

320-1, would have been up to date once more in 325, this time as *soluta*. Most likely, however, they were issued in anticipation of the *vicennalia* with other anachronistic types.

## VI. CONSTANTINE AND CHRISTIANITY

Research into Constantinian history is most usually employed to shed some light on the controversial question concerning the conversion of Constantine and the emperor's attitude towards the Church. To neglect this aspect here would be almost heretical.

Yet the coins give no positive evidence of any conversion, but only of a gradually changing attitude towards the old gods. The break with tetrarchic conservatism marked by the adoption of the Sol imagery is more of a claim to supremacy<sup>1</sup> and a challenge of Jupiter's ideological domination than a profession of faith. So too the disappearance of Sol witnesses yet another step on the path to divine rulership rather than the banishment of the image of the main opponent of the Christian God.<sup>2</sup> The *vota* coinages exalted the emperor and his House, and they yielded only when the heaven-inspired ruler vested with the diadem had replaced the traditional effigy of the Roman emperor.

The arguments have been centred around Constantine's heavenly vision and the victorious sign of the Milvian Bridge. The vision, whether fictitious or real, was no doubt of paramount importance for the building up of the Constantinian legend. Thus, regardless of its historicity, it assumes historical importance. The sign, at the moment of its creation, was ambiguous. In essence it was a monogram composed of the Greek letters X P, and, while the monogrammatic combination of these two letters was by no means unusual in pre-Constantinian times, the occurrence of X P with a clearly Christian significance is exceedingly rare.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> in the eyes of some possibly recalling Sun worship and the Mithras cult, to others suggesting the mystic Egyptian *ankh*.

Quite apart from the personal religious conviction of Constantine, the sign was diffused as the victorious symbol of the emperor. The distinctly Christian character of ✠ represents a later stage of development. In so far

<sup>1</sup> H. Kraft, *Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung*, pp. 14 f.

<sup>2</sup> Had Constantine so desired, the Sol imagery could very well have been transformed in a way acceptable to the Christians, or given a Christian interpretation. *Sol Invictus* was in any case succeeded by *Sol Salutis*.

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the available material in Bruun, 'Symboles, signes et monogrammes' in *Sylloge inscriptionum Christianarum veterum Musei Vaticani* 2, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae I: 2, Helsinki, 1963, pp. 156-60.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. J. Dölger, 'Sol Salutis', *Liturgiegeschichte. Forschungen* 4-5, Münster, 1920, p. 61.

as religious tolerance implied a victory for Christianity, intrinsically connected with Constantine and the battle of the Milvian Bridge, the sign became a symbol of that victory and finally assumed an exclusively Christian significance.

As a symbol of Constantinian victory the ✠ (at times graphically drawn ✠) appears on the coins, most frequently in a subordinate position, employed as a mark of issue<sup>1</sup> or imperial rank.<sup>2</sup> In this capacity the mark must have been accepted (and chosen) by the *procurator monetarum*;<sup>3</sup> in one instance the responsibility may have been even higher up, with the *rationalis summarum*,<sup>4</sup> but still very far from emperor and court and *comes sacrarum largitionum*. Certain other signs interpreted as Christian were employed in the same capacity, as mint-marks;<sup>5</sup> in all these cases the responsibility was the procurator's, and the Christian character of the signs was extremely dubious, to say the least, if we except the very unusual cross used as a serial mark at Aquileia<sup>6</sup> in the last years of Constantine's reign.

Two details merit closer inspection—the coins with the new bowl-shaped, high-crested Constantinian helmet, and the Constantinopolitan type SPES PVBLIC showing the labarum piercing a dragon (a serpent).<sup>7</sup> The former is a case of the ✠ decorating the helmet and thus being an integral part of the sign of the potency inherent in the imperial portrait. The helmet, occurring on the silver SALVS REIPVBLICAE multiples of Ticinum<sup>8</sup> and on the bronzes of the type *Victoriae laetae princ perp*, has been a recurring theme in the prolific work of that great numismatist Andreas Alföldi. A detailed presentation and refutation of his theories on this particular point would take us too far. Let it suffice to state that the 'Christograms' on the helmets of the bronze coins, seen in profile, are quite exceptional and must be considered to be engraver's slips. Of all the signs Alföldi purported to find on the helmet, including the cross-like marks on the bowl on either side of the cross-bar, only the ✠ on the cross-bar can have any symbolic significance. Yet these ✠ signs occur in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bruun, 'The Christian Signs', pp. 19, 24 ff., and coin-lists below, Siscia, nos. 138-9; Aquileia, nos. 58-62; Thessalonica, nos. 82-83; Constantina (Arles), nos. 381-6, 394-401.

