going so far as to define conversion as ‘self-realisation’, but only when “this religious self-realisation is intense, and is attained with some abruptness” does he term it ‘conversion’.⁴⁶⁸ Owing to the intense emotional character

⁴⁶⁷ See, for example, J.H. Leuba, ‘A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena’, *AJP* 7 (1986) 309-85; E.D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion* (London, 1899); G.S. Hall, *Adolescence*, 2 vols. (New York, 1904); E.S. Ames, *The Psychology of Religious Experience* (Boston, 1910); J.H. Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion* (New York, 1912); *The Belief in God and Immortality* (Boston, 1916); G.A. Coe, *The Psychology of Religion* (Chicago, 1917); E. Clark, *The Psychology of Religious Awakening* (New York, 1929). Cf. A.D. Nock, ‘Conversion and Adolescence’, in T. Klauser and A. Rücker (eds.), *Pisciculi* (Münster, 1939) 165-77. Regarding conversion and religion as a developmental phenomenon and integral in identity formation, see more recently C. Ullmann, *The Transformed Self* (New York, 1989); H. Grzymala-Moszczyńska and B. Beit-Hallahmi (eds.), *Religion, Psychopathology and Coping* (Amsterdam, 1996); V. Saroglou et al., ‘Need for Closure and Adult Attachment Dimensions as Predictors of Religion and Reading Interest’, in P.H.M.P. Roelofsma et al. (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Psychology and Religion* (Amsterdam, 2003) 139-54; M.R. Levenson et al., ‘Religious Development from Adolescence to Middle Adulthood’, in R.F. Paloutzian and C.L. Park (eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York, 2005) 144-61. Leuba and Starbuck both did their doctoral studies at Clark University (Massachusetts), the same institution where Hall was teaching, hence the common nickname for these theorists, the ‘Clark School’ of religious psychology. James was receptive to these theorists, in particular Starbuck, which manifests in his own theories; cf. J.A. Blezen, ‘Debates among German Contemporaries of William James’, in Roelofsma et al., *One Hundred Years of Psychology and Religion*, 33-55.

⁴⁶⁸ Quote: Coe, *Psychology of Religion*, 152. Crisis is an essential feature of ‘sudden conversion’ for these early theorists and emphasised strongly by Starbuck and James, who argue that the transformation itself is a means of resolving inner conflict. For Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion*, crisis consists of two mental processes: it is the struggling away from sin until the point of exhaustion, at which point the convert relinquishes control or surrenders to a higher power; the straining ceases and God, as it were, strolls in effortlessly. Cf. Leuba, ‘Religious Phenomenon’, 318; id., *Psychological Study*, 268-75, who suggests that a god is not needed for conversion, but simply the convert’s perceived need for divine aid and the supposed receipt of that aid; Coe, *Psychology of Religion*, 154. James’ take on ‘crisis’ (*Varieties*, 121-238) is similar to Starbuck’s in the sense that he defines it as self-despair or inclination to self-surrender, a state of being that is alleviated through ‘second birth’, by which he means ‘conversion’. For James, the sudden convert suffers from a ‘sick soul’

of the experience, psycho-somatic responses (such as, visual or auditory hallucinations) are not only possible, but expected. As such, James comments, “Saint Paul’s blinding heavenly vision seems to have been a phenomenon of this sort; so does Constantine’s cross in the sky”.⁴⁶⁹

In *Conversion*, Nock defines and discusses the phenomenon in some detail, presenting it as primarily a psychological affair. Strongly influenced by James, Nock first describes conversion as, “the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right”, adding “[w]e know this best from the history of modern Christianity”, and further:

The features of such conversion have been classified by William James as a passion of willingness and acquiescence, which removes the feeling of anxiety, a sense of perceiving truths not known before, a sense of clean and beautiful newness within and without and an ecstasy of happiness; these emotions are sometimes, and in fact often, accompanied by hallucinatory or quasi-hallucinatory phenomena. This type of experience is very well known.⁴⁷⁰

personality: they are unsatisfied, often depressed, and experience feelings of inferiority, liminality, or guilt. The goal of the ‘sick soul’ individual, then, is to become ‘healthy minded’ (i.e. satisfied with their quality of life, with an optimistic view of the world around them) – conversion is seen as renewing their livelihood, from which point onward they cease to be unfulfilled [cf. B. Beit-Hallahmi, ‘In Debt to William James: The Varieties as Inspiration and Blueprint’, in Roelofsma et al., *One Hundred Years of Psychology and Religion*, 83-104, at 98-100, who notes that crisis resolution does not always result in improved functioning]. In the case of ‘sudden conversion’, the convert is reacting to a process of emotional development and therefore passive; at the height of the moral or emotional crisis, something occurs which is perceived by the convert as nothing less than a miracle, such as visual or auditory hallucinations, unconscious motor control, a perceived loss of personal will, or simply an overwhelming sense of ease and/or happiness. As to the influence of the psychological approach and the role of emotional crisis in discussions of Constantine’s conversion, see, for example, Baynes, *Constantine*, 8-9, who describes the Battle of Milvian Bridge as “a moment of crisis”; and, Barnes, ‘Conversion’, 376-7, that in 312 Constantine’s “psychological crisis” was that his ambitions to be sole ruler of the Empire might be frustrated by Licinius, whose task it was to reclaim Italy. More examples below.

⁴⁶⁹ James, *Varieties*, 231; cf. Nock, *Conversion*, 7-8.

⁴⁷⁰ Nock, *Conversion*, 7-8. Additionally, Nock comments that, while Christian conversion demands the realisation “that the old was wrong and the new is right”, the journey of religious development itself is “driven by the longing for moral regeneration”. On Nock’s indebtedness to James and modern psychological frameworks, see, Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 22-7.

Later, in the conclusion to his analysis of the moral and intellectual struggle of Saint Augustine that culminated in his conversion, Nock elaborates on his definition to include the observation that it is a gradual and lengthy process of introspection and personal religious development, for which it is realised at the moment of conversion that the elements contributing to the conscious conviction were subconsciously present the entire time.

So there was an emotional background for conversion... Adolescence brought to him, as to so many, not only its welter of vague inquisitive desire which does not exactly know what it wants, but also its generous if incoherent aspirations after new truths. So his quest ran its way to an intellectual conviction, and this conviction gradually acquired an emotional strength sufficient to bring him to decisive action. The story is like the familiar type of conversion discussed in the first chapter, in that Christianity is throughout presupposed and present in the subject's subconsciousness... it is a progress in a continuous line; it is like a chemical process in which the addition of a catalytic agent produces a reaction for which all the elements were already present.⁴⁷¹

Despite the gradual process leading up to the actual moment of 'turning', for Nock religious conversion is nonetheless an intensely emotional and sudden affair, and it is these qualities that make it legitimate. Unlike adherents to ancient cults, Nock argues, who were free to slip in and out with minimal emotional investment and belong to several at any given time, converts to Christianity suffer intellectual and moral crises, characterised by a personal search for truth and inward reflection, eventually being resolved in an abrupt and psychically tumultuous episode. Nock's influence, or at least the influence of modern Western psychology, is readily apparent in Constantinian scholarship in references to Constantine's 'moment of psychological conviction' or his 'longing for moral regeneration'.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Nock, *Conversion*, 266. This 'catalyst' can be an event, such as the 'vision', or even the influence of someone at a crucial point of spiritual development. See also, Nock, 'Conversion and Adolescence', 165, where he describes conversion as the moment when the convert consciously accepts what subconsciously he had always simply accepted.

⁴⁷² Thus, Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 13, remarks, "That the psychological approach is the default one is true despite the fact that one can study different *aspects* of conversion that are not psychological or that would not appear to lend themselves to psychological commentary or assumptions" (emphasis in the original).

Such an approach for understanding Constantine's conversion, I would say, is flawed for several reasons. The studies of religious conversion on which Nock relied were intrinsically limited in both scope and application. The subjects of observation were solely converts to Christianity, who were raised in Christian communities and already somewhat familiar with theology and practice. The societal conditions and social expectations of adherence to Christianity resulted in a purely Christian-centric understanding of religious conversion in a predominantly Christian environment, which does not easily lend itself to the religious setting of the late third and early fourth centuries.⁴⁷³ As such, the psychological

See, for instance, MacMullen, *Constantine*, 78, contends that Constantine's experience was "a purely psychological event", but this is in reference to Lactantius' account of the dream, which he prefers; Smith, *Constantine*, 101, that, as a result of the combination of Maximian's recent revolt and Maxentius' reputation for magic, "[p]sychologically, his state of mind was a classic one for conversion to a new ideology"; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 43, "moment of psychological conviction"; id., 'Conversion', 377, "psychological crisis", and at 380: "And it may be that Constantine was impelled towards conversion by a subconscious or semi-conscious desire to outdo Maxentius", who in 311 had finally legislated the return of confiscated Christian property; Nicholson, 'Vision', 323: "The shining cross and subsequent dream had no doubt a profound mental effect... But this was something more than ... a "moment of psychological conviction" about Christianity in general"; Singor, 'Labarum', 500: "the psychological need in later years to mark a clear break between the old and the new and to emphasize in sharper lines what had in reality most probably been a blurred transition, transformed his decision ... into a momentous 'conversion' "; Odahl, *Constantine*, 106: "His conversion was not the final decision in a long internal search for moral regeneration and personal salvation"; P. Veyne, *When Our World Became Christian, 312-394* (trans. J. Lloyd; Cambridge, 2010) 54, who, although he does not use explicit psychological terminology, describes Constantine's dream-vision as subconscious conflict resolution that resulted in a conversion (cf. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 180: "Here [i.e. in dreams], we have been taught, is where the unconscious sorts through data that our stressed and bewildered conscious minds overlook"). On the other hand, Van Dam, 'Many Conversions', *passim*, is slightly more subtle, alluding instead to emotional elements inherent in the psychological model, such as 'crisis', to argue that there were numerous opportunities for sudden conversion (or numerous conversions) without relying on the retrospective account in *Vita*; he seems, however, to depart from the literature by removing the religious condition from his definition of 'conversion' to encompass any alteration in self-representation, which in his analysis ultimately falls within the realm of religious representation.

⁴⁷³ Nock, *Conversion*, 8, admits this himself somewhat when he says: "We must not, however, expect to find exact analogies for it beyond the range of countries with a long-standing Christian tradition". See the important note by J. Lofland and R. Stark, 'Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective', *ASR* 30 (1965) 862-74, at 862 (n. 2): "The meaning of this term [i.e. 'conversion'] has been muddled by the inconsistent usage of Christian religious writers. Often they have used "conversion" to refer to an aroused concern among persons who already accept the essential truth of the ideological system. Yet, in keeping with the earliest Christian examples of conversion, such as that of St. Paul, they have also used the word to describe

models more properly describe a ‘return to faith’ or ‘rediscovery’, albeit entirely within a Christian sphere.

Equally problematic for the application to Antiquity is the superimposition of a modern Western psychological framework on peoples removed both culturally and temporally – doing so assumes a sameness between ancient Mediterranean and modern Western societies with respect to psychic and emotional experience, conceptualisation, and expression of the ‘self’, and other aspects of psychology that are largely culturally constructed. This is not to say that there does not exist some universal psychology that transcends cultural, geographic, and temporal boundaries, but the idiocentric and egocentric requisites of the modern Western psychological model of religious conversion, as well as the particular psychical processes that extend from that culturally-specific perspective, for the most part results in an anachronistic understanding of conversion in Antiquity.⁴⁷⁴ It is one

changes from one such system to another. These are very different events and ought to be indicated by different words”. See also the comment by Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 73-4, which – although directed at Nock and the ancient context – is generally applicable to the psychological theorists: “Common sense dictates that only in the first generation of Christianity in a family did all enter necessarily by conversion. Thereafter, the progeny of the converts would be socialized into Christianity. The child needs no conversion, for social mores, values, and institutions present themselves as self-evidently true in a family that provides instruction into its religious rites. Primary socialization of the child, the process by which the family’s accepted truths become internalized and recognized as objective reality, can therefore be an important analogy to the way in which conversion works in developing commitment. We must therefore differentiate between conversion and other factors that raised group commitment”.

⁴⁷⁴ See, for example, M.Z. Rosaldo, ‘Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling’, in R.A. Shweder and R.A. LeVine (eds.), *Culture Theory* (Cambridge, 1984) 137-57; H.C. Triandis et al., ‘Allocentric versus Idiocentric Tendencies: Convergent and Discriminant Validation’, *J Res Pers* 19 (1985) 395-415; R.A. Shweder, ‘Does the Concept of the Person Vary Cross-Culturally?: With Edmund J. Bourne’, in R.A. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures* (Cambridge, MA, 1991) 113-55; H.C. Triandis, *Individualism and Collectivism* (Boulder, 1995); id., ‘Individualism and Collectivism: Past, Present, and Future’, in D. Matsumoto (ed.), *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology* (Oxford, 2001) 35-50. See also the excellent discussion by Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 31-52. More pointedly, regarding the disconnect between technical terms for emotions (e.g. fear, pity, love) and the cultural construction of emotions in a cross-temporal context, see D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks* (Toronto, 2006); cf. id., ‘Aristotle on Anger and the Emotions: The Strategies of Status’, in S.M. Braund and G.W. Most (eds.), *Ancient Anger* (New York, 2003) 99-120; id., ‘The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: A Cross-Cultural Perspective’, *Psychologia* 48 (2005) 225-40.

thing for a modern person from any cultural background to identify with certain aspects of the ancient experience, yet quite another thing indeed to claim that ancient Greeks and Romans thought and felt, and moreover responded to those thoughts and feelings, in the same way that he/she does.

It has been realised in modern studies of religious conversion that the ‘sudden’ or ‘lightning conversion’ of the Pauline variety represents an idealised type, rather than the sort of process that typical converts undergo.⁴⁷⁵ This development, however, is fairly recent with respect to the field in general and is the product of the first-hand studying of converts to New Religious Movements using a principally sociological framework.⁴⁷⁶ At face-value such models would seem to offer a much better option for understanding the mechanics of conversion in Antiquity, if only because the influx of New Religious Movements in the 1950s and 1960s, which provided the impetus for this field, more closely resembles the pluralism of the ancient world. Although not abandoning the developments in religious psychology wholesale, this more recent methodological approach has either disproved or clarified several fundamental tenets of the psychological theories, which are of immediate relevance for the study of the ‘vision’ account.⁴⁷⁷ As opposed to religious psychology’s

⁴⁷⁵ Some more recent studies are sensitive to these developments. See, for example, Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 187-91; Van Dam, ‘Many Conversions’; Bremmer, ‘Vision’, 67-8; Potter, *Constantine*, 159.

⁴⁷⁶ For a survey of the literature, see Rambo, ‘Current Research on Religious Conversion’, *RSR* 8 (1982) 146-59; S. Bruce, ‘Sociology of Conversion: The Last Twenty-Five Years’, in J.N. Bremmer et al. (eds.), *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion* (Leuven, 2006) 1-11.

⁴⁷⁷ So, for instance, Lofland and Stark, ‘Becoming a World-Saver’, construct a primarily sociological model (albeit, non-empirical) for predicting conversion based on their observance of converts to the Unification Church that nevertheless includes numerous idiocentric and egocentric conditions, and places high value on emotional factors; thus, ‘crisis’ (described as “tension”) is a necessary ‘predisposing condition’ for a successful conversion, provided that the convert encounters the group at the height of their struggle (described as the “turning point”). Similarly, Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 44-65, makes emotional ‘crisis’ and the ‘quest’ for crisis resolution two of the essential stages in his seven-stage model of conversion; cf. L.R.

passive (Pauline) model of conversion, in which the converts were already well-integrated in their religious communities and had some foundation in faith, the more recent sociological approaches show that converts assume active roles in their conversions and that their participation in a new religious system typically precedes their belief in its doctrine.⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, researchers observed that social interaction guaranteed conversion: successful converts often required a familiar introduction to the new movement, such as a friend or family member, and social contact with members of the movement tended to exceed contact with those outside.⁴⁷⁹ Most pointedly, these studies have shown that the instantaneous conversion of the Pauline variety is not representative of the majority of conversion types. Rather, the progress from commitment to conversion is a process that takes place over an extended period of time and that, instead of being definite or assured, the likelihood of a successful conversion increases when certain psychological and social conditions are met at particular points during the convert's religious development.⁴⁸⁰

Rambo and C.E. Farhadian, 'Converting: Stages of Religious Change', in C. Lamb and M.D. Bryant (eds.), *Religious Conversion* (London, 1999) 23-34, for a concise exposition of the model.

⁴⁷⁸ See, in particular, J.T. Richardson, 'The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research', *JSSR* 24 (1985) 119-236.

⁴⁷⁹ For example, D.A. Snow and C.L. Phillips, 'The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Reassessment', *Soc. Probl.* 27 (1980) 430-47; D.A. Snow and R. Machalek, 'The Convert as a Social Type', *Sociol. Theor.* 1 (1983) 259-89; 'The Sociology of Conversion', *Ann. Rev. Sociol.* 10 (1984) 167-90; C.L. Staples and A.L. Mauss, 'Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion', *JSSR* 26 (1987) 133-47. Snow and Phillips, in particular, in applying the 'model' of Lofland and Stark ('Becoming a World-Saver') to their own study of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement in America, found rather that it was the social interaction conditions that guaranteed conversion.

⁴⁸⁰ See, in particular, the non-empirical models of Lofland and Stark, 'Becoming a World-Saver', and Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, for which successful conversion requires the intermixture of not only a specific set of psychological and sociological factors, but predisposing and situational factors as well – conversion thus becomes something of a 'perfect storm', with the right factors interacting at the right times and under the right conditions.

This does not mean, however, that sudden conversion experiences do not exist, but what these researches have shown is that, when they do, they are the result of the convert imposing a post-conversion outlook on their pre-conversion life and religious development. In their examination of converts as a ‘social type’, David Snow and Richard Machalek found, among other things, that the transformation of the individual does not end with the ‘turning’ itself. After their conversion, the convert rationalises their pre-conversion life by restructuring and redefining it in terms of their new worldview and adopted discourse; they adopt a new hermeneutic system as provided by their community and reject the comparative association of terms, functions, and metaphors; and finally, their self-representation and personality undergo a shift to match the expectations of the movement into which they have become immersed and assimilated.⁴⁸¹ In a later article Snow and Machalek include also the reconstruction or elaboration of conversion testimonies over time, both throughout their religious development and after their conversion.⁴⁸² Several studies have elucidated this

⁴⁸¹ Snow and Machalek, ‘The Convert as a Social Type’. The aim of their study is to outline an empirical model for identifying converts, that is, how to detect that a conversion has taken place, rather than predict conversion. They isolate four particular ‘rhetorical indicators’ in the convert’s discourse that would suggest a conversion has occurred: Biographical Reconstruction (reinterpretation of pre-conversion life using post-conversion values), Adoption of a Master Attribution Scheme (the adoption of a single pervasive scheme provided by the community through which behaviour and events are interpreted), Suspension of Analogical Reasoning (preference for iconic, as opposed to analogical, metaphors to underscore the incompatibility of belief and practice with other groups), and Embracement of a Master Role (the interests of the movement are applied to all areas of the convert’s life). In their reassessment of this study, as applied to ‘born-again Christians’, Staples and Mauss, ‘Conversion or Commitment?’, argue (at 134) that the theory “is flawed because three of the four proposed “rhetorical indicators” of conversion fail to distinguish religious converts from people who, though not “converted”, are religiously *committed*” (emphasis in the original); the only ‘indicator’ that they found was unique to the self-avowed converts in their study was ‘biographical reconstruction’, “[w]here the subject *actively* reinterprets past experiences or self-conceptions from the vantage point of the present in such a way as to *change the meaning* of the past for the subject” (at 140; emphasis in the original).

⁴⁸² Snow and Machalek, ‘The Sociology of Conversion’, 176-8, find that convert testimonies frequently change over time; they are elaborated, refined, and sometimes completely reconstructed to reflect developments in ‘spiritual growth’ or shifts in the ideology of the movement. That is to say, convert testimonies constantly undergo revision in response to internal and external developments. Conversion, however, is unlike other forms of retrospective and identity formation, in that this process of reorientation is much more intensive. Cf. Staples

element of the conversion process, showing that converts, despite the totality of the journey that led to their conversion, when engaging in ‘biographical reconstruction’ tend to perceive that a much greater change took place. Thus, they are able to isolate a particular moment in the history of their religious development – however insignificant it may have seemed at the time – which they can confidently identify as the precise moment of their conversion. In addition, the convert testimony that results from such ‘reconstruction’ often correlates to a normative narrative as perpetuated by their respective community.⁴⁸³

With respect to the potential application to Antiquity and Constantine, however, these more recent approaches also have their limitations. Aside from the fact that they too rely on a modern Western context (at times even relying on religious psychology alone to fill instrumental stages in their models) and that the nature of the pluralistic system within which they operate is at variance with the ancient situation (since, in a modern context there are numerous religious options each requiring total allegiance, whereas ‘pagan’ conversion to Christianity in Antiquity was a matter of transitioning from an open to a closed system), we nonetheless know very little about Constantine’s personal life to render with any accuracy judgements as to his degree of socialisation, let alone the precise details of his exposure to Christianity. Attempts to use a cut-and-paste approach to apply these models to Constantine,

and Mauss, ‘Conversion or Commitment?’, who argue that the change in discourse and rhetoric is not the result of the transformation, but tools to assist transformation.

⁴⁸³ See, for example, B. Taylor, ‘Recollection and Membership: Converts’ Talk and the Ratiocination of Commonality’, *Sociology* 12 (1978) 316-24; Snow and Machalek, ‘The Sociology of Conversion’, 175-6, with the particular observation that Nichiren Shoshu members are provided guidelines for constructing a normative conversion experience; Staples and Mauss, ‘Conversion or Commitment?’, 141-6; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 137-9. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 18-9, notes that the Pauline experience as a model of conversion to Christianity in Antiquity was established as early as the pastoral epistles (e.g. *1 Tim* 1:12-17) and, at 73, that Nock’s concept of conversion is deeply indebted to the Lukan tradition; cf. the comment by Van Dam, ‘Many Conversions’, 133, that “[b]y the time he wrote the *Life* Eusebius seems to have read A. D. Nock’s *Conversion*”, insinuating that the *Vita* account conforms to a normative narrative of Christian conversion, that is, Paul in *Acts*.

and so attempt to map his conversion according to an assumed ‘universal’ pattern, would serve only to again produce an anachronistic (and largely fictionalised) reconstruction.⁴⁸⁴

On the other hand, there is great attractiveness in the idea that the ‘vision’ story is the result of ‘biographical reconstruction’, that is, that Constantine – following a lengthy process of integration and eventual conversion – came to regard the early ‘vision’ as a moment of sudden conversion to Christianity, befitting the idealised conversion narrative of his new community, namely, Paul on the road to Damascus.⁴⁸⁵ Such an assumption is certainly supported by the reproduction of Constantine’s contemplations in *Vita*, which combine pre-

⁴⁸⁴ At best, I suppose, certain aspects of particular models could be used to detect whether a ‘conversion’ was in progress, but admittedly even this much is tenuous simply because of the position in society that Constantine occupied. For example, one could attempt to assess the degree of Constantine’s Christian socialisation or determine whether a conversion has occurred by seeking out ‘rhetorical indicators’ in his correspondence, such as the letters reproduced by Optatus or even the imperial letter sent to the bishops throughout the Empire regarding the promulgations at Nicaea (see Eus. *VC* 3.17- 19.2). However, one would first be faced with the daunting task of determining which correspondence were written or worded by the emperor himself and which were composed by clerks in the administration’s employ, whose job it was to also tailor documents for specific audiences. Cf. B.H. Warmington, ‘The Sources of Some Constantinian Documents in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History and Life of Constantine*’, *Studia Patristica* 18 (1985) 93-8, on Christian *notarii*; Barnes, ‘Conversion’, 388, who argues that even the *Oration to the Saints*, though delivered by Constantine and expressing his “policy and ideology”, was probably written by a “good speechwriter”, who contributed the particular language that we find.

⁴⁸⁵ This particular ‘rhetorical indicator’ would appear to not be as anachronistic, since we have ready examples of an ancient Christian convert’s re-evaluation of their past in the autobiographical *Confessions* of Augustine and the authentic Pauline epistles. Cf., for example, Fredriksen, ‘Paul and Augustine’; Segal, *Paul the Convert*, especially at 16-30 and 118. However, Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 117-32, finds that such re-evaluation is common to both ancient philosophy and Christianity conversion narratives, which he terms ‘patronal *synkrisis*’. Similar to panegyric *synkrisis*, it is the convert’s juxtaposition of their life before (negative) and after (positive) encountering their patron (human or divine), so as to further garner honour for the patron by representing them as directly responsible for a dramatic change in quality of life. ‘Biographical reconstruction’ has already been plausibly applied to the case of Constantine. See, for instance, Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 188-9, who sees the *Vita* account, including the conversion aspect, as Constantine’s own later reconstruction, with the further comment that the span of time between event and report, which “had previously seemed a weakness ... now becomes perhaps the most significant evidence”; id., ‘Impact of Constantine’, 115; Bremmer, ‘Vision’, 67-8, with the added detail that the convert “relates a story that must look credible in the eyes of his new community”. See also, MacMullen, *Constantine*, 74-8, who observes that interpretive filters are at work in the Lactantian and Eusebian accounts, describing the *Vita* version as resulting from Constantine’s own reworking of his experience “according to the prevailing religious and literary habits of thought” and reinforced by legendary stories of holy men.

and post-‘vision’ events, such as the fates of the persecuting emperors, and is somewhat in line with the hypothesis of Weiss that Constantine later reinterpreted his vision of Apollo as a vision of Christ. However, as attractive as it may be, does this actually reflect what is accomplished in the *Vita* ‘vision’?

Regardless of the structural alterations to the events leading up to the ‘vision’ that Constantine appears to have included in his report to Eusebius, such as the substance of his contemplations and deliberations, the perceived need for divine assistance would seem to plausibly, if not accurately, characterise his foremost concern at that time. What is particularly telling, then, about a potential ‘conversion’ aspect in the ‘vision’ story is the central, and non-Christian (at least, at this point in time), emphasis on victory, which must stem from Constantine’s original report. As a man of his times, Constantine was aware of the distinction between what Nock terms ‘adhesion’ to the ancient cults, as opposed to the full-fledged commitment demanded in conversion to – not Christianity necessarily – philosophy. As Nock succinctly puts it, “[a] man used Mithraism, but he did not belong to it body and soul; if he did, that was a matter of special attachment and not an inevitable concomitant prescribed by authority”.⁴⁸⁶ Constantine’s awareness is certainly evident in his *Oration to the Saints*, where he conveys a fairly heavy critique on the pragmatism/functionalism of traditional polytheism, which is decidedly impractical and dysfunctional.

And who would know the Maker of the whole realm of being? Who would be first or last in prayers and litanies? To whom could I pay especial worship without impiety to others? Or perhaps if I had need of something for my livelihood, I would offer thanks to the one who aided me, but blamed the one who withstood? From whom would I have prayed to know the cause of the present calamity and thought fit to obtain relief? Let us imagine that we had received responses from oracles and prophecies, but that it was not *in their power* and these

⁴⁸⁶ Nock, *Conversion*, 14. The parallels in ‘rhetorical indicators’ of conversion between ancient philosophy and Christianity are discussed in considerable detail by Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, and fall well within the scope of the ancient system of divine patronage and benefaction.

things were the province of another god: what pity would there be, what providential oversight of God with regard to humanity?⁴⁸⁷

The impetus for the ‘vision’ is an overwhelming concern for the condition of the imperial city and its population, caught in the clutches of the tyrannical Maxentius. Despite the later development of a fervent belief in a personal, possibly prophetic, mission to Christianise the Empire, this is not what is conveyed to Constantine through the ‘vision’, nor does the narrative express any concerns on the part of the emperor for the condition of Roman Christians or the status of Christianity.⁴⁸⁸

According to Eusebius, when Constantine entreated the unknown god that would soon become his patron, his immediate concerns were securing the support of a divinity that possessed the strength to assist him against “the mischievous magical devices practiced by the tyrant”.⁴⁸⁹ It is curious that after at least two decades of Christian socialisation and

⁴⁸⁷ OC 3.3-4: τίς δ’ ἂν ἔγνω τὸν συμπάσης γενέσεως δημιουργόν; εὐχαὶ δὲ καὶ λιτανεῖται πρὸς τίνα πρῶτον ἢ τελευταῖον; τίνα δὲ θεραπεύων ἐξαιρέτως οὐκ ἂν περὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἠσέβησα; ἢ τάχα δ’ ἂν καὶ δεόμενος τῶν βιωτικῶν τινος τῷ μὲν συναραμένῳ χάριν ἔγνω, τῷ δ’ ἀντιπράξαντι ἐμεμφάμην. τίτι δὲ προσευξάμενος τὴν αἰτίαν <ἂν> τῆς περιστάσεως γνῶναι τῆς τ’ ἀπαλλαγῆς τυχεῖν ἤξιουν; θῶμεν δὲ λογίοις καὶ χρησιμοῖς ἡμῖν ἀποκεκρίσθαι, μὴ εἶναι δὲ τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐξουσίας ἄλλῳ τε ταῦτα ἀνήκειν θεῷ· τίς οὖν ἔλεος, ποία δὲ θεοῦ εἰς ἄνθρωπον πρόνοια;. The emphasis in this passage notes my correction of the translation of Edwards, who renders τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐξουσίας as ‘in our power’. I have also omitted Edwards’ repetition of “what pity there would be”, which seems to me a typographical error, since the repetition does not appear in the Greek text.

⁴⁸⁸ Although Eusebius describes Maxentius as a ‘tyrant’, which by this time had come to include the connotation of ‘persecutor’ [cf. T.D. Barnes, ‘Oppressor, Persecutor, Usurper: The Meaning of ‘Tyrannus’ in the Fourth Century’, in G. Bonamente and M. Mayer (eds.), *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Barcinonense* (Bari, 1996) 55-65], the description of the situation at Rome and Maxentius’ behaviour accords with the traditional understanding of ‘tyrant’ as a ruler whose illegitimacy is evident in their rejection of Roman values. See the terse, yet apt, comment of Holloway, *Constantine and Rome*, 2: “Constantine was fighting to win the empire for himself, not for the Christians”.

⁴⁸⁹ So, for example, Jones, *Constantine*, 102: “But it was not a spiritual experience. Constantine knew and cared nothing for the metaphysical and ethical teaching of Christianity when he became a devotee of the Christian God: he simply wished to enlist on his side a powerful divinity, Who had, he believed, spontaneously offered him a sign”; Vogt, ‘Pagans and Christians’, 53, though he maintains the image of a fervently Christian Constantine throughout, nevertheless makes the lucid comment: “The attempt to obtain divine help by force and receive it as a tangible counter was a remnant of pagan beliefs”; MacMullen, ‘Constantine and the Miraculous’,

interaction, as well as reflection on the experience, that his recollection of the ‘vision’ faithfully preserves that immediate (and extremely functional) concern and not any post-conversion, or otherwise present, ideals. Wolf Liebeschuetz, who maintains Constantine’s Christian conversion in 312, sets out the nature of the issue quite clearly:

The version told by Constantine in his old age inspires confidence because it is so unlike any other publicized case of conversion to Christianity that one cannot imagine it to have been invented by a fully informed Christian such as Constantine was in his later years. Constantine claimed that he was converted in a period of stress. The stress was not caused by any of the usual motives for conversion, fear of death, longing for moral regeneration, seeking after truth, but by the need for powerful supernatural assistance to counter that which his rival Maxentius was thought to be tapping, and with whose aid he had already disposed of two powerful opponents.⁴⁹⁰

Much is said about Constantine’s preoccupation with divine protection and victory, but not a word is offered in the entire episode on metaphysical preoccupations, such as salvation, let alone relevant religious themes acquired over a long Christian career that could reasonably be incorporated in hindsight, such as a desire to depose the persecuting emperors or bring peace to the Church. When we consider that Constantine did report the story ‘in his later

86-8; Dörries, *Constantine*, 36, notes that Constantine’s “appeal to a heavenly champion” and “confidence in the power of magical signs” are particularly non-Christian; D. MacDonald, ‘The Vision of Constantine as Literary Motif’, in M.A. Powell Jr. and R.H. Sack (eds.), *Studies in Honor of Tom B. Jones* (Kevelaer, 1979) 289-96, at 296, remarks on the ‘pagan’-ness of the ‘vision’ scenario; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 615: “On his march south, practical concern for the gods was surely more urgent”; Corsaro, ‘Sogni e visioni’, 333-4; Holloway, *Constantine and Rome*, 3: “Constantine’s approach to the Christian God was no more a conversion than Sulla’s dream in which the Anatolian goddess Ma-Bellona offered him a lightning bolt with which to strike his enemies”; Odahl, *Constantine*, 318 (n. 10), comments that Eusebius’ description of Constantine’s “psychological state” is reliable because “it fits the religious environment of the times”; Demandt, ‘Wenn Kaiser Träumen’, 43, that for the first time ever Christ has become the ‘Lord of Battles’; Leppin, ‘Old Religions Transformed’, 104: Constantine’s “main interest in the Christian God seems to have been in his power to grant victory, which is a fundamentally pagan concept and not specifically Christian”; Bardill, *Constantine*, 178-83; Potter, *Constantine*, 156. On the other hand, Veyne, *When Our World Became Christian*, 49-50, notes that Constantine engaged the Christian god as a ‘pagan’ would, but contends that he “converted because he believed in God and the Redemption”, and that victory came with it. This would, of course, be the ideal scenario for the Christian Constantine, but “Redemption” does not make an appearance in the ‘vision’ story, nor do any other concerns that can be characterised as related to ancient Christian ideals.

⁴⁹⁰ Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change*, 278. I am not singling out Liebeschuetz here because he is particularly deserving of criticism, but rather because of how neatly he frames this matter.

years', at a time when he was, more or less, 'a fully informed Christian', confidence in the *Vita* 'vision' as an authentic 'conversion narrative' should not only fizzle, but disappear altogether. Given the span of time between 'vision' and report, naturally some elements of the story became jumbled in Constantine's memory, yet in some ways it remained remarkably lucid – the story that Constantine told was not a tale of a miraculous conversion to Christianity, but the providential origin of the *Labarum*. What Eusebius *heard*, on the other hand, would seem to be a different matter entirely.

Conclusion

In many ways analysing the Eusebian account is an exercise in understanding the reconstruction of personal memory. To be sure, the story is an attractive one and the broad strokes, at least, are hard to forget: a spectacular dazzle of light in the sky, the promise of divine assistance, personal contact with a heavenly power – these are striking qualities for any audience. However, also key to a good story is a proper beginning, middle, and end, not only for those hearing the story, but also the person to whom it belongs. The interpolation of decidedly relevant details – regardless of at what point they are identified as such – and the omission of extraneous ones are pertinent for formulating a tidy, easily-consumable narrative that presupposes a desired interpretation.

In such a way, relating an episode from one's personal history in the form of a story to serve a point or purpose is not unlike selecting material for the construction of a focused argument. For stories, as for recollections, causality and closure are essential, and so such narratives are indicative of how a person has come to remember something, as well as how they have *chosen* to remember it. Life experience not only changes the way that one approaches the future, but also how one (re)conceptualises the past; the retrospective

application of new realisations grants the individual the ability to reinvent their past – to see things not previously seen, to know things previously unknown, to call to notice tangential details formerly deemed inconsequential, and thus to impose or construct additional contexts in order to render a tale ‘full-bodied’ or comprehensive and teeming with meaning. The evidence of this process is then manifested in the story’s emphasis, selection of content, and structure.

It would be a grand understatement to say that in the nearly twenty-five years that stand between the ‘vision’ experience (spring 308 to late 311) and Constantine’s report of it to Eusebius (late July 336) there would have been innumerable opportunities for him to recount and reinterpret the event. Whether a result of the progression of his reign (his conquests and acquisitions), his interactions with various priests, philosophers, and bishops, or perhaps simply his reaction to how others (orators and writers) represented the experience and its significance, the potential for Constantine’s reconstruction of the ‘vision’ in hindsight is immeasurable. There are clear instances in the account where Constantine imposed a post-Milvian Bridge perspective on his pre-Milvian Bridge experience, which – apart from willful distortion – can only mean that certain developments had caused him to reflect on the event afresh.

However, certain other elements of the story would seem to have been faithfully preserved in 336, if only because we find them emphasised in the much earlier accounts of the panegyrist of 313, Lactantius, and Nazarius; namely, divine assistance in the civil war against Maxentius. Even Eusebius’ *Historia ecclesiastica*, though it does not describe a vision, nevertheless claims that Constantine called upon divine powers before invading Italy. It is a distinct possibility, then, that the experience did not precisely coincide with the emperor’s intentions to march against Maxentius, but that post-war accounts influenced his

understanding of the event's import: what at the time might have been perceived as a general promise of divine protection with no specific application could in retrospect be understood as intimately connected to his monumental enterprise in Italy – once the cognitive association between vision and victory over Maxentius was firmly established, the remaining details could fall into place with the result that Constantine and others (not necessarily in that order) came to represent the event as being a direct response to the situation at Rome.

Regardless of the plausibility of such a scenario, what is apparent is that from an early stage descriptions of the civil war of 312 were attended by themes of divine protection and visions, and that somewhere in between the Battle of Milvian Bridge and the composition of *Vita* the Vision legend evolved to include a conversion to Christianity, which has been a mainstay of the Constantinian tradition ever since. Ideally, this element of the story would have derived from Constantine himself, but it would be too idealistic, I would say, to suppose that he exercised exclusive creative control over his experience. As opposed to a bold and explicit declaration of a miraculous conversion, it is the editorial features of the *Vita* narrative – by which I mean context, structure, language, and framework, not to mention the story's strategic position at what Eusebius makes it seem to be the start of Constantine's formal Christian life – that are instrumental in suggesting that a conversion took place. It need not be assumed that Eusebius completely fabricated Constantine's 'vision' or conversion; there should be no doubt that the emperor did indeed entertain him with a story of auspicious divine intervention that was intended to awe and amaze. As happens all too often, however, what was *said* and what was *understood* may have been somewhat different.

When we acknowledge Eusebius' creative contribution to the 'vision' story, the more authentic elements of Constantine's report become easier to detect. It is to be expected that after more than two decades the sequence of certain ancillary developments became

confused in the emperor's recollection, but he nonetheless appears to have preserved some essential details of the experience, which come through in the *Vita* account. Namely, in his desire for a powerful protector and victory Constantine's attitude to divine powers comes across as extremely functional in nature – the story demonstrates an overt practical desire that requires divine intercession and the prayers he directs to the unknown god, whose function Constantine believes it to be, are designed to secure the tools to realise his pragmatic goals. This in no way makes Constantine irreligious, but it shows that even after approximately twenty-five years of (presumably, Christian) religious development and socialisation he nevertheless reflected on his experience within the framework of pedestrian 'pagan' worship. It should be regarded as highly significant that, despite obvious later alterations (whether deliberate or simply natural distortions of memory), absolutely no adjustments were made to the overtly cultic mindset with which Constantine approached his god.

We could take the *Vita* narrative at face-value that at that time Constantine did not intend to entreat the Christian god specifically and therefore suppose that conversion was not a consideration for him. However, in the process of 'biographical reconstruction' and the reinterpretation of his life within the scope of his Christianity, this aspect of the story would most assuredly have undergone subsequent revision, namely, with what purpose and intent he beseeched the unknown god, and particularly in what manner he approached and engaged Him. It is in this detail in particular, I believe, that we find an aspect of the real Constantine and his story peeking through the Eusebian veil, and it shows how he later regarded the 'vision' experience – as the origin of the *Labarum*. The *Vita* 'vision' was only ever realised as a conversion narrative by the man holding the stylus.

