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The city of Rome in late imperial ideology: The Tetrarchs, Maxentius, and Constantine*

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*Groaning, Diocletian declared, «You are not giving me men fit to be entrusted with the care of the state». «I have tested them», said [Galerius]. «Well, it is for you to see to it, since you are going to undertake the guidance of the empire ... If any trouble follow, it will not be my fault» (Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 18, 14-15).*

After reigning for twenty years the emperor Diocletian fell seriously ill. During his reign, he had done much to improve the stability of the Roman empire, most noticeably by developing the tetrarchic system of rule. Now he would have to make sure that succession went according to scheme. In order to do so, he forced his fellow emperor Maximian to abdicate with him, and promoted their erstwhile Caesars, Galerius and Constantius to be the next Augusti. Surprisingly enough, Maximian's and Constantius' sons, Maxentius and Constantine, were passed over in favour of Severus and Maximinus Daia when appointing new Caesars. This was the first time in Roman history that near relatives were ignored when looking for succession to the throne. Unsurprisingly, they did not particularly like it. As Lactantius had made Diocletian prophesy, trouble would indeed follow¹.

On the 28th of October 306, Maxentius took control of Rome, keeping the city and large parts of Italy and Africa in his possession for exactly six years. During this time he seems to have developed a coherent ideology of his own, which opposed in many facets the ideas of the tetrarchs. The focus

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¹ Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 17, 3-18, 15; Aur. Vict. 39, 48; 40, 18; Zos. II 7, 7; F. Kolb, *Diocletian und die Erste Tetrarchie. Improvisation oder Experiment in der Organisation monarchischer Herrschaft*, Berlin-New York 1987, 128-159.

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of this article is on analysing Maxentius' policies as a reaction to the tetrarchic system; a reaction upon which Constantine responded in his turn, when coming to power. The ultimate aim is to emphasise how important ideological messages of a predecessor are, if one is to understand the ideology of a new ruler.

Tetrarchic ideology

The most obvious change Diocletian's system brought about was, of course, that there was no longer one single ruler. At first only the fellow-Augustus, Maximian, but later the two Caesars, too, shared in the supreme power. This had, of course, some far-reaching consequences. The most crucial one must have been that this system put the power to appoint an emperor strictly in hands of the emperors themselves. The senior emperor was the *auctor imperii* of his co-Augustus, and both the emperors were personally responsible for 'creating' their Caesars. In the tetrarchy senatorial acclamation was no longer necessary, nor sufficient to legitimise one's rule. The armies would likewise no longer be able to elevate their most popular generals to the purple. In the tetrarchic system there could be no doubt whatsoever that only the four chosen rulers would reign. If any one of those rulers died, it would be up to the legitimate rulers left to find someone to replace him in the self-supplementing imperial college².

Three modes of representation reflected this idea of joint rule. Firstly there was the invention of the Jovian and Herculean houses, secondly a massive production of statues, mosaics and coinage emphasising *concordia*, and depicting the emperors as a group whose members were indistinguishable, and finally the choice on the part of the rulers to settle for a 'travelling court', or, if they settled down, to do so at a capital near the borders of the empire, leaving no single emperor clearly in charge of the traditional centre of the realm.

Jovius and Herculus

The renaming of the emperors (and Caesars) as respectively *Jovius* and *Herculus* was easily the most noticeable ideological feature of tetrarchic

² N. Hannestad, *Roman art and imperial policy*, Aarhus 1986, 308.

policy. Literary texts, coinage and epigraphical evidence all testify to common acceptance of these names throughout the empire³. «The designation of one imperial dynasty as ‘Jovian’ and the other as ‘Herculean’ united the two in the sense that they were both set apart from everybody else, elevated beyond the status of simple mortals»⁴. Furthermore, by designating Maximian as his ‘Hercules’, Diocletian made clear what the relationship between the two ‘brothers’ actually was. However equal the partners were, there was a clear distinction between them as well, which emphasised the older man’s superiority. As Hercules was born Jupiter’s son, and had through his deeds become his father’s equal – crucial in defeating the Titans – so too Maximian had started out as Diocletian’s adopted son, only to become his equal in AD 286.

The step towards divinity which the emperors made by calling themselves *Jovius* and *Herculius* was one which had been prepared by their predecessors. However, the tetrarchs did more than just name Hercules and Jupiter as their *comites*, they seemed to claim to be (in a symbolical way) the *fili* of the divinities and to share in those gods’ *virtutes*⁵. Libanius remarked that, of all emperors, Diocletian had understood better than anyone else the power of divine consent or, better even, a divine mandate to legitimise one’s rule (*Or.* 4, 61, 5). Indeed, by emphasising how *both* emperors ruled the earth as their namesakes ruled the heavens, Diocletian put the emperorship well out of reach of a military usurper, or even the need for senatorial goodwill. Jupiter and Hercules were of course also convenient symbols to familiarise the empire with the new system of two — or even four — person rule. It might not have been a coincidence that both Maximian and Diocletian incorporated ‘Aurelius’ into their imperial name (‘Gaius Aurelius Diocletianus’ and ‘Marcus Aurelius Maximianus’). Although one can point to numerous other advantages of adopting themselves into the Aurelian dynasty⁶, in doing so they also referred to the one

³ *CIL* III 3231, 4413, 12310; VI 254, 255; VIII 18230; *RIC* VI 72, 608, 636; W. Derichs, *Herakles, Vorbild des Herrschers in der Antike*, PhD, Cologne 1950, 106-113; Kolb, *Diocletian*, cit., 88-114; R. Rees, *Imperial ideology in Latin Panegyric 289-298*, PhD, St. Andrews 1997, 198-200.

⁴ Rees, *Imperial ideology in Latin Panegyric*, cit., 192.

⁵ Kolb, *Diocletian*, cit., 89-91. A.D. Nock, *The emperor’s divine comes*, *JRS* 37, 1947, 102-116, is still indispensable to any research in the topic.

⁶ The name Aurelius seems to have been highly attractive to new rulers. Numerous successors of the Antonines adopted it, either to legitimate themselves by referring to a previous ruling dynasty, or possibly even for the more mundane reason of creating a claim to the private possessions of their predecessors. The example was of course set by Septimius

real precedent in brotherly shared imperial rule⁷. A divine example must have been even better than an earthly one.

Imperial artwork

The divine character of the emperors was equally clearly displayed in the new types of statues and mosaics that were put on display. The well-known porphyry groups from Constantinople, now in the Piazza of S. Marco in Venice and the Vatican libraries, represented the emperors as a homogeneous group. «The tetrarchic image often defies modern attempts to identify individual emperors. It was the ruling body, not its constituent members, the office and not the man, which was of primary importance»⁸. Individuality was suppressed in the image, and the similar postures of the rulers and their military dress emphasised that the tetrarchs' main strength was unity⁹. At least, that was the case as long as the images depicted a tetrarchy taken out of time and place; a strictly symbolic rendering of the new system of rule. For when the tetrarchs figured in images referring to 'real' events, within the apparent homogeneity, a hierarchy was visible. On the arch of Galerius (Salonica), for instance, one of the two central figures on the east face of the south pier, performing the sacrifice, is marked by distinct superiority over the other. On the north face of that pier the four enthroned rulers are depicted. The two Augusti are seated, flanked by their Caesars. Through frontality and the gesture made by the left hand one of the Augusti is recognisably the more majestic figure¹⁰.

In a room at the temple of Ammon at Luxor, commonly accepted to have been a chamber for the imperial cult under Diocletian, the frescoes

Severus, who posthumously adopted himself into the Antonine dynasty, thus becoming *divi Commodi frater* and heir to the Antonine wealth.

⁷ Maximus and Pupienus Balbinus, too, had shared power, but they had never been referred to as brothers and their co-emperorship arose from very peculiar historical circumstances. F. Kolb, *Die Gestalt des Spätantiken Kaisertums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Tetrarchie*, in F. Paschoud - J. Szidat (eds.), *Usurpationen in der Spätantike*, Stuttgart 1997, 35-45, 38-39.

⁸ R. Rees, *Images and image: a re-examination of tetrarchic iconography*, «Greece and Rome» 40/2, 1993, 181-200; 193.

⁹ Rees, *Images and image*, cit., 184 pl. 2, 194-195 pl. 9-10; R.R.R. Smith, *The Public Image of Licinius I: Portrait Sculpture and Imperial Ideology in the early fourth Century*, *JRS* 87, 1997, 170-202; 181-183.