<sup>2</sup> Bruun, *ibid.*, pp. 20, 29 ff.; Ticinum, nos. 118-21, 125-6, 129; Antioch, nos. 98-110.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Bruun, 'Roman Imperial Administration', *Eranos* 1962, pp. 94 f., and n. 1 above.

<sup>5</sup> Crosses on the face of the altars of some *Victoriae laetae princ perp* series of London (cf. nos. 166-82) and Ticinum (no. 86) and the T in wreath of the last Sol series of Rome (nos. 129-36); also the 'cross of St. Andrew' on the *Gloria exercitus* of Constantina (Arles) nos. 402-8, cf. Bruun, 'The Christian Signs', p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Nos. 124-7, dated to 334-5. The upper part of the cross is ovoid in shape, the lower part exceptionally broad, like a very high trapezium. This cross has been connected with the Egyptian *crux ansata* or *ankh* because of both the shape of the sign and the close relations between the churches of Aquileia and Alexandria (cf. H. Leclercq, *Dict. Arch. Chrét. et Lit.* 3. 2 s.v. *Croix*, col. 3124). The cross marks only a part of the issue (the *Gloria exercitus* coins, not *Constantinopolis* and *Urbs Roma*).

<sup>7</sup> Nos. 19, 26.

<sup>8</sup> No. 36.

issues of Siscia alone exclusively in the third of five series and, as already stated, on a few individual specimens only.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore impossible that all the other signs represent degenerated Christograms, and this applies to the Siscian coins as well as to the coins of all other pertinent mints.

The silver multiples with their facing portraits represent an altogether different case. The ✠ is here set in a badge just below the root of the crest. The official character of the badge has recently been demonstrated in a convincing manner.<sup>2</sup> No doubt, therefore, persists about the meaning of the new emblem: the emperor had adopted his own victorious sign as an emblem of power.<sup>3</sup>

The elaborate bust of the silver multiple has yet another interesting trait. The emperor holds a horse by the bridle with his right hand, and a shield on his left arm. Across the left shoulder he carries an object, described by Alföldi as a cross-sceptre, and accordingly regarded as a new Christian sign of power.<sup>4</sup> It has now been established that the globe surmounting the so-called sceptre is nothing but the globular end of a reversed spear,<sup>5</sup> such as is frequently seen on the coins, though rarely so minutely executed. The cross-bar of the sceptre should consequently be identified with a cross-section of the disk separating the globular end from the shaft proper.<sup>6</sup> It would, indeed, have been curious to find a one-dimensional cross-bar supporting a two-dimensional globe.

The character of the *Salus reipublicae* obverse is thus satisfactorily explained, but there remains the corollary of the *Constantinopolis* obverses, showing Constantinople holding an object usually described as a sceptre because of its frequent resemblance to the so-called cross-sceptre. An analysis of the relevant coins suggests that the basic design includes a cross-bar. We can hardly doubt that this actually corresponds to the disk, just as on the silver multiple. Nevertheless, it is possible that the unusual execution of the silver medallion created an iconographic precedent, subsequently adopted for the *Constantinopolis* obverses.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No. 61, n. For analysis of the Siscian series of this type, cf. Introduction, pp. 416 ff., and Bruun, 'The Christian Signs', pp. 10-15. These views are now supported by M. R. Alföldi also, *Goldprägung*, Appendix, 'Das Stirnjuwel des Kaisers', p. 141: 'Aus dem Zahlenverhältnis zwischen den Stücken mit bzw. ohne Monogramm ist es ohne weiteres klar, daß man die Variation mit Monogramm seitlich auf dem Helme sofort für unstatthaft erklärt und beseitigt hat.' On the other hand, it should now be clear that a badge with ✠ worn in front under the crest was an essential part of the helmet, regarded as a sign of power, cf. below.