CHAPTER FOUR: SIGNS OF GOD

“I thank the gods ... that I did not waste my time on writers [of histories], or in the resolution of syllogisms, or occupy myself about the investigation of appearances in the heavens; for all these things require the help of the gods and fortune”.

The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, 1.17⁴⁹¹

In the previous three chapters we have examined various features of the main contemporary accounts – one ‘pagan’, two Christian – of Constantine’s vision, but the issue of precisely how these accounts are related still looms large. Clearly enough, I assume here that they are related, though the matter is certainly not without debate. On account of the similarities in the descriptions of Lactantius and Eusebius at least, many scholars are inclined to regard them as reporting the same experience,⁴⁹² while others are more reluctant to attribute both

⁴⁹¹ G. Long (trans.), *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (London, 1871).

⁴⁹² See, for example, A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (trans. H. Mattingly; Oxford, 1948) 17-8; J. Vogt, ‘Pagans and Christians in the Family of Constantine the Great’, in A.D. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963) 38-55, at 40; R. MacMullen, ‘Constantine and the Miraculous’, *GRBS* 9 (1968) 81-96, at 83-4; J.H. Smith, *Constantine the Great* (London, 1971) 103-5; H. Dörries, *Constantine the Great* (trans. R.H. Bainton; New York, 1972) 32-6; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1983) 616; T.G. Elliott, ‘Constantine’s Conversion: Do We Really Need It?’, *Phoenix* 41 (1987) 420-38, at 435 (n. 50); M.J.R. Gervás, ‘Los sueños de Constantino en autores paganos y cristianos’, *A&Cr* 7 (1990) 143-50, at 149-50; R. Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus* (Berlin, 1992) 129-40; H. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops* (Baltimore, 2000) 179-80 and 189-90; O. Nicholson, ‘Constantine’s Vision of the Cross’, *VC* 54 (2000) 309-23, at 310-1; C.M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London, 2004) 105-6; H. Singor, ‘The Labarum, Shield Blazons, and Constantine’s Caeleste Signum’, in L. de Blois et al. (eds.), *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power* (Amsterdam, 2003) 481-500, at 482-4; N.E. Lenski, ‘Constantine’, in A.A. Barrett (ed.), *Lives of the Caesars* (Oxford, 2008) 255-79, at 260-1; J. Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2012) 174.

narratives to a single episode,⁴⁹³ and even when it is agreed that the two sources are attempting to describe the same event the nature of the relationship remains in dispute.⁴⁹⁴ Since Henri Grégoire's arguments in the 1930s for the primacy of the vision of Apollo, some scholars have even been inclined to conclude that Eusebius produces some conflation of the accounts of the panegyrist and Lactantius to create a narrative that combines a dream and some solar-related tradition.⁴⁹⁵ This perspective, we can say, has reached a sort of culmination in the hypothesis of Peter Weiss.⁴⁹⁶

Although I have discussed aspects of his argument in detail elsewhere, it would be prudent to summarise here Weiss' particular contribution, since it has direct bearing on the discussion that follows. Weiss theorises that Constantine was privy to two experiences – a

⁴⁹³ See, for example, N.H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London, 1972) 60; P. Keresztes, *Constantine* (Amsterdam, 1981) 17; T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 43; J. Bleicken, *Constantin der Grosse und die Christen* (Munich, 1992) 28-9; Av. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Eusebius* (Oxford, 1999) 204; R. Van Dam, 'The Many Conversions of the Emperor Constantine', in K. Mills and A. Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Rochester, 2003) 127-51, at 134-7; W.V. Harris, 'Constantine's Dream', *Klio* 87 (2005) 488-94, at 491; J. Bremmer, 'The Vision of Constantine', in A.P.M.H. Lardinois et al. (eds.), *Land of Dreams* (Leiden, 2006) 57-79, at 67; J. Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine* (London, 2006) 36-7; K.M. Girardet, *Der Kaiser und sein Gott* (Berlin, 2010) 49; P.J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove, IL, 2010) 71-2.

⁴⁹⁴ So, for instance, Alföldi, *Conversion*, 17-8, following Lactantius, puts Eusebius' 'vision' on the eve of the battle and entirely within a dream; Dörries, *Constantine*, 32-6, considers Eusebius' account to be the product of a later stage of the Vision legend, which removed the dream-vision from Lactantius' narrative of the battle and placed it in the context of Constantine's overall religious development; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 616, posits that Lactantius is incorrect to put the vision on the eve of the battle, while Eusebius is incorrect in placing the construction of the *Labarum* immediately following the 'vision'; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 140, argues that Eusebius' version represents the endpoint of the evolution of the Vision legend, Lactantius' version being indicative of an earlier stage; Odahl, *Constantine*, 105-6, combines the two narratives with the result that the *Vita* 'vision' takes place in on the eve of the battle, and the divine symbol is both employed on the shields and fashioned into the *Labarum*; Bardill, *Constantine*, 174, suggests that Eusebius may have intentionally adjusted the chronology of the dream-vision described by Lactantius in order to heighten the experience by having two visions in one episode.

⁴⁹⁵ H. Grégoire, 'La "conversion" de Constantin', *RUB* 36 (1930/1931) 231-72; id., 'La vision de Constantin "liquidée"', *Byzantion* 14 (1939) 341-51. Cf., for example, W. Seston, 'La vision païenne de 310 et les origines du chrisme constantinien', *AIPhO* 4 (1936) 373-95; P. Orgels, 'La première vision de Constantin (310) et le temple d'Apollon à Nîmes', *BAB* 34 (1948) 176-208; E. Galletier, 'La mort de Maximien d'après le panégyrique de 310 et la vision de Constantin au temple d'Apollon', *REA* 52 (1950) 288-99; B. Bleckmann, 'Pagane Visionen Konstantins in der Chronik des Johannes Zonaras', in G. Bonamente and F. Fusco (eds.), *Costantino il Grande*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1992-1993) 1.151-70; Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 181-7.

⁴⁹⁶ P. Weiss, 'The Vision of Constantine', (trans. A.R. Birley), *JRA* 16 (2003) 237-59.

celestial-vision while still in Gaul and a dream-vision on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge – and the reconstruction that he proposes aligns the diverging narratives of the panegyrist and Lactantius by supposing that years later Eusebius combined their accounts into one unified episode. Moreover, Weiss’ reasoning for the shift from a ‘pagan’ to a Christian conceptualisation is that, after Constantine had interpreted the dream-vision as Christian, he then reinterpreted the previous celestial-vision as having been Christian as well.

In these terms, Weiss’ hypothesis seems plausible. All three accounts have strong continuities, aside from the obvious commonality that they describe a vision experience for the same individual.⁴⁹⁷ Firstly, each version claims that Constantine had direct contact with a divinity: in Panegyric 6 he treats personally with Apollo; in *De mortibus persecutorum*, with an undisclosed dream-figure, whom the context suggests is the pre-existent Christ; and in *De vita Constantini*, explicitly with Christ. Secondly, in each case Constantine is the recipient of a divine promise of victory: the panegyrist identifies Apollo as accompanied by Victoria and explicitly declares that the emperor has been promised a long life, that is, he will remain unconquered; according to Lactantius, Constantine is given a divine guarantee of victory over Maxentius, provided he follows the instructions given to him in the dream-vision; and Eusebius emphasises the divine promise of victory in his description of both visions, stating that the message $\tau\acute{o}\upsilon\tau\omega\ \nu\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha$ was part of the celestial-vision and that Christ reiterated this in the subsequent dream-vision, elaborating further that Constantine would be divinely protected from his enemies.⁴⁹⁸ Finally, in each account this divine promise of victory is

⁴⁹⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).21; Lact. *DMP* 44.4-6; Eus. *VC* 1.28-32.

⁴⁹⁸ Here the difference in the directives of the visions reported of Lactantius and Eusebius can be attributed to their relative perspectives: Lactantius was writing ca. 315, not long after the civil war against Maxentius, Constantine’s only major war to date; whereas Eusebius, writing in the late 330s, takes into account also Constantine’s later wars.

signified by a token gesture that amounts to a physical representation: the panegyrist claims that Apollo offered Constantine laurel wreaths, images of victory; Lactantius states that the emperor was instructed to place a divine symbol on his soldiers' shields; and Eusebius reports that both visions contained a divine symbol, upon which the *Labarum* was modelled. On the basis of these fundamental features it would appear that the three accounts are indelibly linked. At the very least we can draw two preliminary conclusions from the basic similarities in these narratives: it is conceivable that these sources are describing two or three separate vision experiences, claimed either by or for Constantine, that are founded on a singular template; or, they are differing versions of the same experience filtered by the variety of its reporters. For reasons I have already discussed in previous chapters and will expand presently, the latter is the more likely conclusion.

The similarities in the themes, content, and context across all three accounts suggest that they are related, but the challenge lies in determining how. Weiss' reconstruction would appear to be reasonable, since it seems – as Timothy Barnes offers – to best satisfy the evidence at hand.⁴⁹⁹ The proposition that Constantine viewed a solar halo phenomenon is not entirely far-fetched: not only had a similar suggestion been made previously for Eusebius' cross in the sky, but Weiss provides adequate meteorological documentation to show that the atmospheric conditions of the region near Granum, together with the rough chronology provided by the panegyrist, to show that Constantine could have witnessed such an event.⁵⁰⁰

The intersections of the mock suns of a double solar halo occurrence, which Weiss suggests

⁴⁹⁹ T.D. Barnes, 'Constantine and Christianity: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations', *ZAC* 2 (1998) 274-94, at 288; id., *Constantine* (Malden, MA, 2011) 75.

⁵⁰⁰ A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948) 96. Weiss, 'Vision', 240-5, with references. The chronology gleaned from the panegyrist's narrative, that is, following the revolt and death of Maximian, would place Constantine near Granum sometime in the spring, when atmospheric conditions for a solar halo are more favourable.

Constantine viewed, can create a cross-shaped effect that might then accord with Eusebius' description of a cross-shaped trophy formed from light. When we take into account the vague overlap in the chronologies of the panegyrist and Eusebius, namely, that it occurred between the death of Maximian (spring or summer 309) and the preparations for the invasion of Italy (late 311), it is not outrageous to posit that both sources are describing the same incident. In this scenario, the panegyrist's account would have been an abstract depiction, as opposed to the more 'literal' description given later by Eusebius. However, as I have concluded in Chapter One, the panegyrist is like not describing a celestial-vision, but a dream-vision at the incubation sanctuary of Apollo Grannus. The grammar of the passage does not indicate that the vision he describes took place before Constantine's detour to Granum and, furthermore, the details of the vision itself do not lend themselves, even abstractly, to a solar halo: Constantine is said to have seen a distinct divinity with recognisable facial features and attending characteristics (i.e. accompanied by Victoria and offering laurel wreaths). Assuming a dream-vision, rather, would better suit this description.

Regarding Lactantius, Weiss contends that the dream-vision took place on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge and that it inspired Constantine to reinterpret the celestial-vision that he had years earlier. In Chapter Two, however, I concluded that Lactantius is probably incorrect with respect to the chronology of the vision: it is unlikely that he was in a position to obtain accurate details about the Italian campaign; rather, it is more likely that he applied the characteristics of Licinius' dream-vision before the Battle of Campus Erganus to Constantine's experience. As to the religious character of the dream-vision, I concluded also that Lactantius' narrative is not necessarily the earliest account of a Christian vision, but simply the earliest account by a Christian: according to Lactantius' own 'dream theory' it was not required that Constantine have been a Christian in order to receive a vision from the

Christian god. Lactantius includes the dream-vision and conveys its auspicious result, but this requires only that he regarded the event as a ‘true dream’, and therefore emanating from the Christian god regardless of the religion of the dreamer.

In the case of Eusebius, the ‘vision’ becomes an explicitly Christian experience: the symbol in the sky is reported to be distinctly cruciform and Christ visits Constantine in his sleep. As argued in Chapter Three, some of the Christian significance attached to the ‘vision’ is artificial; in particular, the conversion element of the story can be identified as a Eusebian interpolation (though, not necessarily an intentional one) to highlight the fact that even decades later Constantine represented his experience in somewhat non-Christian terms. Even so, it is apparent that all three visions have another strong commonality: in addition to the similarities noted above – personal contact with a divinity, a divine promise of victory, and a token representation of that promise – all three sources depict a dream-vision. Thus, it is Eusebius who seems to stand apart in his description of a celestial manifestation, which is mentioned by neither the panegyrist nor Lactantius and would appear to obstruct drawing a direct connection between these accounts.

It is being increasingly recognised, however, that Lactantius may indeed be making at least a passing reference to some celestial manifestation in his account. Weiss proposes (and it should be noted that he is not the first to do so) that Lactantius’ *caeleste signum dei*, should be rendered “the sign of God in the sky”, as opposed to the traditional, and rather pleonastic, translation “the heavenly sign of God”.⁵⁰¹ The adjusted translation is more than reasonable

⁵⁰¹ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 246. Cf. H. Schrörs, *Konstantins des Grossen Kreuzerscheinung* (Bonn, 1913) 14; F. Kampers, *Vom Werdegang der abendländischen Kaisermystik* (Hildesheim, 1924) 150; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 775 (n. 20); Elliott, ‘Constantine’s Conversion’, 435 (n. 50); M. Green and J. Ferguson, ‘Constantine, Sun-Symbols and the Labarum’, *DUJ* 49 (1987) 9-17, at 15. Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole de la croix et les monogrammes de Jésus chez les premiers chrétiens’, *Byzantion* 2 (1925) 337-448, at 402, notes that the manuscript (Codex Colbertinus, Paris 2627) gives *coelesti*, a variation of *caelesti*. If this is the case, the MS reading might actually be preferable: the editorial emendation to *caeleste* is the correction of a perceived

and so it would appear that in some capacity Lactantius was aware of a celestial-vision tradition.⁵⁰² For whatever reason peculiar to him – he may not have known much about it or perhaps simply chose not to dwell on it – he opted not to provide further details.

There is, however, a much greater obstacle to illustrating a direct link between the accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius. General consensus at the moment maintains that both sources are in some way related in their description of the vision, but the most puzzling feature of their narratives is that they appear to describe completely different divine symbols. Lactantius, it would seem, reports that the symbol that Constantine employed on his soldiers' shields was a staurogram or perhaps a Chi-Rho monogram, whereas the personal testimony of the emperor reproduced by Eusebius describes a Chi-Rho monogram. In the first section of this chapter I will examine the portrayals of the symbols described by Lactantius and Eusebius to demonstrate that both authors are indeed describing the same divine symbol, which was neither a staurogram nor a Chi-Rho. In all of this the panegyrist would seem to be the odd-man out; at the very least he does not appear to mention a celestial-vision, which would put him at odds with the later narratives. However, as I argue in the second section of this chapter, the vision of Apollo is indeed the precursor of the later accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius. On the one hand, there are details in the relative chronology of the *Vita*

spelling mistake, presumably under the assumption that as an adjective it is meant to qualify *signum*. However, *coelesti/caelesti* is the ablative singular not only for all three genders of the adjective, but also the substantive masculine and feminine forms – thus, Lactantius may have intended it as a locative, 'in the sky'.

⁵⁰² Nicholson, 'Vision', 320-3, suggests that Lactantius may be making a reference to the celestial-vision as part of his apocalyptic prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ in his *Epitome divinarum institutionum*, written ca. 317. Lact. *Epit. DI* 67.1: "In the depths of the night the sky will open and Christ will come down in great power and there will go before him fiery brightness and an innumerable force of angels and all that multitude of the wicked will be extinguished and torrents of blood will run" (trans. Nicholson, 320); *Tunc caelum intempesta nocte patefiet et descendet Christus in uirtute magna et anteibit eum claritas ignea et uirtus inaestimabilis angelorum et extinguetur omnis illa multitudo impiorum et torrentes sanguinis current*; cf. Lact. *DI* 7.24-26.4. Lactantius' description in the *Epitome divinarum institutionum* is reminiscent of Nazarius' description of the celestial army descending from the sky with flaming weapons; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).14.

‘vision’ that can enable us to render a more specific dating, while on the other hand the solar halo, though not explicitly mentioned, is perhaps referenced by the panegyrist. More than just being similar, in this chapter I contend that all three sources are describing the very same episode and that it is only at face-value that they appear to be at variance.

Reconciling Lactantius and Eusebius

The fundamental characteristics of the substance of the visions described by Lactantius and Eusebius are overwhelming: in both cases Constantine is not only visited personally by a divinity and given a symbol that in some way signifies Christ, but he is also informed that, if he uses it, he will obtain victory. Without a doubt both authors are operating within the same tradition and, although their accounts differ in some regards, the nature of the commonalities place their testimonies beyond the realm of mere coincidence. Aside from the chronology of the visions, which we have already discussed, the main hindrance to drawing a definite parallel between the two accounts is the apparent incongruity in their depictions of the divine symbol that Constantine is supposed to have received and employed.

Lactantius, writing considerably earlier than Eusebius, gives a cursory description of the symbol; he states: “Constantine was advised in a dream to mark *the sign of God in the sky* on the shields of his soldiers and then engage in battle. He did as he was commanded and by means of a slanted letter X with the top of its head bent round, he marked Christ on their shields”.⁵⁰³ Although brief and seemingly cryptic, it is significant that Lactantius felt the need to go to some effort to describe the Christian symbol, even though he was writing for a

⁵⁰³ Lact. *DMP* 44.5; emphasis indicates my emendation of Creed’s translation.

Christian audience.⁵⁰⁴ This is no simple cross, but precisely what Lactantius is describing continues to be debated, primarily because of the lengthier and more incisive description of Eusebius.

In his account of Constantine's 'vision', Eusebius' description of the divine symbol takes two forms. Firstly, he states that the sign that appeared in the sky was τοῦ σταυροῦ τρόπαιον, literally 'the trophy of the cross',⁵⁰⁵ which was then presented to him again later in his sleep by Christ. Secondly, he provides an extensive description of the copy of the symbol that Constantine was instructed to make, that is, the *Labarum*, which Eusebius claims he was permitted to examine personally. Upon waking from the dream-vision:

Then he [i.e. Constantine] summoned goldsmiths and jewellers, sat down among them, and explained the shape of the sign, and gave them instructions about copying it in gold and precious stones. This was something which the Emperor himself once saw fit to let me also set eyes on, God vouchsafing even this. It was constructed to the following design. A tall poll 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 *chi*. These letters the Emperor also used to wear upon his helmet in later times. From the transverse bar, which was bisected by the pole, hung suspended a cloth, an imperial tapestry covered with a pattern of precious stones fastened together, which glittered with shafts of light, and interwoven with much gold, producing an impression of indescribable beauty on those who saw it. This banner then, attached to the bar, was given equal dimensions of length and breadth. But the upright pole, which extended upwards a long way from its lower end, below the trophy of the cross and near the top of the tapestry delineated, carried the golden head-and-shoulders portrait of the Godbeloved Emperor, and likewise of his sons. This saving sign was always used by the Emperor for protection against every opposing and hostile force, and he commanded replicas of it to lead all his armies.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ See also Dörries, *Constantine*, 33: "But if the intention had been only to represent a cross, a much more obvious form could have been chosen". Lactantius did not need to resort to Greek, let alone the letter Chi, in order to relate the shape of a cross; cf., for example, Tert. *Adv. Marc.* 3.22.6, who describes the shape of the cross as the Greek *tau* as well as the Latin character 'T'.

⁵⁰⁵ Eus. *VC* 1.28.2.

⁵⁰⁶ Eus. *VC* 30-31: ἅμα δ' ἡμέρα διαναστὰς τοῖς φίλοις ἐξηγόρευε τὸ ἀπόρρητον. κάπειτα χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν δημιουργοὺς συγκαλέσας μέσος αὐτὸς καθιζάνει καὶ τοῦ σημείου τὴν εἰκόνα φράζει, ἀπομιεῖσθαι τε αὐτὴν χρυσοῦ καὶ πολυτελέσι λίθοις διεκελεύετο. ὃ δὴ καὶ ἡμᾶς ὀφθαλμοῖς ποτε παραλαβεῖν αὐτὸς βασιλεύς, θεοῦ καὶ τοῦτο χαρισαμένου, ἠξίωσεν. Ἦν δὲ τοιῶδε σχήματι

Eusebius, as is frequently noted, is not describing the *Labarum* as it appeared newly crafted, but at some point after Constantine’s conquest of the East, perhaps as early as the Council of Nicaea in mid 325.⁵⁰⁷ It is also in this period that we find the only contemporary depiction of the *Labarum*, though in truth this identification should be considered suspect. On the reverse of an extremely rare bronze SPES-PVBLIC series struck at Constantinople ca. 327, a military standard crowned with a Chi-Rho with a drapery hanging from the crossbar sporting three medallions is shown piercing a serpent, presumed to be a representation of the recently deposed Licinius.⁵⁰⁸ Based on Eusebius’ description here it is generally assumed that the coin reverse depicts the *Labarum*, but there are inconsistencies between description and depiction that need to be highlighted. Immediately noticeable is that the Chi-Rho is not

κατεσκευασμένον. ὑψηλὸν δόρυ χρυσῷ κατημφιεσμένον κέρας εἶχεν ἐγκάρσιον σταυροῦ σχήματι πεποιημένον, ἄνω δὲ πρὸς ἄκρῳ τοῦ παντός στέφανος ἐκ λίθων πολυτελῶν καὶ χρυσοῦ συμπεπλεγμένος κατεστήρικτο, καθ’ οὗ τῆς σωτηρίου ἐπιγραφῆς τὸ σύμβολον δύο στοιχεῖα τὸ Χριστοῦ παραδηλοῦντα ὄνομα διὰ τῶν πρώτων ὑπεσήμενον χαρακτήρων, χιαζομένου τοῦ ῥῶ κατὰ τὸ μεσαίτατον· ἃ δὲ καὶ κατὰ τοῦ κράνου φέρειν εἴωθε κἀν τοῖς μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνοις ὁ βασιλεὺς. τοῦ δὲ πλαγίου κέρως τοῦ κατὰ τὸ δόρυ πεπαρμένου ὀθόνη τις ἐκκρεμῆς ἀπηώρητο, βασιλικὸν ὕφασμα ποικιλίᾳ συνημμένων πολυτελῶν λίθων φωτὸς αὐγαῖς ἐξαστραπτόντων καλυπτόμενον σὺν πολλῶν τε καθυφασμένον χρυσῷ, ἀδιήγητόν τι χρῆμα τοῖς ὀρώσι παρέχον τοῦ κάλλους. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τὸ φᾶρος τοῦ κέρως ἐξημμένον σύμμετρον μήκους τε καὶ πλάτους περιγραφὴν ἀπελάμβανε· τὸ δ’ ὄρθιον δόρυ, τῆς κάτω ἀρχῆς ἐπὶ πολὺ μῆκον ἔχον ἄνω μετέωρον, ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ σταυροῦ τροπαίων πρὸς αὐτοῖς ἄκροις τοῦ ‘διαγραφέντος’ ὑφάσματος τὴν τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς βασιλέως εἰκόνα χρυσοῦ μέχρι στέρνων τῶν τ’ αὐτοῦ παίδων ὁμοίως ἔφερε. τοῦτῳ μὲν οὖν τῶ σωτηρίῳ σημείῳ πάσης ἀντικειμένης καὶ πολεμίας δυνάμεως ἀμυντηρίῳ διὰ παντός ἐχρηῖτο βασιλεὺς, τῶν τε στρατοπέδων ἀπάντων ἠγεῖσθαι τὰ τούτου ὁμοιώματα προσέταττεν.

⁵⁰⁷ This does not mean, as numerous scholars have assumed, that the *Labarum* was only created ca. 326; its appearance could have evolved over time. Cf. Baynes, *Constantine*, 63, proposes that the *Labarum* in its final form “be regarded as a summary of Constantine’s personal experience... the summary expression of both visions”, that is, subject to adaptation and elaboration. A similar perspective is offered by Bardill, *Constantine*, 175, who finds no reason to discount the possibility of a prototype or precursor to the ornate *Labarum* with the Chi-Rho.

⁵⁰⁸ *RIC 7* Constantinople.19 and 26 (according to Bruun’s notes, at most only a few copies of no. 19 are known and no. 26 is unique). Only Constantine II and Constantius II appear with Constantine in this issue, indicating that the entire issue was minted after the death and *damnatio memoriae* of Crispus in 326. Licinius is typically identified as the ‘serpent’; in a letter from Constantine addressed to Eusebius, which is reproduced in *Vita*, the emperor refers to the recently deposed Licinius as a “dragon” (δράκων; Eus. *VC* 2.46.2). Eusebius also describes an encaustic painting (at 3.3.1-2; see below) in which Constantine pierces a serpent, though the implication there is that Licinius is Satan (“the invisible enemy of the human race”). Cf., however, J.M.C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions* (New York, 1944) 182, who argues that the imagery of the conquered serpent is in reference to ‘barbarians’.

situated within a wreath, which is perhaps permissible if the wreath was not essential for the iconography, except that we have no other examples against which to compare it.

Somewhat more subtle, however, is the presence of the three medallions on the drapery, which are presumed to be the portraits of Constantine and his sons/Caesars, Constantine II and Constantius II. The influence of the hypothesis that the standard depicted on the coin is the *Labarum* can be seen in the translation of Averil Cameron and Stuart Hall above, who – finding Eusebius’ description “difficult to interpret” – assume that the busts of the emperor and his sons could only have been on the tapestry.⁵⁰⁹ Rather, Eusebius indicates that the portraits are on the shaft of the standard beneath the tapestry: “But the upright pole, extending from the base high into the air, beneath the trophy of the cross to the extreme edge of the delineating tapestry, carried the golden head-and-shoulders portrait of the Godbeloved Emperor, and likewise of his sons”.⁵¹⁰

The particular image of a serpent being pierced is mentioned elsewhere by Eusebius, who describes the following encaustic painting as he viewed it above one of the entrances to Constantine’s palace in Constantinople:

This [i.e. the Saviour’s trophy] he displayed on a very high panel set before the entrance to the palace for the eyes of all to see, showing in the picture the Saviour’s sign placed above his own head, and the hostile and inimical beast, which had laid siege to the Church of God through the tyranny of the godless, he made in the form of a dragon borne down to the deep. For the oracles proclaimed him a ‘dragon’ and a ‘crooked serpent’ in the books of the prophets of God; therefore the Emperor also showed to all, through the medium of the encaustic painting, the

⁵⁰⁹ Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 211.

⁵¹⁰ Eus. *VC* 1.31.2; emphasis indicates my adjustment to Av. Cameron and Hall’s translation of τῆς κάτω ἀρχῆς ἐπὶ πολὺ μηκυνόμενον ἄνω μετέωρον, ὑπὸ τῷ τοῦ σταυροῦ τροπαίῳ πρὸς αὐτοῖς ἄκροις τοῦ ‘διαγραφέντος’ ὑφάσματος. Following Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 211, however, I have preferred here the manuscript reading διαγράφοντος (‘delineating’, i.e. indicating a border), rather than the editorial emendation διαγραφέντος (‘delineated’, i.e. just described). Thus, the reconstruction of the *Labarum* put forward in P. Franchi de’ Cavalieri, ‘Ancora del labaro descritto da Eusebio’, *StudRom* 2 (1914) 216-223, is to be preferred, which situates the portraits of Constantine and his sons on the shaft itself beneath the tapestry; cf. Bardill, *Constantine*, 176, who notes this discrepancy as well.

dragon under his feet and those of his sons, pierced through the middle of the body with a javelin, and thrust down in the depths of the sea. In this way he indicated the invisible enemy of the human race, whom he showed also to have departed to the depths of destruction by the power of the Saviour's trophy which was set up over his head.⁵¹¹

Here it is not the *Labarum* piercing the serpent, but a javelin, and the 'Saviour's trophy', that is, the *Labarum*, is set up over the Constantine's head. Although variation in iconography is to be expected, we have no surviving contemporary images from which to work and the representation on the coin reverse does not conform to our unequivocal sole source for the appearance of the *Labarum*, namely, Eusebius. It is extremely significant – possibly reflecting on the sanctity of the symbol for Constantine – that a clear and easily identifiable image of the *Labarum* appears nowhere on the contemporary coinage, save perhaps this lone image (though, if the standard on the SPES-PVBLIC series is indeed an attempt to portray the *Labarum*, we can conclude at the very least that it was not an official release).

The prominence of the Chi-Rho on the SPES-PVBLIC reverse (the main, if not the only, reason for concluding that it must be the *Labarum*), in addition to its appearance on other coinage, has led to the prevalent assumption that the monogram is a fundamental component of the vision experience claimed by Lactantius and Eusebius. In particular, the Chi-Rho appears on Constantine's helmet on the well-known silver medallion minted at Ticinum ca. 315⁵¹² and a couple of bronze coins minted at Siscia ca. 319,⁵¹³ while a coin

⁵¹¹ Eus. *VC* 3.3.1-2: 'ὁ δὲ {μὲν} δὴ καὶ ἐν {γραφῆς} ὑψηλοτάτῳ πίνακι πρὸ τῶν βασιλικῶν προθύρων ἀνακειμένῳ τοῖς πάντων ὀφθαλμοῖς ὄρασθαι προὔτιθει, τὸ μὲν σωτήριον <σημεῖον> ὑπερκείμενον τῆς αὐτοῦ κεφαλῆς τῇ γραφῇ παραδούς, τὸν δὲ ἔχθρον καὶ πολέμιον θῆρα τὸν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τῆς τῶν ἀθέων πολιορκήσαντα τυραννίδος κατὰ βυθοῦ φερόμενον ποιήσας ἐν δράκοντος μορφῇ. δράκοντα γὰρ αὐτὸν καὶ σκολιὸν ὄφιν ἐν προφητῶν θεοῦ βίβλοις ἀνηγόρευε τὰ λόγια. διὸ καὶ βασιλεὺς ὑπὸ τοῖς αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ παίδων ποσὶ βέλει πεπαρμένον κατὰ μέσου τοῦ κύτους βυθοῖς τε θαλάττης ἀπερριμμένον διὰ τῆς κηροχύτου γραφῆς ἐδείκνυ τοῖς πᾶσι τὸν δράκοντα, ὧδέ πη τὸν ἀφανῆ τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους πολέμιον αἰνιττόμενος, ὃν καὶ δυνάμει τοῦ ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἀνακειμένου σωτηρίου τροπαίου κατὰ βυθῶν ἀπωλείας κεχωρηκέναι ἐδήλου.

⁵¹² *RIC* 7 Ticinum.36; cf. K. Ehling, 'Das Christogramm als magisches Siegeszeichen – Zum konstantinischen Silbermedaillon des Jahres 315', in id. and G. Weber (eds.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Darmstadt, 2011) 27-32. Regarding the date, see R. Delbrück, *Spätantike Kaiserporträts* (Berlin, 1933) 72; A. Alföldi, 'The Initials of

minted at Trier ca. 322 depicts Crispus holding a shield bearing the monogram.⁵¹⁴ These issues, however, are somewhat misleading: they were limited in production and distribution, the monogram appearing only briefly and inconsistently. The Ticinum medallion at least – the obverse depicting Constantine, front-facing, wearing a high-crested helmet with the Chi-Rho on a badge at the base of the crest – is likely to have been an official issue: the high-crested helmet appears on coins minted at numerous other Western mints, signifying an official type (or, as Patrick Bruun declares it, “the new Constantinian state helmet”) and the unusual front-facing portrait (this instance being the last to appear on Constantinian coins) required a particular artistic talent rarely seen.⁵¹⁵ Although officially commissioned, the medallion was probably intended for distribution among army officers, which would have considerably limited its influence as a medium.⁵¹⁶

The appearance of the Chi-Rho on coinage at Siscia and Trier is more straightforward. Although obverses of Constantine in profile wearing a high-crested helmet appear throughout the Western mints, only Siscia minted coins with the monogram on the

Christ on the Helmet of Constantine’, in P.R. Coleman-Norton (ed.), *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allan Chester Johnson* (Princeton, 1951) 303-11. Cf. K. Kraft, ‘Das Silbermedaillon Constantins des Grossen mit dem Christusmonogram auf dem Helm’, *JNG* (1954/1955) 151-78, at 152-6, in support.

⁵¹³ *RIC* 7 Siscia.61.

⁵¹⁴ *RIC* 7 Trier.372. As to the seemingly indiscriminate appearance of the Chi-Rho monogram on other Constantinian coins, Bruun, ‘The Christian Signs on the Coins of Constantine’, *Arctos* 3 (1962) 1-35, concludes that they were intended either as marks of issue or to indicate sub-issues, without any official Christian meaning. See also id., ‘Early Christian Symbolism on Coins and Inscriptions’, *ACIAC* 6 (Vatican City, 1965) 528-34.

⁵¹⁵ Bruun, ‘Christian Signs’, 14-18 (quote at 18); cf. A. Alföldi, ‘The Helmet of Constantine with the Christian Monogram’, *JRS* 22 (1932) 9-23. The high-crested helmet appears on contemporaneous *VICTORIA LAETAE* bronzes minted at London, Lyons, Trier, Arles, Ticinum, and Siscia. Regarding the front-facing portraits as an instance of exceptional artistry, see Alföldi, ‘Initials of Christ’, 305, that the style is “an unusual accomplishment, matched only by another excellent artist a half-century earlier on the magnificent aurei of Postumus”.

⁵¹⁶ Kraft, ‘Silbermedaillon Constantins’, 157; Bruun, ‘Christian Signs’, 31-2.

helmet. These coins, Bruun has concluded, were exceptional, could not have had much symbolic value, and were not an official design: the monogram is placed on the crossbar, rather than on some sort of badge; they appear within the same issue, which was not only one out of five *VICTORIAE LAETAE* issues, but third in the chronological sequence of that series at Siscia; they were produced by a single workshop (*officina* B); and out of the 145 Siscia high-crested helmet coins identified by Bruun, the monogram appears on only two.⁵¹⁷ The *BEATA TRANQVILLITAS* coins minted at Trier depicting Crispus holding a shield, on the other hand, are quite common, but there is great variety in the shield designs: Bruun notes that the same workshop that produced the Chi-Rho on the shield (*officina* P) also minted as shield designs, for example, the head of Medusa and Victory crowning the emperor, while all five coins in the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) collection, produced at the only other workshop minting this issue (*officina* S), each had different shield designs.⁵¹⁸ The appearance of the Chi-Rho here, then, is not only exceptional, but would seem to have been on the initiative of mint employees, rather than any direction from the court.⁵¹⁹

Considering, in particular, the Ticinum medallion and supposing perhaps that the Chi-Rho was more prolific in imperial media than it actually was, the assumption has been that the emergence of the monogram must be intimately related to the vision experience.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Bruun, 'Christian Signs', 10-8; cf. id., *RIC* 7, 433 (n. 61) and 461. Kraft, 'Silbermedaillon Constantins', 158, notes that many of the designs on the crossbar, such as crosses and stars, represent jewels and rivets; cf. Bruun, 'Christian Signs', 16, in support. See also, C.M. Odahl, 'Christian Symbols on Constantine's Siscia Helmet Coins', *SAN* 8 (1977) 56-8.

⁵¹⁸ Bruun, *RIC* 7, 197 (n. 372); cf. id., 'Christian Signs', 17 (n. 1). Singor, 'Labarum', 189-90, argues that the Chi-Rho here is symbolic, probably to indicate "Christ's favour for the young prince", as opposed to depicting a real shield.

⁵¹⁹ Bruun, 'Christian Signs', 31.

⁵²⁰ So, for instance, Alföldi, *Conversion*, 17-8, who also assumes that appearance of the Chi-Rho on coinage was dictated by the court. Bruun, 'Christian Signs', 31-2, concludes that the monogram on coinage may not have been effective as propaganda, but that its appearance must be linked to the Battle of Milvian Bridge.

Lactantius would seem to be attempting to describe just such a monogram, though his description is somewhat indistinct: *Facit ut iussus est et transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo, Christum in scutis notat.*⁵²¹ Understanding *transversa* as meaning ‘crossed through’ or ‘intersected’, Grégoire (as related by Max Sulzberger) proposes that this description has been corrupted and should read either *[I] transversa X littera* or *transversa X littera [I]*, thus indicating that the X is being crossed through with an I, the top of which then being bent round to resemble a *rho* – hence, the Chi-Rho monogram.⁵²² A similar suggestion has also been made by Andreas Alföldi, who proposes *virgula* in place of Grégoire’s *I*, to the same effect.⁵²³ In an article published in 1959, Henri-Irénée Marrou pointed out that *transversa* here can only mean that the X is ‘turned over’ or ‘lying on its side’, which remains now the standard translation.⁵²⁴ The effect of a X turned on its side would render the

⁵²¹ F. Altheim, *Literatur und Gesellschaft im ausgehenden Altertum, I* (Halle, 1948) 145-6, contends that Lactantius’ particular use of *notare* here signifies a word or an idea in the form of an abbreviation, hence a monogram. However – as P. Batiffol, ‘Interprétation des descriptions du chrismon constantinien’, *BSAF* (1913) 211-6, at 215, notes – Lactantius uses *signum notare* elsewhere to mean ‘to mark the cross’; cf., for example, Lact. *DI* 26.42.

⁵²² Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole de la croix’, 406-7 and (n. 2). This emendation was employed in the critical edition of J. Moreau, *Lactance: De la mort des persécuteurs*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1954) 1.127; cf. *ibid.*, 2.433-6. Cf. M. Black, ‘The Chi-Rho Sign – Christogram and/or Staurogram?’, in W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, 1970) 319-27, at 322, who comments that, “[t]his ‘emendation’ of Lactantius does not seem to have been entirely unconnected with the desire to find a *Chi-Rho* symbol in the text”.

⁵²³ A. Alföldi, ‘Hoc signo victor eris. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Bekehrung Konstantins des Großen’, in T. Klauser and A. Rücker (eds.), *Pisciculi* (Münster in Westfalen, 1939) 1-18, at 5.

⁵²⁴ H.-I. Marrou, ‘Autour du monogramme constantinien’, in *Mélanges offerts à Étienne Gilson* (Toronto, 1959) 403-14. There have been some exceptions; for instance, Keresztes, *Constantine*, 18, maintains Grégoire’s emendation, as does E.D. Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire* (Ithaca, 2000), 122 with 172 (n. 18). In certain cases, however, a similar reading is upheld by scholars who continue to employ the problematic translation of D.D. Fletcher, ‘Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died’, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume VII* (Edinburgh, 1886) 301-22, at 318: “He did as he had been commanded, and he marked on their shields the letter X, with a perpendicular line drawn through it and turned round thus at the top, being the cipher of Christ”. So, for instance, Smith, *Constantine*, 103, offers a slightly altered version of Fletcher’s translation, despite his consultation of excellent studies that clearly incorporated Marrou’s conclusions, such as R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (New York, 1969), who states unambiguously (at 72) that the X is “turned”, not intersected. More recently, Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 71, not only relies solely on Fletcher’s translation, but also seems to be completely unaware of the essential contributions of Jacques Moreau, Marrou, and John L. Creed.

shape of a *tau*-cross with an upper arm (similar to a ‘Greek cross’, with the vertical and horizontal strokes of equal length); with the upper arm bent around, it would resemble a staurogram.⁵²⁵

Contrary to Sulzberger’s opinion that the staurogram was an early fourth century innovation that developed out of the Chi-Rho monogram,⁵²⁶ studies since have demonstrated that it appears in a Christian context as early as ca. 200 as a *nomen sacrum* for the noun σταυρός (‘cross’) and verb σταυρώω (‘to crucify’), specifically in reference to Jesus’ crucifixion.⁵²⁷ As both a *nomen sacrum* and a free-standing symbol, the staurogram serves as a pictographic representation of the crucifixion of Jesus, which either coincided with or was prompted by the early-Christian acceptance of the Greek letter *tau* as a symbol for the cross

⁵²⁵ A more drastic emendation is suggested by J. Rougé, ‘À propos du manuscrit du *De Mortibus Persecutorum*’, in J. Fontaine and M. Perrin (eds.), *Lactance et son temps* (Paris, 1978) 13-22, at 21-2, who argues that the entire description *transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo* should be deleted as a post-Lactantian interpolation, so as to render *Fecit ut iussus est et Christum in scutis notat*. This, then, is an attempt to achieve the same meaning of Grégoire and Alföldi’s proposed emendations, and circumvent Marrou’s arguments, since ‘to mark Christ on the shields’ would presumably mean to employ the Chi-Rho monogram. Cf. T.D. Barnes, ‘The Conversion of Constantine’, *CV* 29 (1985) 371-93, at 383-4; K.M. Girardet, *Die konstantinische Wende* (Darmstadt, 2006) 76; and Singer, ‘Labarum’, 487-8 in support.