¹⁰ Rees, *Images and image*, cit., 182, 186, 187 pl. 4. Cf. D. Srejovic, *The Representations of Tetrarchs in Romuliana*, *AnTard* 2, 1994, 143-152; 144-146.

must have broadcast the same message of strength through unity, but with a distinct hierarchy. Those frescoes are now lost, but can be reconstructed with the help of nineteenth-century sketches by J. G. Wilkinson. On them, the emperor and his companions in the tetrarchy appear to be represented several times, either in «a context of divine otherness», or «in a secular context, a narrative»¹¹. In this way the tetrarchs tried to solve a problem that had haunted the image of the *princeps* ever since Augustus: «Where Augustus was at the same time and in the same statue an individual within history and a deity who transcends history, Diocletian and his fellow tetrarchs were represented in both these modes but in different places and contexts within the chamber»¹². But besides these different modes of representation, one of the most telling aspects of these frescoes is that within the different groups of rulers one person always stands out, either because of superior size (on the east side of the apse, on the south wall) or because he is in possession of an *orbs* and staff (in the apse of the south wall)¹³. The artwork made clear that there was a unified group of supreme leaders, but equally clear that one emperor was more equal than the others.

Imperial residences

Although the superior position which Diocletian held was often referred to, these references were by no means too apparent. On the whole the tetrarchic ideology seems to have emphasised the equality of the different rulers, rather than the differences between them. The choice to shun Rome as an obvious capital might well have been connected to this attempt to avoid one superior autocrat. Of course the tetrarchs' motivation for repeatedly residing in places such as Antioch, Milan, Thessalonica and Trier will also have been a military and logistical one, but that does not detract from the fact that as a consequence there was no one clear capital, but rather different major cities which emperors tended to reside in¹⁴.

¹¹ Wilkinson *Sketchbook (1852-56)*, Griffith institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge 1995, 175.

¹² Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, cit., 173; J. Deckers, *Die Wandmalerei des tetrarchischen Lagerheiligtums im Ammon-Tempel von Luxor*, JDAI 94, 1979, 600-652; 647.

¹³ Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, cit., 173-176, Deckers, *Wandmalerei*, cit., 604-650, fig. 34; Rees, *Images and image*, cit., 183-186, 198-199.

¹⁴ A. Frazer, *The iconography of the Emperor's Maxentius' buildings in the Via Appia*, ArtB 48, 1966, 385-392; 59 fig. 15; N. Duval, *Les résidences impériales: Leur rapport avec les problèmes de légitimité, les partages de l'Empire et la chronologie des combinaisons*

In promoting other centres, the tetrarchs furthermore counterbalanced the privileged position Rome had enjoyed throughout her history. The marginalized position of the Roman Senate and the praetorians further emphasised this loss of undoubted primacy. On the above-mentioned arch of Galerius, the lowest panel of the west face of the south pier might still show a superior Roma, seated and holding a globe and a circle of the zodiac, but on the east face of that same pier the situation is radically different. Here a panel shows the reception by Galerius of a Persian delegation. «The kneeling barbarians are flanked by the emperor and a personification of Roma. Four figures are behind Roma, identified as major cities of the empire». This seems to suggest that the goddess Roma, in tetrarchic ideology, had ceased to be the personification of the city itself, but had rather become an «expression of the superior force of the whole Roman Empire in general»¹⁵. Of the major cities that had played important roles in the victory of 297, the city of Rome was not one. It is surely of some importance that the tetrarchs «only rarely used the *Dea Roma* on their coinage and practically never during the first tetrarchy». Nor were the *Dioscuri* or the she-wolf often depicted in imperial iconography¹⁶.

However, this is not to say that Rome was abandoned. The city remained of primary importance. Though the inhabitants of Rome will have noticed that the bulk of imperial attention went to other cities, the tetrarchs would be justified in pointing at the attention they gave to Rome nevertheless. The baths of Diocletian are the grandest of Roman public buildings, and brick stamps mentioning *AUGG ET CAESS* may indicate that the tetrarchs actively supported the production of building material, of which there seems to have been a shortage¹⁷. This enabled them to finally restore the Forum

dynastiques, in Paschoud-Szidat (eds.), *Usurpationen*, cit., 127-153; 137-142. Cf. *Pan. Lat. X* (II), 13-14, which expects the emperors to go back to Rome once their work on the frontiers is completed, thus admitting that, for the time being, the tetrarchs have abandoned Rome, and *Pan. Lat. XI* (III), 2: «in consequence the capital of the Empire appeared to be there, where the two Emperors met».

¹⁵ Rees, *Images and image*, cit., 196. Rome had of course been a symbol of superior force from the moment it conquered its empire, and emphasising that symbol did not necessarily mean a diminishing in the status of the city of Rome. However, here a clear iconographical distinction is made between the goddess Roma and the four cities behind her, thereby excluding Rome as a major city.

¹⁶ M. Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae. Studies in the politics and propaganda of the emperor Maxentius*, Stockholm 1994, 62; C. Fayer, *Il culto della dea Roma. Origine e diffusione nell'impero*, Pescara 1976, 320.

¹⁷ E.M. Steinby, *L'industria laterizia di Roma nel tardo impero*, in A. Giardina (a cura di), *Società romana e impero tardoantico II*, Roma-Bari 1986, 99-164; 117. Tetrarchic building

Romanum, which had been destroyed by fire in AD 283, and seems to have remained destroyed till the tetrarchs restored it. Yet in that restoration, changes were made in the orientation of the Forum, linking it closely to the Imperial Fora¹⁸. One could argue that in that way the tetrarchs once more made clear who was really in power. The Forum had functioned, from the republic onwards, as a «topographical mirror of the constitution», pointing at the people's power in reaching decisions¹⁹. Augustus' building policies had transformed it into the first princeps' 'reception room', with references to the Julian family being almost omnipresent²⁰. The tetrarchs went yet one step beyond that, changing the focus by constructing a new *rostra* and numerous columns, thus linking the Forum Romanum to the emperors' showpieces, making it but an extension of a far grander design. However, one should not forget that all the buildings surrounding the Forum were rebuilt like they were before the fire, and that the entrance towards the Via Sacra remained of utmost importance. Furthermore, in this reconstruction of the Forum, emphasis was on the *rostra*, thus maintaining at least the suggestion of popular participation – though on the old *rostra* the tetrarchs placed five columns that functioned as the bases for statues; one of Jupiter, the others of themselves²¹. The limits of participation must have been obvious.

The divine *Augusti* had already shown that they no longer depended on the senate. Equally, legitimacy like theirs would never be obtained by any usurper the armies could put forward. By transforming Rome into yet another major city, rather than the natural centre of the realm, they indicated that they could also ignore the last traditional base of power. There was to be no doubt that the tetrarchs rose far above the elements that had until then constituted the Roman state. They did not need the consent of the Senate

activities in Rome were undertaken by Maximian, whose territory Italy was, rather than by Diocletian. It is even possible that Maxentius was involved in overseeing some of these constructions: Diocletian's baths were finished between the 1st of May 305 and the 25th of July 306 (*CIL* VI 1130 = *ILS* 646), a period in which Maxentius was residing in the vicinity of Rome. Furthermore, the *curator* of the baths was Attius Insteius Tertullus, whose links with Maxentius are apparent; Tertullus was to be *praefectus urbi* from 27 August 307 to 13 April 308 (*CIL* VI 1696). On Maximian's building activities: A. Pasqualini, *Massimiano Herculeus. Per un'interpretazione della figura e dell'opera*, Rome 1979, 121-131.

¹⁸ C. Giuliani - P. Verduchi, *Forum Romanum (Età Tarda)*, *LTUR* II, 342-343.

¹⁹ N. Purcell, *Forum Romanum (the Republican Period)*, *LTUR* II, 325-336; 326-367; *idem*, *Forum Romanum (the Imperial Period)*, *LTUR* II, 336-342; 339-341.

²⁰ P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Michigan 1988, 79-82.

²¹ P. Verduchi, *Rostra Diocletiani*, *LTUR* IV, 217-218.

and the people of Rome, but were the divine rulers of the civilised world: 'L'état, c'est nous'.

At least, that was the theory. For although, according to the tetrarchic rules, Carausius was a mere usurper, that did not stop him from ruling a substantial part of the empire for approximately seven years²². When Constantine, furthermore, was acclaimed Augustus by his father's armies, there was little that Galerius could do to prevent it. And Maxentius used the tetrarchs' neglect of the *Senatus Populusque Romanus* to lay a firm foundation on which he ruled Rome itself for six years, outliving all of the original tetrarchs, and creating a noticeable ideology of his own.

Maxentius, the great builder

This ideology, as a recent study by Mats Cullhed has shown, centres largely around the city of Rome²³. This is hardly surprising. Whatever the exact circumstances of Maxentius' seizure of power may have been, discontent by the praetorians and people of Rome with the tetrarchs' attitude towards their city must surely have played a crucial part in it. Yet the message which Maxentius disseminated dismissed the tetrarchic notions on more than merely the role of Rome. There seems to be a constant return to traditional Roman values in Maxentius' policies; values that he claimed the tetrarchs had too easily abandoned.