<sup>2</sup> M. R. Alföldi, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 ff.

<sup>3</sup> A. Alföldi, *Pisciculi*, p. 4, underlines the connexion between the helmeted portrait and the battle of the Milvian Bridge. The portrait therefore also connects the ✠ with the battle.

<sup>4</sup> A. Alföldi, 'Kreuzzepter', pp. 81 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> M. R. Alföldi, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-53.

<sup>7</sup> The true character of the so-called cross-sceptre was not realized in Bruun, 'The Christian Signs', pp. 23 f., where accordingly the traditional view was accepted.

The problem of the labarum piercing the dragon on the Constantinopolitan *Spes public* bronzes remains. Here again we find the vexillum, the standard of the emperor with his personal victorious sign on top, piercing his foremost foe, the internal enemy Licinius, symbolized by the dragon (or serpent).<sup>1</sup>

Such is the tale of the coins. Christian symbolism has no place on the coins of Constantine, but, again, this does not necessarily tell us anything of the personal conviction of the emperor or give any clues as to his religious policy. We have noted the original<sup>2</sup> ambiguity of the signs ✠ and †. Other signs, artistic representations and expressions may appear to be equally vague, hovering between paganism and Christianity. This is the natural state of affairs. There was no independently Christian artistic tradition. The Christian ideas now about to conquer the State had to employ old means to express new conceptions. Only gradually does the new pictorial language find its *métier*, and Constantinian history in a decisive way affect the future development. The victor is the official interpreter of history, and Christianity was to be the true victor of the Milvian Bridge and Chrysopolis. Thus Constantine's victorious sign, his personal standard, his helmet, his seeming cross-sceptre and the aura around his head were adopted by posterity as Christian symbols, Christian signs of power. The Augustan age, similarly, had exerted a dominating influence on the first centuries of the Roman Empire.

## SILVER

—, 315

Obv. legend: 1. IMP CONSTANT-INVS P F AVG

Obv. bust: H<sup>13</sup>

36	1 (H <sup>13</sup> )	<b>SA-LVS REI-PVBLIC-AE</b> Emperor in military dress, stg. l. on platform, trophy across l. shoulder, crowned by Victory with palm branch; nine soldiers stg. around, four in foreground holding horses, others with shields, the two in background on either side of dais holding standard.	V, 5.56 gm.; Len, 6.65 gm.; Mun, 6.41 gm. (Pl. 9).
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33. L and Santamaria coins with obv. break I-N.

34. One V coin and DO with obv. break I-N.

35. Laffranchi coin, cf. *JRS* 1932, p. 23, no. 30, pl. III. 6.

36. V specimen very worn. Len coin with a second rev. break A-E. Described by Pridik, *ZN* 1930, p. 78, pl. 3. 18; cf. also Delbrück, *Spätantike Kaiserporträts* 1937, p. 72, no. 11; A. Alföldi, *Pisciculi*, p. 4; and *Studies in Honour of Allan Chester Johnson* 1951, pp. 303-11. Mun specimen published by Kraft, 'Das Silbermedallion', pp. 151-78, pl. xi. 1-2. This is the well-known silver medallion with Constantine wearing a high-crested helmet with  $\text{K}$  monogram on the obv. There appears to be no doubt about the date, the *decennalia* of Constantine in 315 (cf. Kraft, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-6, in support of A. Alföldi's date and theories) or about the mint, Ticinum, in view of the facing portraits struck at that time by that mint (*ibid.*). Endeavours to contest this dating by Moreau (*REA* 55, 1953, p. 313, n. 2) and earlier by Piganiol (*Historia* i, 1950, p. 88) have not been based on any detailed scrutiny of the evidence adduced by A. Alföldi. For the significance of the monogram on the helmet, cf. Introduction, p. 62 above, and the present writer's 'The Christian Signs', pp. 10-18.

Kraft suggests that this medallion was struck for distribution among the officers of the army (*op. cit.*, p. 157, particularly n. 28). The official character of the coin cannot be doubted, although restricted circulation must have made its impact fairly limited as a means of propaganda (cf. Moreau, *op. cit.*, p. 313).