⁵²⁶ Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole de la croix’, 393-401; oddly he concludes this, despite consideration (at 376) of a third-century inscription from Alexandria (Egypt), in which a staurogram appears between an *alpha* and an *omega*; cf. Lefebvre, *Recueil* 5 (no. 21). See L.W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (Grand Rapids, 2006) 137-8 with (nn. 11 and 12), regarding the pre/non-Christian use of the *tau-rho* ligature; cf. A. Blanchard, *Sigles et abréviations dans les papyrus documentaires grecs* (London, 1974), who provides a thorough survey of tachygraphic symbols.

⁵²⁷ J. de Savignac, ‘Les papyrus Bodmer XIV et XV’, *Scriptorium* 17 (1963) 50-5; K. Aland, ‘Neue Neutestamentliche Papyri II’, *NTS* 10 (1963-1964) 62-79; id., ‘Neue Neutestamentliche Papyri II’, *NTS* 11 (1964-1965) 1-21; id., ‘Bemerkungen zum Alter und Entstehung des Christogramms anhand von Beobachtungen bei Ϡ66 und Ϡ75’, in *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textes* (Berlin, 1967) 173-9; Black, ‘Chi-Rho Sign’, 320-2; E. Dinkler-von Schubert, ‘CTAYPOC: Vom “Wort vom Kreuz” (1 Kor. 1,18) zum Kreuz-Symbol’, in C. Moss and K. Kiefer (eds.), *Byzantine East, Latin West* (Princeton, 1995) 29-39, at 31-3; Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 139-45. As Larry Hurtado points out (at 141-6), the symbol was probably in use prior to the beginning of the third century: we have three roughly contemporaneous papyri [Ϡ⁶⁶ (=P. Bodmer II), Ϡ⁷⁵ (=P. Bodmer XIV-XV), and Ϡ⁴⁵ (=P. Chester Beatty I)] all using the same symbol/*nomen sacrum* in the same context. Regarding pre-Constantinian, non-Christian uses of the *tau-rho* ligature, see M. Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions (The Near East, 200 B.C.–A.D. 1100)* (Jerusalem, 1940) 105.

of Jesus.⁵²⁸ On the other hand, to the best of my knowledge, the earliest known occurrence of the Chi-Rho monogram in a Christian context is a Latin *graffito* as a shorthand for ‘Christ’ discovered at a pre-Constantinian building phase (possibly third century) of the ‘Shrine of St. Peter’ beneath the Vatican Basilica,⁵²⁹ though in a non-Christian context it appears as early as the third century BCE on the coins of Ptolemy III Eurgetes of Egypt (246-222 BCE) and in pre-Constantinian manuscripts, papyri, and inscriptions as a tachygraphic symbol for various terms, such as χρῆστὸν (‘useful’, to note important passages).⁵³⁰ Inasmuch as both the staurogram and the Chi-Rho are pre-Constantinian, the staurogram is clearly the earlier symbol in Christian usage, and while loosely similar in form, their functions are dissimilar enough to suggest that they developed somewhat independently.⁵³¹ As pertains to Lactantius, although the staurogram was not a monogram for ‘Christ’ (nor did it necessarily operate as a monogram at all), it nonetheless signified Christ, but in the particular context of the crucifixion with all of the theological baggage attending it, such as salvation and life-after-

⁵²⁸ Aland, ‘Papyri II’ (1963-1964), 75-9; E. Dinkler, *Signum Crucis* (Tübingen, 1967) 177-8; R.M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London, 2000) 138; L.W. Hurtado, ‘The Earliest Evidence of an Emerging Christian Material and Visual Culture: The Codex, the *Nomina Sacra* and the Staurogram’, in S.G. Wilson and M. Desjardins (eds.), *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity* (Waterloo, 2000) 271-88, at 279-84; id., ‘The Staurogram in Early Christian Manuscripts: The Earliest Visual Reference to the Crucified Jesus?’, in T.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas (eds.), *New Testament Manuscripts* (Leiden, 2006) 207-26, at 220-4; L.H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians* (Leiden, 2012) 43-5.

⁵²⁹ J.M.C. Toynbee, ‘The Shrine of St. Peter and Its Setting’, *JRS* 43 (1953) 1-26, at 24; J.M.C. Toynbee and J. Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (New York, 1957), 165; M. Guarducci, *The Tomb of St. Peter* (London, 1960) 111.

⁵³⁰ H. Leclercq, ‘Chrisme’, in F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq (eds.), *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, Volume III, Part I* (Paris, 1913) 1481-1534, at 1481-5; Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole de la croix’, 397-401; Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations*, 112; E.G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (Princeton, 1971) 56 (no. 27) and 98 (no. 58); D.P. Colella, ‘Les abréviations $\chi\rho$ et $\chi\rho$ (XP)’, *RBi* (1973) 547-58, at 553-8; E.R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen, 1991) 39-40 and 40 (n. 112); Dinkler-von Schubert, ‘CTAYPOC’, 33-4; Hurtado, ‘Staurogram’, 208-10.

⁵³¹ Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 145-6, cautiously advises that it is unreasonable to suppose that there was one initial Christian monogram or symbol out of which the others developed.

death.⁵³² As such, Lactantius need not describe a Chi-Rho in order to satisfy his condition that Constantine ‘marked Christ’ on the shields (*Christum ... notat*); as a pictographic representation of the crucified Christ, the staurogram could presumably suffice.⁵³³

⁵³² This is emphasised particularly in Aland, ‘Papyri II’ (1963-1964), 78; id., ‘Bemerkungen’, (1967), 178; Dinkler, *Signum Crucis*, 178]; Black, ‘Chi-Rho Sign’, 327; cf. Hurtado, ‘Earliest Evidence’, 280-1; id., ‘Staurogram’, 219-26. Rougé, ‘À propos du manuscrit’, 21-22, has suggested that Lactantius’ description is an interpolation, possibly from a marginal gloss, inserted at a time when the staurogram could unambiguously refer to the crucified Christ. However, the observations of Kurt Aland in particular demonstrate that this is just what the staurogram indicated as early as ca. 200. See also Dörries, *Constantine*, 33, who suggests that the symbol was originally a staurogram, but was later changed to a Chi-Rho monogram, commenting further that the shift is negligible because “the sense is identical”.

⁵³³ Although Andreas Alföldi previously argued in favour of a Chi-Rho monogram, in a later article [‘Cornuti: A Teutonic Contingent in the Service of Constantine the Great and Its Decisive Role in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge; with a Discussion of Bronze Statuettes of Constantine the Great by M.C. Ross’, *DOP* 13 (1959) 169-83] he contends that Lactantius’ staurogram is confirmed by a Byzantine bronze statuette of a seated figure, which he identifies as Constantine, resting its left arm on a circular shield with a staurogram inscribed on the upper portion. The identification of Constantine is based on three major features: the jewelled diadem, which Constantine was the first emperor to adopt (cf. Bardill, *Constantine*, 11-9); a Jupiter-like costume (a mantle draped over the left shoulder and covering the legs, leaving the torso nude), which Constantine would presumably have been the last emperor to employ [cf. *RIC* 7 Rome.279; A. Alföldi, ‘On the Foundation of Constantinople: A Few Notes’, *JRS* 37 (1947) 10-6, at 15]; and the emblem on the lower part of the shield – two large, curved horns terminating in facing goats’ heads, the blazon of the Germanic contingent the *Cornuti* (‘horned ones’) – which is found also on the Arch of Constantine [cf. A. Alföldi, ‘Ein spät römisches Schildzeichen keltischer oder germanischer Herkunft’, *Germania* 19 (1935) 324-8; H.P. L’Orange and A. von Gerkan, *Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens* (Berlin, 1939) 43 and 124]. The statuette itself – crudely cast and of low artistic quality, probably an item of mass production – likely dates to between the fifth and early seventh centuries, but Alföldi suggests that it is probably based on a ‘monumental prototype’, which is supported by Marvin Ross in the second part of the article (Alföldi, ‘Cornuti’, 179-81). The argument for the statuette as supporting Lactantius’ account rests on the supposition that the shield design accurately reflects the appearance of the original monument. However, there are a few issues that Alföldi does not duly take into account. The statuette is but one of five known copies (see the survey at 179-83, with figs. 1-2 and 13-16) and the only one of which to display the *Cornuti* emblem: the shields of the other statuettes are either blank or in such bad condition that no symbols can be discerned, but at least one displays distinctly an encircled six-pointed star with the shield boss at its intersection, which dominates the entire shield (see Alföldi’s fig. 16). In response to Alföldi’s argument for the authenticity of the *Cornuti*/staurogram design, Ross surmises (at 180) that “[t]his variation indicates that the bronze casters did not understand the significance of the shield-emblem”, and (at 181) that the original “must have been set up soon after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in A.D. 312, when the role of the *cornuti* and the meaning of their “regimental badge” were still known to all”. It is reasonable to suppose that, from the age of Constantine onward, the significance of the *Cornuti* emblem decreased, but the same cannot be said for the staurogram: the bronze casters may have been inclined to supplant the blazon, but the fact that the staurogram is entirely absent from the other statuettes – in one case even being replaced by a shield design that left no room for a staurogram – suggests that, though the blazon may well be authentic, the staurogram is an instance where the artists may have exercised a free hand. Additionally, although the *Cornuti* blazon appears on the Arch of Constantine, there the upper portion of the shield displays neither staurogram nor empty space, but a representation of Victoria (see Alföldi’s figs. 5-6): if both the Arch and the statuette are to be considered depictions of the *Cornuti* shields as they appeared at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, this needs to be addressed. Finally, the statuette presents a curious mix of Christian and non-Christian representation, namely, Constantine as Jupiter with a staurogram. While such a mixture of religious imagery is perhaps plausible in the early years of Constantine’s reign, the diadem was only introduced after 324 and the jewelled diadem a few years after that – the likelihood of Constantine being depicted as

However, Lactantius' description might indicate a different symbol – a symbol closely related in both appearance and meaning to the staurogram – depending on how one chooses to translate *summo capite circumflexo*. For a staurogram this must be taken to mean that the upper arm is bent around to form a *rho*-shape, but it can also mean that the upper arm is turned around in a circle,⁵³⁴ the possibility for which has already been noted by, for example, Ramsey MacMullen, Rudolf Leeb, and more recently Jonathan Bardill.⁵³⁵ The result, then, is a *tau* surmounted by a circle, something akin to a *crux ansata*, or 'handled cross', so termed because of its resemblance to the *ankh*, the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'life',⁵³⁶ with the main difference being that the loop of the *crux ansata* is circular rather than oval.⁵³⁷ The visual similarities between the staurogram and the *ankh*, and the occurrence of

Jupiter in imperial statuary after 324 remains to be shown. It cannot be the case, as Alföldi and Ross imply, that the statuette is based on the statue erected in the *Basilica Nova* (Rome) following the defeat of Maxentius, since it does not accord with either the description provided by Eusebius (*HE* 9.9.10; *VC* 1.40) or the surviving fragments of the Constantinian statue (see now Bardill, *Constantine*, 203-17).

⁵³⁴ Sulzberger, 'Le symbole de la croix', 404. It is in this sense that we find the verb *circumflectere* used in Virgil's *Aeneid* (at *Aen.* 3.430), which text Lactantius seems prone to quote. See, for example, Lact. *DMP* 12.1 (= *Aen.* 4.169-70); 16.2 (= *Aen.* 6.625-7); 30.5 (= *Aen.* 6.471 and 12.603); 33.8 (= *Aen.* 2.222-4).

⁵³⁵ MacMullen, *Constantine*, 72, who does not suppose a staurogram at all, only a *tau* with an elongated shaft and a surmounting circular loop; Green and Ferguson, 'Constantine', 14, state, in no uncertain terms, "[t]he vertical with the centrally rounded top is more like the vertical section of the ankh"; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 135-6; Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine*, 36, considers the symbol to be a staurogram, but describes it as "a cross with the sun on top"; Bardill, *Constantine*, 166-8. Cf. Odahl, 'The Celestial Signs on Constantine's Shields at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge', *JRMRA* 2 (1981) 15-28, at 23 (n. 30), who notes that a symbol similar to MacMullen's description appears on the reverse of a *Gloria Exercitus* aes series from Aquileia, minted in 334 or 335, which, unfortunately, I have been unable to confirm. See also, Alföldi, *Conversion*, 18, who assumes that Lactantius is conveying a Chi-Rho and argues that his description suggests that the *rho*, "hastily painted on the shields, took the form of a round-headed pin"; cf. Sulzberger, 'Le symbole de la croix', 414-5. Keresztes, *Constantine*, 29, mistakenly understands Alföldi's description to mean a staurogram with the rounded top sitting directly on the crossbar, resulting in a depiction similar to MacMullen.

⁵³⁶ Y. Bonnamy, *Dictionnaire des hiéroglyphes* (Arles, 2013) 108-11.

⁵³⁷ The circular loop possibly represents a sun-disc or a nimbus; cf. Bardill, *Constantine*, 166-7. See Spier, *Catalogue* (2007), 229 (cat. 56), with 229 (fig. 1): a fourth century gem, possibly from Syria, which survives now only as a plaster cast, depicting a nude, front-facing nimbate Christ on a *tau*-cross with arms flush with the crossbar; and 229-32 (cat. 57): an early fifth century ivory plaque (one of the "Maskell Ivories") depicting a front-facing nimbate Christ on a *tau*-cross with arms flush with the crossbar.

the two symbols together,⁵³⁸ have prompted some specialists of Christian iconography to suppose a direct line of influence; so, for instance, Victor Gardthausen and Jean de Savignac, though they disagree as to when the staurogram came into use, both argue that it derives from the *ankh*.⁵³⁹ Regardless of how reasonable such a hypothesis may seem, especially since the earliest evidence for the staurogram (the Bodmer papyri) comes from Egypt, the Christian appropriation of the *ankh* seems to be a later development,⁵⁴⁰ the earliest known instance being found in the Tchacos (or Al-Minya) Codex,⁵⁴¹ generally considered to have been compiled sometime in the late third or early fourth century,⁵⁴² where it appears with a circular loop. This would make the *crux ansata* roughly contemporaneous with the Constantinian era, though perhaps limited to Egypt at that time.

⁵³⁸ See Lefebvre, *Recueil* 79 (no. 423): a fourth-century inscription from Armant (ancient Hermonthis) shows an *ankh* between a staurogram (left) and Chi-Rho monogram (right), with a second Chi-Rho as part of the main inscription immediately above and to the far left.

⁵³⁹ V.E. Gardthausen, *Das alte Monogramm* (Leipzig, 1924) 78-9; de Savignac, 'Les papyrus Bodmer'. The disagreement amounts to nothing more than de Savignac's consideration of the Bodmer papyri, which were only discovered in the 1950s.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Hurtado, 'Staurogram', 216-8; *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 144-6.

⁵⁴¹ Specifically, on the last page of the *Letter of Peter to Philip*; an image of the page can be found in H. Krosney, *The Lost Gospel* (Washington, 2006), immediately following page 166. Cf. L. Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas* (Tübingen, 2011) 123, who notes the artistic quality of this *crux ansata* compared to the examples we find in the Nag Hammadi codices (see note below). Bardill, *Constantine*, 167, notes this occurrence, but mistakenly attributes it to the *Gospel of Judas*, which is found in the same codex.

⁵⁴² Cf. Krosney, *Lost Gospel*, 272-3 and 302, reports the carbon-14 dating of the codex to be between 220 and 340; G. Wurst, 'Irenaeus of Lyon and the Gospel of Judas', in R. Kasser et al. (eds.), *The Gospel of Judas*, 2nd ed. (Washington, 2008) 178, dates the *Gospel of Judas* to the early fourth century on paleographic grounds, but acknowledges the carbon-14 dating of the codex to roughly the last quarter of the third century, noting that a more secure dating will depend on the reconstruction of the cartonnage; Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas*, 103-5, late third or early fourth century for the codex. The *ankh* also appears throughout the first and second Nag Hammadi codices (specifically, at the end of part one of the *Tripartite Tractate*, on the cover of the second codex, and at the end of *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*), which were produced in the early or mid fourth century; cf. H.W. Attridge and E.H. Pagels, 'NHC I,5: The Tripartite Tractate', in H.W. Attridge (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex), Volume II* (Leiden, 1985) 217-497, at 402; J.M. Robinson, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4th rev. ed. (Leiden, 1996) 1-26, at 18. There is also the curious, albeit still undated (so far as I know), inscription from Antinooupolis that not only situates an *ankh* between two Chi-Rho monograms, but also places a third Chi-Rho inside the loop of the *ankh*; cf. Lefebvre, *Recueil* 39 (no. 204); M. Sulzberger, 'Note sur la croix chrétienne en Egypte', *Byzantion* 3 (1926) 303-4.

Recently, Bardill has suggested that the Christian appropriation of the *ankh* as the *crux ansata* may have been inspired by another early Christian symbol that appears in the Latin West which also signifies the crucifixion of Jesus and its attending theology: the ‘anchor’.⁵⁴³ Although the form of the Christian anchor varies, it is frequently depicted as a *tau*-cross with an elongated shaft terminating in hooks and with a circular ‘eye’ (or loop) sitting above the crossbar.⁵⁴⁴ As Sulzberger notes, the anchor is perhaps one of the oldest Christian symbols, the earliest examples – found in the catacombs of Priscilla and Domitilla (Rome) – being dated to the beginning of the second century, though it gradually disappears starting in the mid third century.⁵⁴⁵ A possible interpretation for (and potential origin of) the symbol is to be found in *Epistle to the Hebrews*, which a number of early Church Fathers attributed to St. Paul: “We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”.⁵⁴⁶ The concept of ‘hope’ that is likened here to an “anchor of the soul” refers to the expectation of salvation and resurrection, as well as divine aid, as the reward for the faithful made possible through the crucifixion of Jesus.⁵⁴⁷ The anchor, then, when depicted with a crossbar, presumably performs a pictographic function similar to what we find in the case of the staurogram: the *tau* that creates the shaft and crossbar of the anchor is a representation of the

⁵⁴³ Bardill, *Constantine*, 166-8; cf. Hurtado, ‘Staurogram’, 217, and id., *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 144-5, who argues that the Christian appropriation of the *ankh* may have resulted from its visual similarity to the staurogram.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole de la croix’, 378-81.

⁵⁴⁵ Sulzberger, ‘Le symbole de la croix’, 377-8.

⁵⁴⁶ *Heb* 6:19-20:[ἐλπίς] ἦν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. *Heb* 4:14-16 and 6:1-18.

cross; and, whereas the *rho*-loop of the staurogram depicts the head of Jesus in profile, the circular loop of the anchor is frontal.⁵⁴⁸

Although the *ankh* as the *crux ansata* appears as early as the Tchacos Codex, and as the *ankh* proper in the mid fourth century Nag Hammadi codices (see note above), formal acknowledgement of the symbol in the Latin West is not attested until the beginning of the fifth century. In his description of the mass conversions of ‘pagan’ Alexandrians to Christianity during the destruction of the Serapeum in 391, the Church historian Rufinus claims that the inspiration for their change of faith was directly connected to the display of a particular Christian symbol.

Another thing was done in Alexandria: the busts of Serapis, which had been in every house in the walls, the entrances, the doorposts, and even the windows, were so cut and filed away that not even a trace or mention of this or any other demon remained anywhere. In their place everyone painted the sign of the Lord’s cross on doorposts, entrances, windows, walls, and columns. It is said that when the pagans who were left saw this, they were reminded of an important tradition which had come down to them from of old. The Egyptians are said to have this our sign of the Lord’s cross among the characters which they call “hieratic,” or priestly, as one of the letters making up their script. They state that the meaning of this character or noun is “the life to come.” Those then who were coming over to the faith out of astonishment at what was happening said that it had been handed down to them from of old that the things now worshiped would remain until they saw that the sign had come in which was life. Hence it was the temple priests and ministers who came over to the faith rather than those who enjoyed the tricks of error and devices of deceit.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ More finely detailed artistic depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus do not begin to appear until the second quarter of the fifth century, and even then rarely. However, we do possess one exceptionally rare depiction from the second or third century (possibly from Syria) in the form of a magical amulet, which depicts a front-facing Jesus on a *tau*-cross; cf. Spier, *Catalogue* 228-9 (cat. 55). See also the two examples of a front-facing, nimbate Jesus from the fourth and fifth centuries given in a note above. Additionally, there is the early fifth-century crucifixion scene – the earliest example of a detailed representation, aside from the ivory plaque previously mentioned – carved into a wood panel on the door of Santa Sabina (Rome), which depicts Jesus front-facing as well; cf. Spier, *Catalogue* 227, with fig. 1.

⁵⁴⁹ Ruf. *HE* 11.29: *Sed et illud apud Alexandriam gestum est, quod etiam thoraces Serapis, qui per singulas quasque domos in parietibus, in ingressibus et postibus etiam ac fenestris erant, ita abscisi sunt omnes in abrasi, ut ne vestigium quidem usquam vel nominis appellatio aut ipsius aut cuiuslibet alterius daemonis remaneret, sed pro his crucis dominicae signum unusquisque in postibus, in ingressibus, in fenestris, in parietibus columnisque depingeret. quod cum factum hi, qui superfuerant ex paganis, viderent, in recordationem rei magnae ex traditione sibimet antiquitus commendata venisse perhibentur. signum hoc nostrum dominicae crucis inter illas, quas dicunt hieraticas, id est sacerdotales litteras, habere Aegyptii*

Similar accounts are related by the Church historians Socrates and Sozomen, writing around the middle of the fifth century, though the circumstances change somewhat, and the roles of the ‘pagans’ and Christians are swapped. Both authors assert that cruciform hieroglyphics were revealed when the stones of the Serapeum were torn down and that Christian converts familiar with hieratic writing interpreted them as meaning “the life to come”, resulting in mass conversions.⁵⁵⁰ Socrates in particular reports that onlookers were inclined to interpret the symbol according to their own religious inclinations, with the Christians claiming that it signified the salvific suffering of Jesus. The cruciform hieratic character described by Rufinus, Socrates, and Sozomen as meaning ‘the life to come’ (whether ‘immortality’, ‘eternal life’, ‘resurrection’, or ‘life-after-death’) can be none other than the *ankh*, which for Alexandrian Christians apparently could signify the crucified Christ. Considering the fact that we have papyrological evidence of the symbol being used in a Christian context in Egypt approximately a century before the destruction of the Serapeum, the Christian appropriation of the *ankh* was likely not as sudden as these authors present it as being – particularly in the case of Rufinus, who gives the impression that it was not a simple cross that the Egyptian priests identified as being their own.⁵⁵¹

This, then, brings us to an important point about how to regard Lactantius’ description of the sign that Constantine was supposedly instructed to place on his soldiers’ shields. We

dicuntur, velut unum ex ceteris litterarum quae apud illos sunt elementis. cuius litterae seu vocabuli hanc esse adserunt interpretationem: vita ventura. dicebant ergo hi, qui tunc admiratione rerum gestarum convertebantur ad fidem, ita sibi ab antiquis traditum, quod haec, quae nunc coluntur. tamdiu starent, quamdiu viderent signum istud venisse, in quo esset vita. unde accidit, ut magis hi, qui erant ex sacerdotibus vel ministris templorum, ad fidem converterentur, quam illi, quos errorum praestigiae et deceptionum machinae delectabant.

⁵⁵⁰ Socr. *HE* 5.17; Soz. *HE* 7.15.10. In both cases “the life to come” is rendered ζωή ἐπερχομένη; Rufinus states *vita ventura*.

⁵⁵¹ Bardill, *Constantine*, 168, posits that, if not the *crux ansata*, the Alexandrian Christians may have drawn staurograms or anchors. For his part, Rufinus states that the sign was “the Lord’s cross” (*crux dominicae*).

have now discussed three early-Christian symbols – two of which that are undoubtedly pre-Constantinian (the staurogram and anchor) and another that is either pre-Constantinian or contemporaneous – that are visually similar and carry the same significance: they are pictographic representations of the crucifixion, signifying the human rewards for Jesus’ suffering, namely, salvation and life-after-death. We can say that Lactantius is certainly not trying to describe a Chi-Rho monogram; rather, his description better suits either a staurogram or a *crux ansata*. He would have been familiar with the staurogram and it is not unreasonable to assume that he may also have been familiar with the *ankh/crux ansata*. As Larry Hurtado comments:

“Christians clearly made efforts to network with other Christian circles, both locally and translocally. So if any given ligature was first adopted among some Christians, they may well have known of the appropriation of one or more of the other ligatures among their own or other circles of Christians”.⁵⁵²

Supposing, however, that he was not familiar with this particular symbol, it likely would not have mattered: in a very general sense, what Lactantius depicts is a *tau*-cross with a surmounting loop of some sort. Considering the similarities in the appearance and interpretation of the staurogram, anchor, and *ankh/crux ansata*, it appears that there was a tendency amongst early Christians to relativise symbols with those fundamental features as representations of the crucified Christ and signifying the benefits of Jesus’ suffering for the faithful.⁵⁵³ It was not required that Constantine employ a Christian symbol for Lactantius to interpret the symbol as Christian. Personally, I am inclined to understand *transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo* as indicating a *tau*-cross with the entire upper arm turned

⁵⁵² Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 145 (n. 36).

⁵⁵³ See the insightful comment by Bruun, *RIC* 7, 61: “The sign, at the moment of its creation, was ambiguous... At least Greek-speaking Christians were therefore probably in a position to realize the possibilities of interpretation when confronted with the new sign. To others ☩ or ⚡ was a powerful heavenly sign, in the eyes of some possibly recalling Sun worship and the Mithras cult, to others suggesting the mystic Egyptian *ankh*”.

around in a circle, something roughly similar to a *crux ansata*. On its own, however, Lactantius' testimony is inconclusive and we must turn to Eusebius' later description to elucidate the matter.

However diverse scholarly attitudes to Lactantius' description of the symbol may be, with respect to Eusebius' account they are considerably more so, if only because his narrative has received greater attention – an indication of the presumption that it more accurately reflects some official version of events. Constantine, we are told, viewed a “cross-shaped trophy” in the sky,⁵⁵⁴ and later that night in his sleep Christ presented him “the sign which had appeared in the sky, and urged him to make himself a copy of the sign which had appeared in the sky”.⁵⁵⁵ Upon waking, “he summoned goldsmiths and jewellers ... and explained the shape of the sign, and gave them instructions about copying it in gold and precious stones”. The result, then, was the *Labarum*, a military standard decorated with a Chi-Rho monogram within a wreath, which Constantine reportedly carried into battle first against Maxentius as a declaration of his new divine patron, the Christian god. In his elaborate description of the *Labarum*, which he claims to have been permitted to examine personally, Eusebius seems to place considerable emphasis on the presence of the Chi-Rho: he not only describes in absolute terms the form and import of the monogram, but notes also that Constantine was accustomed to wear the symbol on his helmet – a detail perhaps confirmed by the Ticinum medallion of 315.⁵⁵⁶ Thus, the Chi-Rho would appear to have

⁵⁵⁴ Eus. *VC* 1.28.2.

⁵⁵⁵ Eus. *VC* 1.29.

⁵⁵⁶ G.H.R. Horsley and E.R. Waterhouse, ‘The Greek *Nomen Sacrum* XP– in Some Latin and Old English Manuscripts’, *Scriptorium* 38 (1984) 211-30, show that the proliferation of the Chi-Rho under Constantine probably secured its Christian recognition, but add (at 229) that he was likely not the first to reimagine the pre/non-Christian symbol in this way.

been the essential or “distinctive feature” of the *Labarum*,⁵⁵⁷ the element that elevated it from mere *vexillum* to Christian banner.

Consideration of the attention paid to the Chi-Rho by Eusebius, the appearance of the symbol, for example, on the Ticinum medallion and atop the standard on the SPES-PUBLIC Constantinople series, and Lactantius’ apparent attempt to describe such a monogram has led to a plethora of interpretations, which are far too numerous and divergent to fully recount here, though some representative perspectives will suffice. For instance, Norman Baynes, who considers Lactantius and Eusebius to be describing two separate episodes, proposes that the chronologically earlier ‘vision’ described in *Vita* inspired the cruciform shape of the *Labarum* and that the later dream-vision before the final battle against Maxentius contributed the wreathed monogram – as a composite unit, the *Labarum* (first appearing perhaps as early as 312) comes to be a representation of Constantine’s visionary experiences.⁵⁵⁸ Arnold H.M. Jones argues that Lactantius was not aware that Constantine’s celestial-vision was of the cross; the sign employed on the shields was the Chi-Rho, a symbol of Constantine’s own invention which he used, instead of the cross, to signify his new divine patron.⁵⁵⁹ The suggestion of Hermann Dörries is that the Constantinian symbol began as a staurogram, as described by Lactantius, but was later changed to the Chi-Rho, musing also that the cruciform shape of the *Labarum* may have developed out from the shield symbol.⁵⁶⁰ Somewhat similarly, Robin Lane Fox asserts that Eusebius is incorrect in assigning the Chi-Rho to the ‘vision’ experience: Lactantius’ staurogram (a cruciform abbreviation for ‘cross’)

⁵⁵⁷ Jones, *Constantine*, 97.

⁵⁵⁸ Baynes, *Constantine*, 60-4.

⁵⁵⁹ Jones, *Constantine*, 93-7.

⁵⁶⁰ Dörries, *Constantine*, 33-6.

and the basic shape of Eusebius' *Labarum* (a simple cross) are in agreement, but the Chi-Rho, being more complex and less familiar, was a later addition.⁵⁶¹ Weiss, on the other hand, in keeping with his hypothesis, posits that the Constantinian symbol is but a pictorial representation of the solar halo in the form of a six-pointed star, which either early on had a slight curvature on the upper arm resembling a stunted *rho* (hence, Lactantius) or was later adapted into a distinguishable Chi-Rho.⁵⁶² Charles M. Odahl, combining the accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius, contends that Constantine emerged from his 'vision' on the eve of the battle with two Christian symbols – the cross and the Chi-Rho – that came together as the *Labarum*, but that it was the Chi-Rho that was placed on the shields.⁵⁶³ More recently, Bardill puts forward that Lactantius describes a staurogram, but that the form of the symbol in both the celestial and dream-vision reported by Eusebius, which was then reproduced as the *Labarum*, was distinctly cruciform or *tau*-shaped, perhaps even being – before the addition of the Chi-Rho – a staurogram with an elongated shaft.⁵⁶⁴ And so on, and so forth.

⁵⁶¹ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 613-7.

⁵⁶² Weiss, 'Vision', 251-6. Weiss' precise thoughts regarding the *Labarum* are somewhat indistinct: he seems to suggest simultaneously that the Chi-Rho is and is not the form of the celestial-vision. Although he argues intensively for solar (and cosmic) prototypes of Constantine's Chi-Rho – stating even (at 254) that "[t]he divine sign within a crown ... seems to be indeed nothing other than an interpretation in pictorial form of the halo he had seen" – and consistently refers to the monogram as 'the symbol on the standard/*Labarum*', he nevertheless makes the concluding statement (at 256): "Recognizing the oracular ambiguity in this famous phrase [i.e. *hoc signo victor eris*] brings one back to what the emperor reported to Eusebius: that he had the sign seen in the heavens copied and used it as a military standard, and that this standard brought him his victories. And one has still greater reason to infer that *the sign in the sky and the image on the standard are indistinguishable*, both iconographically and in the word which described them: the *Labarum* *is* the sign seen in the sky" (first emphasis mine; second in the original). It is unclear whether by this he means that the entire military standard represents the form of the celestial-vision or that the term *Labarum* in its original sense referred solely to the six-pointed star/Chi-Rho, since he states (at 254-5): "the word [i.e. *Labarum*] must have been applied to the actual phenomenon seen in the sky. It was only at a second stage that it was used for the replicas as well". Additionally, although following Creed's edition, Weiss' detection of something akin to a six-pointed star or Chi-Rho in Lactantius' testimony depends on a translation reminiscent of the proposed emendations of Grégoire and Alföldi: "the letter X with a stroke through it and the top of its head bent" (at 246).

⁵⁶³ Odahl, *Constantine*, 105-6; cf. id., 'Celestial Signs'.

⁵⁶⁴ Bardill, *Constantine*, 160-78.

One opinion in particular, which continues to be quite prevalent in popular culture and non-Constantinian studies, must firmly be put to rest – namely, that the sign described by Eusebius as having appeared in the sky and in the dream is the Chi-Rho. Although there may be disagreement as to the precise form of the symbol that Constantine chose to signify his allegiance to his protective deity, it is almost universally recognised amongst Constantinian scholars that the sign Eusebius says appeared in the sky is a cross. Scholars sensitive to this are apt to point it out,⁵⁶⁵ but perhaps the sharpest correction comes from the commentary of *Vita* by Cameron and Hall: “Constantine sees a cross. Nothing in the text suggests that he sees a *chi-rho* emblem at this point. When Eusebius describes the *labarum* or battle-standard later, the chief shape is the long upright and the cross-piece, making a simple cross”.⁵⁶⁶ As far as I can determine, the conception of the Chi-Rho as the celestial-vision derives from Alföldi’s still influential *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, published in 1948: the evidence of the Chi-Rho on Constantinian coinage and his particular emendation of Lactantius’ description causes him to conclude that “[i]t was not the Cross that appeared in the vision, but the monogram of Christ, consisting of the letters Chi Rho”.⁵⁶⁷ Despite the later abandonment of Alföldi’s proposed emendation of Lactantius’ text and nuanced

⁵⁶⁵ For example, J. Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284 to 363* (Edinburgh, 2012) 110, notes brusquely, “the form of a cross, not a chi-rho”.

⁵⁶⁶ Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 207. The point is further driven home (at 208): “Constantine also has a dream, in which Christ himself appears to him together with the cross. He is told to manufacture a copy of what he had seen in the sky. This is the *labarum*”; and again (at 210): “The overall cross-shape is meant, the *chi-rho* ... not being part of the shape but of the decoration of the *labarum*”. Although not declared as boldly, Van Dam, ‘Many Conversions’, 138, would seem to be suggesting the same thing when he states that, in the dream, “Jesus Christ had suggested turning this symbol of the cross into a military standard”, which included “religious symbols”.

⁵⁶⁷ Alföldi, *Conversion*, 16-8 (quote at 17). See Odahl, ‘Celestial Signs’, 17-8, in support, adding that if the symbol in the sky was indeed a cross, it would have only served to identify the god.

arguments on the significance of the coinage, this is an interpretation that has nonetheless persisted in certain circles.

With respect to Eusebius' account of the 'vision' and the symbol derived from it, there are a few points that are essential to highlight in order to elucidate his meaning. Firstly, Eusebius is quite explicit that the symbol that appeared in the sky is the cross, which is made clear by two details in particular: in describing the sign manifesting in the sky Eusebius states that it was 'the trophy of the cross'; and later he relates that the interpretation that Constantine received when he consulted his mysterious 'Christian experts' was that "the sign which appeared was a token of immortality, and was an abiding trophy of the victory over death, which he [i.e. Christ] had once won when he was present on earth".⁵⁶⁸ Secondly, Eusebius says distinctly, as noted above, that the sign shown to Constantine in his sleep by Christ was precisely the same symbol that had appeared in the sky – a detail rendered unambiguous by his repetition of "the sign which had appeared in the sky". Finally, in his dream Constantine is instructed to make a physical copy of the symbol, but the exhortation does not simply concern the symbol that is being shown to him by the dream visitor – rather, Constantine is told to reproduce "the sign which had appeared in the sky".

These details indicate that it is the cross that Constantine was ordered to manufacture and that constitutes the primary element of the *Labarum*. This much, it seems, was apparent to the post-Eusebian editor of *Vita* who inserted the headings for each of Eusebius' chapters,

⁵⁶⁸ Eus. *VC* 1.32.2. For Eusebius – as for previous Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr (*Apol.* 1.150), Tertullian (*Apol.* 16.1; *Adv. Marc.* 4.20), and Minucius Felix (*Oct.* 29) – the *tau*-cross of Christ's crucifixion is a symbol of victory, building on the cruciform Roman *tropaeum* that had become the customary symbol of triumph and military success (both for the military leader individually and the Roman Empire collectively) from the second century BCE onward; cf. R.H. Storch, 'The Trophy and the Cross: Pagan and Christian Symbolism in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', *Byzantion* 40 (1970) 105-18; J.W. Drijvers, 'The Power of the Cross: Celestial Cross Appearances in the Fourth Century', in A. Cain and N.E. Lenski (eds.), *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity: Selected Papers from the Seventh Biennial Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity Conference* (Farnham, 2009) 237-48.

since the cross is mentioned in each heading pertaining to the ‘vision’. As such, for the chapter on the celestial-vision, the editor wrote, “How when he prayed God vouchsafed the vision of a cross of light in the sky at noon and a writing urging him to ‘Conquer by this’”;⁵⁶⁹ for the dream-vision, “How the Christ of God appeared to him in his sleep, and directed him to use a sign of the same shape as the cross in his wars”;⁵⁷⁰ for the morning after the dream-vision, when Constantine gave instructions to the goldsmiths and jewellers, “The making of the same cruciform sign”;⁵⁷¹ and, lastly, for the description of the *Labarum*, “A description of the cross-shaped sign, which the Romans now call the *labarum*”.⁵⁷² However, it would appear to have been unambiguous to Eusebius’ readers as well. Thus, Rufinus declares that the symbol revealed to Constantine was the *signum crucis* and that this symbol became the *Labarum* – with no mention of a Chi-Rho:

Then, with happiness restored and now unconcerned about the victory, he traced the sign of the cross, which he had seen in the sky, on his forehead... Thereafter he transformed the sign, which had appeared to him in the sky, into military *vexilla* and adapted the *Labarum*, as they call it, into the appearance of the cross of the Lord. Having thus been furnished with the weapons [*arma* could mean ‘shields’ here] and *vexilla* of Religion, he marched against the troops of the godless.⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁹ Eus. *VC* 1.28 (heading): “Ὅπως εὐξαμένῳ τὴν ὀπτασίαν ὁ θεὸς παρέσχε, σταυρὸν ἐκ φωτὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ μεσημβρία καὶ γραφὴν τούτῳ νικᾶν παραινοῦσαν.

⁵⁷⁰ Eus. *VC* 1.29 (heading): “Ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ θεοῦ καθ’ ὕπνου αὐτῷ φανεῖς ὁμοιοτρόπῳ τοῦ σταυροῦ σημείῳ κεχρηῆσθαι κατὰ τοὺς πολέμους προσέταξεν.