When Maxentius restored the temple of Venus and Roma, which was damaged during a fire in AD 307, he rebuilt it from its very foundations, maintaining, according to Barattolo, the Hadrianic temple «without adding to, or improving on the original architecture»²⁴. However, it seems clear that Maxentius did take liberties with the Hadrianic original, notably in the *cellae* and by adding *exedrae*²⁵. In doing so, he connected his own name to this highly traditional temple. Yet real architectural wonders were saved for the great new building on the Via Sacra, the Basilica Nova. This colossal

²² Aur. Vict. 39, 40; Eutr. IX 22, 2; Orosius, VII 25, 5. Allectus reigned an additional three years.

²³ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit. One must remain aware of the fact that not too much is known about building policies by other rulers in other cities in this period, so that it is difficult to place the extent of Maxentius' building programme in the right context.

²⁴ Aur. Vict. 40, 26; A. Barattolo, *Nuove ricerche sull'architettura del tempio di Venere e di Roma in età Adrianea*, MDAI(R) 80, 1973, 243-269; 245: «senza nulla aggiungere o levare alla planimetria ed alla concezione architettonica originale», 247; R. Krautheimer, *Rome. Profile of a city. 312-1308*, Princeton 1980, 7.

²⁵ A. Cassatella, *Venus et Roma, aedes, templum*, LTUR V, forthcoming.

hall, the remains of which still dominate the heart of Rome, is, as the brickstamps indicate, clearly Maxentian, notwithstanding former doubts on that point. It even appears that the famous statue of Constantine, which was found in the western apse of the basilica, may originally have portrayed Maxentius²⁶.

The exact function of this magnificent building is not known, but Filippo Coarelli has made valuable suggestions on the subject. Taking into account the topographical situation of the site (close to the *templum Pacis* and the *templum Telluris*), the lay-out of the building and epigraphical evidence connected to the *praefectura urbi* which has been found in the proximity of the basilica, Coarelli came to the conclusion that the building could have been no other than the *secretarium tellurensis*, the 'sede ufficiale' of the *praefectus urbi*²⁷. One can, according to Coarelli, easily combine «the realisation of the great complex of the *secretarium tellurensis*» with the «radical reforms of the *praefectura urbi*, begun by Maximian and Maxentius, and finished by Constantine»²⁸.

If the basilica can indeed be identified with such a building, the references to a restoration of Roman values are obvious. A building of such size and splendour would demonstrate the importance which the new ruler attached to what could easily be described as the most important position connected to the city of Rome. The sheer size of the building and its vaults would further stress the magnificence of the emperor. An inscription referring to Maxentius as the *conservator urbis suae* has been found nearby²⁹. It seems reasonable to suggest that Maxentius wished to stress his loyalty to the city of Rome by referring to the great building which he built for her city prefect.

West of the basilica, and currently housing the church of SS. Cosma e Damiano, lies the so-called 'temple of Romulus'. This building has been the subject of much debate over the years. Romulus was, of course, the name of Maxentius' son who died in 309 and who was subsequently commemorated on a series of coins bearing the legend *aeternae memoriae*. The

²⁶ F. Coarelli, *Basilica Constantiniana, B. Nova*, *LTUR* I, 170-173; 171; F. Coarelli, *L'Urbs e il suburbio*, in A. Giardina (a cura di), *Società romana e impero tardoantico* II, 1-58; 20, 32; Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 50-52; J. Rasch, *Das Maxentius-Mausoleum an der Via Appia in Rom*, Mainz 1984, 71; U. Kultermann, *Die Maxentius-Basilika. Ein Schlüsselwerk spätantiker Architektur*, Weimar 1996.

²⁷ F. Coarelli, *Praefectura Urbana*, *LTUR* IV, 159-60; Coarelli, *L'Urbs e il suburbio*, cit., 22-28; Coarelli, *Basilica Constantiniana*, cit., 172.

²⁸ Coarelli, *Praefectura Urbana*, cit., 160.

²⁹ *CIL* VI 1223; Coarelli, *Basilica Constantiniana*, cit., 171.

reverses of these coins figure a domed rotunda³⁰. This building has been identified as the domed building on the Via Sacra. However, it has also been maintained that the building on the coin depicts the Maxentian mausoleum on the Via Appia, or even that it does not depict any specific building at all, but should rather be seen as a symbol with funerary connotations³¹.

As for Maxentius' heir-apparent being named Romulus; it would be tempting to use that fact as further evidence of emphasis on 'Rome' and tradition. But one has to keep in mind that the most likely explanation for that particular name is that Maxentius' mother-in-law – Galerius' mother – was called Romula³². However, that does not detract from the fact that the name Romulus had very special connotations, of which Maxentius seems to have made full use. He may even have honoured his son's memory by rededicating the colossal statue of Nero, that stood in front of the *Meta Sudans* by the Colosseum, to him. The inscription suggesting this was found twenty years ago by La Regina (though it has not been published yet). It has been re-used in the roof of the arch of Constantine³³.

Furthermore, on 21 April 308 (the birthday of the city), shortly after co-operation with his father had ended rather dramatically, and the day after his son had become consul for the first time, Maxentius dedicated a statue-group of Mars in the Forum. The base of this statue figured two reliefs: one showing Mars and his sons Romulus and Remus, the other Maxentius and his son Romulus³⁴. The inscription on the base read:

*Marti invicto patri et aeternae urbis suae conditoribus dominus noster Imp.
[Maxentius] P(ius) F(elix) invictus Aug(ustus) (CIL VI 33856 = ILS 8935).*

³⁰ RIC VI 226; 239-240.

³¹ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 53-55; E. Papi, *Romulus, divus, Templum (Tempio di Romolo)*, *LTUR* IV, 210-212; L. Luschi, *L'iconografia dell'edificio rotondo nella monetazione massenziana e il 'tempio del divo Romolo'*, *BullCom* 89, 1984, 41-54; 50. The mausoleum seems a very unlikely explanation for the depiction, as no previous, or successive, mausoleum was ever depicted on coinage. Exceptions could, however, be made for buildings that were burial sites, but also had other symbolic functions, such as the column of Trajan or, in a different context, the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*.

³² Aur. Vict. 40, 16; Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 9, 9; *PLRE* I, 770.

³³ P. Peirce, *The arch of Constantine: propaganda and Ideology in Late Roman Art*, «Art History», 12, 1989, 387-418; 404, citing Amanda Claridge, who could unfortunately not confirm the validity of the inscription. It may also be relevant to note that the original place of the Colossus had been the site of the newly restored temple of Venus and Roma: cf. SHA, *Hadr.* 19, 12.

³⁴ H. Wrede, *Der Genius Populi Romani und das Fünfsäulendenkmal der Tetrarchen auf dem Forum Romanum*, *BJ* 181, 1981, 111-142; 140-141.

The monument is both stylistically and topographical closely connected to the tetrarchic *decennalia* monument in the Forum, which broadcast a clear ideological message, and on which Maxentius was conspicuously absent. Wrede therefore formulated the theory that Maxentius was trying to draw attention to the fact that «Diocletian's system of government had ignored the son of Maximian Herculus in its choice of Caesars». The emphasis on Mars and Romulus, rather than on the Maximian Hercules, would indicate that Maxentius had broken away from his father and wanted to distance himself from the 'Herculean' house which was so intrinsically interwoven with Maximian, and through him with the tetrarchy³⁵.

Lately the 'temple of Romulus' has been interpreted as «a combination of a reconstructed cenotaph for the *gens Valeria*, which stood in the area, in commemoration of one of the first consuls of Rome, Valerius Poplicola, and of the *aedes penatium*»³⁶. On this view Maxentius (who was a Valerius himself, just like the other tetrarchs) would have created a dynastic monument which was also explicitly connected with one of the focal points of Roman history and the veneration of the *urbs*³⁷. However, a connecting doorway between the rotunda, and the building lying behind it, seems to be Maxentian in date. As this doorway is situated at the place where one would expect the cult-statue, a 'sacred' function of the rotunda must be excluded. A monumental entrance towards — possibly — the *templum pacis* appears to be a better alternative³⁸.

Maxentian residences

Maxentius also restored the Basilica Aemilia, and built almost all of the baths in the area of the Quirinal, which would later be appropriated by Constantine, who finished them³⁹. But aside his activities along the Via Sacra, Maxentius' main building activities centred round the traditional imperial residences. On the Palatine, he practically rebuilt the Severan baths

³⁵ Wrede, *Der Genius Populi Romani und das Fünfsäulendenkmal*, cit., 142: «... daß das diokletianische Regierungssystem bei der Wahl des Caesaren den Sohn des Maximianus Herculus übergangen hatte»; T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge, MA, 1982; 93-95.

³⁶ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 55.

³⁷ Liv., II 7, 5-12; Dion. Hal. I 68, 1; Luschi, *L'iconografia dell'edificio rotondo*, cit., 51-54. Papi, Romulus, divus, Templum, cit., 211. It may be worth while to compare such an emphasis on the 'Valerian' dynasty to the tetrarchs' self-adoption into the 'Aurelian' family. Cf. n. 6, p. 3.