⁵⁷¹ Eus. *VC* 1.30 (heading): Κατασκευὴ τοῦ αὐτοῦ σταυρικοῦ σημείου.

⁵⁷² Eus. *VC* 1.31 (heading): Ἐκφρασις σταυροειδοῦς σημείου, ὅπερ νῦν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι λάβαρον καλοῦσιν.

⁵⁷³ Ruf. *HE* 9.9: *tum vero laetus redditus et de victoria iam securus, signum crucis, quod in caelo viderat, in sua fronte designat ... exin signum, quod in caelo sibi fuerat demonstratum, in militaria vexilla transformat ac labarum, quem dicunt, in speciem crucis dominicae exaptat et ita armis vexillisque religionis instructus adversum impiorum arma proficiscitur*. Eusebius (at *VC* 1.31.3- 32.1) notes that Constantine made copies of the *Labarum* to lead his armies, but that this was sometime after the creation of the original. Thus, Rufinus would seem to be combining the creation of the *Labarum* and the replicas for the armies in the same episode. This could also be the reason why he claims that the cross was employed as both *vexilla* and *arma*, the latter either referring to military instruments (i.e. weapons, shields, helmets, etc) or to the soldiers themselves. He appears to use the term *arma* in two different senses here; the contexts suggest that in the first case he is speaking about objects (*armis vexillisque*), and in the second as a reference to soldiers, though it could perhaps be taken as ‘the

Similarly, the Church historians Socrates and Sozomen, both of whom were aware of and used Eusebius' works,⁵⁷⁴ declare not only that the symbol of the 'vision' was the cross, but that the *Labarum* was fashioned according to that design – again, there is no mention of a Chi-Rho. According to Socrates,

For, around the time of the midday sun, when the day was just turning, he saw in the sky a cross-shaped pillar of light, on which was writing saying, "By this, conquer!"... When night overtook him he saw Christ in a dream telling him to prepare a copy of the sign which he saw and to use this against his enemies as a ready trophy. Obeying this oracle he prepared the cross-shaped trophy, which even now is kept in the imperial palace.⁵⁷⁵

Sozomen, on the other hand, gives two summaries of the 'vision'. He first reports the popular tradition of his day, stating that when Constantine was debating going to war against Maxentius, "in a dream-vision he saw the sign of the cross shining brightly in the sky... It is even said that Christ Himself, having appeared to him, showed him the token of the cross, and advised him to make for himself a likeness and to carry it in battles as [both] an aid and a procurer of victory".⁵⁷⁶ At this point he cites Eusebius for confirmation and then proceeds to

weapons of the godless'. Another point of interest: *religio* here must mean 'Christianity' in the sense of 'true religion', which is contrasted with the *impii* of the main clause, reflecting the post-Theodosian-period distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*.

⁵⁷⁴ Socrates (at *HE* 1.1) mentions not only Eusebius' *HE*, of which his own Church history is intended as a continuation, but gives a brief critique of *Vita*. Sozomen (at *HE* 1.3.2) cites Eusebius' *Vita* as the source for his second summary of the 'vision' (see below).

⁵⁷⁵ Socr. *HE* 1.2.4-7: Περὶ γὰρ μεσημβρινὰς ἡλίου ὥρας, ἤδη τῆς ἡμέρας ἀποκλινούσης εἶδεν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ στύλον φωτὸς σταυροειδῆ, ἐν ᾧ γράμματα ἦν λέγοντα «τούτῳ νικά.»... νυκτὸς δὲ ἐπιλαβούσης κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους ὄρα τὸν Χριστὸν λέγοντα αὐτῷ, κατασκευάσαι ἀντίτυπον τοῦ ὀφθέντος σημείου καὶ τούτῳ κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων ὡς ἐτοίμῳ κεχρηθῆσαι τροπαίῳ. Τούτῳ πεισθεὶς τῷ χρησμῷ κατασκευάζει μὲν τὸ σταυροειδὲς τρόπαιον, ὃ μέχρι νῦν ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις φυλάττεται. Socrates does not appear to be referring to a representation, but the actual Constantinian *Labarum* in the palace in Constantinople. Whether it was set up in a conspicuous location or merely known to be housed there is unclear.

⁵⁷⁶ Soz. *HE* 1.3.1-2: ὄναρ εἶδε τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σελαγίζον... λέγεται δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν Χριστὸν ἐπιφανέντα αὐτῷ δεῖξαι τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ σύμβολον καὶ παρακελεύσασθαι ἑοικὸς τούτῳ ποιῆσαι καὶ ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ἔχειν ἐπίκουρον καὶ νίκης ποριστικόν. Sozomen's initial summary explicitly situates the vision of the cross within a dream. It would appear that the popular tradition in the early fifth century did not necessarily ascribe a waking vision, which is evident also in Rufinus' narrative (at *HE* 9.9), who also claims that the celestial-vision was seen within a dream. This version may have even been a contemporary development, since it is possible to understand Lactantius' "Constantine was advised in a dream to mark the sign of God in the sky on the shields of his soldiers" as meaning that the sign was seen in the sky within a

give a second, lengthier account of the ‘vision’ based on *Vita*, some details of which he elaborates:

Eusebius Pamphilus claims to have heard the emperor say under oath that around midday, when the sun was just turning, he and the soldiers who were with him beheld the trophy of the cross formed from light and writing attached to it saying, “By this, conquer!” in the sky... While he was thinking to himself what it might mean night came upon him. And as he slept Christ appeared with the sign that had manifested in the sky, and advised him to make himself a copy of this [sign] and to use [it] as protection in battles against his enemies... at dawn, after convening the priests of Christ, he questioned them about their doctrines... They told him that the sign which had appeared to him was a token of His victory over death [literally, ‘Hades’], which, having come among men, he achieved by being crucified, dying, and coming back to life on the third day... And so with the priests having given their interpretation, the emperor, marvelling at the prophecies concerning Christ, summoned skilled men to adorn in gold and precious stones the token of the cross that, according to the Romans, is called the *Labarum*.⁵⁷⁷

Curiously, none of the three Church historians, all of whom were operating within some popular tradition in addition to the Eusebian tradition, mention even in passing the Chi-Rho monogram. Clearly for them it was a negligible detail – the most important feature of the *Labarum* was the cross, the symbol that Constantine saw in the sky. Turning back to *Vita*, it is easier to detect Eusebius’ meaning in his description of the special standard: although he

dream. It is also worthwhile to note that in the popular traditions of both Rufinus and Sozomen the sky-writing is replaced by angels saying ‘By this conquer’. On the other hand, Socrates claims that the words appeared on the cross itself, while Sozomen, in his second account of the ‘vision’, follows Eusebius that the words were attached the cross (see below).

⁵⁷⁷ Soz. *HE* 1.3.2 - 4.1: Εὐσέβιος γε μὴν ὁ Παμφίλου αὐτοῦ φήσαντος ἐνωμότως τοῦ βασιλέως ἀκηκοέναι ἰσχυρίζεται, ὡς ἀμφὶ μεσημβρίαν ἤδη τοῦ ἡλίου ἀποκλίναντος σταυροῦ τρόπαιον ἐκ φωτὸς συνεστῶς καὶ γραφὴν συνημμένην αὐτῷ «τούτῳ νίκα» λέγουσαν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἐθεάσατο αὐτός τε καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ στρατιῶται... λογιζομένῳ δὲ αὐτῷ ὅ τι εἶη νύξ ἐπῆλθε. καθεύδοντί τε τὸν Χριστὸν ὀφθῆναι σὺν τῷ φανέντι ἐν οὐρανῷ σημείῳ καὶ παρακελεύεσθαι μίμημα ποιήσασθαι τούτου καὶ ἀλεξήματι κεχρησθαι ἐν ταῖς πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους μάχαις... ἅμα ἡμέρα συγκαλέσας τοὺς ἱερέας τοῦ Χριστοῦ περὶ τοῦ δόγματος ἐπυνθάνετο... τὸ δὲ φανὲν αὐτῷ σημεῖον σύμβολον εἶναι ἔλεγον τῆς κατὰ τοῦ ἄδου νίκης, ἦν εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐλθὼν κατῶρθωσε τῷ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ ἀποθανεῖν καὶ τριταῖος ἀναβιῶναι... Τοιαῦτα τῶν ἱερέων ὑφηγουμένων θαυμάσας τὰς περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ προφητείας ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκέλευσεν ἄνδρας ἐπιστήμονας χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθοις τιμίῳ εἰς σταυροῦ σύμβολον μετασκευάσαι τὸ παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις καλούμενον λάβωρον. It will be noticed that Sozomen’s language in the main description of the ‘vision’ is very similar to that of Eusebius, so his departures and elaborations should be considered significant indicators as to how he understands the Eusebian tradition. Also, he seems to be under the impression that there was already a military standard called *Labarum*, which Constantine augmented to make cruciform. Rufinus may be alluding to the same idea when he states (at *HE* 9.9) that Constantine, *labarum, quem dicunt, in speciem crucis dominicae exaptat*.

appears to emphasise the presence of the Chi-Rho, his visual narrative indicates that it was merely a feature of the *Labarum* as he viewed it and not necessarily the primary element of it. At the outset of his description Eusebius reports that, once Constantine had assembled his goldsmiths and jewellers, “he explained the shape of the sign, and gave them instructions about copying it... It was constructed to the following design”. When Eusebius proceeds to describe what ‘it’ looked like, he begins not with the Chi-Rho monogram, but a description that complies with the ‘trophy of the cross’ that appeared in both the celestial and dream-vision: “A tall pole ... had a transverse bar forming the shape of a cross”.

At the time that he was preparing the first edition of his *Historia ecclesiastica*, that is, ca. 312/313, Eusebius does not appear to have been aware of any story about a vision, stating simply that Constantine adopted the Christian god as his protector before marching against Maxentius.⁵⁷⁸ Nevertheless, even this early and writing in the East, Eusebius demonstrates knowledge that in the West emperor had made special use of the cross in his imperial representation, specifically as a military instrument. In his description of the aftermath of the Battle of Milvian Bridge, Eusebius states that a statue of Constantine was erected in a very conspicuous location in Rome (perhaps that of the *Basilica Nova*), with the emperor holding “the trophy of the Saviour’s Passion”, also termed “the Saviour’s sign”, with an attending inscription explaining that it was by means of “this salutary sign” that Rome was liberated from tyranny:

[A]nd straightway he gave orders that the *trophy* of the Saviour’s Passion should be set up in the hand of his own statue; and indeed when they set him in the most public place in Rome holding the Saviour’s sign in his right hand, he bade them engrave this very inscription in these words in the Latin tongue: “By this salutary sign, the true proof of bravery, I saved and

⁵⁷⁸ Eus. *HE* 9.9.2.

delivered your city from the yoke of the tyrant; and moreover I freed and restored to their ancient fame and splendour both the senate and the people of the Romans.⁵⁷⁹

It is reasonable to assume that by “the trophy of the Saviour’s Passion” Eusebius can only be referring to the cross,⁵⁸⁰ and that “the Saviour’s sign” and “salutary sign” are epithets for the cross as well. If Eusebius seems at all vague here as to the nature of the symbol, he is much more explicit in the corresponding passage in *Vita*:

He announced to all people in large lettering and inscriptions the sign of the Saviour, setting this up in the middle of the imperial city as a great trophy of victory over his enemies, explicitly inscribing this in indelible letters as the salvific sign of the authority of Rome and the protection of the whole empire. He therefore immediately ordered *a tall pole to be erected in the shape of a cross* in the hand of a statue made to represent himself, and this text to be inscribed upon it word for word in Latin: ‘By this salutary sign, the true proof of valour, I liberated your city, saved from the tyrant’s yoke; moreover the Senate and People of Rome I liberated and restored to their ancient splendour and brilliance.’ The Godbeloved Emperor, proudly confessing in this way *the victory-bringing cross*, was entirely open in making the Son of God known to the Romans.⁵⁸¹

The particular context here, which is absent from *Historia ecclesiastica*, suggests that the ‘sign’ held in the hand of the statue was similar to, if not the same as, the product of the

⁵⁷⁹ Eus. *HE* 9.9.10-11: ... αὐτίκα τοῦ σωτηρίου τρόπαιον πάθους ὑπὸ χεῖρα ἰδίας εἰκόνας ἀνατεθῆναι προστάττει, καὶ δὴ τὸ σωτήριον σημεῖον ἐπὶ τῇ δεξιᾷ κατέχοντα αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ μάλιστα τῶν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης δεδημοσιευμένῳ τόπῳ στήσαντας αὐτὴν δὴ ταύτην προγραφὴν ἐντάξαι ῥήμασιν αὐτοῖς τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἐγκελεύεται φωνῇ· “ τούτῳ τῷ σωτηριῳδῆι σημεῖῳ, 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 ”. Emphasis indicates my adjustment of the translation of Oulton, who renders τρόπαιον as “memorial”.

⁵⁸⁰ Singor, ‘Labarum’, 483, comments, “[t]his is Eusebian language for the sign of the cross”, though he adds that the object in the statue’s hand was probably just a *vexillum* with a banner that, he proposes (at 497), may have featured a stitched Chi-Rho monogram, thus representing “the earliest known form of the labarum”.

⁵⁸¹ Eus. *VC* 1.40- 41.1: γραφῇ τε μεγάλη καὶ στήλαις ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις τὸ σωτήριον ἀνεκέρυττε σημεῖον, μέση τῇ βασιλευούσῃ πόλει μέγα τρόπαιον τουτὶ κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων ἐγείρας, διαρρήδην δὲ ἀνεξαλείπτοις ἐγχαράξας τύποις σωτήριον τουτὶ σημεῖον τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς καὶ τῆς καθόλου βασιλείας φυλακτῆριον. αὐτίκα δ’ οὖν ὑψηλὸν δόρυ σταυροῦ σχήματι ὑπὸ χεῖρα ἰδίας εἰκόνας ἐν ἀνδριάντι κατειργασμένης τῶν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης δεδημοσιευμένων ἐν τόπῳ στήσαντας αὐτὴν δὴ ταύτην τὴν γραφὴν ῥήμασιν αὐτοῖς ἐγχαράξαι τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἐγκελεύεται φωνῇ· «Τούτῳ τῷ σωτηριῳδῆι σημεῖῳ τῷ ἀληθεῖ ἐλέγχῳ τῆς ἀνδρείας τὴν πόλιν ὑμῶν ζυγοῦ τυραννικοῦ διασωθεῖσαν ἠλευθέρωσα· ἔτι μὴν καὶ τὴν σύγκλητον καὶ τὸν δῆμον Ῥωμαίων τῇ ἀρχαίᾳ ἐπιφανείᾳ καὶ λαμπρότητι ἐλευθερώσας ἀποκατέστησα.» Ὁ μὲν οὖν θεοφιλῆς βασιλεὺς ὧδέ πη τῇ τοῦ νικοποιοῦ σταυροῦ ὁμολογία λαμπρυνόμενος σὺν παρρησίᾳ πάσῃ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ Ῥωμαίοις αὐτοῖς γνώριμον ἐποίησε. (Emphases mine.)

‘vision’ used by Constantine in the battle. The simplicity of the description of the monumental ‘sign’ – compared to the *Labarum* seen much later by Eusebius – indicates that this was some form of prototype, an early and basic construction which Constantine would ornament and elaborate in the years to come.⁵⁸² If so, this means that Eusebius understood the visionary ‘trophy of the cross’ as being the fundamental element of the *Labarum*, but at the very least it demonstrates without any ambiguity whatsoever that his various epithets for Constantine’s ‘sign’ are references to the cross, not the Chi-Rho monogram.

It is at this point that I must acknowledge a willful anachronism. Thus far in this study I have been using the term *Labarum* to refer to Constantine’s special standard, but it is necessary to note that Eusebius himself never refers to it by that name – rather, the sole occurrence of the term in *Vita* is in the chapter heading inserted by a later editor: “A description of the cross-shaped sign, which the Romans now call the *Labarum*”.⁵⁸³ Almost immediately upon introducing the Christian standard in *Vita*, Eusebius retreats to a variety of appellations for the cross and the *Labarum*, many of which are not only carried over from previous works, but also indicative of his inclination to conflate the two symbols with the result that overt references to the *Labarum* come to carry the theological connotations of the Christian cross. Thus, in *Vita*, Eusebius refers to Constantine’s cruciform standard and/or the

⁵⁸² At the end of his digression on the *Labarum*, Eusebius comments (at *VC* 1.32.1) “[b]ut these [things] were shortly later” (Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μικρὸν ὕστερον, which Av. Cameron and Hall render as, “[t]hat was, however, sometime later”). This is somewhat vague, since Eusebius discusses many aspects of the *Labarum* in the preceding chapter, and so it would appear to be left to the reader to decide what is to be included in the statement. Thus, proceeding backwards, it could refer to: the creation of replicas of the *Labarum* for the armies; its use as a military standard; and its appearance. Bremmer, ‘Vision’, 67, understands this as referring to its use in battle. However, I am inclined to read ταῦτα as referring to the closest neuter plural noun in the preceding chapter, ‘the replicas’ (τὰ ὁμοιώματα), rather than the entire description, since it simply does not make sense otherwise. Firstly, Eusebius’ statement that the “saving sign was always used by the Emperor for protection against every opposing and hostile force” would be rendered immediately false. Secondly, in the description of the civil war only a few chapters later Eusebius states explicitly (at 1.37.1) that the standard was carried by the army against Maxentius.

⁵⁸³ Eus. *VC* 1.31 (heading).

cross as: “the Saviour’s sign” (τὸ σωτήριον σημεῖον);⁵⁸⁴ “the salutary sign” (τὸ σωτηριώδει σημεῖον);⁵⁸⁵ “the saving and life-giving sign” (τὸ σωτήριον καὶ ζωοποιὸν σημεῖον);⁵⁸⁶ simply “the sign” (τὸ σημεῖον);⁵⁸⁷ “the Saviour’s trophy” (τὸ σωτήριον

⁵⁸⁴ Also translated as “the saving sign” or “the salutary sign: Eus. *VC* 1.31.3; 1.37.1; 1.40.1 [occurs twice, the second time without a definite article (“a saving sign”); cf. *HE* 9.9.10 and *LC* 9.8, in the latter instance also without an article]; 3.2.2; 3.3.1 (σημεῖον inserted by Heikel). Cf. *LC* 6.21, where the phrase appears with an attending interpretation that must mean the cross: “He [i.e. Christ] has revealed even His own Saving Sign, by which He prevailed over death and fashioned a triumph over His enemies” (τὸ αὐτοῦ σωτήριον ἀνέδειξε σημεῖον, δι’ οὗ τὸν θάνατον καταγωνισάμενος τὸν κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἤγειρε θρίαμβον). There are several other instances of this epithet in Eusebius’ tricennial oration where it would also appear to mean the cross. At *LC* 9.16, Eusebius gives a brief description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre complex (for a fuller account, see *VC* 3.29-40), noting the ornamentation of a “temple sacred to the Saving Sign” (νεῶς ... ἅγιον τῶ σωτηριῶ σημεῖω); cf. *SC* 18.3, where Eusebius describes the temple as a “trophy of His victory over death” (τρόπαιον τῆς κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου νίκης). At *LC* 9.17, he gives a brief account of the construction of the churches of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Ascension on the Mount of Olives (for a fuller account, see *VC* 3.41-43), and alludes to the cave at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well, claiming that Constantine constructed these “in order to herald the Saving Sign to all” (τὸ σωτήριον εἰς ἅπαντας ἀνακηρύττων σημεῖον), which is immediately followed (at 9.18) by its identification as “the Sign that, in turn, gives him [i.e. Constantine] compensation for his piety” (τὸ δὲ τῆς εὐσεβείας αὐτῶ τὰ ἀμοιβαῖα δωρούμενον). At *LC* 9.19, Eusebius further claims that Constantine’s successes are attributable to his use of, presumably, the *Labarum* – “Thus have the deeds of God become clear through the divine efficacy of the Saving Sign” (ὧδε θεοῦ κατεφαίνοντο πράξεις δι’ ἐνθέου ἀρετῆς τοῦ σωτηρίου σημεῖου) –, by which he clearly means to emphasise the cross-aspect of it, since he at once continues (at 10.1) with the comment: “About this Sign the account may be lengthy indeed when delivered by men initiated into the mysteries of divine knowledge. For this – remarkable as it is to say, and very remarkable to conceive – was truly salutary” (οὗ δὲ περὶ μακρὸς ἂν εἴη λόγος μύσταις θεολόγων ἀνδρῶν παραδεδομένους· καὶ γὰρ ἦν τουτὶ σωτήριον ἀληθῶς, θαῦμα μὲν εἰπεῖν πολὺ δὲ θαυμάσιον ἐννοῆσαι).

⁵⁸⁵ Eus. *VC* 1.40.2 (cf. *HE* 9.9.11). In both *Vita* and the *HE*, this phrase appears as Eusebius’ translation from Latin into Greek of the inscription attending the statue of Constantine in Rome; cf. Ruf. *HE* 9.9.11, who may have used the language of the inscription itself, rather than translating it back into Latin from Greek, and renders it *in hoc singulari signo* (“in this singular sign”), that is, it is ‘unique’ or ‘extraordinary’ – he does not carry over the sense of Eusebius’ translation. Nevertheless, Rufinus – either out of his understanding of Eusebius’ terminology or having viewed the statue personally – states (at 9.9.10) that the instrument in the statue’s hand was the *vexillum dominicae crucis* (“the *vexillum* of the Lord’s cross”), indicating not only that it was in the shape of a cross, but also that it had the appearance of a military standard.

⁵⁸⁶ Eus. *VC* 2.16.2. In *Vita* this epithet appears in the narrative of the civil war against Licinius, though it should be noted that he uses this same phrase at *LC* 9.8 in the context of Constantine’s statue in Rome.

⁵⁸⁷ For “the sign” as the cross: Eus. *VC* 1.29.1 (occurs twice); 1.30.1; 1.32.1; 1.32.2. Cf. *LC* 10.3, more implicitly, despite Eusebius’ elaboration: “Of such benefits to mankind the cause plainly is this great and wonderful Sign, through which all that was evil no longer exists, whereas what was not before now shines forth to all in rays of piety” (τοσοῦτων δῆτα παραίτιον ἀγαθῶν ἀνθρώποις τὸ μέγα τουτὶ καὶ παράδοξον ἀναπέφανται σημεῖον, δι’ οὗ τὰ μὲν οὐκ <έτ’> ἔστιν ὅσα φαῦλα, τὰ δὲ πρὶν οὐκ ὄντα νῦν παρὰ τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀκτίσιν εὐσεβείας ἐκλάμπει). The phrase also occurs at *VC* 3.60.9, in Constantine’s letter to the laity of Antioch; it may stand for the cross, but its meaning here is ambiguous. For “the sign” as the *Labarum*: *VC* 2.3.2 (dismissed by I.A. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke I* (Leipzig, 1902) 41, as a post-Eusebian gloss); 2.8.1 (occurs twice); 2.9.1 (occurs twice); 4.9. The meaning – cross or *Labarum* – depends on the context of the passages. In the first case, the use of the term seems confined to the ‘vision’ narrative. The second case is slightly more

τρόπαιον);⁵⁸⁸ “the victorious trophy” (τὸ νικητικὸν τρόπαιον);⁵⁸⁹ “the trophy of the cross” (τὸ σταυροῦ τρόπαιον);⁵⁹⁰ “the trophy of the Passion” (τὸ τοῦ πάθους τρόπαιον);⁵⁹¹ or simply “the trophy” (τὸ τρόπαιον).⁵⁹² In none of these instances does Eusebius seem to

complicated. For instance, the occurrences at 2.8.1 and 9.1 clearly refer to the *Labarum* (indeed, Av. Cameron and Hall translate it as “the standard”); they appear in the passages describing the preparations for the civil war against Licinius [whether first (316) or second (324) is unclear] and the miraculous protective powers of “the sign” witnessed in battle, both of which were supposedly reported to Eusebius by Constantine (cf. 8.2). However, Eusebius’ use of the term in these instances carries the double meaning of *Labarum* and cross, which is understandable since he perceives the latter as being the fundamental element of the former. This conflation is best seen at 4.9 – in Eusebius’ translation from Latin into Greek of Constantine’s letter to Shapur of Persia, the emperor is made to say that, “[t]he God I represent is the one whose sign my army, dedicated to God, carries on its shoulders” (τοῦτον τὸν θεὸν πρεσβεύω, οὗ τὸ σημεῖον ὁ τῷ θεῷ ἀνακείμενός μου στρατὸς ὑπὲρ τῶν ὤμων φέρει). Thus, σημεῖον here signifies simultaneously the sign of Constantine’s god (i.e. the cross) and the military standard (i.e. the *Labarum*); cf. 2.8.1, where Eusebius describes the special detachment of soldiers tasked with protecting the sign/standard as “taking it in turns to carry it on their shoulders” (ἀμοιβαίως ἐκάστου φέροντος αὐτὸ ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων), while he notes also in the next chapter (at 2.9.1) that the bearer of the sign/standard would carry it on their shoulder (τὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων φέροντα τὸ σημεῖον). An instance of particular note, the term σημεῖον appears in Licinius’ speech to his troops (at 2.5.2) at the beginning of the (first or second) civil war, which Eusebius claims (at 2.5.5) was reported to him by witnesses. Licinius is made to say that Constantine has shamed his army “with this god’s disgraceful sign” (αἰσχρῶ τε τούτου σημεῖω τὸν οἰκεῖον κατασχύνει στρατόν; Av. Cameron and Hall translate it as “emblem”). The term here must mean the cross and the particular qualifier “disgraceful” is likely in reference to the prevalent accusation levied against early Christians that they worshiped a person who died a criminal’s death, that is, by crucifixion. Cf. 3.1.2: “Next, they [i.e. the persecutors] mocked the Christ of God with blasphemous words; but the very thing the godless chiefly aimed their slanders at he [i.e. Constantine] endorsed as his victorious protection, taking pride in the trophy of the Passion” (εἶθ’ οἱ μὲν βλασφημοῖς τὸν Χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ διεχλεύαζον φωναῖς, ὁ δὲ ἐφ’ ᾧ μάλιστα οἱ ἄθεοι τὰς βλασφημίας ἐκίνουν τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ νικητικὸν ἐπεγράφετο φυλακτήριον, τῷ τοῦ πάθους σεμνυνόμενος τροπαίω).

⁵⁸⁸ Also translated as “the saving trophy” or “the salutary trophy”; Eus. *VC* 2.6.2; 2.7; 2.9.2; 2.16.1; 3.3.2; 4.21 (occurs twice). Cf. *LC* 9.14, where the phrase clearly means the *Labarum*, since Eusebius declares that Constantine triumphs under it.

⁵⁸⁹ Eus. *VC* 1.37.1; 3.2.2; 4.5.2. Cf. *LC* 6.21, where it is identified as the cross (see note above). A related term used in the tricennial oration (at 9.8), which does not appear in *Vita* or *Historia ecclesiastica*, is “the victory-bringing sign” (τὸ νικοποιὸν σημεῖον) for the *Labarum*, again with the implied significance of the cross; cf. *LC* 9.8 (Constantine’s statue in Rome) and 9.12 (Constantine’s use of the sign in military engagements). The latter instance in particular reveals that Eusebius has the *Labarum* as the cross in mind: the “sign” shows itself to be effective not only in defeating the persecuting emperors and pacifying ‘barbarians’, but it also drives away “invisible spirits” (ἀφανεῖς δαίμονες) and refutes “superstitious fraud” (δεισιδαίμων ἀπάτη).

⁵⁹⁰ Eus. *VC* 1.28.2; 1.31.2. Both occurrences are confined to the ‘vision’ narrative, the former as the form of the celestial-vision and the latter as a part of the *Labarum*.

⁵⁹¹ Eus. *VC* 3.1.2. This instance is one of the most explicit in *Vita* for Eusebius’ understanding of the *Labarum* as essentially equivalent to the cross. Cf. *HE* 9.9.10, where Eusebius calls the instrument held by Constantine’s statue the “trophy of the Saviour’s Passion”.

⁵⁹² For “the trophy” as the cross: *VC* 1.32.2, where the symbol of Constantine’s ‘vision’ is interpreted as Christ’s “trophy of the victory over death”. For “the trophy” as the *Labarum*: *VC* 1.40.1 (cf. *LC* 9.8); 2.9.2. Cf.

refer to the *Labarum* and mean at the same time the Chi-Rho, so these epithets should be considered distinct from Eusebius' phrase "the Saviour's title" (ἡ σωτήριος ἐπιγραφία) for the Chi-Rho monogram.⁵⁹³

As reflected in his language, Eusebius clearly understood the cross as being the central aspect of Constantine's standard – indeed, his epithets reveal an intentional double meaning, which at times amounts to a latent ambiguity. This does not mean, however, that a simple *tau*-cross was the core of the *Labarum*; this is simply how Eusebius communicated it according to his own religious sensibilities. Rather, his description of the fully elaborated *Labarum*, though it does highlight the cruciform shape of the standard, indicates that the basic structure was more than just the cross. According to Eusebius, on the morning of the dream-vision Constantine is supposed to have specifically summoned "goldsmiths and

LC 2.3, albeit in the plural. As with σημεῖον (see note above), when Eusebius uses τρόπαιον on its own to denote Constantine's standard, it carries the double meaning of *Labarum* and the cross.

⁵⁹³ Eus. *VC* 1.31.1; 3.2.2. R. Grigg, 'Constantine the Great and the Cult without Images', *Viator* 8 (1977) 1-32, at 4-5 and 20-1, contends that Eusebius' phrase "the saving sign" (though his discussion leads one to believe that he means the use of σημεῖον in general) is used both varyingly and sometimes simultaneously as a reference to the cross, the *Labarum*, and/or the Chi-Rho monogram; cf. Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 319, in support. This assertion, however, is made under the assumption that the Chi-Rho was not only the fundamental element of the *Labarum*, but the primary aspect of Constantinian symbolism, and that Eusebius understood it this way. Rather, as is evident from the examples and discussion above, Eusebius is fairly consistent in his use of the term σημεῖον (I should add here that in the notes above I have recorded every occurrence in *Vita*) – in the contexts of the 'vision' and Constantinian symbolism the term only ever means the cross or the *Labarum* as the cross and is differentiated from the "title" (ἐπιγραφία) or "name" (ὄνομα; *VC* 1.31.1) Christ. It is the term "trophy" (τρόπαιον), on the other hand, that is used in various ways by Eusebius, though never for the Chi-Rho. In addition to meaning the cross or the *Labarum* (or the *Labarum* as the cross), Eusebius uses it to refer also to military victories (e.g. *HE* 10.4.20; *VC* 1.11.1), the triumph of Christ over death (e.g. *LC* 9.16; *SC* 11.2), monuments to victories (e.g. *VC* 2.12.2), the Body of Christ as a trophy (e.g. *SC* 15.13), churches and oratories as monuments to Christ's triumph (e.g. *SC* 17.4), and relics (e.g. *HE* 2.25.7; *VC* 3.33.3), among other things. However, in the context of the *Labarum* – whether "the Saviour's trophy", "the victorious trophy", or some other variation – Eusebius intends it to bear the theological significance of Christ's Passion and victory over death. In denoting the *Labarum*, Eusebius' equivalence of the terms σημεῖον and τρόπαιον with both the cross and each other is most evident in his descriptions of the instrument held by the statue of Constantine in Rome; cf. *HE* 9.9.10-11 ("trophy of the Saviour's Passion" = "the Saviour's sign" = "the salutary sign"), *LC* 9.8 ("the saving and life-giving sign" = "the victory-bringing sign" = "the trophy" = "a saving sign"), and *VC* 1.40-41.1 ("the Saviour's sign" = "the trophy" = "a saving sign" = "a tall pole ... in the shape of a cross" = "the salutary sign" = "the victory-bringing cross"). See also Franchi de' Cavalieri, 'Ancora del labaro'.

jewellers” and provided them with the design as he had seen it in the sky and in his sleep, in order that they could recreate “the shape of the sign ... in gold and precious stones”. In the detailed description that follows, we are told: that the pole and crossbar, which constituted the ‘trophy of the cross’, were gilded; that the wreath attached to the top of the cross was “woven of precious stones and gold”; that on the tapestry hanging from the crossbar there was a pattern of “precious stones fastened together ... and interwoven with much gold”; and, finally, that the imperial effigies on the pole beneath the tapestry were made of gold.

Immediately noticeable is that the only element of the *Labarum* that is not described as gilded or jewelled is the Chi-Rho monogram. Eusebius is fairly meticulous in noting how each part of the *Labarum* was ornamented, so it is interesting that he says very little about how the Chi-Rho was manufactured. Without his clarification we cannot go so far as to conclude that it was jewelled, but at the very least it may be assumed that it too was made of gold, in order to conform to the overall aesthetic of the symbol. Despite what such an assumption may grant us, there is good reason to suppose that the Chi-Rho was developed separately and, although incorporated into the *Labarum*, extraneous to the original design. When describing the Chi-Rho – the third element of his description – Eusebius notes that Constantine “also used to wear [these letters] upon his helmet in later times”, seemingly under the impression that the symbol appeared first on the *Labarum* and was sometime afterward applied to the helmet. The Ticinum silver-medallion of 315, the earliest appearance of the Chi-Rho in any Constantinian media, would appear to confirm Eusebius’ statement regarding the helmet, though “in later times” is too indistinct to conclude that he was aware of this representation. Nevertheless, Eusebius’ description and the Ticinum medallion would indeed affirm that the Chi-Rho was exceptional: if Constantine was inclined to remove the monogram from the context of the *Labarum* and apply it to other

contexts, such as his helmet, it indicates that the monogram was not bound exclusively to the standard. However, an important distinction needs to be made here. As demonstrated above, it was the cross – not the Chi-Rho – that constituted the central element of the *Labarum*, which is how Eusebius and his readers received it. It is not the case that the emperor created or adopted the Chi-Rho (as a result of the ‘vision’ or otherwise) and built the standard around it, but rather that the monogram was incorporated into the design of the “cross-shaped trophy”, perhaps at a point in Constantine’s religious development when he became ever more convinced that his protective deity was the Christian god.⁵⁹⁴

Whether deriving from Constantine’s report or solely from his own examination of the standard (very likely the latter), Eusebius includes the Chi-Rho as an element of the *Labarum* with the implication that it featured the monogram from the beginning. To be sure, it cannot be said which came first, the Chi-Rho on the standard or on Constantine’s helmet. However, what should be clear – if the description of a simple cross being held by the emperor’s statue in Rome is any indication – is that the object that Eusebius saw in later years was the *Labarum* after decades of elaboration, a process that at some point came to include the monogram for Christ, possibly to act as an indication of the god that it signified. This process of elaboration is best seen in another, more obvious feature of the standard: the golden effigies of Constantine and his (unidentified and unnumbered) sons.⁵⁹⁵ These too Eusebius includes as if they were part of the standard’s original appearance, perhaps not

⁵⁹⁴ Av. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 210, regard the Chi-Rho as a decorative element, not part of the original design. See, however, A. Lucaszewicz, ‘À propos du symbolisme impérial romain au IV^e siècle: Quelques remarques sur le christogramme’, *Historia* 39 (1990) 504-6, who proposes that the cruciform standard derives from the celestial-vision, while the Chi-Rho identifies the deity that appeared.

⁵⁹⁵ Bardill, *Constantine*, 160, suggests that this was to legitimise the standard as an imperial tool, adding that the banner and Chi-Rho may also have been added at some later point.

realising that the ages of the Caesars in fact contradicted its appearance before ca. 317 (though it is possible that he was aware that his description was anachronistic).⁵⁹⁶

There is, however, a yet subtler feature of the emperor's special standard mentioned by Eusebius that is also most likely an addition to the original design: the decorative tapestry. The incorporation of the tapestry adds an interesting dimension to the *Labarum*; Eusebius is both particular and vague in his portrayal of the cloth hanging from the transverse arm of the cross, describing it as “covered with a pattern of precious stones fastened together, which glittered with shafts of light, and interwoven with much gold, producing an impression of indescribably beauty on those who saw it”. A suspended cloth is not an unusual feature of Roman *vexilla*, but Eusebius' emphasis on the dramatic, visual quality of the tapestry leads one to assume that it was constructed in this way to produce a desired optical effect.⁵⁹⁷ If Constantine did indeed witness a solar halo, the ornamented cloth “glittering with shafts of

⁵⁹⁶ Crispus was Constantine's only son in 312, Constantine II being born in 316, Constantius II in 317, and Constans in 323. The argument that the *Labarum* could only have come about ca. 327 does not take certain factors into due account, primarily because it is based on the supposition that the standard depicted on the SPES-PUBLIC Constantinople series is the earliest representation, literary or artistic, of the *Labarum*. In this case, as pointed out by Singor, ‘Labarum’, 497, such an argument depends on the appearance of the standard being unchanging since its construction. As I have discussed above, this representation – if indeed it is the *Labarum* – should not be considered accurate, since Eusebius states that the effigies were on the pole below the tapestry. Assuming for the moment that the medallions do represent imperial busts, there should be four depicted, not three; unless portrayals on the standard were restricted to Caesars, Constans should be pictured alongside his father and two brothers, who are normally assumed to be the three individuals depicted. Even then, we can assume that after the elevation of Constans in 333 his effigy would have been added, thus making its appearance subject to alteration. Finally, the Constantinople series is not the first that we hear about the *Labarum*. Eusebius refers to it in his *HE* ca. 315/316 as the object in the hand of Constantine's statue, using the same terminology that he employs throughout *Vita* (including the corresponding passage in *Vita* concerning the statue) to mean the *Labarum*; cf. B. Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, 2nd ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2003) 61-2. Additionally, in both works Eusebius' description of the object held by the statue suggests that it was very simplistic, which again indicates that its appearance was subject to change. As to the earliest artistic representation, Bardill, *Constantine*, 177-8, has proposed that the cruciform pole surmounted by a roundel – normally taken to depict a sceptre – pictured on the reverse of the Ticinum medallion may be the early *Labarum*, hence 315; cf. Ehling, ‘Christogramm’, 29-32, who states that it is most likely a sceptre with a globe, similar to one discovered recently in Rome and attributed to Maxentius [see C. Panella, ‘Imperial Insignia from the Palatine Hill’, in J.-J. Aillagon (ed.), *Rome and the Barbarians* (Milan, 2008) 86-91 and 611-3; id. (ed.), *I segni del potere* (Bari, 2011)].