³⁸ F. Paolo Fiore, *L'impianto architettonico antico*, «Quaderni dell'istituto di storia dell'architettura» 26, 1981, 63-90; 72-73.

³⁹ Steinby, *L'industria laterizia*, cit., 142.

(in the south-east part), and, crucially, worked on an *exedra* from the palace towards the Circus Maximus — thus further strengthening the link between the Palatine and the adjacent circus⁴⁰. On another site, the Licinian Gardens, which had been an imperial abode since Gallienus, Maxentius built a ten-sided domed hall, the so-called *Minerva Medica*⁴¹. To the south of this building, in a third century palace (the *Sessorium*) «rose an apsed hall, later known as the temple of Venus and Cupid»⁴², whilst not far off, on imperial premises, to the west of the present St John Lateran, a huge mansion was erected or remodelled by Maxentius. This building, the *domus Faustae*, would be the location of the anti-Donatist church council of 313⁴³. At the centre of it, archaeologists have recently excavated an *exedra*, dated to Maxentius' reign. At the centre of the *exedra* they found a base, carrying 'four shallow depressions' which square perfectly with the paws of the *lupa capitolina*, the presence of which in the Lateran area is well attested from medieval times onwards. This use of one of the most prominent symbols of the city of Rome would, if correct, be a perfect example of the prominence of Rome and Roman tradition in Maxentius' policies⁴⁴.

The city walls were also heavily improved by Maxentius – unsurprisingly for someone who had to withstand three proper sieges during his reign⁴⁵. Outside of them, people could see the impressive 'palace' on the Via Appia.

⁴⁰ T. Heres, *Paries. A proposal for a dating system of Late-antique masonry structures in Rome and Ostia. AD 235-600*, PhD, Amsterdam 1982, 106, 238; J. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses. Arenas for Chariot Racing*, London 1986, 688 n. 31.

⁴¹ S. Rizzo, *Horti Liciniani*, *LTUR* III, 64-66; 66: «un luogo destinato all'imperatore»; M. Cima, *Gli Horti Liciniani: una residenza imperiale della tarda antichità*, in E. La Rocca - M. Cima (a cura di), *Horti Romani*, Rome 1998, 425-452; 430-433.

⁴² Krautheimer, *Rome*, cit., 8; F. Guidobaldi, *Sessorium*, *LTUR* IV, 304-308. The *Sessorium* was in an area of vast imperial property, «articolato in vari nuclei residenziali» 306, and seems to be connected with the *horti Spei Veteris* (305) or the *horti Variiani* 305-306. However, considering the extent of the complex, it seems logical to assume «qualcosa di ben più ampio, cioè ad una sorta di unificazione di molte proprietà imperiali preesistenti» (307). These new extensive *horti* also incorporated a circus.

⁴³ See also p. 24 of this article. But see now P. Liverani, *Dalle aedes Laterani al patriarcio Lateranense*, *RAC* 75, 1999, 521-549; 525-526.

⁴⁴ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 56; V. Santa Maria Scrinari, *Il Laterano imperiale I: Dalle 'aedes Laterani' alla 'Domus Faustae'*, Città del Vaticano 1991, 98-101, 118 fig. 64.

⁴⁵ *Chr. Min.* I p. 148; Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 7; G. Pisani Sartorio, *Muri Aureliani*, *LTUR* III, 290-299, notably 290-291, 296; M. Todd, *The Walls of Rome*, London 1978, 47; I. Richmond, *The City Wall of Imperial Rome*, Maryland 1971, 253; L. Cozza, *Mura di Roma dalla Porta Pinciana alla Salaria*, *AnalRom* 21, 1993, 81-93; Id., *Mura di Roma dalla Porta Salaria alla Porta Nomentana*, *AnalRom* 22, 1994, 61-95. But see Heres, *Paries*, cit., 103-105.

Although the function of the complex has been hotly debated, it seems only natural in the light of Maxentius' further building activities in the imperial gardens, to see the complex first and foremost as yet another imperial dwelling. It is of course still possible that Maxentius used the complex to hold office when his father was *Augustus* and he himself only *princeps* (the Palatine being unavailable, as it was the official residence of the legitimate emperor), or that it was his residence after the decisions of AD 305, as has been maintained⁴⁶. Yet we can see from, for instance, the reign of Domitian, that it was easily possible for an emperor to construct numerous residences, all of which were used at different times and in different contexts. With that in mind it appears useful to note that the Via Appia complex shares the characteristic presence of a circus with some imperial *horti*, notably those surrounding the *Sessorium* — another extensive Maxentian building-site⁴⁷. The conclusion that the site should simply be interpreted as the *horti Maxentii*, seems justified.

But even if Maxentius only meant to construct yet more imperial *horti* — or yet another villa-complex —, that does not diminish the theory put forward by Frazer in his ground-breaking article on the subject⁴⁸. In it, Frazer compared the buildings alongside the Via Appia with the tetrarchic residences, pointing at a number of features which Maxentius' compound shares with those complexes: a palace, circus and mausoleum in close vicinity. All of these residences should, according to Frazer, be seen as copies of the area around the Palatine, the circuses alluding to the adjacent Circus Maximus. He then expressed surprise that Maxentius, who was of course in possession of the original, would take so much effort to construct what could be nothing but yet another imitation-Palatine.

Reasoning along these lines, and comparing the sites along the Via Appia and around the Circus Maximus more closely, Frazer noted that the lay-out of Maxentius' complex was almost identical to that of the area around the Circus Maximus, to an extent which was unparalleled by the tetrarchic residences. The 'Romulan' mausoleum was placed on exactly the same location in the 'copy' as the *Ara Maxima* was in the 'original'. Pointing to the importance of Hercules in Maxentian imagery, Frazer suggested

⁴⁶ G. Pisani Sartorio - R. Calza, *La Villa di Massenzio sulla Via Appia. Il palazzo – le opere di arte*, Roma 1976, 152-153.

⁴⁷ Interestingly enough both the circus in the area around the *Sessorium*, and the circus in the Via Appia complex seem to have been adorned with an obelisk, as was the Circus Maximus. None of the 'tetrarchic circuses' share this particular characteristic.

⁴⁸ *Supra* n. 14.

that the complex alluded, in some way, to Maxentius' claim to represent the Herculean dynasty, drawing parallels between the *Ara Maxima* and the dynastic mausoleum⁴⁹. It is of course tempting to go even further than that, and link the round mausoleum to the round temples of Hercules in the *Forum Boarium*⁵⁰.

If we accept this view, we interpret the complex as broadcasting an interest in dynastic claims of a type which is far from surprising for someone who mainly ruled because his father had done so before him. Such symbolism could, furthermore, only be applied to a new residence. In Mary Beard's words: «The more the Palatine came to represent the institution of the Principate, the less adaptable it was to the self-fashioning of the emperor as an individual emperor»⁵¹. If Maxentius wanted to broadcast his personal message, he had to construct new surroundings to do so; the structures on the Palatine were far too well established to respond to personal needs. In any respect, it was an imposing complex that rose just outside Rome's city walls, emphasising the vicinity of a powerful ruler.

Maxentius' coinage and portraits

Maxentius' emphasis in his building policies on the fact that his reign brought about a restoration of 'the traditional Rome' is equally well displayed in his coinage. The full impact of the concept of *romanitas* in Maxentian coinage has recently been demonstrated by (again) Mats Cullhed, who has assembled all of Maxentius' coins depicting Dea Roma, the *lupa romana* and Romulus and Remus. He furthermore brought together those coins naming Maxentius as *conservator urbis suae* and those with the legends *Romae Aeternae*, *temporum felicitas* and *saeculi felicitas* (the latter two often going with an image of the *lupa* and her twins)⁵². Cullhed also notices that «contrary to the opinion of some scholars, it is not Hercules but

⁴⁹ Frazer, *Iconography*, cit., 385-391. C. Heucke, *Circus und Hippodrom als politischer Raum*, Hildesheim 1994, 391-394 still accepts this theory, with some minor amendments. On the Via Appia complex and its circus, see Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, cit., 582-602, especially 601-602.

⁵⁰ F. Coarelli, *Il Foro Boario dalle origini alla fine della Repubblica*, Rome 1988, 8; 84-103; 164-204; Id., *Hercules, Aedes Aemilia*, *LTUR* III, 11-12; Id., *Hercules Olivarius*, *LTUR* III, 19-20.

⁵¹ M. Beard, *Imaginary Horti; or up the garden path*, in *Horti Romani*, cit., 23-32; 32.

⁵² Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, 46-49, with all relevant coins in n. 192-202; C. Dulière, *Lupa Romana. Recherches d'Iconographie et essai d'interprétation*, Brussels 1979, II vols.; I, 177-184.