⁵⁹⁷ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 254, is compelling in his suggestion that the tapestry “was designed to represent what he [i.e. Constantine] had experienced”.

light” to produce “an impression of indescribable beauty” may very well have been designed to recreate the shimmering reflection and refraction of light produced by the ice crystals falling in front of the sun. Together with the other gemmed and gilded elements of the *Labarum*, the military standard could thus imitate somewhat the meteorological event he had witnessed – an attempt, perhaps, to follow as literally as possible the divine exhortation “to make himself a copy of the sign which had appeared in the sky”.⁵⁹⁸

Should we remove those elements of the *Labarum* that are clearly extraneous – being interpretive features, later additions, and/or decorative – we arrive at the basic structure of the symbol. The result, it would seem, is not simply a gilded *tau*-cross forming the upright pole and transverse arm of the standard, but also the gilded and gemmed wreath fixed immediately above the crossbar. That these two features should be the very first two elements given by Eusebius in his description of the standard – the cross and surmounting wreath constituted the basic skeleton of Constantine’s divine symbol, which came to include the Chi-Rho, ornamented tapestry, and imperial effigies. The fundamental appearance, then, of Eusebius’ *Labarum* would seem to be something akin to an Egyptian *ankh* or a *crux ansata*, which is perhaps supported by the primary interpretation offered by Constantine’s

⁵⁹⁸ It is often neglected that Eusebius says that the gold and gems formed a pattern. D. Woods, Postumus and the Three Suns: Neglected Numismatic Evidence for a Solar Halo’, *NC* 172 (2012) 85-92, has recently made the convincing argument that the two AETERNITAS AVG series of the emperor Postumus (260-269) minted in autumn 261 and depicting three busts of Sol – one front-facing and one on either side facing inward – were intended to commemorate a solar halo, with the centre Sol indicating the real sun and the outside Sols the mock suns. From this Woods hypothesises (at 90-1) that the three medallions on the tapestry of the Constantinople SPES-PVBLIC coin may represent three suns or three busts of Sol. I myself started thinking along similar lines a couple of years ago when browsing the sixteenth-century *History of the Northern Peoples* by Olaus Magnus and noticed his illustration of a solar halo as three ringed circles in a horizontal row, the centre ring featuring a sun with emanating rays and forward-facing facial features, and on the far edges of the other two circles a smaller sun with fewer rays facing inward (perhaps indicating the concentrated points of light on each mock sun); see Olaus *Hist.* 1.17. In light of Woods’ study, I have no doubt that the medallions loosely depict the unspecified pattern on the tapestry; if not some creative depictions of Sol, then an artistic representation of the three suns Constantine viewed in the sky.

‘Christian experts’ that “the sign which appeared was a token of immortality”.⁵⁹⁹ Although the cross in its various forms could, and indeed did, signify for Christians Christ’s victory over death by virtue of the Passion and hence immortality, this particular interpretation of the symbol may have been in response to its very appearance.

The correlation between Constantine’s symbol and the *ankh/crux ansata* need not have been made as early as the ‘vision’ or the construction of the *Labarum*, as Eusebius states it was; the similarity was bound to be pointed out, and sooner rather than later as the emperor’s contact with learned Christians from different areas of the Empire intensified following the Battle of Milvian Bridge.⁶⁰⁰ At the very least, it would have been mentioned to the emperor, if he was not already aware, that the *tau* shape held great significance for Christians. Regardless of whether or not the *crux ansata* was an already established symbol in the early fourth century, it is not inconceivable that contemporary Christians, being just as prone as anyone to interpret symbols according to their cultural inclinations, would have understood Constantine’s sign as a representation of the crucifixion. Proceeding from that observance, even if Constantine learned only later about the parallels between his divine symbol and the *ankh/crux ansata*, he could nevertheless have retrospectively applied that knowledge to the ‘vision’ story he reported to Eusebius near the end of his life, claiming that the sign was interpreted immediately as “a token of immortality”.

More pointedly, however, such an appearance agrees largely with Lactantius’ description of the symbol on the soldiers’ shields, provided that *circumflexus* is taken to mean that the entire upper arm of the transverse Chi was turned around in a circle. The

⁵⁹⁹ Eus. *VC* 1.32.2. Consider the interpretations reported by Rufinus, Socrates, and Sozomen that the *ankh* meant “the life to come”.

⁶⁰⁰ Singor, ‘Labarum’, 495-6, proposes that this happened perhaps as early as 311 as a result of Constantine’s association with the bishops of Arelate, Autun, and Cologne.

fundamental similarities between the ‘vision’ accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius are already too close to ignore, especially now with the reintroduction of the hypothesis that Lactantius’ *caeleste signum dei* may be a passing reference to a celestial-vision. The tendency to prefer Eusebius’ description of the Constantinian symbol is not inherently incorrect, but the misapprehension of his description of the form of the sign derived from the ‘vision’ has had a direct and tremendous effect on how Lactantius’ account has been understood. Attempts to contort Lactantius’ description in order to arrive at something that conforms to Eusebius’ Chi-Rho – even when it is realised that Eusebius is describing some form of cross – have distorted the fact that both accounts are quite clear that the symbol which Constantine reportedly saw in the sky or his dream was not a Chi-Rho. Although the Chi-Rho plays an important part in Constantinian symbolism and is perhaps connected to the emperor’s claimed visionary experience, aside from Alföldi and the resultant layman tradition it is not generally recognised as being the substance of the ‘vision’. Lactantius may be trying to describe a staurogram, but it is quite plausible that he is indicating something similar to an *ankh/crux ansata* – or, in Eusebius’ words, “[a] tall pole” with “a transverse bar forming the shape of a cross” and “at the extreme top a wreath”.

Thus, we can include one more element – perhaps the most significant one – to the list of similarities between the two accounts: both authors describe a celestial-vision (Lactantius, albeit, indistinctly); a dream-vision, in which there is personal contact with a divinity; a divine promise of victory; a token representation of that divine promise, which Constantine is instructed to recreate; and, now, the same divine sign that could, regardless of its original meaning, be interpreted as signifying ‘Christ’. I have already accounted for Lactantius’ claim that the dream-vision occurred just prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge in Chapter Two, so the only remaining point of dissension between the two accounts regards

the symbol's medium: Lactantius states that the symbol was placed on the soldiers' shields and makes no mention of an ornate standard, whereas Eusebius makes no mention of shields and states that the *Labarum* was constructed immediately. According to the protocols of historical inquiry Lactantius is certainly to be preferred, given the earliness of his account, since Eusebius' rather late description is likely to have suffered some distortion, especially if the emperor's report to him had more to do with the civil wars against Licinius than the victory over Maxentius. However, a partial explanation is to be found in a passage later in *Vita*: "Furthermore he [i.e. Constantine] caused the sign of the saving trophy to be marked on their shields, and had the army led on parade, not by any of the golden images, as had been their past practice, but by the saving trophy alone".⁶⁰¹ Important to note here is that Eusebius claims that, in the place of regular military insignia, these military parades were led by "the saving trophy" and it is presumably the same "saving trophy" which was placed on the soldiers' shields. As discussed above, Eusebius employs τὸ σωτήριον τρόπαιον as an epithet for the *Labarum*, Constantine's divine symbol turned military standard, and not the Chi-Rho. We can imagine, then, that the shields did not feature depictions of an ornamented military standard complete with tapestries and effigies. Rather, they would have portrayed rudimentary images of the *Labarum* in its unelaborated form, in which case Lactantius' description holds weight. Had Lactantius – or, more likely, his source(s) – viewed such a procession, the symbol on the shields would have made a striking impression; and Lactantius, either unaware of the *Labarum* at the time he was writing or finding the creation

⁶⁰¹ Eus. *VC* 4.21: "Ἡδὴ δὲ καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ὀπλῶν τὸ τοῦ σωτηρίου τροπαιοῦ σύμβολον κατασημαίνεσθαι ἐποίησε, τοῦ τε ἐνόπλου στρατοῦ προπομπεύειν χρυσῶν μὲν ἀγαλμάτων, ὅποια πρότερον αὐτοῖς ἔθος ἦν, τὸ μὴθέν, μόνον δὲ τὸ σωτήριον τρόπαιον. Cf. P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, 'Il labaro descritto da Eusebio', *StudRom* 1 (1913) 161-88, at 182-3.

of the standard incompatible with his particular chronology for the dream-vision, became attached to the idea that symbol was initially employed only on the shields.

As a final musing, Bardill has recently given renewed support for Richard Delbrück's identification of a porphyry sarcophagus situated in the atrium of the Hagia Eirene (Istanbul; sarcophagus no. 608) as belonging to Constantine.⁶⁰² Interestingly, it is the only porphyry sarcophagus that shows evidence of ornamentation on the outside, suggesting special veneration of the occupant: drilled sockets on the flank indicate a solar symbol with thirteen emanating rays, while sockets on the lid outline a Patriarchal Cross with the ends of the upper, shorter crossbar indented.⁶⁰³ The Patriarchal Cross indicates that this decoration, at least, was installed sometime after the early eighth century, which is consistent with the Byzantine veneration of Constantine as a saint. However, what Bardill considers to be most suggestive for the identification of this sarcophagus is the original relief carved into the eastern, gable end of the lid: a *crux ansata* with a Chi-Rho monogram placed inside the circular loop.⁶⁰⁴

This relief, Bardill argues, is a representation of the *Labarum*; elaborated, as Eusebius viewed it, with the Chi-Rho, but without the ornate tapestry and imperial effigies. The proposition is reasonable: Constantine would certainly have had a hand in the decoration of his own sarcophagus, and quite understandably would have requested that the instrument which had brought him significant victories and served ostensibly as a demonstration of his piety be represented. However, as I have concluded in this section, the *Labarum* was not simply a structure to house or complement the symbol that Constantine believed he had seen

⁶⁰² R. Delbrück, *Antike Porphyrwerke* (Berlin, 1932) 223-4 ; cf. Bardill, *Constantine*, 187-94.

⁶⁰³ Bardill, *Constantine*, 190-2, with figs. 125-6.

⁶⁰⁴ Bardill, *Constantine*, 192-4, with fig. 127.

in the sky and in his sleep – it *was* the divine symbol on a larger scale; exaggerated in size, elaborated, and ornamented. Rather than the *Labarum*, it seems more probable that Constantine would have directed the divine symbol itself, upon which his special standard was based, to be represented on his sarcophagus. The relief, I would venture, is likely closer to the symbol that Lactantius claims was depicted on the shields, with the exception of the Chi-Rho, which was not originally an element of the divine sign, but was included here – as on the *Labarum* – as an indication of the god whose sign Constantine considered it to be.

In the endeavour to reconcile the similar yet somewhat conflicting accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius, the nature and design of the symbol that Constantine derived from his ‘vision’ experience has been a consistent stumbling block – one that, as I offer here, it is certainly possible to remove without recourse to alteration or emendation. With the resolution of Lactantius’ chronology and the meaning of *caeleste signum dei*, this would mean that both authors are indeed giving accounts of the same episode, though they approached it from different perspectives. The issue of perspective is equally important in the next section as well – having demonstrated that Lactantius and Eusebius are referring to the same experience, it remains to be shown how the vision of Apollo fits into the equation.

Reconciling the Vision of Apollo

While the same core elements of the ‘vision’ accounts of Lactantius and Eusebius – namely, a dream-vision, direct contact with a divinity, a divine promise of victory, and a token representation of that promise – are also apparent in the vision narrative of Panegyric 6, the precise nature of the relationship between this early account and the later version(s) is not as readily apparent. At the very least, the similarities would suggest that the panegyrist’s account – being not just the earliest portrayal, but emerging shortly after the experience it

claims to describe – is representative of the most elementary stage of the Vision legend. The later accounts would certainly seem to support this: despite the potential for variability, the retention of these elements shows them to be essential to the tradition. As such, we can reasonably attribute the flexibility of the story to shifts in historical context, as well as the perspectives of its authors; that is, the details of the tradition were subject to change as circumstances and its reporters did.

Perhaps the most basic and jarring obstacle to linking the three accounts is the religious character of the vision of Apollo, which is at odds with the popular tradition. Put simply, the question of the importance of Panegyric 6 can be rendered, what does some spurious ‘pagan’ tale have to do with an established Christian tradition? In a sense, this is the question that both Grégoire and Weiss address,⁶⁰⁵ and although they both conclude that Panegyric 6 is a precursor of sorts for the Christian tradition, their inquiries have resulted in considerably different perspectives. Grégoire’s appreciation for the early account prompted him to argue that the later Christian versions were independent and unsanctioned reactions to the vision of Apollo, which Lactantius and (pseudo-)Eusebius hijacked and manipulated in order to serve their own religious agendas. Weiss, on the other hand, quite ingeniously argues for a healthy compromise between the sources, placing responsibility for the development of the legend squarely on Constantine. The vision of Apollo stands again as the precursor to a central component of the overall tradition (the celestial-vision), but the shift from ‘pagan’ to Christian is dependent on the progress of the emperor’s own journey of religious discovery.

⁶⁰⁵ To be sure, no such question has been posed outright. However, the vision of Apollo had been noted prior to Grégoire’s introduction of it into the Vision debate (despite his insistence that he had ‘discovered’ it) – the fact that prior to Grégoire nobody had envisioned a connection, to my mind, presupposes the question.

My own investigations throughout this study have led to a different explanation for the shift from ‘pagan’ to Christian, which – although not intentional – is in some ways a compromise of the conclusions of Grégoire and Weiss. The interests of the ancient authors are certainly represented in all three accounts, but whereas the antipodal versions of the panegyrist and Eusebius likely reflect Constantine’s own religious positions in 309 and 336 respectively, Lactantius’ account tells us more about his own religious perspective than the religious character of the tradition ca. 315 (or 312, respectively). Lactantius actually contributes little in determining when such a shift took place, except to show that it was perhaps not as sudden – or as early! – as might be assumed.

Such a resolution, however, is of moderate significance without firmer verification that the panegyrist is indeed referring to the same experience as Lactantius and Eusebius. The elements shared by all three accounts demonstrate that a connection does indeed exist, but in order to strengthen this relationship two main issues require resolution. Firstly, there is the question of chronology. As I have outlined in previous chapters, Eusebius’ chronology is to be preferred for both the celestial and dream-visions, which he places successively in Gaul with a relative dating of between spring 308 and late 311. It should not be taken lightly that Panegyric 6 falls within this timeframe. Even so, these chronologies need to be aligned more precisely to show that they are referring to the same episode.⁶⁰⁶

On account of his temporal proximity and subject matter, the relative chronology provided by the panegyrist for the vision of Apollo is considerably more focussed, despite the omission of specific locations and landmarks. These details were probably rendered unnecessary by previous public presentations on the topic, with the result that this orator

⁶⁰⁶ Since much of the material over the next several pages have been discussed and referenced at length in previous chapters, I will refrain from reproducing footnotes or restating arguments for certain premises.

could be confident that his reference, for example, to “the most beautiful temple in the world” would be perfectly adequate for his audience, while producing extensive details on lesser-known matters, such as the revolt of Maximian, about which he was certainly the first to speak. According to the version of events that the panegyrist sets out, the vision occurred while Constantine was marching back to the Rhine frontier following the failed revolt and death of Maximian. Thus, it follows that the vision, which likely took place at Granum, happened sometime between late spring and mid summer 309. Conversely, Eusebius, writing nearly thirty years after the fact, gives an extremely detailed account of the ‘vision’ itself, but his relative chronology is considerably broader. I must note here, however, as I have in Chapter Three, that Eusebius’ chronology is only broad because of the sorts of temporal cues that he provides. Although he states distinctly that the ‘vision’ occurred before Constantine began making preparations for the Italian campaign, which I have cautiously rendered as late 311, the *terminus post quem* is complicated by the fact that Eusebius, drawing primarily on the emperor himself as his source, situates the episode in relation to Constantine’s private thoughts – the ‘vision’ occurred at a time when Constantine began to seriously consider waging civil war against Maxentius. The *Vita* narrative shows that in later years Constantine clearly imagined himself as wanting to ‘liberate’ Rome from the very beginning of Maxentius’ reign, though our knowledge of the complex relationship between Constantine, Maximian, and Maxentius in those early years complicates this desired legacy. Nevertheless, Lactantius’ narrative would seem to support the notion that fairly soon after the Battle of Milvian Bridge the ‘vision’ tradition had come to adopt the civil war as its primary context, indicating that on some level this actually was the case. While it seems more reasonable to me to locate this after the death of Maximian, since it cannot be said exactly when

Constantine began to contemplate civil war I have cautiously put forward spring 308, when Maximian was exiled from Rome by Maxentius and fled to Gaul.

I believe that it is, quite ironically, in Eusebius' most ambiguous and seemingly unhelpful detail that we might find the greatest elucidation in his chronology. Although Eusebius provides no specifics as to the date or location of the 'vision', there is much to be read, I think, into his statement that the celestial-vision occurred when Constantine was marching with his army "somewhere" (ποῖ).⁶⁰⁷ In the years preceding the Italian campaign Constantine was consistently on the move, oftentimes with his army, so ποῖ is far from revelatory.⁶⁰⁸ Interpretations of this detail have generally been restricted to the realm of credibility, in both directions. So, for instance, Jones supposes that it offers a hint of authenticity for the story and its source, since Eusebius, unlike Lactantius, does not attempt to situate the 'vision' at some "dramatic moment",⁶⁰⁹ while others have viewed this vagueness as consistent with invention, either on the part of Constantine or Eusebius.⁶¹⁰ Although both positions have their merits, the use of ποῖ here seems more than just intentionally vague – it is purposefully vague as well. In the previous chapter I proposed that Eusebius employed this description in order to create a similarity with Paul and his experience on the road to Damascus by emphasising Constantine's liminal position at the time of the celestial-vision and providing him with travelling companions. However, as the

⁶⁰⁷ Eus. *VC* 1.28.2: "Amazement at the spectacle seized both him and the whole company of soldiers which was then accompanying him on a campaign he was conducting somewhere, and witnessed the miracle" (θάμβος δ' ἐπὶ τῷ θεάματι κρατῆσαι αὐτόν τε καὶ τὸ στρατιωτικὸν ἅπαν, ὃ δὴ στελλομένῳ ποῖ πορείαν συνείπετό τε καὶ θεωρὸν ἐγένετο τοῦ θαύματος).

⁶⁰⁸ See Barnes, *New Empire*, 69-70, with id., *Constantine*, 71-3, for a concise overview.

⁶⁰⁹ Jones, *Constantine*, 96.

⁶¹⁰ For instance, Bremmer, 'Vision', 65, identifies Constantine as the responsible party; Elliott, *Christianity*, 68, Eusebius.

man behind the stylus there are a number of ways that Eusebius could have constructed this element of the scenario. This detail, then, is likely to be one that he carried over from Constantine's report; perhaps not the word *προι* itself, but the sense of it. While its omission would have been inconsequential to the overall narrative, its inclusion smacks of willful evasion – thus, *προι* serves a double purpose.

In the face of such deliberate imprecision, two assumptions are natural: either Constantine simply did not remember where and when he viewed the celestial-vision or he (and Eusebius by proxy) was being actively deceptive. The former is decidedly not plausible, since it would require that Constantine be completely forgetful of not the details, but the context of what he understood as one of the most formative events of his life and reign. Given the nature of the story, the latter is more probable: Constantine may very well have wanted to avoid a connection with a previous 'vision' tradition. This was argued, for instance, recently by Jan Bremmer, who contends that Constantine intentionally distorted the chronology in his report to Eusebius, placing the 'vision' non-specifically before 312, in order to avoid a clash between this new version and the "too well attested" version produced by Lactantius.⁶¹¹

We have already discussed the emperor's efforts, evident as early as 324/325, to reinvent himself and his family as Christian, and thus this could be viewed as yet another attempt by Constantine to revise his personal history so as to make himself seem not just sympathetic to Christianity, but beholden to the Christian god from an early point in his reign. Even so, it does not seem realistic to me that Constantine would be concerned with overriding a previous version. Firstly, one would have to assume that the version given by

⁶¹¹ Bremmer, 'Vision', 65-7 (quote at 67).

Lactantius was actually well-known. Eusebius – arguably, one of the most learned men of his day – was seemingly unaware of it not only when writing his *Historia ecclesiastica*, but also when he delivered his tricennial oration in July 336. It is also noteworthy that Lactantius is the only contemporary, post-312 account to locate a divine encounter after the Italian campaign had been launched.⁶¹² Secondly, we have to consider how plausible it is that Eusebius, bombarded as he was by Constantine’s oaths, would have been inclined to reject the personal account of the emperor himself. Though Eusebius was not aware of any version in particular, there were apt to be several in circulation, which preserved the core elements of the main tradition, but varied in level of detail and presentation (literal, abstract, etc). Their influence, however, would have been limited to occasion, region, audience, and access.⁶¹³ Eusebius, or any contemporary for that matter, if aware of one or several versions, would probably have accepted Constantine’s account as a correction or clarification. Should there have indeed been an already popular tradition of Christ visiting the emperor in his sleep with

⁶¹² See *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.5, 3.3, and 4.1, where the panegyrist alludes, not to a vision, but the emperor’s personal contact with divine powers before the Italian campaign; Eus. *HE* 9.9.2, who states that Constantine secured the assistance of the Christian god prior to entering Italy; and *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).14, which claims divine assistance was given to Constantine while he was still in Gaul. Eusebius does claim that Constantine conversed with divine powers on other occasions, but these experiences were not of the same sort as the ‘vision’ and the implication is that they occurred after the Battle of Milvian Bridge; cf. *VC* 2.12.

⁶¹³ See, for example, K.A.E. Enekel and I.L. Pfeijffer, ‘Introduction’, in id. (eds.), *The Manipulative Mode* (Leiden, 2005) 1-12, especially at 2-9, who point out that discussions about ‘propaganda’ in Antiquity border on anachronism, chiefly because the term carries with it the modern conception of the centrally approved and systematic dissemination of information to a broad audience through some form of mass media. This is to say, with respect to the present topic, that what was reported by a panegyrist in Rome or published out of Nicomedia would not thereafter (or perhaps ever) become available in Caesarea or Constantinople. Rather, sporadic descriptions of Constantine’s experience would have been quite limited to time and place, and if circulated, would have been restricted to those who had access to those sources, be it oration or text. As such, should Eusebius have been aware of one or several versions of the tradition, he likely would have regarded Constantine as something of a ‘primary source’.

a promise of victory and a divine sign, the shift in chronology would not have been enough to dissuade one from making a connection with the pre-existing version.⁶¹⁴

Considering the geography and relative chronology provided in *Vita*, the more reasonable conclusion would be that Constantine may have been attempting to supplant the ‘vision of Apollo’. This version may have also been unknown to Eusebius, but Constantine’s relationship with Apollo as Sol Invictus had been well propagated in imperial media for much of his reign, and so this would be consistent with the emperor’s efforts to reinvent himself as a Christian. In addition to providing assurance that the ‘vision’ in fact occurred, Constantine’s oaths to Eusebius may also have pertained to its interpretation, namely, that it was Christ who had appeared. It does not seem likely that Constantine’s ambiguity was intended to avoid mentioning the sanctuary of Apollo Grannus, since this detail is simply omitted from the dream report. Rather, *παι* appears to pertain precisely to the circumstances of the march and it is here that the true purpose of Constantine’s prevarication may be realised: to the best of our knowledge there is only one occasion in the early years of Constantine’s reign when he would have been marching with his army that by 336 he and his court would have become very accustomed to never mentioning: the revolt and execution of Maximian.⁶¹⁵ In addition to the purpose it serves for Eusebius’ narrative, I propose here that

⁶¹⁴ The potential for dismissing the *Vita* ‘vision’ is evident, for instance, in the fifth-century report of Sozomen, who provides both Eusebius’ version and the pedestrian version known to him. Rufinus, despite acting as Eusebius’ translator, also incorporates details of his own. Additionally, see Gel. *HE* 1.3-7, who describes a celestial-vision, but places it near Rome. It would seem that, even by the late fourth and fifth century there was no uniform ‘popular version’ being perpetuated empire-wide, though certain core elements are very much apparent. The idea of a ‘popular version’ is further complicated by the significantly divergent *Actus Silvestri* version, which though only composed in the late fifth or early sixth century, likely has its roots in the late fourth century.

⁶¹⁵ This “somewhere” cannot be intended to avoid mention of the sanctuary of Apollo Grannus, since it is specifically in reference to the celestial-vision seen while on the road. As to the dream-vision, Constantine (and Eusebius) simply omits that detail.

the emperor's original dislocation was intended not to avoid an association being made with this previous version of the 'vision', but to avoid mentioning the events that transpired around it.⁶¹⁶

The unfortunate situation with Maximian was so effectively concealed following the Battle of Milvian Bridge that in *Vita* Eusebius situates it in his narrative between the defeat of Maxentius and Constantine's *decennalia*.⁶¹⁷ Either the imperial court's campaign was a tremendous success, in which case Eusebius may not have fully appreciated the emperor's imprecision, or he knew all too well Constantine's intent and assisted in the concealment. In either case, the similarities in the narratives of the panegyrist and Eusebius – not just their relative chronologies, but also the nature, elements, and interpretations of the incident(s) – tend heavily towards both sources being differing descriptions of the same episode; the indefinite “somewhere”, then, can be explained without recourse to dismissing the *Vita* account as a wholesale fabrication.

Yet the second and most intriguing obstacle in aligning the two narratives remains: the conspicuous absence of the celestial-vision – featured so prominently in *Vita* – in the panegyrist's narrative. As I concluded in Chapter One, the panegyrist's description is inclined towards a more intimate affair, better befitting a dream-vision at the sanctuary of Apollo Grannus than a celestial manifestation appearing openly to the emperor and his army while on the road. Even abstractly, a solar halo does not support the sorts of details that the panegyrist offers, nor does it account for the bizarre dream elements that seem to be

⁶¹⁶ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 178, suggests that Constantine invaded Italy because he considered civil war “inevitable” following the death of Maximian. If so, this would certainly satisfy the chronological conditions set by Eusebius, since Constantine would most certainly have had cause to mull over civil war while on the march back to the Rhine frontier.

⁶¹⁷ Eus. *VC* 1.47.1. Even in 313/314 Eusebius was only able to locate Maximian's death loosely in the aftermath of the Conference at Carnuntum; cf. *HE* 8.13.14-15.

incorporated into the description. That said, it is here that I must acknowledge a particular debt to Weiss. I do not agree that the experience described by the panegyrist is a solar halo; on this I believe he is most certainly wrong. However, he is also most certainly correct that Constantine witnessed such a phenomenon around that time. Weiss' ingenious hypothesis brings all the evidence together in a way that makes the most sense. Still, this is not what the panegyrist describes. Although the modern expectation might be that the story of a solar halo – “a really spectacular display”, as Weiss puts it – would have made an impressive addition to the panegyric,⁶¹⁸ we should consider the culture of the day and address a very real practical concern that would have confronted the panegyrist, as well as Constantine and his court. For the orator, speaking not long after the event, it may simply have been considered too recent to discuss it – to be sure, not too recent to describe such a thing with accuracy, but to avoid misinterpretation.

Generally, in Antiquity celestial manifestations, whether atmospheric or cosmic, were considered portents of immense importance for the imperial office. The emperor Vespasian (69-79) is a widely noted example of the reception of such phenomena for his humorous rebuke of a foreboding comet in 79, incidentally the year that he died.⁶¹⁹ When informed that the comet was a sign of his impending death, the emperor wittily replied that it must be intended for the king of Parthia because, like the king, the comet had long hair, whereas he himself was bald.⁶²⁰ Much the same, solar halos were considered to be portents of future

⁶¹⁸ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 250.

⁶¹⁹ Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 66.17.3. On the ancient reception of comets, see S.S. Genuth, *Comets, Popular Culture, and the Birth of Modern Cosmology* (Princeton, 1997) 17-26.

⁶²⁰ Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 41.16) and Eutropius (*Brev.* 10.8.2) both report that Constantine's death was foretold by a comet in 336/337. Although we are not informed as to Constantine's reaction to the omen, he may have known from Vespasian's example that his baldness would not spare him; on Constantine's baldness, see R. Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2007) 17-8.

events, but in the specific context of war and uprisings.⁶²¹ In the Republican period they are mentioned in relation to wars in general,⁶²² but beginning with Augustus and increasingly throughout the Principate – as portents (be they omens, prodigies, or otherwise) come to have less bearing on the security of the State, and more about the life and actions of important political players – solar halos become signs of civil war specifically and are received as prophecies of the outcome.⁶²³ One instance in particular, which is mentioned quite frequently by ancient authors, concerns a solar halo seen in 44 BCE when Octavius was entering Rome following the death of Julius Caesar that was determined to be a foretelling of his rise to power.⁶²⁴ This example is relatively mild in its context, but other instances also

⁶²¹ Natural scientists, such as Aristotle (*Met.* 3.2) in the fourth century BCE and Seneca the Younger (*Nat. quaest.* 1.11) in the first century CE, regarded solar halos as rare, but nonetheless well-attested, scientifically explainable meteorological phenomena; cf. Pliny *Nat. hist.* 2.28-31, with descriptions of various types of solar halo appearances known to him in the first century CE. See P.T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol* (Princeton, 2004) 190, commenting on Cicero's defender of divination, Quintus, that just because something is scientifically explainable, it does not mean that divine powers are not causing it with meaning. Whether this represents a commonplace Roman attitude to portents is unclear.

⁶²² See, for example, Livy *AUC* 28.11.4; 29.14.3; 30.2.11. See also Virg. *Georg.* 1.463-465: "Who would dare to call the sun / a liar? Often it even gives warning that hidden uprisings / are threatening, and treachery and hidden wars are swelling up" (*Solem quis dicere falsum / audeat? ille etiam caecos instare tumultus / saepe monet fraudem que et operta tumescere bella*).

⁶²³ D. Feeney, 'The History of Roman Religion in Roman Historiography and Epic', in J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion* (Malden, 2007) 129-42, at 140-2, underlines Tacitus, writing in the early second century, as best illustrating the transition from the Republican era treatment of portents: quite hyperbolically, Tacitus suggests that portents have become subject to the monopolising tendencies of the emperors, particularly corrupt ones, such as Nero (54-68). Cf. O. Devillers, 'The Concentration of Power and Writing History: Forms of Historical Persuasion in the *Historiae* (1.1-49)', in V.E. Pagán (ed.), *A Companion to Tacitus* (Malden, 2012) 162-86, at 181-2. As early as the late first century BCE, however, we find Livy lamenting the general neglect of public portents; cf. Livy *AUC* 43.13.1-2. While this is normally taken to be an indication of Livy's traditionalist religiosity or even a justification for his inclusion of portents despite a perceived scepticism in his accounts of portents [on which see D.S. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden, 1993) 22-30], Livy is more likely commenting on the emerging trend of his day to personalise what would normally be public portents and offering positive interpretations for traditionally pessimistic signs – for Livy, the transformation from public to private interpretation is as good as neglect; cf. S.W. Rasmussen, *Public Portents in Republican Rome* (Rome, 2003) 255-6; J.P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History* (Cambridge, 2004) 46-51.

⁶²⁴ Vell. Pat. *Hist. Rom.* 2.59.6; Sen. *Nat. quaest.* 1.2.1; Pliny *Nat. hist.* 2.28; Suet. *D. Aug.* 95; Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 45.4.4; Jul. Obseq. *DP* 68.

described by the Roman historian Cassius Dio, who was writing in the early third century CE, suggest that the commonplace reaction was quite otherwise. In addition to this episode, Dio includes a solar halo within a list of portents that occurred throughout 44 BCE, which he claims the Senate considered to be ‘unfavourable’ and that ‘frightened the rest of the populace’,⁶²⁵ and were by his time understood as pertaining to the civil war, years yet in the making, between the members of the Second Triumvirate.

Then the light of the sun seemed to be diminished and even extinguished, and at times to appear in three circles, one of which was surmounted by a fiery crown of sheaves. This came true for them as clearly as ever any prophecy did. For the three men were in power, – I mean [Octavius] Caesar, Lepidus, and Antony, – and of these Caesar subsequently secured the victory.⁶²⁶

The interpretation of these two solar halos is informative, since both portents preceded any active war – especially significant is the case of the second solar halo, which occurred a year and a half before the Second Triumvirate was even instituted (November 43 BCE). Interesting also is that Dio connects this solar halo – the interpretation of which, he states, was extremely obvious – with the Second Triumvirate, and not with the civil war that Octavius and Antony declared late the following year against Caesar’s assassins, Brutus and Cassius. Rather, it is yet another solar halo that appeared in the skies above Rome in 42

⁶²⁵ Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 45.17.

⁶²⁶ Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 45.17.5: τό τε φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου ἐλαττοῦσθαι τε καὶ σβέννυσθαι, τοτὲ δὲ ἐν τρισὶ κύκλοις φαντάζεσθαι ἐδόκει, καὶ ἓνα γε αὐτῶν στέφανος σταχύων πυρώδης περιέσχεν, ὥστ’ εἴπερ τι ἄλλο, καὶ τοῦτο ἐναργέστατα αὐτοῖς ἐκβῆναι· οἳ τε γὰρ ἄνδρες οἱ τρεῖς ἐδυνάστευον, λέγω δὲ τὸν Καίσαρα καὶ τὸν Λέπιδον καὶ τὸν Ἀντώνιον, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ὁ Καῖσαρ μετὰ τοῦτο τὴν νίκην ἔλαβεν. Other sources mention the diminishing of the sun’s light and/or the appearance of three suns, often in relation to the death of Caesar; cf. Virg. *Georg.* 1.463-468; Tib. *Carm.* 2.5.77-78; Pliny *Nat. hist.* 2.30-31; Plut. *Caes.* 69.4-5; Jos. *Ant. Jud.* 14.12.3; Jul. *Obseq.* DP 68. The nearly year-long dimming of the sun was likely caused by sulphuric-acid aerosol collecting in the atmosphere from the eruption of Mt. Etna (Sicily) early in 44 BCE, though Pliny describes it as a prolonged eclipse. In modern scholarship, this solar halo is sometimes combined with the one said to have appeared to Octavius in May 44 BCE into a single episode. However, Julius Obsequens explicitly describes the two solar halos as distinct occurrences, and Pliny describes the solar halo that appeared to Octavius as having a different appearance and records it under a different heading (cf. *Nat. hist.* 2.28).

BCE, during the course of that civil war, that Dio claims was a foreshadowing of the victory of the two *triumviri* over the conspirators at the Battle of Philippi later that year.

We may infer also from the portents which appeared to them at that time that it was manifestly a supreme struggle in which they were engaged; for Heaven, even as it is ever accustomed to give warning signs before the most unusual events, foretold to them accurately both in Rome and in Macedonia all the results that would come of it. Thus, in the city [i.e. Rome] the sun at one time would be diminished and grow extremely small, and again would show itself huge and trebled in size, and once it even shone forth at night.⁶²⁷

By the very fact of its occurrence, Dio states, the solar halo of 42 BCE was an indication of the significance of that civil war. Unlike the first two examples, which were likely determined in hindsight, the interpretation of this solar halo seems to have become established at the time, since we find it commemorated on Antony's in that year.⁶²⁸ This is, incidentally, the earliest that we find a solar halo represented on Roman coinage – the occurrence seems to have left an immediate and lasting impression that, on account of its timing, was not only propagandistically useful, but accorded with the traditional interpretation of such phenomena. Antony's coins, however, reflect his desired interpretation of the solar halo; it does not mean that all were agreed as to its import – such a scenario is perhaps best demonstrated by Tacitus, writing in the early second century CE, who notes that the many portents that foretold the emperor Vespasian's rise to power were not unanimously accepted until after his accession.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 47.40.1-2: πάρεστι δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν σημείων τῶν τότε συμβάντων σφίσι τεκμήρασθαι ὅτι μέγιστος διαφανῶς ὁ ἀγὼν αὐτοῖς ἐγένετο· τὸ γὰρ δαιμόνιον, ὡσπερ που καὶ αἰεὶ πρὸ τῶν ἀτοπωτάτων φιλεῖ προσημαίνειν, πάντα σφίσι ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ τὰ ἐκβάντα ἀπ' αὐτοῦ προεμαντεύσατο. ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἄστει ὁ τε ἥλιος τοτὲ μὲν ἠλαττοῦτο καὶ ἐλάχιστος ἐγίγνετο, τοτὲ δὲ καὶ μέγας καὶ τριπλῶς ἐξεφαίνετο, καὶ ποτε καὶ νυκτὸς ἐξέλαμψε. Cf. Pliny *Nat. hist.* 2.31; Jul. Obseq. *DP* 70. Contrary to Dio's description, Pliny and Julius Obsequens state that three suns appeared, though the latter claims that the three suns could be seen merging into one.

⁶²⁸ Woods, 'Postumus', 87-8.

⁶²⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 1.10.3 and 5.13.2; cf. Davies, *Religious History*, 161-2, who notes that a recurring theme in Tacitus' works is numerous interpretations of portents. Alternately, a good example of the potential for

For Dio, in any case, the activities of the Second Triumvirate were distant events; the fates of the historical actors had already unfolded and his narrative communicates how these signs were being maintained in cultural memory. Dio is particularly helpful in that he offers some comments that are, albeit to a limited degree, psychologically relevant. As he indicates, the second solar halo in 44 BCE and the one in 42 BCE were met with fear and/or apprehension – emotional qualities which, quite understandably, can become lost in historical reporting. With this in mind, perhaps the most illustrative example of the psychological effects of a solar halo comes also from Dio, who – to the best of my knowledge – is the only ancient author to provide a personal description of the emotional reactions of those viewing such a phenomenon.⁶³⁰ In 193 a solar halo appeared over the Senate-house in Rome and was interpreted, at least in hindsight, as foretelling civil war and the demise of Didius Julianus (March-June 193), who had just recently come to power and was killed soon thereafter.

For three men at this time, each commanding three legions of citizens and many foreigners besides, attempted to secure the control of affairs – [Septimius] Severus, [Pescennius] Niger and [Clodius] Albinus... These, then, were the three men portended by the three stars that suddenly came to view surrounding the sun when Julianus in our presence was offering the Sacrifices of Entrance in front of the senate-house. These stars were so very distinct that the soldiers kept continually looking at them and pointing them out to one another, while declaring that some dreadful fate would befall the emperor. As for us, however much we hoped and prayed that it might so prove, yet the fear of the moment would not permit us to gaze up at

numerous interpretations, both contemporary and post-contemporary, of a portent is the destruction of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in 83 BCE; see H.I. Flower, 'Remembering and Forgetting Temple Destruction: The Destruction of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in 83 BC', in G. Gardner and K.L. Osterloh (eds.), *Antiquity in Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2008) 74-92, especially at 82-92.

⁶³⁰ Pliny *Nat. hist.* 2.31, claims to have personally viewed a solar halo in 51, but unfortunately he does not offer any psychological observations, personal or otherwise.

them except by furtive glances. So much for this incident, which I give from my own knowledge.⁶³¹

There is much to be taken from this passage. Firstly, whether partially or entirely in retrospect, Dio perceived what he had witnessed as heralding a civil war between Septimius Severus, Niger, and Albinus (three points of light, each denoting a contender), and moreover the death of Julianus. Dio's recollection of his immediate interpretation of the portent is surely coloured by his knowledge of later developments – he states with confidence that none of the points of light that appeared over Julianus represented him or even hinted at his success over any of the recent usurpers, in stark contrast to previous examples (i.e. the solar halo above Octavius in 44 BCE, the three suns later in 44 BCE, and the solar halo in 42 BCE that was honoured by Antony), which occurred under more-or-less similar circumstances, but received positive interpretations.⁶³² The element of retrospect must be emphasised here; although the general meaning of a solar halo could be determined from historical precedent, specific interpretations were likely developed in hindsight, following the outcomes of their

⁶³¹ Cass. Dio *Hist. Rom.* 73.14.3-5 (Cary, 74.14.3-5): τρεῖς γὰρ δὴ τότε ἄνδρες, τριῶν ἕκαστος πολιτικῶν στρατοπέδων καὶ ἄλλων ξενικῶν συχνῶν ἄρχοντες, ἀντελάβοντο τῶν πραγμάτων, ὃ τε Σεουήρος καὶ ὁ Νίγρος καὶ ὁ Ἀλβῖνος, οὗτος μὲν τῆς Βρεττανίας ἄρχων, Σεουήρος δὲ τῆς Παννονίας, Νίγρος δὲ τῆς Συρίας. καὶ τούτους ἄρα οἱ ἀστέρες οἱ τρεῖς οἱ ἐξαίφνης φανέντες καὶ τὸν ἥλιον περισχόντες, ὅτε τὰ ἐσιτήρια πρὸ τοῦ βουλευτηρίου ἔθυσεν ὁ Ἰουλιανὸς παρόντων ἡμῶν, ὑπηνίττοντο. οὕτω γὰρ ἐκφανέστατοι ἦσαν ὥστε καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας συνεχῶς τε αὐτοὺς ὄραν καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἀντεπιδεικνύειν, καὶ προσέτι καὶ διαθροεῖν ὅτι δεινὸν αὐτῶ συμβήσεται. ἡμεῖς γὰρ εἰ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα καὶ ἠυχόμεθα ταῦθ' οὕτω γενέσθαι καὶ ἠλπίζομεν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ γε τοῦ παρόντος δέους οὐδ' ἀναβλέπειν ἐς αὐτούς, εἰ μὴ παρορῶντές πως, ἐτολμῶμεν. See the comment of Barnes, *Constantine*, 76, on the necessity of reviewing this passage when assessing Constantine's celestial-vision.

⁶³² Septimius Severus seems to have also grown more confident in the meaning of the solar halo after the civil war was concluded, since he only began to commemorate the solar halo on his coinage after the defeat of Albinus in 197; cf. Woods, 'Postumus', 88. Regarding the second solar halo of 44 BCE and the benefit of retrospect, see the comment by J. Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy* (Cambridge, 2006) 24-5, on Virg. *Georg.* 1.463-468: "What also adds to the horror here is the poet's certainty, won from hindsight, that these prodigies did lead up to civil war".

respective civil wars.⁶³³ In the process, as events unfolded, we can presume that the interpretation of a particular portent would have evolved in reaction to various developments. This is not a matter of passing judgement on the validity of ancient divination. Rather, omens (*omina*), the category of Roman portents to which solar halos belong,⁶³⁴ were not obvious in

⁶³³ “[P]recedent and a culturally specific sense of the supernatural”, to borrow the phrase from Jason Davies [*Religious History*, 74], were important not only for lay identification of potential portents, but in recognising the significance of their basic meaning as well. So, for instance, Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.22) describes how in the reign of Nero the appearance of a comet in 60 resulted, quite misguidedly, in an imperial candidate being named in anticipation of the emperor’s death, while Virgil’s pastoral character Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 1.16-17) reflects that he should have known that misfortune would befall him when a few days earlier lightning struck an oak tree on his farm. Cf. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 187-92, who notes the role of historical precedent, emphasising also that continued relevance of the diviner’s craft required that the precise meanings of signs not be obvious. The general import of a solar halo as indicating civil war up to the late antique period is evident from the examples in Dio’s history, while the strengthening of this trend in Late Antiquity and beyond is demonstrated by John Lydus (*De ost.* Pref.4.14A-C), writing in the sixth century, who comments that they signify “strong rulers” (βασιλείς δυνατοί) rising up against each other. Dio (*Hist. Rom.* 47.40.1) seems to be thinking along the same lines when he states that, by virtue of their character, portents such as these reflect the immense importance of a conflict.

⁶³⁴ The tendency in modern scholarship is to separate omens (*omina*) and prodigies (*prodigia*) as distinct categories of portents, where omens provide divine foreknowledge, imparted privately, of usually unalterable events and outcomes, while prodigies are meaningful and inherently negative disruptions of the natural order by divine powers to indicate a breach in the *pax deorum*, hence affecting society as a whole, and requiring expiation to avert future disasters. Cf. F.B Krauss, *An Interpretation of the Omens, Portents, and Prodigies Recorded by Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius* (Philadelphia, 1930) 31-4; B. MacBain, *Prodigy and Expiation* (Brussels, 1982) 7-8; Levene, *Religion in Livy*, 4-6; Rasmussen, *Public Portents*, 35; V. Rosenberger, ‘Republican *Nobiles*: Controlling the *Res Publica*’, in Rüpke, *Companion to Roman Religion*, 292-303, at 293-8; J. Rüpke, ‘New Perspectives on Ancient Divination’, in V. Rosenberger (ed.), *Divination in the Ancient World* (Stuttgart, 2013) 9-19, at 14-7. This is certainly in line with the terminology used in many ancient sources. However, Livy, Dio, Julius Obsequens, and others include solar halos within larger lists of characteristic signs, such as lightning strikes, androgynous births, and natural disasters, which were determined to be prodigies by the Senate or one of the relevant priesthoods and expiated. There is no evidence that solar halos specifically required expiation, but it is not clear from the narratives that mention this action being taken that they were not included in the process. Quite often as well we find that a sign is referred to as both *omen* and *prodigium*. So, for instance, when Livy (*AUC* 22.3.11-14) describes two ill portents for the consul Gaius Flaminius – his horse stumbles, unseating him, and a standard bearer is unable to lift the battle standard – before the Battle of Lake Trasimene (217 BCE), where he was ambushed and killed by Hannibal, they are described as omen and prodigy. Similarly, Dio (*Hist. Rom.* 50.8.4-5), in describing the events leading up to the Battle of Actium, claims that it was later recalled that an eighty-five foot long, two-headed serpent had wreaked havoc in Etruria (an Etruscan region, and therefore notable for portents) before it was finally struck down by lightning – although several prodigy elements are evident here (monstrous birth and lightning, just to name a couple), Dio reports that it was later realised to have been a prediction of the outcome of the war, hence an omen. See, however, Davies, *Religious History*, 42, who contends that although solar halos were not prodigies on their own, the public viewing of one could be taken as mass hallucination, which was an acceptable prodigy.

their meanings, which had to be constructed – something that could be done much more securely (or, if necessary, amended) following an event of significance relative to the nature of the omen.⁶³⁵

Secondly, Dio's first-hand account of his own reaction and of those around him also grants us a glimpse into how such a phenomenon might commonly have been received in the moment: with awe and astonishment, certainly, but also confusion and anxiety.⁶³⁶ As such, his personal recollection of the solar halo in 193 presents us with a sobering scenario. Onlookers could only guess at what it was prophesying and, in the case of Dio and his fellow senators, who had been reluctant to admit Julianus to the imperial office, hope that it meant the end of the emperor at Rome, but its precise meaning was by no means a certainty. One thing, however, about which all observers – whether eager soldiers pointing up at the sky or fearful senators maintaining a downward gaze – could be firmly assured is that the sign meant something good for one individual in particular, but something very bad for another (or others).

Returning to the panegyrist's dilemma, only time would tell what a solar halo meant for Constantine. By virtue of popular belief and historical precedent, at the very least it could have been interpreted as signifying civil war, but until some major event should come about that would solidify an interpretation, promises of success could be countered with predictions

It may be the case that the different authors regarded portents and their classifications somewhat differently. Regarding Tacitus' use of prodigies, M.T. Griffin, 'Tacitus as a Historian', in A.J. Woodman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2009) 168-83, at 169-71, observes that they appear to fall into two classes: prodigies sent by Fate reveal what is unalterable, whereas those sent by the gods are warnings of future ills that can be avoided.

⁶³⁵ See, for instance, Plut. *DPO* 409C-D, that rainbows and solar halos are not straightforward portents, but enigmas, allegories, and metaphors, dependent on imagination.

⁶³⁶ Woods, 'Postumus', 88, notes this as proof that "this phenomenon continued to be treated with the same shock or awe that it always had been".

of failure, possibly resulting in dissension among the Gallic aristocracy and populace, and at worst demoralising the army. It is possible also that the timing of the solar halo would have created a complication as well. According to Constantine's report to Eusebius, the celestial-vision occurred in the afternoon prior to the dream-vision – indeed, it somewhat prompted it. When we align the chronologies of the panegyrist and Eusebius, this would mean that the solar halo appeared before Constantine's detour to the temple, that is, following the defeat and death/execution of Maximian. As such, there was the potential for certain factions to further interpret a celestial manifestation as an expression of divine disapproval of Constantine's recent actions, not unlike the solar eclipse that appeared following the emperor Nero's assassination of his own mother or, more pointedly, the solar halo that predicted the downfall of the emperor Vitellius (April-December 69), which Dio implies was a divine reaction to his inappropriate behaviour at that time.⁶³⁷ Furthermore, should the story of Constantine's celestial-vision have become popularised in other regions of the Empire, we can only imagine what Constantine's co-rulers would have made of such a characteristic portent at a point when numerous emperors were reigning. For the time being, then, the panegyrist seems to have adopted the most prudent of approaches: he does not discuss a celestial-vision at all, but instead retreats to a related visionary experience with a far more secure (and propagandistically satisfactory) interpretation, namely, the dream-vision at the sanctuary. From a cultural perspective, it is perhaps a matter of a mysterious public omen (celestial-vision), which was uncertain, versus a private omen (dream-vision) that involved direction communication with a divine power.

⁶³⁷ Cass. Dio 64.8.1. According to Dio's chronology, the portent appeared between April and June 69, that is, after the death of Otho (January-April 69), but before the accession of Vespasian (early-July 69).

It has been noted, with respect to *Vita*, that there are no instances of a celestial and dream-vision occurring together in any Christian vision narratives,⁶³⁸ though in the previous chapter I do indicate at least one instance (the second account of Paul's vision in *Acts*) where the two types appear sequentially in the same narrative, albeit not part of the same vision experience. If we consider here that we may in fact be dealing with a real experience (though, not necessarily a genuine miracle), this scenario is perhaps not so unusual. Eusebius' narrative preserves quite well, I believe, a particular element of the overall experience. He states that Constantine was confused and unsure as to the meaning of the celestial-vision, but that elucidation came about via the dream-vision that night; that is, the god responsible for the vision in the sky visited him in his sleep to iterate the message in a more intelligible fashion. Since the panegyrist and Eusebius are referring to the same experience, albeit from different perspectives, we can reasonably incorporate Constantine's own later assertion of this aspect of the dream-vision into the scenario, taking into account that one of the specialities of the cult at Granum was incubation, so as to achieve a rough reconstruction of the episode. Following the solar halo, Constantine appears to have undertaken a logical course of action in the face of an enigmatic portent: whether at the behest of the priests of Apollo Grannus or on his own initiative, the emperor spent the night in the incubation sanctuary in order to receive an oracular response from the god responsible for the celestial manifestation.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸ Bremmer, 'Vision', 66.

⁶³⁹ Perhaps the best known example of such a scenario, albeit fictitious, is Virgil's account (*Aen.* 7.81-95) of King Latinus, confused and disturbed by some recent portents, engaging in ritual incubation in order to receive elucidation and counsel. Cf. L.D. Johnston, 'Incubation-Oracles', *CJ* 43 (1948) 349-55, at 350-1.

The fruits of the incubation experience seem to have rendered the panegyrist's job considerably easier. The very same elements that could be put forward for a solar halo – the promise of victory and future successes – could be introduced not on the basis of an ambiguous portent open to numerous avenues of interpretation, but by appealing to the source, Apollo himself, who communicated with Constantine personally. Yet rumours and tales would certainly have been in circulation at Trier.⁶⁴⁰ In order that those familiar with the gossip about a solar halo might be satisfied, it seems that the speaker may have made a reference to the incident in passing, but with a slightly altered, yet culturally appropriate, interpretation – the allusion is easily missed, mainly because the passage in question is difficult to deconstruct. Prior to his description of Constantine's visit to Granum, the panegyrist recounts a particular sequence of events that led the emperor to the temple.

For on the day after that news had been received [i.e. regarding the 'barbarian' uprising] and you had undertaken the labor of double stages on your journey, you learnt that all the waves had subsided, and that the all-pervading calm, which you had left behind had been restored. Fortune herself so ordered this matter that the happy outcome of your affairs prompted you to convey to the immortal Gods what you had vowed at the very spot where you had turned aside toward the most beautiful temple in the whole world, or rather, to the deity made manifest, as you saw.⁶⁴¹

I have already treated the progression of the action in this passage in detail in Chapter One, but it would be useful to highlight one aspect in particular here; specifically, at what point Constantine "learnt" about the 'barbarian' withdrawal. Charles E.V. Nixon and Barbara S. Rodgers, whose translation of this panegyric remains still the standard in English, remark

⁶⁴⁰ MacMullen, *Constantine*, 73, comments that, "if the sky-writing was witnessed by forty thousand men, the true miracle lies in their unbroken silence about it". Cf. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 617, who notes that this is not surprising, since "the views of common soldiers escaped history at this period". The soldiers who witnessed the solar halo themselves would certainly have spoken about it, but the spread of the story beyond Constantine's territory would have been hindered not only by the limitations of the army's movements, but also by public orations, such as the one we have, giving priority to the dream-vision.

⁶⁴¹ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).21.3 (Latin text below).

that, “Constantine, who had already turned aside to fulfill his vows to the gods upon the successful outcome of his campaign against Maximian, can now offer thanks, too, for the stilling of barbarian unrest”.⁶⁴² According to this reconstruction, Constantine was updated on the Rhine situation only after he had reached the temple and the reason for the detour was to give thanks for the suppression of Maximian. Weiss, on the other hand, has understood this passage to mean that Constantine received the news after his visit to the temple was concluded, once he had returned to the very spot on the road from where he had detoured.⁶⁴³ In both cases, however, it is difficult to overcome the implausibility of Constantine interrupting a forced march to engage a real or perceived threat to the security of the frontier and, quite likely, his recent building project. The ‘threat level’ indicated by the panegyrist may very well be an exaggeration, but this still does not satisfy certain curiosities, such as why the vows had to be fulfilled at Granum. In any case, my prior analysis of the sequence of events, which concurs with the more traditional reading of this passage, shows neither reconstruction to be viable – Constantine clearly turned to the temple at the spot on the road where he had been informed about the ‘barbarian’ withdrawal.

⁶⁴² C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994) 248 (n. 91). Cf. M. Vermes, ‘Constantine’s ‘Pagan Vision’: The Anonymous Panegyric on Constantine (310, *Pan. Lat.* VII(6))’, with introduction by S.N.C. Lieu, in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds.), *From Constantine to Julian* (London, 1996) 63-96, at 72; in his introduction to Mark Vermes’ translation of Panegyric 6, Sam Lieu states that, either on his way to or from Massalia, Constantine “learnt” at a particular spot along his march where there was a road leading to the temple. However, Vermes’ translation of this passage (at 89-90) seems to agree largely with the reconstruction proposed by Nixon and Rodgers: “For, the day after you had heard that news and doubled the daily route-march, you learnt that all the waves of rebellion had calmed, and all the tranquility you had left there had returned. Fortune herself so ordered this that the felicity of your situation reminded you to bring what you had vowed to the immortal gods, in the very place where you had already made a detour to the most beautiful temple in the whole world, or rather to the god who was manifest there, when you saw him”.

⁶⁴³ Weiss, ‘Vision’, 249.

In the critical edition of Roger A.B. Mynors this entire passage comprises one lengthy sentence. However, the translation of Nixon and Rodgers, though impressive, makes it difficult to see precisely how the various clauses are operating together.

Postridie enim quam accepto illo nuntio geminatum itineris laborem susceperas, omnes fluctus resedissee, omnem quam reliqueras tranquillitatem redisse didicisti, ipsa hoc sic ordinante Fortuna ut te ibi rerum tuarum felicitas admoneret dis immortalibus ferre quae uoueras, ubi deflexisses ad templum toto orbe pulcherrimum, immo ad praesentem, ut uidisti, deum.

The ablative absolute *ipsa hoc sic ordinante Fortuna*, and in particular *hoc*, refers directly to Constantine's 'having learnt'; that is, Fortune 'arranged' (*ordinante*) that Constantine become aware of the 'barbarian' situation. Moreover, the subordinate clause *ut te ibi rerum tuarum felicitas admoneret dis immortalibus ferre* indicates that Fortune orchestrated this 'learning' with the result that (*sic ... ut*) Constantine was 'reminded' or 'inspired' (*admoneret*) to pay his respects to the gods, something that we are informed – here for the first time – that he had vowed to do. Important to note here is that although *ibi* is connected with the subsequent *ubi*, it is attached to *admoneret* and not *uoueras*; Constantine turned aside to the temple at the spot where he was prompted to thank the gods, not at the spot where he made his vows. It is clear that the adverb *sic* is related to the outcome of, rather than the purpose behind, Fortune's actions, but it is not so obvious as to what it refers. Certainly, the panegyrist means to indicate that Fortune accomplished Constantine's learning in such a way that the only logical result would be his detour to the temple. While *sic* could perhaps pertain to the timeliness of the sequence of events, namely, that the second message came so soon after the first one and was conveniently received near Granum, it seems possible that the panegyrist is making a veiled allusion to Constantine being informed, in some spectacular fashion, by Fortune herself, as opposed to by a messenger, as has generally been assumed. Rather than more commonplace verbs for the reporting or reception of

intelligence, such as *accipere*, *audire*, or *nuntiare*, the panegyrist's use of *discere*, which often connotes the acquisition of knowledge by observation, experience, example, and/or direct instruction (hence, a power dynamic), may be deliberate here.⁶⁴⁴

Of course, *discere* and the allusion to Fortune's role in the matter are not specific references to any sort of celestial manifestation, but this would be precisely the point. By employing *discere* in this way, the panegyrist would be able to walk the line between two audiences. Those unaware of the celestial-vision would simply take this to mean that Constantine had perhaps heard from a messenger that the 'barbarians' had retreated. On the other hand, those familiar with the rumour or story might take this as a reference to Fortune informing Constantine that the 'barbarians' had withdrawn – that something the emperor saw signalled to him that the frontier was calm once more, and it transpired in so favourable a manner that he felt compelled to immediately turn towards the nearest temple. If so, the panegyrist's spin is an interesting one: he maintains the cultural commonplace of such phenomena appearing during times of conflict and potentially signifying 'victory', and secures that interpretation by plausibly aligning it with the success on the frontier. Meanwhile, the dream-vision – the intimate experience between emperor and god – is reserved for pride-of-place, as is the grander interpretation of the entire episode, which both panegyrist and court no doubt hoped would leave the greater impression on the audience at that time.

⁶⁴⁴ Other instances of *discere* in the *Panegyrici Latini* convey a visual element and suggest a power dynamic. *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).10.5: the Franks learn to be submissive by observing Maximian Herculus and following the example of their king. *Pan. Lat.* 9(4).20.2: the panegyrist describes a map of the region on display in the main building of the school at Autun as a visual aid that, he argues, facilitates instruction better than simply having the students understand (*percipere*) by listening. *Pan. Lat.* 2(12).8.5: the panegyrist suggests that seeing the emperor Theodosius' accomplishments would have enhanced the learning experiences of famous generals of history (here, Alexander the Great, Scipio Africanus, and Hannibal), and by way of comparison not only imagining his achievements as superior to theirs, but positing him as a mentor as well.

This hypothesis is admittedly tenuous, since it hinges on an assumption of something that is otherwise absent from the panegyrist's account based on later sources. In other words, it is a break from the protocol of responsible historical analysis. Regardless of the issue of *discere*, what is clear at any rate is that the panegyrist and Eusebius are referring to the same 'vision' experience. The common core elements of their respective 'vision' traditions are enough to suggest this, but the agreement of the relative chronologies they set out is tantamount to confirmation. The variance in details, then, is matter of temporal perspective. When Constantine related his 'vision' experience to Eusebius decades later the story had undergone many developments. Chief among them, he had reinterpreted his experience and replaced Apollo with Christ; he omitted the details of the occasion for his march in accordance with the propaganda regarding Maximian which, at that point, he and his court had been maintaining for twenty years; and there had been not one, but three civil wars, out of which Constantine had emerged as sole ruler of the Roman Empire. The lattermost point requires emphasis. The panegyrist refers to a dream-vision in some detail, with either an oblique reference to a solar halo or none at all, but he was likely acting out of the same sense of experiential prudence that led to his being chosen to be the first to speak publicly about the revolt and death of Maximian. Eusebius, however, was writing at the end of Constantine's reign, at a point when a solar halo could be mentioned, with the safety of hindsight, in the context of civil war. The interests of both the panegyrist and Eusebius are thus well represented in their treatments of the 'vision'. On the one hand, Eusebius sees the episode in the past and present, describing the 'vision' in great detail to illustrate the divine providence of the emperor's rise to power. The panegyrist, on the other hand, speaking in the present with a mind towards the future, is not so much less interested in the details as he is

primarily concerned with the interpretation: Constantine is given the divine assurance – indeed, the means – of victory, but that victory is non-specific.

Conclusion

Ironically, the main pitfall in deciphering the issue of Constantine's 'vision' is the abundance of the source material. The persistent elements in all three accounts lead one to note that they are referring to related, if not identical, events. However, even when it is acknowledged that significant similarities exist, it is the finer details that have consistently impeded attempts to connect them directly. These details, such as symbols and chronology, are by no means minor quibbles, but critical inconsistencies, with the result that the panegyrist, Lactantius, and Eusebius at the same time appear to fall within the same tradition, yet represent wholly independent ones. Even acknowledging that these narratives represent different stages of a tradition that was gradually building into a grander legend does not remove the complications created by their evident disagreements.

In the case of Lactantius and Eusebius the divine sign has been a consistent hurdle in resolving what are generally regarded as related accounts. Cross, staurogram, Chi-Rho monogram – either the two sources are thought to be describing completely different symbols or harmonisation is attempted, usually by favouring Eusebius and emending, altering, or otherwise causing Lactantius' description to conform to the later narrative. Alternately, I propose that we should instead consider adjusting our understanding of Eusebius' narrative. There is no question that Constantine utilised the Chi-Rho in various contexts, but a great many conflicts are negated by not automatically overturning Lactantius' 'transverse chi with a rounded top', or even Eusebius' 'cross of light', in order to arrive at this monogram.

The situation with the vision of Apollo is slightly more complex, if only because it demands appreciation for the panegyrist's position in August 309. Constantine viewed a solar halo on his return march from Massalia, as Weiss has suggested; of that there should be no doubt. However, not only could a celestial or meteorological portent be interpreted a number of ways, but they were traditionally understood as politically relevant. At the time that the panegyrist was speaking Maximian, a senior emperor of the previous Tetrarchy who had been well-regarded in Gaul, had recently died under somewhat mysterious circumstances and Constantine, although he continued to represent himself as Augustus in Gaul, was considered by the then senior emperor Galerius, and therefore throughout the rest of the Empire, simply as *filius Augustorum*. The panegyrist was already confronted with reporting on a delicate situation, the revolt and death (or execution) of Maximian, but there was the additional matter of how to spin such a potentially dangerous portent. Almost certainly, whether as part of the city's festivities or at the celebrations for Constantine's *dies imperii* only weeks before, a few orators had already spoken about the dream-vision at Granum. Quite prudently, the panegyrist played on this, placing emphasis on the dream-vision and more so its interpretation.

Lactantius and Eusebius, we have determined, are describing the same episode, and we have also determined that the panegyrist and Eusebius are as well. From this we can reasonably conclude that the panegyrist and Lactantius must be describing the same episode; that is, all three sources are referring to the same visionary experience, but simply fall within different stages of the developing tradition. Even so, this still leaves some issues open that at present are beyond our grasp, mainly the origin of the divine sign, since that must somehow derive from the vision of Apollo. The name *Labarum* is thought to be Celtic/Gallic in origin, but since the earliest attestation of the term is in the chapter headings inserted in *Vita* by

Eusebius' posthumous editor, I doubt that this term was used in Constantine's lifetime.⁶⁴⁵ It has been suggested also that a wreath and Chi-Rho may have originally been a Celtic/Gallic solar wheel, featuring some form of pointed star.⁶⁴⁶ The wreath of the *Labarum*, then, may have its origins in the vision of Apollo handing laurel wreaths to Constantine, which carried the interpretation of 'long life', while on the shields it might have appeared in roundel form as a sun disc. Such an explanation, though it may explain the wreath, does not account for Eusebius' 'cross of light', which was rendered similar to an *ankh/crux ansata*. It is perhaps to the panegyrist's particular interpretation of the 'vision' to which we should turn our attention, namely, *aeternitas*.

In a recent article, David Woods has argued that the depiction of three busts of Sol on the reverse of a coin of the Gallic emperor Postumus (260-269) is very likely a representation of a solar halo and, on the basis of the AETERNITAS AVG reverse legend, contends further that it was interpreted as a portent of 'long life' and the longevity of his dynasty.⁶⁴⁷ As Woods points out, by the third century the role of Aeternitas, typically portrayed with arms outstretched and holding inward-facing busts of Sol and Luna in each hand, comes to be assumed by Sol, who is represented in a similar stance (albeit, without the additional busts),

⁶⁴⁵ Barnes, 'Conversion', 387, supports the theory that the name is derived from the root *labar* (Latin *loquens*), perhaps with the intended meaning of 'powerful'; cf. Sulzberger, 'Le symbole de la croix', 422-3, who proposes that, as a neuter noun, it may be considered synonymous with *verbum* (λόγος), hence carrying a Christian connotation. For other theories, see, for example, H. Grégoire, 'L'étymologie de "Labarum"', *Byzantion* 4 (1927-1928) 477-82; R. Egger, *Das Labarum* (Vienna, 1960); L.J.D. Richardson, 'Labarum', *Euphrosyne* 5 (1972) 415-21. The panegyrist does not mention a standard and Lactantius seems not to have been aware of it, so understandably they do not mention the name. If it was in use during Constantine's lifetime, the only reason I can think of that Eusebius does not employ it is that it had a very strong non-Christian connotation, which was lost or forgotten shortly after Constantine's death.

⁶⁴⁶ See, for example, J.J. Hatt, 'La vision de Constantin au sanctuaire de Grand et l'origine celtique du labarum', *Latomus* 9 (1950) 427-36; id., 'Problèmes d'archéologie lyonnaise', *RAE* 37 (1986) 137-9; Green and Ferguson, 'Constantine'.

⁶⁴⁷ Woods, 'Postumus'.

as the personification of ‘long’ or ‘eternal life’.⁶⁴⁸ The cruciform symbol with a surmounting wreath or disc, as described by Lactantius and Eusebius, may very well have served a pictographic function similar to what we find with the Christian staurogram, anchor, and *crux ansata* – except that, instead of depicting Christ on the cross, it was originally intended to portray Sol with his arms outstretched and his head indicated by the loop above the crossbar.⁶⁴⁹ As a drawing on the shields the loop would have been seen as a solar disc, while as the *Labarum* the wreath was an attribute of Sol generally, and Apollo Grannus specifically. If so, Constantine’s transition from his divine *comes* Sol to his new patron Christ may be clearer. There was already a pre-fourth century tendency for Christians to equate Apollo/Sol with Christ, which may have served as a bridge for Constantine to move from solar to Christian worship. However, the cruciform divine sign that developed out of his ‘pagan vision’ was not only similar to various symbols that Christians had been using since the second century, it carried a nearly identical interpretation as well. This connection could have been pointed out to Constantine as early as 309 by local bishops who were

⁶⁴⁸ Such a representation of Sol can be found on Constantinian coinage; see, for example, *RIC 7* Thessalonica.66-71 (and Plate 16.71). Woods, ‘Postumus’, 89-91, with references. Based on his understanding that the panegyrist is describing a solar halo in 310, Woods argues that this is the interpretation put forward by the panegyrist, mainly because a more traditional interpretation was complicated by there being more rulers at that time than suns that appeared. From a Gallic perspective, however, there were only three legitimate rulers in 309 (Constantine, Galerius, and Licinius), Maxentius being recognised as a usurper and Maximin as *filius Augustorum*, and Eusebius years later seemed to have had no qualms about attributing the celestial-vision to the struggle between two rulers. Nevertheless, we can say that if this was a recognised import for such a portent in the early fourth century, the panegyrist’s interpretation of the dream-vision as signifying ‘long life’ would have served as a comprehensive interpretation for those familiar with the story of a celestial manifestation.

⁶⁴⁹ Alternately, though not likely, the symbol may be directly connected to the *ankh*. Sacral objects of Egyptian origin have been discovered during excavations at Granum, specifically four ivory tables constituting two diptychs depicting the zodiac, which were likely brought to the temple in the first century; cf. E. Tissot and J.-C. Groyon, ‘Les tables zodiacales’, in M. Colardelle, et al., *Grand (Les dossiers d’archéologie 162, 1991) 62-4*. The interpretation of ‘long’ or ‘eternal life’ would accord with the hieratic meaning of the symbol, while the oval loop of the *ankh* may have been replaced with a circular sun disc (and later a wreath) in order to indicate more clearly Sol. To my knowledge, however, no other Egyptian ritual objects have yet been discovered at the site and the zodiacs that have been recovered, although they depict Sol, do not seem to portray an *ankh*.

regularly attending the court at Trier, though the emperor may have made the association on his own as his dealings with various Church communities increased throughout his reign. This is, unfortunately, outside of our scope and must be a discussion for another time. At present, what is important to note is that the evolution of the Vision legend owes much to an event of great significance which is typically highlighted in modern studies of Constantine's 'vision' and religion, and where we shall end this study: the Battle of Milvian Bridge.

EPILOGUE

The story goes that I first had the idea for *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* while lying drunk in a field in Innsbruck (or 'Spain' as the BBC TV publicity department authoritatively has it, probably because it's easier to spell).

Apparently I was hitch-hiking around Europe at the time, and had a copy of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to Europe* (by Ken Walsh, also published by Pan Books) with me at the time. I didn't have *Europe on (as it was then) Five Dollars a Day* because I simply wasn't in that kind of financial league.

My condition was brought on not so much by having had too much drink, so much as having had a bit to drink and nothing to eat for two days. So as I lay there in this field, the stars span lazily around my head, and just before I nodded off, it occurred to me that someone ought to write a *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as well.

Now, this may well be true.

It sounds plausible. It certainly has a familiar kind of ring to it. Unfortunately, I've only got my own word for it now, because the constant need to repeat the story ('Tell me, Douglas, how did it all *start . . . ?*') has now completely obliterated my memory of the actual event. All I can remember now is the sequence of words which makes up the story – ('Well, it's very interesting you should ask that, Brian. I was lying in this field . . .'), and if I ever forget that, then the whole thing will have vanished from my mind forever.

If I then come across a BBC press release which says that I thought of the idea in Spain, I'll probably think it must be true. After all, they are the BBC, aren't they?⁶⁵⁰

The Battle of Milvian Bridge was, as is generally maintained in scholarship, indeed a turning point. At the very least it marked a change of regime in Italy, but modern discussions tend to stress the significance of the battle for the religious transformation of emperor and empire, usually with a firm eye on the contemporary Christian testimonies of Lactantius and

⁶⁵⁰ Douglas Adams, 'Foreword by Douglas Adams: 'Where do you get all your ideas from?', in G. Perkins (ed.), *The Original Hitchhiker Radio Scripts* (New York, 1985) 12-14, at 12.

Eusebius. Without becoming lost in the meanders of deterministic speculation, there is no doubt that Constantine's personal interest in Christian affairs and patronage of the Church sped up, or possibly began, the process that led to the eventual declaration of Christianity as the "official religion" of the Roman Empire, and his victory outside the walls of Rome cleared the way for this to unfold.⁶⁵¹

Some reverberations of that final encounter between Constantine and Maxentius were more subtle. With respect to the Vision legend, the battle was a turning point of a different sort – it was a change in historical context. When the panegyrist stood before his audience in Trier in 309, he could only speak of potentials: the vision of Apollo was a divine promise of future successes and future victories, but with no specific application. The abundance of historical precedent for and general cultural acceptance of solar halo phenomena as portents of civil war prompted the panegyrist to present his narrative and interpretation in the manner in which he did. However, the success of Constantine's Italian campaign three years later sparked a new development in the tradition: following the triumphant entry of the Gallic emperor into Rome, led by the severed head of the usurper held high on a pike, the vision could be interpreted in a new light. The gift of hindsight in the aftermath of so momentous an enterprise granted knowledge and certainty that the vision had always been relevant to the civil war, and it is in this context that it would thereafter always be remembered.

This pivotal elaboration is observable almost immediately in the panegyric delivered at Trier in 313, the earliest and most detailed account of the Italian campaign. Absent are references to any specific deity or a detailed description of a particular visionary experience,

⁶⁵¹ It stands to reason, yet must be stated, that whatever Constantine intended is not necessarily what resulted from his actions and policies; cf. H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops* (Baltimore, 2000) 24-7.

yet the panegyrist stresses Constantine's personal connection to divine powers as central to his launching the Italian campaign and his subsequent victory.

And first I shall take up a topic which I believe no one up to now has ventured upon, to speak of your resolution in making the expedition before I praise the victory. Since the fear of an adverse omen has been put aside and the stumbling block removed, I shall avail myself of the freedom of our love for you, a love in which we wavered then among fears and prayers for the State. Could you have had so much foresight, Emperor, that you were the first to embark upon a war which had been stirred up with such vast resources, so much greed, so extensive a contagion of crimes, so complete a despair of pardon, when all your associates in imperial power were inactive and hesitating! What god, what majesty so immediate encouraged you, when almost all of your comrades and commanders were not only silently muttering but even openly fearful, to perceive on your own, against the counsels of men, against the warnings of soothsayers, that the time had come to liberate the City? 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.⁶⁵²

Against the observances of the *haruspices*, the fears of his own experienced soldiers, and the counsel of his advisors, Constantine acted on his own initiative and vaulted over the Alps seeking "no doubtful victory, but one divinely promised".⁶⁵³ According to the panegyrist Constantine had sat on the sidelines watching as the tyranny at Rome intensified, but waiting patiently, as if with foreknowledge, for the right time to strike.⁶⁵⁴ "Since you contemplated, you knew, you saw all these things, Emperor, and neither your nature nor your inherited

⁶⁵² *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).2.1-5: *Ac primum illud adripiam quod credo adhuc neminem ausum fuisse, ut ante de constantia expeditionis tuae dicam quam de laude uictoriae. Transacto enim metu aduersi ominis et offensione reuocata, utar libertate erga te nostri amoris, quem tunc inter metus et rei publicae uota suspendimus. Tene, imperator, tantum animo potuisse praesumere, ut bellum tantis opibus, tanto consensu auaritiae, tanta scelerum contagione, tanta ueniae desperatione conflatum quiescentibus cunctantibusque tunc imperii tui sociis primus inuaderes! Quisnam te deus, quae tam praesens hortata [est] maiestas ut, omnibus fere tuis comitibus et ducibus non solum tacite mussantibus sed etiam aperte timentibus, contra consilia hominum, contra haruspicum monita ipse per temet liberandae Urbis tempus uenisse sentires? Habes profecto aliquod cum illa mente diuina, Constantine, secretum, quae delegata nostri diis minoribus cura uni se tibi dignatur ostendere.*

⁶⁵³ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).3.3: *... non dubiam ... sed promissam diuinitus petere uictoriam.*

⁶⁵⁴ Constantine's delay in liberating Rome is rationalised by the panegyrist Nazarius in 321 as well [*Pan. Lat.* 4(10).9.1-10.4, 12.1-2], who attributes it to the emperor's peculiar and exceptional sense of clemency. As such, Constantine acted only when it was clear that Maxentius had no intentions of ceasing his tyrannical behaviour and after he had declared himself openly hostile to Constantine.

sobriety allowed you to be foolhardy, tell us, I beg you, what you had as counsel if not a divine power?”⁶⁵⁵ In all of this the panegyrist is being coy, confident that his Gallic audience would put the pieces together in much the same way that the builders of the Arch of Constantine must have been confident that *instinctu divinitatis mentis magnitudine* would be properly understood.⁶⁵⁶ Of course Constantine had the assurance of some ultimate divine power that ‘deigned to reveal itself to him alone’ and acted as his advisor; the audience had heard the stories before and the auspicious outcome of the civil war was proof not only that this was true, but that the victory had indeed been “divinely promised”.

Lactantius, for his part, clearly understood the significance of the experience in this way. He was so convinced that the vision and the civil war were inextricably entwined, and that the divine promise of victory had been crucial to Constantine’s success, that he imagined it must have taken place at some critical moment of the campaign. However incorrect Lactantius is regarding the chronology of the vision, he nonetheless accurately reports how the vision was being remembered within only a few years of the war – with the exception of the Christian character of his description, a contribution all his own befitting his particular religio-cultural perspective on the nature and source of dreams and omens. Interesting to note is that Lactantius is the first to make a reference to the celestial-vision; the fact that the mention is brief and vague, presented almost in passing, could indicate that he did not know much about it, but it may also indicate that, even for a Nicomedian audience, it was unnecessary for him to go into greater detail that the emperor had seen something in the sky. Regardless, according to the tradition of which he was aware, and of which he was sure his

⁶⁵⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).4.1: *Haec omnia, imperator, cum cogitares scires uideres, nec te paterna grauitas nec tua natura temerarium esse pateretur, dic, quaeso, quid in consilio nisi diuinum numen habuisti?*

⁶⁵⁶ *CIL* 6.1139.

audience to some extent was as well, what Constantine had seen in the sky had manifested itself in his sleep and this spurred the Western emperor to victory. Curiously, Lactantius alludes not to the appearance of multiple suns in the sky, but a symbol. There is a modicum of caution still being exercised here by Lactantius, who was writing in Licinius' portion of the empire. As if a conflation of the attitudes of the panegyrists of 309 and 313, the vision had a direct effect on the outcome of the civil war, but by deriving a symbol within a very specific context, rather than presenting a solar halo with all of its attending cultural baggage, Lactantius – likely following the lead of his sources – circumvents any relevance it might have for the shared control of the empire, without denying its implications for the future.

All such ambiguity is discarded by the Gallic panegyrist Nazarius at Rome in 321, delivered at a time when tensions between Constantine and Licinius were again increasing, which led up to their second civil war and the eventual overthrow of the Eastern emperor. If Lactantius' account can be considered the first explicit mention of a celestial-vision, Nazarius presents us with the first detailed, albeit not literal, description of it. According to the panegyrist, it was a well-known fact in Gaul that Constantine had seen something in the sky prior to the Italian campaign that amounted to more than just a divine promise of victory – it was a direct conferral of divine assistance.

Finally, it is the talk of all the Gauls that armies were seen which let it be known that they had been divinely sent. And although heavenly things are not in the habit of coming before men's eyes, because the unmixed and incorporeal substance of their subtle nature eludes our dull and darkened vision, yet at that time your helpers submitted to being seen and heard, and escaped contamination by mortal sight after they had attested your worth. But what is their appearance said to have been, the vigor of their bodies, the size of their limbs, the eagerness of their wills? 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". Surely even divine things admit conceit and ambition touches heavenly things as well: those armies come down from heaven, those armies divinely sent bragged because they were fighting for you. Your father

Constantius, I believe, was their leader, who had yielded earthly triumphs to you, greater than he, and who, now deified, was enjoying divine expeditions. This too is a great reward for your piety: although he shared in heaven, he felt that he became more distinguished thanks to you, and your services redounded upon him himself whose services can still abound for others.⁶⁵⁷

What we possess here is, rather than a literal description, a heavily embellished, highly stylised, and abstract representation of the celestial-vision, which combines portent and interpretation into a singular narrative. For Nazarius, as for “all the Gauls” and as should be for the audience at Rome, there is no question whatsoever as to what the vision portended and its potential for the future. Constantine may have seen multiple suns in the sky or something similar, but in reality it had the effect of an army of divine warriors descending from the sky. The reference to ‘their flashing shields aflame with something dreadful’ may very well be a reference to the symbol Constantine ordered to be placed on the shields to acknowledge the source of his divine assistance, as stated by Lactantius, with which Nazarius’ Roman audience might have been familiar, particularly if they had observed Constantine’s triumphal procession following the defeat of Maxentius, though this detail was likely to have been solidified by this time in the local memory and tradition of the civil war. Thus, the soldiers that bore the ‘dreadful’ symbol (indeed, Constantine’s very troops) are to be understood as divine agents and their commander, none other than Constantine’s father himself, deceased and deified, continues to act in the interest of the State, which

⁶⁵⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).14.1-7: *In ore denique est omnium Galliarum exercitus uisos, qui se diuinitus missos prae se ferebant. Et quamuis caelestia sub oculos hominum uenire non soleant, quod crassam et caligantem aciem simplex illa et inconcreta substantia naturae tenuis eludat, ibi tamen auxiliores tui adspici audiriue patientes, ubi meritum tuum testificati sunt, mortalis uisus contagium refugerunt. Sed quaenam illa fuisse dicitur species, qui uigor corporum, quae amplitudo membrorum, quae alacritas uoluntatum? 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.’ Habent profecto etiam diuina iactantiam et caelestia quoque tangit ambitio: illi caelo lapsi, illi diuinitus missi gloriabantur, quod tibi militabant. Ducebat hos, credo, Constantius pater, qui terrarum triumphis altiori tibi cesserat, diuinas expeditiones iam diuus agitabat. Magnus hic quoque pietatis tuae fructus: quamuis particeps caeli, amplioem se fieri gratia tua sensit, et cuius munera in alios influere iam possint, in eum ipsum tua munera redundarunt.*

conveniently aligns with Constantine's endeavours. There is no plain mention of a solar halo, but a description of a very public celestial manifestation, with an emphasis on light, that appeared in Gaul and provided Constantine with the means of victory against Maxentius and the promise of future assistance, since presumably the deified Constantius, not only out of divine concern for the welfare of the State, but also because his character is sufficiently increased by his son's achievements, will lend assistance in times of conflict. Nazarius' description, then, becomes another point of reference in the evolving tradition, which preserves and reinforces previous contexts, while making a contribution to a new one.