Mars who is the most characteristic god on the Maxentian coinage». Although Cullhed does not give any statistics to support this claim, he seems to be making a valid point. Whereas the primacy of Mars on Maxentian coinage, though present, is only marginal on the general coinage (9 Hercules to 10 Mars), the discrepancy is striking when one considers the gold medallions: only five depict Hercules, compared to *fifteen* depicting Mars⁵³.

But Cullhed fails to notice that the difference between the number of coins featuring Mars and those showing Hercules has a clear chronology. Until AD 308 the references to Hercules outnumber those to Mars: seven of the eight Hercules-coins in *RIC* derive from this earlier period (in all probability, since four coins are only dated as early in the period 307-312), whereas only three reverses show Mars. In the period 308-310 the opposite occurs: one definite Hercules from this period is outnumbered by six figures of Mars⁵⁴. In the period 310-311 Maxentius started striking well-known *aeternae memoriae* coins for his father, his son, his father-in-law Galerius and his brother-in-law Constantius. These types have often been interpreted as an attempt by Maxentius to re-establish a 'Herculean' dynasty, but Cullhed has rightly pointed out that this cannot have been so, since Galerius was a Jovian. Maxentius rather emphasised his family, the *gens Valeria*, to which all of the above-mentioned belonged. All of them, furthermore, had died, which seriously discredits the claim that Maxentius tried to approach the tetrarchs through his coinage, since all of the living tetrarchs were specifically ignored — hardly a sympathetic gesture on the part of someone who wanted to become part of the system. It appears more worthwhile to interpret these series as Maxentian *pietas*: «All these persons were members of Maxentius' family ... They had also been emperors and now Maxentius termed them all *divi* ... Maxentius behaved as became heirs to the throne»⁵⁴.

So the years AD 308 and 310 seem to be crucial turning points in Maxentian minting. These dates seem to be confirmed by stylistic changes within the coinage, and by the closure of the mints at Aquileia and Ticinum,

⁵³ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 49; Hercules: *RIC* VI, 137, 138, 147, 171, 181-184, 214; Cohen, *Médailles*, nos. 60, 77-80; Mars: *RIC* VI 140, 148, 172, 186, 189, 218-222; Cohen, *Médailles*, nos. 82-95, 98. Maximian coins with references to Hercules are not included.

⁵⁴ Hercules: 306-307AD: *RIC* VI 137, 138, 147; 307-312 AD: *RIC* VI 171, 181-184; 308-10 AD: *RIC* VI 214; Mars: 306-307 AD: *RIC* VI 140, 148; 307-312 AD: *RIC* VI 172, 186; 307-310 AD: *RIC* VI 189; 308-310 AD: *RIC* VI 218-222. Unfortunately the medallions in Cohen, *Médailles* are not dated.

a full two years before the invasion of Italy by Constantine⁵⁶. But of course these dates are crucial to Maxentius for other reasons too. In April 308 there was the important confrontation with his father, and their ensuing breach; in July 310 Maximian was forced to commit suicide. The connections between Hercules and Maximian Herculeus must have been overwhelming, and it is therefore hardly surprising that Maxentius downplayed the importance of Hercules on his coinage immediately after his father had fled to Constantine. Jupiter, an obvious *comes* for a ruler who wanted to present himself as supreme monarch in Rome, likewise had strong symbolic connections with the tetrarchs. Though Maxentius used coin-types that traditionally depicted the supreme god, those coins now depicted Mars where one would have expected to see Jupiter⁵⁷.

Mars was the best possible alternative as a *comes* for an emperor who emphasised his reverence for tradition and *romanitas*, especially if that emperor happened to have a son called Romulus. As long as Maxentius and Maximian had fought together, Hercules — the founder of the *Ara Maxima*, and a traditional role-model for the emperor⁵⁸ — could figure as a perfect symbol of their power; but when Maxentius became sole ruler of Rome and had to distance himself from his father, he picked Mars as the god who was on *his* side. Father of the founder of Rome, a warrior god and firmly rooted in Roman tradition, Mars had as a further advantage for Maxentius that he had not previously been used in tetrarchic ideological policy. The *Ara Martis* was, finally, the one *ara* whose importance could be compared to Hercules' *Ara Maxima*⁵⁹. Mars was the perfect god to favour a traditional emperor who put Rome first.

Shortly after Maximian had left Rome, Maxentius set up a statue of Mars on a central place in the Forum Romanum, and soon also privileged the deity in his coinage⁶⁰. Only after Maximian had died did Maxentius once more use his father and his Herculean connotations on his coins, but now

⁵⁵ *RIC* VI 381-382 nos. 239-240, 243-248, 250-257, 404 nos. 24-34, 406 nos. 58-59; Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 76-78; C. King, *The Maxentian Mints*, NC 19, 1959, 47-78; 73; Frazer, *Iconography*, cit., 391.

⁵⁶ Albertson, *Maxentian Hoards*, cit., 124, 132; King, *The Maxentian Mints*, cit., 54, 64, 71-73.

⁵⁷ J. Fears, *The cult of Jupiter and Roman imperial ideology*, in *ANRW* 2, 17, 1, 3-141; 119; Id., *Princeps a diis electus. The divine election of the emperor as a political concept at Rome*, Roma 1977, 299-300; *RIC* VI 110-111.

⁵⁸ Derichs, *Herakles, passim*; O. Hekster, *Commodus-Hercules: the people's princeps*, forthcoming.

⁵⁹ For the importance of the *Ara Martis*, see: F. Coarelli, *Mars, ara*, *LTUR* III, 223-226.

⁶⁰ Cf. n. 34 p. 11.

to establish himself as the traditional avenging son. Maxentius will not have failed to notice that the temple of Mars Ultor had been built by yet another *pius filius* to avenge his father. Several strands of representation worked together, all closely connected to the city of Rome and her traditions. It is not surprising that the goddess Roma featured more than any other deity on Maxentian coins.

Optimus Princeps

Maxentius' traditionalism was not only apparent in his coinage and in the way he presented himself as a great builder. In his portraiture too, the ruler of Rome distanced himself from new tetrarchic approaches, to return to a more traditional Roman style. As we have seen, «with Diocletian and the tetrarchy there was a clear break in the formal manner of the imperial image». Personal identity was submerged in order to represent the imperial office, rather than the individual emperors, creating a new portrait manner which could be read as a «physiognomical expression ... of the tetrarchs' radical political morality»⁶¹.

Diana Kleiner has already noticed how Maxentius' portraits were more idiosyncratic than those of the tetrarchs, portraying him in «a naturalistic manner with eyes deeply set beneath relatively straight brows». Hannestad adds the perception that Maxentius' portraits are characterised by «a revived interest in showing a new *coiffure*» and an altogether different style⁶². But the most insightful piece on Maxentian portraiture is undoubtedly Cécile Evers' article on the matter⁶³. She discusses the distinctive classicism of the heads, and notices, like Hannestad, the distinctive hairstyle of the Maxentian portraits. Although the physiognomy could still be described as tetrarchic, she sees a striking parallel between the individually-formed locks on these Maxentian busts and some Trajanic ones — a parallel, moreover, which she considers consciously enhanced. «A comparison between the [Maxentian] ... head and the Trajan in the Capitoline Museum shows a physical resemblance. Anyhow, what is more natural than to associate [oneself] with the *optimus princeps*?». Maxentius, according to Evers, broke away from

⁶¹ Smith, *Public image*, cit., 180-181.

⁶² D. Kleiner, *Roman sculpture*, New Haven-London 1992, 407-408; N. Hannestad, *Tradition in Late Antique Sculpture. Conservation - Modernisation - Production*, Aarhus 1994, 63.

⁶³ C. Evers, *Betrachtungen zur Ikonographie des Maxentius. Zu einer neuen Porträt-Replik im Kestner-Museum Hannover*, «Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte» 31, 1992, 9-22.

tetrarchic traditions in order to refer to the Golden Age of the empire⁶⁴. Again, Maxentius clearly distinguished himself from the tetrarchs by alluding to the golden age and the glory he would once more bring about.

One last interesting element to notice is that all of the surviving statues seem to have presented Maxentius dressed in a toga, probably *capite velato*. Not only are they strikingly different from the standardised cuirassed tetrarchic statues, they also represent a Maxentius for whom the toga, with all its connotations to the traditional roles of the ‘first citizen’, is still important⁶⁵. Rather than stressing the military aspect of his rule, Maxentius chose to emphasise his role as the *civilis princeps*. This was made even more explicit through the title of *princeps (invictus)* which Maxentius used for quite a while. The message of traditionalism and *pietas* must have been abundantly clear.

The senate and the military

Anyone who wanted to appear *pious* and traditional obviously needed to attend to the position of the senate. Restoring the primacy of Rome must have greatly improved senatorial status, and it is more than likely that senators appreciated an emperor presenting himself as a traditional togate *princeps* on his statues. Furthermore, Maxentius started a reappraisal of the old senatorial families in politics which Constantine would continue. The most conspicuous example of this is the appointment of Ceionius Rufius Volusianus as praetorian prefect (and later also as urban prefect)⁶⁶.