The next source to mention the vision is Eusebius, nearly twenty years later, which stands as the last stage in the contemporary evolution of the Vision legend. Although, on the surface, the differences between the vision of Apollo and the *Vita* 'vision' appear staggering, we can see that there was as much variance in the representation and development of the legend between 309 and 321 as there was between 321 and 336, when Eusebius heard the story first-hand from the emperor. Just as for Nazarius' panegyric in 321, Constantine was not always present to hear public declarations and reimaginings of his visionary experiences.⁶⁵⁸ Even so, that to which he was exposed had a clear impact on him. Two things of the utmost relevance are evident in the *Vita* narrative. First, it is clear that Constantine was engaged in a continuous process of reinventing his past and had, over the span of twenty or so years, adjusted his recollection of this early experience: there remains a certain faithfulness to contextual details, but a great many other details concerning historical developments and personal revelations that Constantine retrospectively applied to the vision experience are muddled, overlapping, or chronologically improbable. Second, though closely

⁶⁵⁸ Nazarius speaks of Constantine as if he is not present; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).1.1 and 38.1.

related to the first, Constantine incorporated the perspective that the vision had had direct bearing on the civil war against Maxentius.

More than that, the story had grown to include, thanks to the benefit of hindsight, the additional context of the civil war(s) against Licinius and – the ultimate fulfillment of the portent – Constantine’s emergence as sole ruler. For the panegyrist of 309 the vision was a sign of future victories; for the panegyrist of 313 and Lactantius, of a victory recently won; for Nazarius in 321, it remained important for the victory over Maxentius almost a decade earlier, but also yielded future potential; meanwhile for Eusebius, writing with confidence after all was said and done, the ‘vision’ appeared in direct relation to the civil war against Maxentius (indeed, for each stage of the legend the vision becomes more strongly linked with the Battle of Milvian Bridge), but the effectiveness of the divine sign was perpetual and the ‘vision’ itself a divinely-sent prophecy of his rise to sole rule.

Whether wholly on his own initiative or in response to how others were representing his experiences in relation to the events that unfolded over the course of almost thirty years, gradually more and more details were integrated into the vision tradition, deepening and broadening it into a richer story. The process was very likely, and quite naturally, a strong mixture of both: for every new context or connection presented to him, Constantine would have filtered those observations and interpretations into his own recollection of the experience, drawing out additional details or aspects from other points in his personal history to create new pathways and looking upon his experiences afresh.

As for its reporters, the sustainability of the vision tradition owed much to its extreme adaptability. There is a strong possibility that the Vision legend could have ended at a fairly early point, being limited to a particular context and eventually fading away in order to make room for something more recent, but for every new historical development panegyrists and

writers could find new relevance for the experience, a new interpretation, and a new application. I suspect that Constantine or his court had a direct role in this process, whether regaling some interested party, such as the guests at the dinner party that Eusebius attended, with some version or other of the experience, or instructing court panegyrists on features to include in their orations.

The fact that we have so few contemporary narratives of the vision is simply a symptom of the period in question: Eusebius' *Vita* enjoyed limited readership in the fourth and fifth centuries, and afterwards fell into obscurity for centuries; Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum* barely survived the passage of time and exists now as a sole manuscript; and the *Panegyrici Latini* collection is a brilliant exception to an area of ancient oratory that was fleeting by nature. Many works that have survived from that period or shortly after, such as Optatus' *Against the Donatists* and the anonymous *Origo Constantini*, do not mention the vision, but it cannot be said how many works from the age of Constantine, which have since suffered a fate similar to Praxagoras' history, may have discussed it (though it should be acknowledged that many of those who were privy to the legend, such as Constantine's soldiers, the populace at large, or even aristocrats and bishops, simply did not write anything).

The transition, then, from 'pagan' vision to Christian conversion can be explained. Each speaker or author that mentioned the vision put their own spin on the tale to keep it vibrant and relevant, in accordance with how it was being remembered and interpreted at any given time. Constantine's story to Eusebius and his other guests told of the origin of the *Labarum*, and how divine powers had guided him to victory over first Maxentius and then Licinius to become sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Some of the details culled from the narrative that more plausibly belong to Constantine's tale show that he continued to

conceptualise the experience in a more-or-less non-Christian way, but the narrative as a whole is, much the same as the rest of *Vita*, filtered through Eusebius' Christian-centric lens – not merely as the origin of the divine sign, Eusebius viewed the 'vision' as Constantine's official introduction to the Christian god. In this sense Eusebius was just another link in the chain – another reporter, another interpreter with his own particular perspective. More to the point, he had the last word. And it was a powerful one.

After such a lengthy discussion this may come across as pessimistic; anti-climactic, even. However, there really is no climax to be had – the evolution of the Vision legend did not end with Eusebius. This much is clear from texts such as the *Actus Silvestri* and later Byzantine biographies of Constantine, but also in the visual representations of Raphael and others. Not just the Vision legend, but the legend of Constantine was malleable enough to suit the conditions of any (and every) age and milieu, and it is a process that continues even today, whether in layman, religious, or academic circles.

For my part, I believe that I have demonstrated at least that the evolution of the Vision legend was taking place within Constantine's own lifetime and that, rather than representing completely separate traditions, our three main sources indicate different phases of that process. Furthermore, it is my hope that my particular approach in this study contributes some new and interesting avenues of thought for future studies on the emperor's reign, his religion, and his contemporaries. Even if some of my arguments and ideas here are found to be less than compelling, I think that I have, in any case, shown that there are perspectives yet to be applied to the topic and that our approaches to the material are far from exhausted – indeed, my ultimate hope is that one can say, there is something new that can be said about Constantine's Vision.

APPENDIX A: PANEGYRIC 6 – 309 OR 310?

According to the internal evidence Panegyric 6 was delivered at Trier in the presence of the emperor on the occasion of the anniversary of the city's founding, which followed closely on the heels of not only Constantine's *dies imperii* (25 July 306), but also the fairly recent revolt and death of Maximian Herculius.⁶⁵⁹ Camille Jullian (1859-1933), the great historian of Roman Gaul, proposed that the panegyric was delivered on 1 August 310.⁶⁶⁰ There is no pressing need to discount the day and month; in the absence of evidence to the contrary it should be regarded as close enough. The year 310, however, is a different matter entirely.

For his part, Jullian supposed that it was possible that the panegyric could have been delivered sometime earlier than mid 310, but found it difficult to reconcile the panegyrist's claim that, by virtue of heredity, Constantine was "le maître du monde" prior to Galerius' illness ("au plus tard en février 310"). Lactantius and Eusebius of Caesarea, both writing shortly after the death of Galerius, describe an aggressive terminal ailment – interpreted as a divine punishment – that consumed the persecuting emperor in a manner reminiscent of the horrific death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in *2 Maccabees*.⁶⁶¹ Lactantius, who gives by far

⁶⁵⁹ Many of the details concerning the narratives of Panegyric 6, Lactantius, and Eusebius – such as the revolt of Maximian and travels of Lactantius – are discussed at length in Chapters One and Two, for which reason I will refrain from including them here.

⁶⁶⁰ C. Jullian, *Histoire de la Gaule*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1908-1928) 7.104 (n. 4).

⁶⁶¹ Lact. *DMP* 33; Eus. *HE* 8.16.3- 17.1. Cf. *2 Macc.* 9:5-28. As a form of divine punishment for persecuting Christians, Galerius contracts some form of infection in his bowels/groin that becomes progressively worse, and

the most detailed account, states that the affliction began in the eighteenth year of Galerius' reign (1 March 310-311) and lasted approximately one whole year before finally taking his life. Taking into account that Galerius' letter announcing the cessation of the Christian persecution (the so-called 'Edict of Toleration') was posted in Nicomedia on 30 April 311 (also according to Lactantius), this would imply that he had become ill between March and May 310 at the earliest.⁶⁶² Similarly, Eusebius implies that Galerius fell ill during the eighth year of the persecution (February 310-311) and his description of the progression of the disease, albeit not as detailed, largely concurs with Lactantius' account.⁶⁶³ If the panegyrist's aim was to capitalise on the senior emperor's unfortunate circumstances, this would perhaps render Jullian's conclusion quite satisfactory for an oration delivered in August 310. Such a conclusion, however, requires a couple of problematic suppositions.

It assumes, first, that Galerius' condition was deemed life-threatening from the outset. Both Lactantius and Eusebius claim that the disease was terminal and incurable, but this is likely a determination made only from the perspective of hindsight.⁶⁶⁴ If not a complete exaggeration, the aggressive symptoms that they describe must belong to a later stage of the illness; sepsis or blood poisoning, at the very least, would have claimed Galerius' life far sooner than May 311 had he been so swiftly and consistently rotting since

eventually worms breed inside him and consume him. Towards the end of his life he confesses the Christian god and composes a letter officially ending the persecution (the 'Edict of Toleration').

⁶⁶² Lact. *DMP* 35.1.

⁶⁶³ Eus. *HE* 8.16.1. Eusebius' dating of Galerius' illness is a tad vague. He states that the persecution began to relax after the eighth year – a reference to Galerius' death and the 'Edict of Toleration'. If his understanding of the progression of the disease is the same as Lactantius', he would likely be indicating that Galerius fell ill closer to February 310 than February 311.

⁶⁶⁴ Lactantius in particular states that it began as a sore, which Galerius' physicians excised, but that the scar would not fully heal. It was not until after the incision reopened a second time, causing a great deal of blood loss, that the wound stopped responding to treatment and the infection began to spread.

spring 310. Secondly, the passage that Jullian highlights does not actually designate Constantine as “le maître du monde”, but simply the rightful successor in a dynastic line: “Furthermore, that ancient prerogative of your imperial house advanced your father himself, so that you now take your place on the highest rung, above the destinies of human affairs, as the third emperor after two rulers of your line”.⁶⁶⁵ It is in this context that the panegyrist’s statement should be viewed, namely, that Constantine has legitimate standing in the imperial college, and not a claim to supremacy over his co-rulers, which is further evident in the lip-service paid to the Tetrarchs in the introduction of the oration:

And so I shall make my first abridgment in that, although I esteem you all, invincible rulers, whose majesty is harmonious and united, with the respect that is your due, I shall dedicate this address, trifling as it may be, to your divinity alone, O Constantine. For just as we sometimes worship the immortal gods individually in their own temples and abodes, although we revere them all in our hearts, so I consider that it is proper for me, while piously calling to mind all the rulers, to celebrate with my praises the one who is present.⁶⁶⁶

Far from being Jullian’s ‘master of the world’, something that would presuppose an ambition for sole rule at such an early point in Constantine’s reign, the panegyrist’s statement delineates him merely as his father’s rightful successor. Jullian is absolutely correct that legitimation is a consistent theme throughout the panegyric and to this end the orator hedges all his bets; Constantine is a legitimate emperor because: his dynasty predates the Tetrarchy; Constantius personally recommended him to Jupiter;⁶⁶⁷ all of the gods chose him to be

⁶⁶⁵ *Pan. Lat. 6(7).2.4: Quin immo ipsum patrem tuum uetus illa imperatoriae domus praerogatiua prouexit, ut iam summo gradu et supra humanarum rerum fata consisteres, post duos familiae tuae principes tertius imperator.* The other emperor in this description is Claudius II Gothicus (268-270), who is publicly introduced for the first time in this panegyric as Constantine’s ancestor.

⁶⁶⁶ *Pan. Lat. 6(7).1.4-5: Itaque primum illud compendium faciam quod, cum omnes uos, inuictissimi principes, quorum concursus est et socii maiestas, debita ueneratione suspiciam, hunc tamen quantumcumque tuo modo, Constantine, numini dicabo sermonem. Vt enim ipsos immortales deos, quamquam uniuersos animo colamus, interdum tamen in suo quemque templo ac sede ueneramus, ita mihi fas esse duco omnium principum pietate meminisse, laudibus celebrare praesentem.*

⁶⁶⁷ *Pan. Lat. 6(7).7.3-4.*

emperor;⁶⁶⁸ the army chose him to be emperor;⁶⁶⁹ the personified State pursued him;⁶⁷⁰ and the vision of Apollo promised him a long life and reign.⁶⁷¹ It should be immediately disconcerting, then, that the panegyrist makes absolutely no reference to the five years Constantine has already spent in power, since he was celebrating his *quinquennalia* from 25 July 310-311 – it certainly would have been strategic for the orator to include it, but failing to mention it entirely (especially considering its recentness) would have been to commit a professional *faux pas*.

We can thus do away with Jullian's hesitation and suppose that a date prior to mid 310 is possible, the next likely date therefore being 1 August 309. This creates another problem, since the delivery of Panegyric 6 is also inextricably linked to the failed revolt and death of Maximian in early or mid 310.⁶⁷² The panegyrist more than implies that his oration is being delivered not long after these events and his elaborate description of episode suggests that this is perhaps the first public presentation of the grisly details of Constantine's campaign against Maximian, so it perhaps followed the revolt by no more than a couple of months. The year 310, however, derives solely from the late fifth-century *Consularia Constantinopolitana*. Although somewhat late, the compiler of the *Consularia* was likely

⁶⁶⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).7.5; 8.5.

⁶⁶⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).8.2-3.

⁶⁷⁰ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).8.4-5. Constantine is depicted as fleeing from the soldiers as they attempt to clothe him with the imperial mantle. A standard political ritual in imperial rhetoric, the *recusatio imperii* portrays the honorand as deserving of power because they do not desire it. As such, the State as an entity serves its own interests by choosing the emperor and, in the case of dynastic succession, honours the previous emperor for their service to the State. See now U. Huttner, *Recusatio imperii* (Hildesheim, 2004).

⁶⁷¹ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).21.

⁶⁷² Because of the perceived proximity of the panegyric to the events, July is usually the preferred month for Maximian's death. See, however, K.A.E. Enenkel, 'Panegyrische Geschichtsmithologisierung und Propaganda. Zur Interpretation des Panegyricus Latinus VI', *Hermes* 128 (2000) 91-126, at 99-100 (n. 20), who 'calculates' that Constantine defeated Maximian at Massalia between 15 May and 2 June, and was back in Trier no later than 12 June.

working from a consular list created ca. 314, in addition to some form of historiographical narrative composed around the end of Constantine's reign.⁶⁷³ Nevertheless, numerous entries for the early fourth century are erroneous. Considering, for instance, just the years 300-314, the *Consularia* states that Diocletian's 'Edict on Prices' was issued in 302 (instead of 301);⁶⁷⁴ that the abdications of Diocletian and Maximian, as well as the promotions of Constantius and Galerius (Augusti), and Severus and Maximin Daia (Caesars), took place on 1 April 304 (1 May 305);⁶⁷⁵ and that the Battle of Cibalae between Constantine and Licinius occurred in 314 (early October 316).

There seems to be no consensus in these blatant errors. All three are off by at least one year, though not consistently ahead or behind. Only four entries between 300 and 314 can be corroborated by other source material: the start of the persecution of the Christians in 303;⁶⁷⁶ the death of Constantius and accession of Constantine on 25 July 306; the death of Galerius in 311; and the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. The remaining entries – the death of Severus in 307 and the Conference at Carnuntum on 11 November 308 – cannot be substantiated by other sources, though are generally considered correct because they conform to the relative chronologies provided by other sources.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷³ See R.W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana* (Oxford, 1993) 187-98.

⁶⁷⁴ See S. Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs* (Oxford, 1996) 205-33.

⁶⁷⁵ Lact. *DMP* 19.1; Lactantius, who was likely still in Nicomedia at the time, gives the day as 1 May. On the year, see T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 4-5. A taurobolium inscription from Rome dated 14 April 305 (*CIL* 6.497) indicates that the promotions had not yet occurred.

⁶⁷⁶ See T.D. Barnes, 'From Toleration to Repression: The Evolution of Constantine's Religious Policies', *SCI* 21 (2002) 189-207, at 192-4.

⁶⁷⁷ Regarding the death of Severus, see Barnes, *New Empire*, 5 (n. 13); B. Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian* (London, 2009) 187-9.

The *Consularia* is not (*pace* Nixon and Rodgers) the only source that dates Maximian's death.⁶⁷⁸ Jerome's *Chronicle* states that Maximian was killed in the second year of Constantine's reign (=Year 5 of Persecution/2334 Abraham/271.4 Olympiad), which by his ordering is 308.⁶⁷⁹ By Jerome's own statement the material up to 326 is largely a translation of the third edition of Eusebius' now-lost *Chronicæ canones*, but even so a number of his entries for the early fourth century show themselves to be just as problematic as the *Consularia*.⁶⁸⁰ For instance, he claims that Galerius died in 309 (instead of 311) and that Maximian died during a civil war against Licinius in 311 – a year before the Battle of Milvian Bridge! Regarding Maximian, his death in mid 308 is simply untenable: numismatic evidence indicates that Maximian was only ejected from Rome ca. April 308;⁶⁸¹ Lactantius describes him as being present in Gaul for some time after his expulsion by Maxentius and before the revolt;⁶⁸² and a death in mid 308 would preclude his attendance at the Conference at Carnuntum later that year.

Although Jerome must certainly be incorrect in placing Maximian's death in 308, that does not mean that the *Consularia* is correct in situating it in 310 – neither source inspires confidence, which should not be surprising, since following the Battle of Milvian Bridge the entire episode was obscured in order for Constantine to claim Maximian as a deified

⁶⁷⁸ C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994) 212.

⁶⁷⁹ Jer. *Chron.* 229d. Cf. *Epit. Chron.* 448.983, which follows Jerome in assigning 308.

⁶⁸⁰ Jer. *Chron.* 6-7.

⁶⁸¹ *RIC* 6 Ticinum, Aquileia, and Rome represent Maximian as Augustus until ca. spring 308, at which point both he and Constantine disappear from the coinage. The Carthage mint was closed sometime before September 307, since on the last issues Constantine still appears as Caesar (that is, he had not yet been promoted to Augustus via marriage to Fausta), and the mint at Ostia, which opened sometime in 308, produced no coins for either Maximian or Constantine.

⁶⁸² Lact. *DMP* 29.1. The panegyrist [at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).14.6- 15.1] seems to pass over Maximian's stay in Gaul between spring and November 308, taking up his description with the warm reception by Constantine following the Conference at Carnuntum.

ancestor. Confidence should be placed, rather, in the descriptions of the panegyrist, who was living in Gaul at the time and clearly received information from the imperial court, and Lactantius, who seems to have been working from reliable Western sources, even if it was court propaganda, since they not only provide detailed accounts of the revolt and death of Maximian, but also situate it in relation to other developments at the time.

Panegyric 6

According to the narrative of the panegyrist, the revolt of Maximian and the *dies imperii* of Constantine are not the only recent events; the Franks, he relates, are quite in despair over the beginnings of a bridge being constructed over the Rhine at Cologne (Colonia Agrippina).⁶⁸³ The commencement of this new project followed closely on the heels of Constantine's successful campaign against the Bructeri, a tribe living in the area around modern Deutz (Cologne on the eastern bank of the Rhine). The campaign itself may have taken place in spring or summer 308, since Constantine's victory title *Germanicus Maximus II* was earned before 11 November 308.⁶⁸⁴ For this reason, Timothy Barnes places both the campaign against the Bructeri and the construction of the bridge in 308, leaving 309 empty (a "blank year", in which there is no discernible activity), and then locates another campaign against the Franks (for which there is no evidence of a victory title), Maximian's revolt, and Panegyric 6 in 310.⁶⁸⁵ Similar datings have resulted from consideration of the same criteria;

⁶⁸³ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).11.3.

⁶⁸⁴ T.D. Barnes, 'Imperial Campaigns, A.D. 285-311', *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 174-93, at 192; id. 'The Victories of Constantine', *ZPE* 20 (1976) 149-55, at 150-1. Galerius shares the victory title, but not Licinius; therefore, it must pre-date the promotion of the latter.

⁶⁸⁵ Quote: Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 213. Barnes, *New Empire*, 70; id. *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981) 34. See, more recently, id., *Constantine* (Malden, MA, 2011) 71, that Constantine earned two victory titles between 306 and 310, and that the campaign against the Bructeri followed the

so, for instance, Barceló concludes that construction on the bridge began in 309, while Beisel dates it to 309/310.⁶⁸⁶

It is somewhat essential for the panegyrist to mention the construction of the bridge, as well as the other fortifications ‘ornamenting’ the frontier; it was the sign of a good emperor to not only ensure the security of the State from threats both external and internal,

construction of the bridge. Other variations have been posited. So, for instance, A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948) 63, does not mention the bridge, but puts the campaign against the Bructeri in spring 310; M. Vermes, ‘Constantine’s ‘Pagan Vision’: The Anonymous Panegyric on Constantine (310), *Pan. Lat. VII(6)*’, with introduction and notes by S.N.C. Lieu, in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds.), *From Constantine to Julian* (London, 1996) 63-96, at 94 (n. 27), puts the completion of the bridge in 315; C.M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London, 2004), 89, places the bridge in 308, but follows Lactantius in supposing a campaign against the Franks in 310; S. de Beer, ‘The Panegyric Inventio: A Rhetorical Analysis of *Panegyricus Latinus V*’, in K.A.E. Enkel and I.L. Pfeijffer (eds.), *The Manipulative Mode* (Leiden, 2005) 295-318, at 297, does not mention the bridge, but situates Maximian’s revolt in 308 on the basis of Panegyric 6; J. Engemann, ‘“Dich aber, Konstantin, sollen die Feinde hassen!” Konstantin und die Barbaren’, in A. Demandt and J. Engemann (eds.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Trier, 2006) 173-87, at 184, dates the bridge to 310 [cf. id., ‘Konstantins sicherung der Grenzen des römischen Reiches’, in A. Demandt and J. Engemann, *Imperator Caesar Flavius Constantinus* (Mainz, 2007) 155-9, at 157]; M. Kulikowski, ‘Constantine and the Northern Barbarians’, in N.E. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006) 347-76, at 357, puts the campaign against the Bructeri in 307, and states that the bridge in 310 was constructed in order to attack the Franks. It would appear, however, that Constantine did not actually campaign against the Franks in 310, since he does not claim another victory title until 313/314 (*Germanicus Maximus III*; cf. id., ‘Victories of Constantine’, 153). The progression of the panegyrist’s narrative indicates quite clearly that Maximian’s revolt distracted Constantine from the bridge construction, not a campaign against the Franks or Bructeri (see below). The reason for supposing that he was campaigning derives from Lactantius (*DMP* 29.3-4), who states that at the time of Maximian’s revolt the Franks were active on the frontier and that Constantine had gone to repel them; cf. J. Moreau, *Lactance*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1954) 2.369-70, who suggests that the Franks were responding to the construction of the bridge. More authoritatively, perhaps, the panegyrist [*Pan. Lat.* 6(7).21.1-2] claims that, while on his return march following the suppression of Maximian, Constantine received word that the ‘barbarians’ were running amok in his absence, but when they heard that he was on his way back they dispersed. The panegyrist, then, gives the impression that Constantine needed neither to return immediately to the frontier nor to campaign against the Franks, which would explain why no new victory title was adopted in 310. The version of Lactantius, then, likely stems from his propagandistic source: in an attempt to further blacken the character of Maximian, he is depicted as compromising the security of the State.

⁶⁸⁶ E. Galletier, *Panegyriques Latins*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1949-1955) 2.36-7: 307 or 308; P. Barceló, *Roms auswärtige Beziehungen unter der Constantinischen Dynastie (306-363)* (Regensburg, 1981) 14: 309; F. Beisel, *Studien zu dem fränkisch-römischen Beziehungen* (Idstein, 1987) 17: 309/310; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 237 (n. 60): 309-310; P. Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine* (London, 2001) 171 and 342 (n. 54): 308; Odahl, *Constantine*, 89: 308; H. Elton, ‘Warfare and the Military’, in Lenski, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 325-46, at 342: 309-310; R. Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge, 2011) 254-5, places it during the campaigns against the Franks, but is vague as to chronology.

but also to build.⁶⁸⁷ The panegyrist, however, seems to emphasise quite strongly that the bridge has only just begun.

But it seems a fine thing to you (and indeed it is a very fine thing) not only that the Rhine should be crossed in its upper reaches, where it has many shallows by reason of its breadth, or is insignificant because of its proximity to its source, but also that it should be trodden by means of a new bridge just where it is at its greatest, where it has already absorbed the many waters which this huge river of ours, and the barbarian Neckar and Main, have carried into it, and where, now turbulent because of its mighty flow, and impatient of a single bed, it seeks to spill out into its branches. Assuredly Nature herself serves your divinity, Constantine, since the foundations of such a mighty structure, sunk in the depths of the whirling waters, will find a sure and firm footing... This project is both difficult of accomplishment and of permanent usefulness. Certainly, indeed, from its very commencement it has prompted the submission of the enemy, who have sought peace as suppliants, and offered the noblest of hostages. From this no one can doubt what they will do when the bridge is finished, since they are already subservient when it is only just begun.⁶⁸⁸

If the bridge was half-way or mostly constructed the panegyrist would have stressed or exaggerated the *completion* of the bridge, in order to manufacture as much praise for Constantine as possible. Rather, he appears to overstate the infancy of the project and speaks in terms of future potentials: what a good idea it is to bridge the river, how difficult the project is to accomplish, how useful it will be, how the barbarians will react when it is completed – his use of the future tense when describing the foundations of the bridge might

⁶⁸⁷ On the prestige of bridge building, see the brief but insightful discussion in Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine*, 254-5; cf. J.P. Hallett, ‘‘Over Troubled Waters’’: The Meaning of the Title *Pontifex*, *TAPhA* 101 (1970) 219-27.

⁶⁸⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).13.2-5: *Sed pulchrum tibi uidetur (et re uera pulcherrimum est) ut Rhenus ille non solum superioribus locis, ubi aut latitudine uadosus aut uicinia fontis exiguus, sed etiam ibi nouo ponte calcetur ubi totus est, ubi iam plurimos hausit amnes quos hic noster ingens fluuius et barbarus Nicer et Moenus inuexit, ubi iam immani meatu ferox et aluei unius impatiens in sua cornua gestit excedere. Seruit profecto, Constantine, ipsa rerum natura numini tuo, cum in illa gurgitum altitudine tantarum molium fundamenta iaciuntur fidam et stabilem firmitatem habitura... Hoc opus et difficile factu et usu futurum est sempiternum. Certe quidem iam tibi in exordio sui hostium mouit obsequia, qui pacem supplices petiuerunt, nobilissimos obsides obtulerunt. Ex quo nemo dubitat quid profecto ponte facturi sint qui iam seruiunt inchoato.* Cf. the commentary of 13.1-5 by B. Müller-Rettig, *Der Panegyricus des Jahres 310 auf Konstantin den Grossen* (Stuttgart, 1990) 183-95.

even be taken to mean that they have yet to be set. We can be sure, then, that the panegyrist is reporting accurately when he states that the project has barely started.⁶⁸⁹

Unfortunately, the bridge cannot be reliably dated beyond the late 330s; dendrochronological analyses are complicated by the fact that the bridge underwent numerous augmentations and repairs in the decades following its initial construction and thus far no datable material evidence has been discovered to indicate when construction might have started.⁶⁹⁰ That said, with some exception scholars regularly conclude that construction of the bridge began in 310, since it is mentioned in Panegyric 6, which is traditionally dated to mid 310.⁶⁹¹ The bridge, however, was part of a larger project, forming a crossing over the Rhine to a fortified military encampment, the *Castellum Divitia* (at Deutz), which was completed in 315.⁶⁹² It is evident that the fort was not simply an afterthought but was

⁶⁸⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).11.3: "... and so far are they [i.e. the Franks] from endeavoring to cross that river that they are rather in despair at the bridge you have begun" (*ideoque tantum abest ut amnis illius transitum moliantur, magis ut coepto ponte desperent*); and 13.4-5 (above), in particular, *usu futurum est, in exordium sui, and inchoato*. Cf. Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 183: "Der Brücke war zum Zeitpunkt der Rede gerade in Bau"; T. Grünewald, *Constantinus Maximus Augustus* (Stuttgart, 1990) 105.

⁶⁹⁰ E. Hollstein, *Mitteuropäische Eichenchronologie* (Mainz, 1980) 74; the earliest date from the analysis was from the late 330s. M. Carroll-Spillecke, 'Das römische Militärlager *Divitia* in Köln-Deutz', *KJ* 26 (1993) 321-444, at 384-5, speculates that the lateness of the material is due to the need for continuous repairs and reinforcing.

⁶⁹¹ See, for example, P. Fuchs, 'Daten der Kölner Stadtgeschichte von den Römern bis 1400', in id. (ed.), *Chronik zur Geschichte der Stadt Köln. Band 1* (Köln, 1990) 39-344, at 57; Carroll-Spillecke, 'Militärlager *Divitia*', 384; id. 'The Late Roman Frontier Fort *Divitia* in Köln-Deutz and its Garrisons', in W. Groenman-van Waateringe et al. (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies 1995* (Oxford, 1997) 143-9, at 143. Cf. W. Eck, *Köln in römischer Zeit* (Köln, 2004) 605-6, who allows a broader range, between 308 and 310; H. Hellenkamper, 'Cologne/Deutz – *Divitia*', in M. Reddé et al. (eds.), *Les fortifications militaires* (Paris, 2006) 254-6, who suggests that construction on the bridge began shortly before 310.

⁶⁹² The date is ascertained from an inscription (*CIL* 13.8502) attributed to Constantine's *decennalia* year (25 July 315-316) and attests to the emperor's presence at the time of completion. The inscription no longer survives; it has been transmitted through medieval manuscripts. Either at the time it was copied or during transmission, the text of the inscription is believed to have been corrupted and the *decennalia* reference has been inserted by modern editors; cf. T. Grünewald, 'Ein epigraphisches Zeugnis zur Germanenpolitik Konstantins des Großen: die Bauinschrift des Deutzer Kastells (*CIL* XIII 8502)', in H.E. Herzig and R. Frei-Stolba (eds.), *Labor omnibus unus* (Stuttgart, 1989) 171-85; M. Gechter, 'Zur Überlieferung der Bauinschrift des Kastells *Divitia* (Deutz)', *KJ* 24 (1991) 377-80. See also M.R. Alföldi, 'Das Trierer Stadtbild auf Constantins Goldmultiplum: ein Jahrhundertirrtum', *TrZ* 54 (1991) 239-48, who has redated a gold-multiple minted at Trier

planned from the outset: the bridge is aligned along the same axis as the western and eastern gates of the fort, creating a continuous straight line from Cologne to the end of the *Via principalis* of the camp.⁶⁹³ The bridge, then, was the primary phase of the project.

Investigations at the fort itself have proven more productive. The earliest Constantinian coins found at the site date to 312/313, which would indicate that construction began ca. 313.⁶⁹⁴ However, a recent re-evaluation of the brickstamps at *Divitia* shows that there were two distinct phases of construction, pre and post-312.⁶⁹⁵ A large number of bricks are stamped as having been produced by the 22nd Legion operating out of Mainz, east of Trier, but the details of the stamps differ: some appear as LEGIIXX, while others appear as LEGXXIICV. Formerly the 22nd Legion *Primigenia*, this detachment was renamed *Constantiana Victrix* (hence, CV) following Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge, in which they seem to have participated.⁶⁹⁶ Though the authors of the new study, in keeping with the traditional dating of Panegyric 6, maintain that construction on the bridge began in 310, they conclude that construction on *Divitia* started sometime prior to 312.⁶⁹⁷ If the bricks

to 315, identifying it as a commemorative issue for the completion of the fortress; it depicts a fortified encampment with a bridge in the foreground and the emperor at the top delivering an address.

⁶⁹³ Carroll-Spillecke, 'Militärlager *Divitia*', 385. See also the plans and site description in H. Precht, 'Die Ausgrabungen im Bereich des Castellum *Divitia*: Vorbericht über die Kastellgrabungen', *KJ* 13 (1972/1973) 120-7; id., 'Köln-Deutz: römisches Kastell', in H.G. Horn and T. Bechert (eds.), *Die Römer in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (Stuttgart, 1987) 513-6. Cf. Fuchs, 'Daten der Kölner Stadtgeschichte', 57, for a site-plan that includes most of Cologne on the western bank.

⁶⁹⁴ Carroll-Spillecke, 'Militärlager *Divitia*', 385. Three coins dating to 320 and 337 were also found in the foundation trench, but it is likely that they entered through a breach and are not indicative of the construction date.

⁶⁹⁵ N. Hanel and U. Verstegen, 'Gestempelte Ziegel aus dem spätrömischen Kastell *Divitia* (Köln-Deutz)', *KJ* 39 (2006) 213-52.

⁶⁹⁶ H. von Petrikovits, 'Fortifications in the North-Western Roman Empire from the Third to the Fifth Centuries A.D.', *JRS* 61 (1971) 178-218, at 182-3.

⁶⁹⁷ Hanel and Verstegen, 'Gestempelte Ziegel', 236-7.

stamped as LEGIIXX were being produced before the 22nd Legion began preparations for the Italian campaign, this would place construction at least in 311.⁶⁹⁸

The construction of the fort is not likely to have begun until the bridge was at least mostly completed, which according to one specialist would have taken two to three years.⁶⁹⁹ There are also indications that the bridge, at least initially, was hurriedly constructed: an unusually large amount of stones used in the foundations for the piers suggests that they were installed with haste.⁷⁰⁰ This is quite understandable: the entire point of the project was to establish a foothold in ‘enemy’ territory; to not simply reinforce the frontier and allow easier access across the Rhine, but to force the Franks and other tribes further into the interior.⁷⁰¹ Constantine’s campaign against the Bructeri in 308 thus makes more sense; he was clearing out the area around Deutz in order to both make way for and eliminate a potential threat to his new building project. The panegyrist should therefore be trusted when he states that the building of the bridge came soon after the campaign against the Bructeri, since this would have been difficult to implement if the Bructeri or another tribe were given time and space to resettle the area. It is unreasonable, then, to suppose that if construction on the bridge was already underway in late 308 or 309, that a panegyrist speaking in mid 310 would describe it as being so very incomplete (and perhaps also that he would neglect to mention at least Constantine’s intentions to build a fortified military camp across the Rhine connected to it);

⁶⁹⁸ Construction would not necessarily have ceased during the Italian campaign. The brickstamps show that, in addition to military brickworks out of Mainz, Constantine utilised public brickworks out of *Belgica prima*, north-west of Trier; cf. Hanel and Verstegen, ‘Gestempelte Ziegel’, 223-9.

⁶⁹⁹ Carroll-Spillecke, ‘Militärlager *Divitia*’, 384-5; a surprising estimate, but she takes into account that Constantine would have been motivated by ‘barbarian’ unrest to force a short construction period, possibly even taking shortcuts. This might account for the necessity of extensive reinforcing and repairs in later years.

⁷⁰⁰ S. Neu, ‘Die römische Rheinbrücke’, *Führer zu vor- und frühgeschichte Denkmälern. Köln 2* (1980) 147-52.

⁷⁰¹ Müller-Rettig, *Panegyricus*, 166.

such a description is far more appropriate for a panegyric delivered in mid 309, only months after the work began.

It is at this point that the panegyrist turns to the topic of Maximian's revolt: "When you were concerned with these projects which were so useful and worthwhile for the State", he says, "seditious intrigues of that man, who ought to have welcomed your successes warmly, diverted your attention to themselves".⁷⁰² Contrary to the later account of Lactantius, Constantine was not engaged in a campaign at this time, but overseeing preparations for the construction of the bridge when he was distracted by Maximian's revolt.⁷⁰³ In addition to the bridge, the panegyrist situates the revolt in relation to another recent event: the Conference at Carnuntum. The details of the conference are not given, but the panegyrist makes the point of saying that Maximian had been "spurned by Illyricum", a reference perhaps to his hope that Diocletian and Galerius would ratify his return to imperial power. What happened, rather, is that he was instructed to abdicate once again, which he would have done either before leaving Illyricum or upon his return to Gaul in late 308.

So this fellow [i.e. Maximian] was ashamed to imitate that man who had adopted him as a brother [i.e. Diocletian], and regretted having sworn an oath to him in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter. I do not wonder that he betrayed his word even to his son-in-law! This is good faith, this scrupulous fulfillment of the oath sworn in the inmost shrine of the Palatine sanctuary, to execute one's journey slowly and deliberately, no doubt already hatching those schemes for war, consuming the supplies in the post stations so that no army could follow, suddenly to take

⁷⁰² *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).14.1: *Talibus te pro utilitate ac dignitate publica rebus intentum auerterunt in se noui motus eius hominis quem successibus tuis maxime fauere decuisset.*

⁷⁰³ Lact. *DMP* 29.3-4; cf. J.L. Creed, *Lactantius* (Oxford, 1984) 110 (n. 6), that Constantine was distracted from the bridge, not a campaign. The description here at *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).14.1 cannot mean that Constantine was engaging the Franks. The most recent campaign mentioned by the panegyrist is against the Bructeri, for which he describes the celebration of a triumph; at 12.3: "And so countless numbers were slaughtered, and very many were captured. Whatever herds there were were seized or slaughtered; all the villages were put to the flame; the adults who were captured, whose untrustworthiness made them unfit for military service and whose ferocity for slavery, were given over to the amphitheater for punishment, and their great numbers wore out the raging beasts" (*Caesi igitur innumerabiles, capti plurimi; quidquid fuit pectoris, raptum aut trucidatum est; uici omnes igne consumpti; puberes qui in manus uenerunt, quorum nec perfidia erat apta militiae nec ferocia seruituti, ad poenas spectaculo dati saeuientes bestias multitudine sua fatigarunt*).

up a position within the walls, clad in purple, and usurp imperial power, twice laid down, for the third time, to send dispatches to suborn the armies, to try to undermine the loyalty of the troops by a display of rewards—to contemplate using, clearly without a scruple, an army which he had taught to have an itchy palm!⁷⁰⁴

The implication here is that, in addition to breaking his original oath to Diocletian at Rome in 303 that they would both retire in 305, Maximian also broke an oath made to Constantine, namely, his recent promise that this time he would retire for good – a promise that he would soon break. Not too soon after, though; the panegyrist implies here also that there was a gap between Maximian’s abdication and his attempted usurpation, during which time he was travelling, presumably to Arelate (Arles), where he was to enjoy his retirement as a private citizen and where he would suddenly declare himself emperor, perhaps in the spring or early summer following the conference.⁷⁰⁵ Constantine’s response was swift: he forced a march from the Rhine frontier to Arelate, besieged Maximian at nearby Massalia (Marseilles), and secured his surrender. Shortly following his apprehension, we are told, Maximian – although spared by Constantine – took his own life. As for Constantine, he was present at Trier at the beginning of August for the delivery of the panegyric.