Until this appointment not a single senator had held the praetorian prefecture, and it might be significant that Volusianus was deeply involved in quelling the African revolt of AD 308, the year in which Maxentius broke away from his father. Rapidly after the breach the former *vicarius* of Africa, Domitius Alexander, revolted from Maxentius. Though there are no indications that Maximian played an active role in this usurpation, Maxentius’ removal of his father will not have been very much appreciated by Maximian’s veterans or by Alexander himself, who had been a nominee of the former tetrarch. Maxentius sent the able Volusianus to Africa, who

⁶⁴ Evers, *Ikonographie des Maxentius*, cit., 14, 17-18. H.P. L’Orange, *Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-Söhnen: 284-361 n. Chr.*, Berlin 1984, 114-116 lists the known Maxentius-busts and references to them.

⁶⁵ Evers, *Ikonographie des Maxentius*, cit., 20-21.

⁶⁶ Aur. Vict. 40, 18; Zos. II 14, 2; M. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1972, 49-50; A. Chastagnol, *Le Sénat Romain à l’époque Impériale*, Paris 1992, 236; Barnes, *New Empire*, cit., 111.

ended the revolt rapidly⁶⁷.

Whatever Maxentius' reasons for the selection of Volusianus, senators will have been pleased to see one of them in such an important position. It had been a long time since an emperor had seemed to take senators so seriously. Still, Maxentius is often believed to have had a bad relationship with senators, caused by his outrageous personal behaviour (killing senators, and seducing their wives). Yet most of those accusations consist of *topoi* of sexual excesses and cruelty that characterise the historiography surrounding most 'tyrants', and seem to have been invented by pro-Constantinian writers⁶⁸.

There is however, one argument for supposing a less than friendly relationship between the Senate and Maxentius: the latter's need for enormous sums of money. This was not a problem as long as Maxentius was in control of Africa — arguably the richest part of the empire and the provider of grain for Rome. But as a result of the African revolt, Maxentius had to levy taxes to provide for the needs of the population⁶⁹. However, though Aurelius Victor complained about «a wicked decree» (40, 24) which forced senators to pay taxes, Maxentius may have presented even this as a simple return to ancient traditions: *censurae veteris/ pietatisque singularis/ domino nostro/ [M]axenti[o]* (CIL VI 31394a = 33857). Re-instating an ancient tax was yet another sign of Maxentius' enormous *pietas*.

As for the military, the units that were fundamental as a base of power to Maxentius were those that were intrinsically connected to the city of Rome, such as the praetorian guards and the *equites singulares*. These groups helped Maxentius to come to power, and stayed loyal to him till the bitter end. It was when Galerius tried to abolish the praetorian guards that they helped Maxentius with his coup d'état. Afterwards the new emperor built the praetorians up into his main force, and they were crucial during the African revolt. The closeness between emperor and guards was further emphasised by a strengthening of the *Castra Praetoria*. That bond would eventually lead to the abolition of this ancient institution by Constantine⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Aur. Vict. 40, 17; Zos. II 12, 2; CIL VIII 7004, 21959, 22183; ILS 668; T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge, MA, 1981, 37; Barnes, *New Empire*, cit., 14-15.

⁶⁸ B. Kriegbaum S.J., *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Maxentius*, «Archivum Historiae Pontificae» 30, 1992, 7-54; 10-11; Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 71; O. Hekster, *Volmaakte monsters. De extreme beeldvorming rond Romeinse keizers*, TG 111, 1998, 337-351, 338-339, 350.

⁶⁹ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 72.

⁷⁰ M. Speidel, *Maxentius and his Equites Singulares in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge*, CIAnt 5/2, 1986, 253-262; 254-255; M. Speidel, *Les prétoriens de Maxence?*, Rome 1988,

The *equites singulares* were likewise crucial to Maxentius' reign. Speidel actually argued that when the Panegyricist of 313 claimed that the troops who first proclaimed Maxentius had now stood their ground until all had fallen, he must have meant the Horse Guards rather than the praetorians. This concurs well with Zosimus II 16, which says that «there was hope for Maxentius as long as his cavalry stood firm, but when they gave way he had to flee, and perished in the river». Of course this could relate to the Praetorian Horse as well, but apparently the *Singulares* both outnumbered and outranked them. Speidel claims therefore that it is the *Equites Singulares* that are depicted on the relief on the arch of Constantine «that shows the rout of Maxentius' Horse Guards», and pinpoints Maxentius on this frieze⁷¹. Their importance to Maxentius seems apparent, and Constantine reacted accordingly, destroying both their camp and their burial site, as we shall see shortly. From the military point of view, too, Maxentius focused on traditional Roman institutions.

Constantine: Erasing Maxentius

On the 28th of October 312 Constantine won the decisive battle at the Milvian bridge. Maxentius not only lost his life in that battle, but afterwards Constantine was able to start a historiographical tradition in which his late predecessor figured prominently as an evil tyrant. Blackening Maxentius formed an important method of legitimising Constantine's power. Supporters of Constantine did their utmost to present the new emperor as the *Liberator urbis* (or even *orbis*), emphasising the enthusiasm of the Roman people on his entering the city⁷². In order to be presented in this light, Constantine had to dissociate the former ruler from those actions and policies for which he might have become popular. This of course made building activities a crucial aspect of Constantine's new reign.

With the new buildings alongside the Via Sacra, Maxentius had made a clear imprint on the city. Anyone visiting the traditional centre of the realm would instantly be able to see how well the recently deposed ruler had cared for his city. Of course that did not closely correspond to the image

183-186; E. Lissi Caronna, *Castra Praetoria*, *LTUR* I, 251-254; 253; M. Durry, *Les Cohortes Prétorienne*, Paris 1968, 392-393.

⁷¹ *Pan. Lat.*, XII (IX) 17, 1; Speidel, *Equites Singulares*, 254 n. 5, 257-259, 260-262 pl. 1-3.

⁷² *Eus. h.e.*, IX 9, 9.; *Lact. Mort. Pers.*, 44, 10; *CIL* VI 1139; T. Grünwald, *CONSTANTINUS MAXIMUS AUGUSTUS. Herrschaftspropaganda in der zeitgenössischen Überlieferung*, Stuttgart 1990, 63-64; 63 n. 1-2 for references. Cf. Kriegbaum, *Religionspolitik*, cit., 11.

which Constantine wanted broadcast. He therefore did much to connect himself, rather than his predecessor, to the latter's buildings⁷³.

Furthermore, all the works that he [Maxentius] had built with such magnificence, the sanctuary of the City and the basilica, were dedicated by the senate to the merit of Flavius' (Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*, 40, 26).

Constantine appears to have put more effort into rearranging Maxentius' basilica than into any other public building activities. That should not come as a surprise, since the basilica was by far the most impressive building in the area, its architecture dazzling, its ideological message undeniable. Rather than demolishing it, which could have been interpreted as a direct insult to Rome, Constantine decided to alter it in such a way that his name, instead of Maxentius', would be connected to the building⁷⁴. He may have reshaped the direction and decoration of the basilica, but the most obvious sign of Constantine's replacement of Maxentius as the patron of the building was the installation of the colossal statue of himself in the basilica, which may originally have portrayed Maxentius⁷⁵.

Cullhed argued that this statue may even have been the one which was raised after Constantine's victory, as mentioned by Eusebius (in Cullhed's translation):

... he gave orders that a memorial 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 (ἐν τῷ μάλιστα τῶν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης δεδημοσιευμένῳ τόπῳ)... 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 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 Rome» (Eus. *h.e.*, IX 9, 10-11).

This, however, seems unlikely. If one agrees with the translation of ἐν τῷ μάλιστα τῶν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης δεδημοσιευμένῳ τόπῳ as «in the *most public* place in Rome», the statue needs to be placed at the *rostra*, or at least in the Forum, rather than in a building alongside the Via Sacra. Yet the translation «in a public place» (or perhaps «a frequented place»), seems

⁷³ Kultermann, *Die Maxentius-Basilika*, cit., 58.

⁷⁴ Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, 51-52; Heres, *Paries*, 112. Constantine also rededicated the 'temple of Romulus': *CIL* VI 1147; Krautheimer, *Rome*, cit., 8; Coarelli, *L'Urbs e il suburbio*, cit., 9-12.

⁷⁵ Coarelli, *L'Urbs e il suburbio*, cit., 32: «è molto probabile che la statua di Costantino, collocato nell'abside occidentale della basilica, non sia altro che una statua di Massenzio rilavorato».

more apt, which is far too ambiguous a term to pinpoint an exact location for the statue. Whatever the case, Constantine put up a clearly visible statue in Rome, referring to the new supreme god, denouncing the very claim that had been at the centre of Maxentian propaganda: that Maxentius had restored Rome to its former glory. The reversal of fortune must have been complete. Constantine claimed to deliver Rome from the yoke of the ruler who had claimed to be the *conservator* of that very city.

Almost as ideologically important was the imposing Arch of Constantine. This arch has often been said to be the only major public secular structure constructed in Rome under Constantine. We will shortly discuss the reasons for the absence of other Constantinian ‘secular’ public buildings, but, first of all, it is crucial to note that recently the possibility has been suggested that the arch «was actually planned and partly begun by Maxentius»⁷⁶. Yet even if it was completely built by Constantine, the arch was there to celebrate Constantine’s coming to power, and did not function as a public building like most Maxentian buildings did.

Furthermore, as a triumphal arch, it must have been an oddity, as Constantine’s victory will not have been a formal triumph. That at least, rather than Constantine’s Christian sentiments, seems the best explanation for the fact that Constantine did not sacrifice to Jupiter Optimus Maximus on entering the city. If no real triumph was held after the battle at the Milvian bridge — a normal practice after a civil war, for which formally no triumph could be held — there would have been no reason for a sacrifice⁷⁷. Yet the enormous arch on the Via Sacra was still very much a triumphal arch, telling the story of a victorious campaign, like the arches of Titus and Septimius Severus did. Some mental acrobatics must have been involved. That may be part of the explanation for the complicated re-use of older imperial imagery on the main friezes.

Elsner claims that by incorporating pieces from earlier monuments into the arch, Constantine «parades the taste for eclectic visual antiquarianism, quite apart from the political impact of such appropriations, with the portrait of Constantine replacing the heads of his predecessors»⁷⁸. Though his

⁷⁶ Hannestad, *Tradition in Late Antique Sculpture*, cit., 66, referring to S. Knudsen, *The Arch of Maxentius* (forthcoming).

⁷⁷ E. Künzl, *Der römische Triumph. Siegesfeiern in antiken Rom*, München 1988, 62.

⁷⁸ J. Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, Oxford-New York 1998, 187; W. Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb. Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman Painting*, London 1986; A. Capodiferro, *Arcus Constantini*, *LTUR* I, 86-91. On the expression *instinctu divinitatis* on the arch, and the apparent tension between pagan senators

point in an interesting one, and his idea that the earlier emperors on the friezes are «canonical models, the historically sanctified prototypes for Constantine»⁷⁹, extremely inciting, one needs to realise that by such an antiquarianism, Constantine showed that the battle with Maxentius was not the only (or even principal) reason for building the arch. The main friezes showed how good Constantine was, not whom he had defeated. Constantine made the arch a reflection upon his own authority, rather than a celebration of a triumph that never was.

Punishing the defeated

Round the Via Sacra, Constantine had been content with removing Maxentius' name from his buildings. Destroying massive monuments in Rome's traditional centre was not an option, especially not in a city which for six years had been used to restoration rather than destruction. Outside of that centre Constantine was not quite so considerate, as the Praetorians and the *equites singulares* would notice. It was not enough for Constantine merely to disband the troops that had served his opponent so loyally — dissolving the classical nucleus of the Roman military in the process — he also destroyed the buildings that were intrinsically connected to them⁸⁰.

According to Zosimus, Constantine razed the *castra Praetoria*, though in reality he could do no such thing, as the *castra* were an intrinsic part of the Aurelian wall⁸¹. Yet the new emperor did demolish the Praetorians' graveyard on the via Nomentana, apparently using the latter site for the church of Saint Agnes and the Mausoleum of Constantina⁸². As if that was not enough to show how Constantine's new Christian god had prevailed over Maxentius' troops, Constantine also built the Lateran Basilica (as early as AD 313-5) on the exact location where the New Camp of the *equites singulares Augusti* had been until he destroyed it in 312⁸³. Finally, «on the

and a Christian emperor, see: 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*, *JECS* 6, 1998, 647-671.

⁷⁹ Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, cit., 188.

⁸⁰ *Aur. Vict.* 40, 25; *CIL* VI 1139 (= *ILS* 694).

⁸¹ *Zos.* II 17, 2; Lissi Caronna, *Castra Praetoria*, cit., 252.

⁸² *Amm. Marc.* XXI 1, 5; Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 2-5; Speidel, *Equites Singulares*, cit., 256; Heres, *Paries*, cit., 110, 192-194, 305-311.

⁸³ C. Buzzetti, *Castra Equitum Singularium, Singulariorum*, *LTUR* I, 246-248; 247; P. Liverani, *Introduzione topografica*, in Id. (ed.), *Laterano 1. Scavi sotto la basilica di S. Giovanni in Laterano. I materiali*, Città del Vaticano 1998, 7-16; 15; G. Spinola, *Sculture, rilievi, decorazione architettonica, iscrizioni e reperti ceramici*, in *ibid.*, 17-114; 88-92

site of their cemetery — and with the horsemen's own gravestones — he built, apparently during the same years, the basilica of the Saints Marcellinus and Peter, as well as his own Mausoleum, which then became that of Saint Helen»⁸⁴.

One might wish to note that, whilst in Rome, Constantine and his family spent a lot of time in the *Domus Faustae*, the house named after Constantine's wife, who also happened to be Maxentius' sister⁸⁵. The erection of the new Lateran Basilica, (then called S. Salvator, which was quite possibly dedicated on 9 November 318), would place one of the most important churches to Constantine's new god in close vicinity to the new emperor's dwelling⁸⁶. Almost as nearby, yet another building which was closely associated with Maxentian activities was modified: «Constantine transformed a hall of the Sessorium palace into a basilica», the *S. Crux in Hierusalem*⁸⁷. At the same time, though, that palace formed the residence of Constantine's mother Helena, thus further strengthening the links between the imperial family in power, and their new god. Colli even believes that in this way Constantine tried to create a new centre of power, away from the Palatine. He suggests that a number of buildings in the area were erected by Constantine, who needed to «supply the complex with adequate structures» in order to make it suitable for the new 'court'⁸⁸.

Colli dates those new structures through a typological comparison with buildings from Maxentius' complex on the Via Appia, and those in Piazza Armerina in Sicily. He concludes that some of the buildings in the area of the Sessorium must have been constructed in the years immediately succeeding 310. This adheres to his ideas of early Constantinian activities⁸⁹. Yet one could as easily assume that most of the activities were undertaken by Maxentius, of whom we know that he worked in this general area⁹⁰. That

(nos. 440-443), 112-113; E. Moormann - S. Mols, *Le pitture Romane. Frammenti e resti in situ*, in *ibid.*, 115-134; 115-116, 127-129.

⁸⁴ *LP*, *Vita Silvestri* 1.182; Speidel, *Equites Singulares*, cit., 255; R. Krautheimer (et. al.), *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae. The early Christian basilicas of Rome (IV-IX Cent.)* II, Città del Vaticano 1959, 191-204.

⁸⁵ *PLRE*, I, 325-326; D. Colli, *Il palazzo Sessoriano nell'area archeologica di S. Croce in Gerusalemme: Ultima sede imperiale a Roma?*, *MEFRA* 108, 1996, 771-815; 773.

⁸⁶ M. Cecchelli, *S. Salvator, Basilica*, *LTUR* IV, 230-233, 230-231.

⁸⁷ Colli, *Il palazzo Sessoriano*, cit., 779.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, notably 808-815; 809.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 785-789, 807. Cf. Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb*, cit., 39, which sums up recent discussion on the complex in Piazza Armerina. Though it is quite probably not Maxentian, «(...) observations strongly suggest an early-fourth-century patron».

⁹⁰ See also **pp. 12-13** of this article.

would suggest that here, as elsewhere, Constantine appropriated Maxentian landmarks. Even some of the famous churches that Constantine gave to the capital, are, in this view, nothing than a reaction to Maxentius' actions. The evil tyrant Maxentius, and all who had followed him, were punished through the power of Christ.

Of course Constantine's churches — whatever their origin — may well be interpreted simply as public buildings. If Christ, in the earliest period, could be considered to be just another victorious god, churches would be no different from normal temples, with which every new ruler pleased the Roman people. Yet there are some real differences here. Only few other Roman rulers built more than one temple for one particular god in Rome, let alone as many as Constantine did. This seems to indicate that Christ was being enhanced by the new ruler at the cost of other deities. His churches were there to promote his god, rather than to please the people in general. One could of course counter this by stating that all the churches were dedicated to different 'Christian heroes'; the saint and martyrs around whose burial sites and relics the churches arose. But there seems also to be a symbolic difference in whom a church is given to. A temple is a gift to a god, a church a gift to the people⁹¹. Only a limited number of people would use, and appreciate, those new churches, whoever they were dedicated to. They were Constantine's gift to the group that was to become his new base of power; the Christians. Public buildings for the benefit of the people as a whole are not attested⁹².