⁷⁰⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).15.6-16.1: *Hunc ergo illum, qui ab eo fuerat frater adscitus, puduit imitari, huic illum in Capitolini Iouis templo iurasse paenituit. Non miror quod etiam genero peieravit. Haec est fides, haec religio Palatini sacrarii deuota penetralibus, ut lente et cunctanter, iam scilicet cum illis belli consiliis, itinere confecto, consumptis copiis mansionum ne quis consequi posset exercitus, repente intra parietes consideret purpuratus et bis depositum tertio usurparet imperium, litteras ad sollicitandos exercitus mitteret, fidem militum praemiorum ostentatione turbare temptaret, secure scilicet usus exercitu quem uenales manus habere docuisset.* The mention of an oath in the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter refers to Maximian’s original promise to Diocletian in Rome in 303 to abdicate. Cf. Barnes, *New Empire*, 59; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 241 (n. 73).

⁷⁰⁵ Arelate is reasonably presumed, since that is the army’s destination; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).18. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 242 (n. 78), conclude Arelate (following Moreau, *Lactance*, 2.371) based on Lactantius’ claim (at *DMP* 29.5) that Maximian invaded a mint treasury in order to bribe the soldiers. No; the mint at Arelate was opened in 313, when the mint at Ostia was closed. However, the city may have had a treasury, if indeed it was intended as Maximian’s place of retirement; the panegyrist does comment (at 15.1): “You had given him the most splendid and divine gifts, the ease of a private citizen and the wealth of a king” (*Cui tu summa et diuersissima bona, priuatum otium et regias opes*). Cf. C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage 6* (London, 1967) 238, who suggests that the temporary closure of the mint at Lyons (Lugdunum) was possibly on account of Maximian raiding the treasury there.

On the basis of the panegyrist's description alone mid 309 seems most appropriate for its delivery. It is necessary, however, to consider also the narrative of Lactantius, since he not only provides another detailed contemporary account of the revolt, but exhibits an awareness of developments taking place both within and outside of Gaul that help to further isolate the date of Maximian's death and reinforce this dating of Panegyric 6.

Lactantius

The version of Maximian's revolt and death that Lactantius reports in *De mortibus persecutorum* (ca. 315) portrays the episode in much darker and more sinister tones than the previous account, which is likely how he received it as part of Constantine's pre-war propaganda. Even though the story had been retooled and elaborated, particularly with respect to the details of the aftermath of the siege of Massalia, Lactantius' account nevertheless agrees with that of the panegyrist on numerous important points. Following his expulsion from Rome (ca. April 308) Maximian returned to Gaul and "after staying there some time" (*ibi aliquantum moratus [est]*) he set off to meet Galerius to discuss the organisation of the empire.⁷⁰⁶ His plan, Lactantius informs us, was to kill Galerius and assume his position, but when he arrived at the Conference at Carnuntum he found Diocletian in attendance as well. Once again, the result of the conference was not as he had hoped: Licinius was promoted to Augustus, while Maximian returned to Gaul empty handed.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁶ Lact. *DMP* 29.1.

⁷⁰⁷ Lact. *DMP* 29.2. Quite prudently, Lactantius omits one major development of the conference, namely, that Constantine, whom Galerius had refused to recognise as a member of the imperial college since September 307, was now reintroduced to the fold at the rank of Caesar. On the other hand, he insists that six people were ruling at the same time (*Sic uno tempore sex fuerunt*): not only Galerius, Licinius, Constantine, and Maximian, but also Maximian and Maxentius. Thus, Lactantius fails to mention two other decisions reached at the conference: first,

With his schemes thus frustrated, the old Maximian began to organize a third struggle; he returned to Gaul full of evil and criminal plans, intending to ensnare the emperor Constantine, his own son-in-law and the son of his son-in-law, in a malicious plot, and, in order to disarm suspicion, he laid aside his imperial garb. The Frankish people were in arms. Maximian persuaded the unsuspecting Constantine not to take the whole of his army with him against them, alleging that the barbarians could be defeated by a small body of troops; thus, Maximian planned, he himself would have an army to take over, while Constantine would be crushed because of the paucity of his forces. The young man believed him because of his age and experience, and obeyed him as his father-in-law; he set out, leaving the greater part of his troops behind. Maximian waited a few days until he reckoned that Constantine was inside barbarian territory; then he suddenly assumed the purple, invaded the treasury, and made donations on his usual lavish scale.⁷⁰⁸

Upon hearing this Constantine moves swiftly against Maximian, who shuts himself within the walls of Massalia and, after a brief siege, is apprehended.⁷⁰⁹ As before, Constantine spares his life, but in this rendition the humiliated Maximian devises a new plot to kill Constantine in his sleep with the assistance of his daughter Fausta, who promptly reveals the plot to her husband. A trap is set and Maximian, caught in the act of murdering a body-double, is instructed to kill himself.⁷¹⁰

that Maximian should abdicate; and, second, that Maxentius was again formally declared a usurper with no hopes of recognition from the Tetrarchy. The abdication, then, becomes one of the elements of the story in the following section: Maximian relinquishes the *imperium* on his own initiative, in order to disarm Constantine.

⁷⁰⁸ Lact. *DMP* 29.3-5: *Qua re impeditis consiliis senex Maximianus tertiam quoque pugnam moliebatur; redit in Galliam plenus malae cogitationis ac sceleris, ut Constantinum imperatorem, generum suum, generi filium dolo malo circumveniret, et ut posset fallere, deponit regiam vestem. Francorum gens in armis erat. Persuadet nihil suspicanti, ne omnem secum exercitum duceret, paucis militibus posse barbaros debellari, ut et ipse haberet exercitum quem occuparet, et ille opprimi posset ob militum paucitatem. Credit adulescens ut perito ac seni, paret ut socero; proficiscitur relicta militum parte maiore. Ille paucis diebus expectatis, cum iam Constantinum aestimaret intrasse fines barbarorum, repente purpuram sumit, thesauros invadit, donat ut solet large.*

⁷⁰⁹ Lact. *DMP* 29.6-8. The panegyrist does not mention how the siege ended, whereas Lactantius here informs us that the obstinate Maximian was betrayed by the soldiers with him in the city, who opened the gates and let in the troops.

⁷¹⁰ Lact. *DMP* 30. This episode is a major departure from the earlier account of the panegyrist; it is most certainly the product of Constantinian pre-war propaganda, manufactured around the same time as the *damnatio memoriae* of Maximian. Despite Constantine's best efforts after the Battle of Milvian Bridge to rehabilitate the character of Maximian, it is this image that seems to survive in later histories (see below).

Significant alterations to the version first reported by the panegyrist are evident, but what is interesting about Lactantius' account is that he too places the revolt in the immediate aftermath of the Conference at Carnuntum – he situates it, in fact, much closer to the conference than the panegyrist does, framing the conference, abdication, and usurpation in immediate temporal succession, and obscuring the entire episode with a malevolent intent formed before Maximian had even departed Illyricum. The revolt and death of Maximian, according to Lactantius, seems to come about immediately following his arrival in Gaul, that is, late 308 or spring 309.⁷¹¹

Even more important for the present purpose, however, is where Lactantius situates the revolt within his overall narrative of events throughout the empire: from the death of Maximian Lactantius turns immediately to Galerius' preparations for his *vicennalia*, which likely began sometime in 309.⁷¹² This is not simply a case of an author trying to reconcile the chronological overlapping of events in a historical narrative; Lactantius states quite plainly that he is maintaining a temporal sequence:

Thus that 'greatest' emperor of the Roman name [i.e. Maximian], who achieved for the first time after a long intervening period the great glory of celebrating a festival for the twentieth year of his reign, now by crushing and breaking his arrogant neck ended his abominable life with a shameful and ignominious death. From him God turned His eyes as the avenger of His religion and His people to the second Maximian, the originator of the impious persecution, so that in him too He could reveal the power of His majesty. This Maximian too was contemplating the celebration of his *vicennalia*. He had long been harassing the provinces by raising taxes in gold and silver; now, in order to fulfil his promises, he inflicted on them a second blow of his axe in the name of his *vicennalia*.⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ Lactantius must certainly have the next year in mind: Constantine would not have been campaigning during the winter, much less building a bridge.

⁷¹² Lact. *DMP* 31. Cf. Leadbetter, *Galerius*, 241 (*vicennalia* preparations) and 236-41 (the construction of Galerius' retirement palace). In light of excavations at Gamzigrad (Felix Romuliana), Galerius' birth place, it would seem that he intended to abdicate during his *vicennalia*.

⁷¹³ Lact. *DMP* 30.6- 31.2: *Ita ille Romani nominis maximus imperator, qui post longum temporis intervallum cum ingenti gloria viginti annorum vota celebravit, eliso et fracto superbissimo gutture vitam detestabilem*

In case there is any debate as to when Galerius started to ‘prepare’ for his *vicennalia*, Lactantius cites two other later developments, the datings for which are more secure: the death of Maximian occurs not only prior to the formal investiture of Constantine and Maximin as Augusti by Galerius in mid 310, but also before Galerius’ unsatisfactory compromise to Maximin’s persistent demands for imperial promotion by re-titling the two Caesars “Sons of the Augusti” (*fili Augustorum*) sometime in 309.⁷¹⁴ And all of this before Lactantius even begins to describe Galerius’ terminal illness, which he claims began ca. March 310. This last point is especially indicative, since it goes to the core of the theme of the text: if there is anything here for Lactantius to be particular about, it is the chronology of the deaths of the persecuting emperors. After describing the revolt and death of Maximian, he does not state that Galerius became ill around the same time – rather, he states that after the Christian god had disposed of one persecutor, He turned his attention to the next.

Conclusion

Although the panegyrist and Lactantius are at odds on some of the finer details of Maximian’s revolt, the broad strokes of their narratives and relative chronologies are largely consistent. From their consensus, the revolt and death of Maximian occurred between

turpi et ignominiosa morte finivit. Ab hoc deus religionis ac populi sui vindex oculos ad Maximianum alterum transtulit, nefandae persecutionis auctorem, ut in eo etiam suae vim maiestatis ostenderet. Iam de agendis et ipse vicennialibus cogitabat; <et ut,> qui iam dudum provincias afflixerat auri argentine indictionibus factis, quae promiserat redderet, etiam in nomine vicennialium securem alteram inflixit.

⁷¹⁴ Lact. *DMP* 32. Cf. Barnes, *New Empire*, 6-7 (n. 21-2). Constantine appears as *filius Augustorum* on documents citing him as consul, that is, in 309; cf. *P. Cair. Isidore* 47, 90, and 91. In the East, the mints at Siscia and Thessalonica show Constantine and Maximin as *fili Augustorum* until ca. May 310, when they became Augusti, while at Nicomedia, Antioch, and Alexandria only Constantine appears with that title, Maximin preferring to retain the title Caesar (including at Cyzicus, which did not mint any coins for Constantine as *filius Augustorum*). As such, Lactantius seems to be reporting correctly when he states that Maximin found Galerius’ compromise unsatisfactory. It is in late spring or early summer 310 that both Constantine and Maximin begin to appear as Augusti on the coinage.

November 308 and August 309. The panegyrist's particular point that Maximian distracted Constantine from the bridge project perhaps narrows down the timing of the revolt to spring 309, while Lactantius at the very least makes clear that it did not happen after early 310.

The only other contemporary source to describe the death of Maximian, Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia ecclesiastica*, is unfortunately unhelpful. Eusebius' lack of knowledge of Western events at this time is evident not only in his cursory treatment of Maximian's revolt, but also what appears to be an assumption that the *damnatio memoriae* of Maximian immediately followed his death.

And afterwards Licinius was declared Emperor and Augustus by a common vote of the rulers. These things caused great vexation to Maximin, since up to that time he was still entitled only Caesar by all. Therefore, being above all things a tyrant, he fraudulently seized the honour for himself, and became Augustus, appointed such by himself. At this time he who had resumed office again after his abdication, as we have shown, was discovered devising a plot to secure the death of Constantine, and died a most shameful death. He was the first [emperor] whose honorific inscriptions and statues and all such things as it has been customary to set up publicly they threw down, as belonging to an infamous and utterly godless person.⁷¹⁵

This is not only at odds with the discourse of the panegyrist, whose treatment of Maximian appears somewhat respectful, given the circumstances,⁷¹⁶ but also the testimony of

⁷¹⁵ Eus. *HE* 8.13.14-15: Λικίνιος δ' ἐπὶ τούτοις ὑπὸ κοινῆς ψήφου τῶν κρατούντων αὐτοκράτωρ καὶ Σεβαστὸς ἀναπέφηεν. ταῦτα Μαξιμίον δεινῶς ἐλύπει, μόνον Καίσαρα παρὰ πάντας εἰς ἔτι τότε χρηματίζοντα· ὃς δὴ οὖν τὰ μάλιστα τυραννικὸς ὢν, παραρπάσας ἑαυτῷ τὴν ἀξίαν, Σεβαστὸς ἦν, αὐτὸς ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ γεγονώς. ἐν τούτῳ δὲ Κωνσταντίνῳ μηχανὴν θανάτου συρράπτων ἀλούς ὁ μετὰ τὴν ἀπόθεσιν ἐπανηρῆσθαι δεδηλωμένος αἰσχίστῳ καταστρέφει θανάτῳ· πρῶτου δὲ τούτου τὰς ἐπὶ τιμῇ γραφὰς ἀνδριάντας τε καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα ἐπ' ἀναθέσει νενόμισται, ὡς ἀνοσίου καὶ δυσσεβεστάτου καθήρου.

⁷¹⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).14.3: "What shall I do, then, to touch such deep wounds with a light hand? Indeed I shall employ those customary defenses of all crimes, which for the most part, however, are asserted even by philosophers, that no man commits a sin unless he is fated to, and that those crimes of mortals are the acts of Fortune, while on the other hand virtues are the gifts of the gods" (*Quid faciam igitur ut tam profunda uulnera suspensa manu tractem? Vsurpabo nimirum illa communia omnium facinorum patrocina, quae tamen plerumque etiam a sapientibus adseruntur, neminem hominum peccare nisi fato et ipsa scelera mortalium actus esse fortunae, contra autem deorum munera esse uirtutes*); and at 15.2: "What was this enormous—I won't say craving for power (for what could he not do with you as ruler?)—but delusion of an old age which has lost its reasoning, that he sought such heavy burdens, and civil war, when so laden with years?" (*Quisnam ille tantus fuit non ardor potentiae (quid enim te imperante non posset?) sed error iam desipientis aetatis, ut tot natus annos grauissimas curas et bellum ciuile susciperet?*). Rather than casting Maximian in the same light as Lactantius, the panegyrist here quite gently explains away Maximian's attempted usurpation as a combination

Lactantius.⁷¹⁷ Although Eusebius correctly situates the revolt in the context of the fallout from the Conference at Carnuntum and prior to Galerius' illness, his inability to provide more specific details is probably due to the fact that, as Constantine began to rehabilitate the character of Maximian following the Battle of Milvian Bridge, the details of the revolt increasingly trickled into obscurity. This effort was apparently so effective that when Eusebius was writing *De vita Constantini* he could do no more than cut-and-paste his earlier description of Maximian's death and even then he still could not get the chronology quite right.⁷¹⁸ At the time he was writing the *HE*, at least, he knew that Maximian died sometime between the conference and Maximian's 'promotion' to Augustus, but he could not quite place it, so he fudged the chronology.

Later, non-contemporary sources on the matter are even more unhelpful; they are either extremely unreliable or offer nothing to clarify the situation. Aurelius Victor, writing in the late 350s or early 360s, says only that Maximian was plotting against Constantine and received a deserved death.⁷¹⁹ Not only is his description merely inserted into his account of

of fate and senility. Even Maximian's 'suicide' is depicted as unavoidable, not simply the product of fate, but also the will of the gods; cf. 14.5 and 20.3-4.

⁷¹⁷ Lact. *DMP* 42. Lactantius situates this after the death of Galerius, around the same time as the exile of Diocletian's daughter Valeria, and just before not only Constantine's civil war with Maxentius, but the formation of the alliance between Maximian and Maxentius.

⁷¹⁸ Eus. *VC* 1.47: "While he [i.e. Constantine] was thus engaged, the second of those who had retired from power was caught organizing an assassination plot, and met a shameful end. He was the first whose honorific inscriptions and statues and whatever else of the kind had been accorded him anywhere in the world to acknowledge his rank, were removed because of his profane impiety" (Ἐν τούτοις δ' ὄντι αὐτῷ μηχανὴν θανάτου συρράπτων ἀλοῦς τῶν τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀποθεμένων ὁ δεύτερος αἰσχίστῳ καταστρέφει θανάτῳ. 'πρώτου' δὲ τούτου τὰς ἐπὶ τιμῇ γραφὰς ἀνδριάντας τε καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα ἐπ' ἀναθέσει τιμῆς νενόμιστο πανταχοῦ γῆς ὡς ἀνοσίῳ καὶ δυσσεβοῦς καθήρουν). It is not simply a 'cut-and-paste' job; though the differences between this passage and Eus. *HE* 8.13.14-15 are minimal, some are significant; Eusebius was evidently making an effort to fit this previous description within his new narrative: the variation in the opening words (*HE*'s ἐν τούτῳ, versus *VC*'s Ἐν τούτοις) shows that he adjusted the context. As such, in *Vita* Eusebius is even more mistaken on the chronology than he was in *HE*: he apparently places the death of Maximian after the Battle of Milvian Bridge when Constantine was dealing with the Donatist schism; cf. *VC* 1.44-5, regarding Constantine's intervention in African Church politics.

⁷¹⁹ Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.21-22.

the civil war against Maxentius, offering nothing by way of a relative chronology, but his report of peripheral events is somewhat inaccurate: so, for instance, he places the Conference at Carnuntum before Galerius' invasion of Italy and his death shortly thereafter.⁷²⁰

Eutropius, writing in the late 360s, claims that after being expelled from Rome – which may have only been a pretense – Maximian travelled to Gaul to join Constantine, all the while plotting to kill him and take his territory; after the executions of the Frankish kings Ascaric and Merogaisus, Fausta revealed her father's plot to Constantine. Maximian then fled to Massalia where he was killed.⁷²¹ Again we are confronted by a chronological paradox, since the executions of the Frankish kings occurred relatively early in Constantine's reign, either in late 306 or early 307 – in either case, early enough for the episode to be mentioned in a panegyric delivered in September 307 on the occasion of Constantine's marriage to Fausta.⁷²² Further, he states in the following passage that around this time Licinius was made an emperor by Galerius, and that the death of the latter occurred immediately afterward.⁷²³ Although Eutropius appears to be inclined to place Maximian's death relatively early, and knew well enough to place his death and the Conference at Carnuntum in close proximity, he is seemingly unaware that Maximian had actually attended the conference.

⁷²⁰ Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.8-9.

⁷²¹ Eutr. *Brev.* 10.3.

⁷²² *Pan. Lat.* 7(6).4.2: "You have already begun with their kings themselves, and at the same time both punished their past crimes and bound the slippery faith of the whole race with bonds of fear" (*tu iam ab ipsis eorum regibus auspicatus es, simulque et praeterita eorum scelera punisti et totius gentis lubricam fidem timore uinxisti*). The names Ascaric and Merogaisus are supplied by Panegyric 6 [cf. 6(7).11.5], while Nazarius in 321 not only refers to them, but also compares Constantine's execution of them early in his reign to Hercules in the crib strangling twin serpents [cf. 4(10).16.5-6].

⁷²³ Eutr. *Brev.* 10.4.

Despite offering nothing new, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, composed in the tradition of Aurelius Victor sometime after the death of Theodosius I (395), is refreshingly sober, probably on account of its brevity. It does not provide a relative chronology of any sort, but states simply that Maximian was besieged at Massalia, captured, and executed by hanging.⁷²⁴ Our last relevant source, Zosimus, writing in the late fifth century, is without a doubt not to be trusted on the matter at all.⁷²⁵ Galerius, we are told, appointed Licinius emperor, and shortly afterward fell ill and committed suicide, around which time Maximian was expelled from Rome by Maxentius. Maximian then plotted against Constantine, but when Fausta discovered the scheme she informed her husband. His plans now dashed, Maximian became ill and died at Tarsus. With Zosimus, not only does the death of Galerius take place two years too early and by his own hand, but Maximian's expulsion is placed after the Conference at Carnuntum and the circumstances of his death are swapped with that of Maximin (though later in his narrative Zosimus maintains that Maximin also died at Tarsus).⁷²⁶ At the very last he seems to imply that Maximian's death came not too long after the conference, but considering all of his errors in chronology, this is probably accidental.

Whatever sources these later authors were working from, they clearly preserved the spirit of the pre-312 propaganda concerning Maximian, if not the precise details. Maximian

⁷²⁴ *Epit. de Caes.* 40.5.

⁷²⁵ Zos. *HN* 2.11.1.

⁷²⁶ Lact. *DMP* 49; Eutr. *Brev.* 10.4; and *Epit. de Caes.* 40.8, give the location of Maximin's death as Tarsus. According to Lactantius, when besieged there by Licinius, Maximin attempted suicide by poison. As opposed to its desired effect, the poison instead created plague-like symptoms, resulting in inflammation of his internal organs, agonising pain, and madness. After bashing his own head against a wall, his eyes fall out of their sockets; Maximin confesses the Christian god and, after begging for mercy, is allowed to expire. Eutropius does not describe Maximin's death, but does state that it was accidental. Eus. *HE* 9.10-12-15, does not give a location, but describes the illness, which he claims was a divine punishment in the form of a stroke; in this version as well Maximin's eyes fall out of their sockets, but they do so of their own accord on account of the severity of his illness.

is coloured in the blackest hues as a degenerate schemer, but the specifics of how his death came about are absent. Even in the case of the contemporary Eusebius nothing was clear-cut; by the late 330s he was still just as unsure about what had transpired as he was in the 310s when he first wrote about Maximian's death. The only insightful literary accounts of the death of Maximian, then, are those sources whose access to Western information in the years before the Battle of Milvian Bridge ensured the details they preserve: the orator of Panegyric 6 and Lactantius, both of whom, quite independently, neatly place the events in question in the year 309.

Appendix B: Dedications to Constantine in the Second Edition of *Divinae institutiones*

Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 1.1.13-16:

Quod opus nunc nominis tui auspicio inchoamus, Constantine imperator maxime, qui primus Romanorum principum repudiatis erroribus maiestatem dei singularis ac ueri et cognouisti et honorasti. nam cum dies ille felicissimus orbi terrarum inluxisset, quo te deus summus ad beatum imperii columnen euexit, salutarem uniuersis et optabilem principatum praeclaro initio auspicatus es, cum euersam sublatamque iustitiam reducens taeterrimum aliorum facinus expiasti. pro quo facto dabit tibi deus felicitatem uirtutem diuturnitatem, ut eadem iustitia, qua iuuenis exorsus es, gubernaculum rei publicae etiam senex teneas tuisque liberis ut ipse a patre accepisti tutelam Romani nominis tradas. nam malis, qui adhuc aduersus iustos in aliis terrarum partibus saeuiunt, quanto serius tanto uehementius idem omnipotens mercedem sceleris exsoluet, quia ut est erga pios indulgentissimus pater, sic aduersus impios seuerissimus iudex. cuius religionem cultumque diuinum cupiens defendere quem potius appellem, quem adloquar nisi eum, per quem rebus humanis iustitia et sapientia restituta est?

This work I now commence under the auspices of your name, Constantine, emperor most great: you were the first of Roman emperors to repudiate falsehood and first to know and honour the greatness of the one true God. Ever since that day, the happiest to dawn upon the earth, when God most high raised you to the blessed peak of power, you inaugurated a reign that all desired for their salvation, and you began it outstandingly when you made amends for the abominable crime of others and brought back justice from her overthrow and exile. For this, God will grant you happiness, virtue and long life, so that in your old age you may still keep the helm of state with the justice that you began with in your youth, and hand on the guardianship of the name of Rome to your children as you received it from your father. The wicked who shall persecute the good in other parts of the world will pay full measure for their evil to the almighty one, and the later they do so, the fiercer the payment, because just as he is a most indulgent father to the

pious, so he is a harsh judge of the impious. In my desire to protect his faith and divine worship, whom should I sooner appeal to, whom sooner address, than him through whom justice and wisdom have been restored on earth?

Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.26.11-17:⁷²⁷

Sed omnia iam, sanctissime imperator, figmenta sopita sunt, ex quo te deus summus ad restituendum iustitiae domicilium et ad tutelam generis humani excitauit. quo gubernante Romanae rei publicae statum iam cultores dei pro sceleratis ac nefariis non habemur, iam emergente atque inlustrata ueritate non arguimur ut iniusti qui opera iustitiae facere conamur. nemo iam nobis dei nomen exprobrat, nemo inreligiosus ulterius appellatur, qui soli omnium religiosi sumus, quoniam contemptis imaginibus mortuorum uiuum colimus et uerum deum. te prouidentia summae diuinitatis ad fastigium principale prouexit, qui posses uera pietate aliorum male consulta rescindere, peccata corrigere, saluti hominum paterna clementia prouidere, ipsos denique malos a re publica submouere, quos summa potestate deiectos in manus tuas idem deus tradidit, ut esset omnibus clarum quae sit uera maiestas. illi enim, qui ut impias religiones defenderent, caelestis <ac> singularis dei cultum tollere uoluerunt, profligati iacent, tu autem, qui nomen eius defendis et diligis, uirtute ac felicitate praepollens immortalibus tuis gloriis beatissime fruere. illi poenas sceleris sui et pendunt et pependerunt, te dextera dei potens ab omnibus periculis protegit, tibi quietum tranquillumque moderamen cum summa omnium gratulatione largitur. nec immerito rerum dominus ac rector te potissimum delegit, per quem sanctam religionem suam restauraret, quoniam unus ex omnibus extitisti qui praecipua uirtutis et sanctitatis exempla praeberes, quibus antiquorum principum gloriam, quos tamen fama inter bonos numerat, non modo aequares, sed etiam, quod est maximum, praeterires. illi quidem natura fortasse tantum similes iustis fuerunt. qui enim moderatorem uniuersitatis deum ignorat, similitudinem iustitiae adsequi potest, ipsam uero non potest. tu uero et morum ingenita sanctitate et ueritatis et dei agnitione in omni actu iustitiae opera consummas. erat igitur congruens, ut in formando generis humani statu te auctore ac ministro diuinitas uteretur. cui nos cottidianis precibus supplicamus, ut te in primis, quem rerum custodem uoluit esse, custodiat, deinde inspiret tibi uoluntatem, qua semper in amore diuini nominis perseueres, quod est omnibus salutare et tibi ad felicitatem, ceteris ad quietem.

⁷²⁷ In their translation, Bowen and Garnsey render the numbering of this passage as 7.26.10a-10g.

All fictions have now, most holy emperor, been laid to rest, ever since God most high raised you up to restore the abode of justice and to protect the human race. Now that you are ruler of the world of Rome we worshippers of God are no longer treated as criminals and villains; as the truth comes clear and is brought to light we are not put on trial as unjust for trying to do the works of justice. No one now flings the name of God at us in reproach, no one calls us irreligious any more, for we are the only religious people of them all: we scorn images of dead men; we worship the true and living God. The providence of the most high godhead has promoted you to supreme power so that you can in the trueness of your piety rescind the wicked decrees of others, correct error, provide for the safety of men in your fatherly kindness, and finally remove from public life such evil men as God has ousted with his divine power and has put into your hands, so that all men should be clear what true majesty is. They had sought to be rid of the worship of the one heavenly God in order to protect impious religions: now they lie defeated, and you, who defend his name and adore it, in the might of your virtue and prosperity enjoy your immortal glories in utter bliss. They are paying, and have paid, the penalty for their wickedness; you are protected from all dangers by the powerful right hand of God, who gives you a tranquil and peaceful power of control amid expressions of great gratitude from all. It was not wrong of the lord and ruler of the world to pick you out above all others through whom to re-inaugurate his holy religion, because you were the only one to demonstrate special qualities of virtue and holiness, and through them not just to equal but also, and most importantly, to surpass the glory of emperors of old, even though by reputation they are counted among the good emperors. In their own natures they were perhaps the bare equivalent of just men; a man who does not acknowledge God as the controller of the universe may yet achieve a likeness of justice, but cannot attain the thing itself, but you are the consummation of justice in your every act because of your inborn holiness of behaviour and your acknowledgement of truth and God. It was right therefore that in giving shape to the human race the godhead should make use of you as his advocate and minister. In our daily prayers we beg him first to guard you as his chosen guardian of the world and secondly to inspire in you a will to abide for ever in love of the divine name: for that is good for all men, for you, for your prosperity and for the rest of us for peace.

APPENDIX C: PAUL'S VISION(S) IN ACTS

Acts 9:1-19:

9 Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος, ἔτι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου, προσελθὼν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ ἠτήσατο παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολὰς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγὰς, ὅπως ἐάν τινες εὕρη τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας, ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, δεδεμένους ἀγάγῃ εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ. ³ ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίξιν τῇ Δαμασκῷ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ⁴ καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ, Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; ⁵ εἶπεν δέ, Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ, Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις. ⁶ ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὅ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν. ⁷ οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες. ⁸ ἠγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν. ⁹ καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων, καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν. ¹⁰ Ἦν δὲ τις μαθητὴς ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὀνόματι Ἀνανίας, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὀράματι ὁ κύριος, Ἀνανία. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, κύριε. ¹¹ ὁ δὲ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἀναστάς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν καλουμένην Εὐθεΐαν καὶ ζήτησον ἐν οἰκίᾳ Ἰούδα Σαῦλον ὀνόματι Ταρσέα· ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσεύχεται, ¹² καὶ εἶδεν ἄνδρα [ἐν ὀράματι] Ἀνανίαν ὀνόματι εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ [τὰς] χεῖρας ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃ. ¹³ ἀπεκρίθη δὲ Ἀνανίας, Κύριε, ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, ὅσα κακὰ τοῖς ἀγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ. ¹⁴ καὶ ὧδε ἔχει ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων δῆσαι πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου. ¹⁵ εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν ὁ κύριος, Πορεύου, ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βασιτάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἰῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ. ¹⁶ ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν. ¹⁷ Ἀπῆλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, καὶ ἐπιθείς ἐπ' αὐτόν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν, Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθεις σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἣ ἤρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῆς πνεύματος ἀγίου. ¹⁸ καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψέν τε, καὶ ἀναστάς ἐβαπτίσθη, ¹⁹ καὶ λαβὼν τροφήν ἐνίσχυσεν.

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Acts 22:1-21:

22 Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες, ἀκούσατέ μου τῆς πρὸς ὑμᾶς νυνὶ ἀπολογίας—²ἀκούσαντες δὲ ὅτι τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ προσεφώνει αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον παρέσχον ἡσυχίαν. καὶ φησὶν—³Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἀνὴρ Ἰουδαῖος, γεγεννημένος ἐν Ταρσῶ τῆς Κιλικίας, ἀνατεθραμμένος δὲ ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ, παρὰ τοὺς πόδας Γαμαλιήλ πεπαιδευμένος κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ πατρῶου νόμου, ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ καθὼς πάντες ὑμεῖς ἐστε σήμερον· ⁴ὅς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου, δεσμεύων καὶ παραδιδούς εἰς

φυλακὰς ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, ⁵ὥς καὶ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς μαρτυρεῖ μοι καὶ πᾶν τὸ πρεσβυτέριον· παρ' ὧν καὶ ἐπιστολὰς δεξάμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς εἰς Δαμασκὸν ἐπορευόμην ἄξων καὶ τοὺς ἐκεῖσε ὄντας δεδεμένους εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἵνα τιμωρηθῶσιν. ⁶Ἐγένετο δέ μοι πορευομένῳ καὶ ἐγγίζοντι τῇ Δαμασκῷ περὶ μεσημβρίαν ἐξαίφνης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιαστράψαι φῶς ἰκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ, ⁷ἔπεσά τε εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι, Σαούλ Σαούλ, τί με διώκεις; ⁸ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπεκρίθην, Τίς εἶ, κύριε; εἶπέν τε πρὸς με, Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὃν σὺ διώκεις. ⁹οἱ δὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ ὄντες τὸ μὲν φῶς ἑθεάσαντο τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι. ¹⁰εἶπον δέ, Τί ποιήσω, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με, Ἀναστὰς πορεύου εἰς Δαμασκόν, κάκεῖ σοι λαληθήσεται περὶ πάντων ὧν τέτακταί σοι ποιῆσαι. ¹¹ὥς δὲ οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου, χειραγωγούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν συνόντων μοι ἦλθον εἰς Δαμασκόν. ¹²Ἀνανίας δέ τις, ἀνὴρ εὐλαβῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον, μαρτυρούμενος ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων, ¹³ἐλθὼν πρὸς με καὶ ἐπιστὰς εἶπέν μοι, Σαούλ ἀδελφέ, ἀνάβλεψον· κάγώ αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἀνέβλεψα εἰς αὐτόν. ¹⁴ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό σε γινῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, ¹⁵ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἐώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας. ¹⁶καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. ¹⁷Ἐγένετο δέ μοι ὑποστρέψαντι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ προσευχομένῳ μου ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ γενέσθαι με ἐν ἐκστάσει ¹⁸καὶ ἰδεῖν αὐτὸν λέγοντά μοι, Σπεῦσον καὶ ἔξελθε ἐν τάχει ἐξ Ἱερουσαλήμ, διότι οὐ παραδέξονται σου μαρτυρίαν περὶ ἐμοῦ. ¹⁹κάγώ εἶπον, Κύριε, αὐτοὶ ἐπίστανται ὅτι ἐγὼ ἤμην φυλακίζων καὶ δέρων κατὰ τὰς συναγωγὰς τοὺς πιστεύοντας ἐπὶ σέ· ²⁰καὶ ὅτε ἐξεχύννετο τὸ αἷμα Στεφάνου τοῦ μάρτυρός σου, καὶ αὐτὸς ἤμην ἐφεστῶς καὶ συνευδοκῶν καὶ φυλάσσων τὰ ἱμάτια τῶν ἀναιρούντων αὐτόν. ²¹καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με, Πορεύου, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰς ἔθνη μακρὰν ἐξαποστελῶ σε.

22 “Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you.”

²When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. Then he said: ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. ⁴I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus; and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. ⁶While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light

from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Then he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.’ ¹¹Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus. ¹²A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken by all the Jews living there, ¹³came to me; and standing beside me, he said, ‘Brother Saul, regain your sight!’ In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. ¹⁴Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; ¹⁵for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.’ ¹⁷After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw Jesus saying to me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ ¹⁹And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.’ ²¹Then he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

Acts 26:9-21:

26 ⁹Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ἔδοξα ἑμαυτῷ πρὸς τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου δεῖν πολλὰ ἐναντία πρᾶξαι· ¹⁰ὃ καὶ ἐποίησα ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις, καὶ πολλοὺς τε τῶν ἁγίων ἐγὼ ἐν φυλακαῖς κατέκλεισα τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων ἐξουσίαν λαβὼν, ἀναιρουμένων τε αὐτῶν κατήνεγκα ψῆφον, ¹¹καὶ κατὰ πάσας τὰς συναγωγὰς πολλάκις τιμωρῶν αὐτοὺς ἠνάγκαζον βλασφημεῖν, περισσῶς τε ἐμμαινόμενος αὐτοῖς ἐδίωκον ἕως καὶ εἰς τὰς ἕξω πόλεις. ¹²Ἐν οἷς πορευόμενος εἰς τὴν Δαμασκὸν μετ’ ἐξουσίας καὶ ἐπιτροπῆς τῆς τῶν ἀρχιερέων ¹³ἡμέρας μέσης κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἶδον, βασιλεῦ, οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμπαν με φῶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐμοὶ πορευομένους· ¹⁴πάντων τε καταπεσόντων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἤκουσα φωνὴν λέγουσαν πρὸς με τῇ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ, Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν. ¹⁵Ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπα, Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν, Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις. ¹⁶ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ στῆθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι, προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρέτην καὶ

μάρτυρα ὧν τε εἶδές με ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι, ¹⁷ἐξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν, εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε ¹⁸ἀνοῖξαι ὀφθαλμούς αὐτῶν, τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπὸ σκοτόντος εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, τοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτοὺς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ κληρὸν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει τῇ εἰς ἐμέ. ¹⁹Ὅθεν, βασιλεῦ Ἀγρίππα, οὐκ ἐγενόμην ἀπειθῆς τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ, ²⁰ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἐν Δαμασκῶ πρώτῳν τε καὶ Ἱεροσολύμοις, πᾶσάν τε τὴν χώραν τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπήγγελλον μετανοεῖν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ἅξια τῆς μετανοίας ἔργα πράσσοντας. ²¹Ἔνεκα τούτων με Ἰουδαῖοι συλλαβόμενοι [ὄντα] ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἐπειρῶντο διαχειρίσασθαι.

26 ⁹”Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. ¹¹By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities. ¹²With this in mind, I was travelling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. ¹⁴When we had all fallen to the ground I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. ¹⁷I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ ¹⁹After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. ²¹For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'année épigraphique: revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'antiquité romaine</i> (Paris: 1888–).
BSGRT	Series: Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (1849–).
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin: 1862–).
GCS	Series: Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte (1987–).
LCL	Series: The Loeb Classical Library (1912–).
Lefebvre, <i>Recueil</i>	G. Lefebvre, <i>Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Égypte</i> (Cairo, 1907 [repr. Chicago, 1978]).
<i>RIC 6</i>	C.H.V. Sutherland, <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage. Volume VI: From Diocletian's Reform (A.D. 294) to the Death of Maximinus (A.D. 313)</i> (London: Spink and Son, 1967).
<i>RIC 7</i>	P.M. Bruun, <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage. Volume VII: Constantine and Licinius, A.D. 313-337</i> (London: Spink and Son, 1966).
SC	Series: Sources chrétiennes (1940–).
Spier, <i>Catalogue</i>	Various contributors, 'Catalogue', in J. Spier (ed.), <i>Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art</i> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 171-287.
TTH	Series: Translated Texts for Historians (1985–).

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- Anon. Val. *Origo* Anonymous Valesianus, *Origo Constantini*:
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- Cic. *De off.* Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De officiis*:
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- Codex Vercellensis* J. Belsheim (ed.), *Codex Vercellensis; quatuor evangelia ante hieronymum latine translata ex reliquiis codicis vercellensis, saeculo ut videtur quatro scripti et ex editione iriciana principe* (Christiania: Libraria Mallingiana, 1894).
- CTh* *Codex Theodosianus*:
 T. Mommsen and P. Meyer (eds.), *Theodosiani libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes: consilio et auctoritate Academiae litterarum borussicae*, 2 vols. [in 3] (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905 [repr. 1962]).
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⁷²⁸ References to this text are according to the page number in Mommsen's edition.

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- Dion. Ant. rom.* Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*:
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