Destroying enemy camps, and not constructing any public buildings looks like odd behaviour for someone who had just taken over the power in Rome. Yet if one combines this lack of traditional beneficence with other facets of Constantine's attitude towards Rome, a pattern seems to be recognisable: Constantine appears to have punished Rome for supporting Maxentius. The new emperor resided for only four months in his new city, from October 312 to February 313. In almost all respects he had distanced himself from his predecessor, disbanding his most loyal supporters, and changing the policy of ceaseless building that had so characterised

⁹¹ I owe this point to Ulla Lehtonen.

⁹² The Constantian baths have often been said to be such public buildings, but these are, as mentioned above (p. 12) in all probability Maxentian. The only building that may have been a public building proper is the *Porticus Constantini*, which is mentioned in the regional catalogues (II, 172 VZ I). S. Vilucchi, *Porticus Constantini*, *LTUR* IV, 119-20.

Maxentius' rule. It would be far from surprising if he also broke with his predecessor's attempts to connect himself fully with Rome and her traditions. There are plenty of other examples of cities being punished for supporting the losing side in a civil war, and though Rome was still far from being just another city, her status had undeniably changed over the years. If it was imaginable that she was no longer the capital of the empire, she could also be punished for championing the wrong ruler⁹³.

Yet how does that relate to Constantine's claims to have restored the senate to its ancient authority; a claim which the emperor even supported by minting a gold coin proclaiming the *Aeterna Gloria* of the senate. Under Constantine the number of senators increased tremendously, eventually rising from some six hundred to some two thousand⁹⁴. But although to all appearances this would seem to be an indication of imperial promotion of a good relationship with senators, it is worth noticing that such an enlargement of the senate would necessarily lead to a great number of new senators who did not descend from Roman families: «the enlargement of the senate was inevitably connected to the recruitment of non-Roman nobles»⁹⁵.

That might have been more than a mere side-effect of an increase in senators. On the whole there seems to be a tendency with Constantine to focus on the Senate as an official *ordo*, rather than on it as a body meeting in Rome; he supported the senators, not the Romans. The new senate in Constantinople is of course the most tangible suggestion in this direction. It may be more than a coincidence that the introduction of the only Constantinian letter to the senate which is preserved, has a small but significant alteration from the traditional style: «to the consuls, praetors, *tribuni plebis* and his own senate (*senatui suo*), greeting». One cannot help but noticing the new «possessive adjective applied by the emperor to the senate»⁹⁶. Constantine did increase the number of senators in important positions, incorporating many who had been important to Maxentius (most noticeably Rufius Volusianus, as urban prefect from December 313 to

⁹³ SHA, *Marcus*. 25, 12 shows Marcus Aurelius punishing Cyrrhus for supporting Avidius Cassius; J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour. The Art of Government in the Roman World*, Oxford 1997, 73-89; Kultermann, *Die Maxentius-Basilika*, cit., 57.

⁹⁴ *Pan. Lat.* XII (IX) 20, 1; B. Näf, *Senatorisches Standesbewusstsein in spätrömischer Zeit*, Freiburg 1995, 13-14; Chastagnol, *Senat Romain*, cit., 236-237.

⁹⁵ *Pan. Lat.* X (IV) 35, 2; *Eus. Vit. Const.* 4, 1; *Amm. Marc.* XVI 10, 5; Näf, *Senatorisches Standesbewusstsein*, cit., 14-15: «Die Ausweitung des Senatorenstandes war notgedrungen mit der Rekrutierung aus nichtrömischen Notabeln verbunden».

⁹⁶ F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC-AD 337)*, London 1992², 354 n. 94. The resemblance to Maxentius' *Urbis suae* is striking.

August 315). But at the same time he built a new capital and created a new senate. Though respecting the power of those who had been promoted by Maxentius and while showing the proper respect to senators, it was never their being Roman that he praised⁹⁷.

A second Rome

So how does this relate to the founding of Constantinople? Though the commonly used military-strategic explanations for the change of capital are of course of the utmost importance, it is well worth realising that Constantine might well have tried to distance himself from Maxentius, and from those who had supported him as well. For one thing, the decision to move away from Rome was already taken shortly after defeating Maxentius⁹⁸. Even within Italy he often stayed elsewhere. Likewise, the decision to make Constantinople the new capital was taken fairly early. Already from the very founding of the new city gold coins circulated, the reverses of which showed both Roma and Constantinopolis adorned with the imperial robe and a helmet. Only Constantinopolis was depicted wearing a laurel wreath and holding the imperial sceptre, indicating clearly how the old city had transferred her symbols of power to the new capital. A series of bronze emissions showed the same iconographic message⁹⁹.

The fact that Rome remained a pagan city — notwithstanding the rise of Christians to positions of power — has also often been used as an argument which might well have influenced the emperor's decision to move away. However, it is disputable whether or not Rome's 'paganism' was a serious problem to Constantine early in the reign, when his beliefs must have been closer to heno- than monotheism, the line between Christ and *Sol Invictus* still a narrow one¹⁰⁰. Combining Constantine's almost instant departure from Rome, long before any pro-Christian measures could have come to full effect, with his early decision to move the capital to the East, it is easy to assume that Constantine never had been willing to give Rome another

⁹⁷ *Pap. Ox.* 1, 53, 84; Arnheim, *Senatorial Aristocracy*, cit., 49; H. von Schoenebeck, *Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius un Constantin*, Aalen 1962, 78.

⁹⁸ Chastagnol, *Senát Romain*, cit., 236.

⁹⁹ Von Schoenebeck, *Religionspolitik des Maxentius*, cit., 60-61, Taf. 6.1.5; F. Gneccchi, *I medaglioni Romani*, Milano 1912, I, fig. 131 f.

¹⁰⁰ M. Beard - J. North - S. Price, *Religions of Rome I*, Cambridge 1998, 366-367; T. Barnes, *Statistics and the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy*, *JRS* 85, 1995, 135-147; R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, New Haven-London 1984, 43-5; D. Bowder, *The Age of Constantine and Julian*, London 1978, 90-91.

chance. He wanted to erase the memory of Maxentius from Rome, and, at the same time, make his own imprint there, putting his supporters – the Christians – in power. But the new emperor was never prepared to be the traditional ruler of Rome. Maxentius had done that too well to make a comparison look favourable.

Constantine incorporated some Maxentian policies into his own actions. He even used many of Maxentius' coin-types, although that might also have had to do with the fact that there was 'no stock of *public* Christian imagery on which to draw'¹⁰¹. But the new master of Rome had to distance himself from the two key-elements of traditionalism and *romanitas*. He would make a new start as the first Christian emperor in his new Christian capital. This too was presented as a break from the past, as Constantine tried fervently to present Maxentius as a persecutor, covering up the one thing that both rulers really had had in common: their tolerance towards Christianity¹⁰².

Christianity

For Maxentius too had gone a long way toward accepting the 'new' religion of Christianity. In the historical record Maxentius was for long depicted as anti-Christian, sometimes even as a persecutor. However, the last thirty years have seen a clear re-appraisal of Maxentius' attitude towards the Christians¹⁰³. It has even been suggested that Maxentius was a Christian himself, though that view can ultimately not been maintained for various reasons¹⁰⁴. However, Maxentius was never a persecutor. Lactantius explicitly states that after Diocletian's death «one of the adversaries of God still survived» (34, 1), who is then named as Maximinus, not Maxentius. There are even indications that Maxentius issued an early toleration edict

¹⁰¹ Bowder, *The Age of Constantine*, cit., 91.

¹⁰² D. de Decker, *La politique religieuse de Maxence*, «Byzantion» 38, 1968, 472-562, 515-519; T. Barnes, *Christentum und dynastische Politik (300-25)*, in Paschoud, Szidat (eds.), *Usurpationen*, cit., 99-109, 104 even claims that Galerius initiated the Great Persecution mainly to prevent the «Christian loving princes from entering the imperial College».

¹⁰³ Von Schoenebeck, *Religionspolitik des Maxentius*, cit., 5-27; S. Pezzella, *Massenzio e la politica religiosa di Costantino*, SMSR 38, 1967, 434-450; de Decker, *La politique religieuse de Maxence*, cit.; Kriegbaum, *Religionspolitik*, cit.

¹⁰⁴ Decker, *Politique religieuse*, cit., 485-501; Kriegbaum, *Religionspolitik*, cit., 16-19; A. Rouselles, *La chronologie de Maximien Hercule et le mythe de la tétrarchie*, DHA 2, 1976, 445-466; 460. A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im Römischen Kaiserreiche*, Darmstadt 1980, 6-25.

of his own. Optatus Milevensis records that Maxentius restored liberty to the Christians¹⁰⁵:

The tempest of persecution was brought to an end and terminated. By the command of God, Maxentius ordered a remission and the Christians had their liberty restored to them.

Bernard Kriegbaum studied at great length the date of this edict, and finally concluded that the most likely moment was shortly after the break between Maxentius and Maximian, but some time before Galerius' edict of 30 April 311. A date in 308 appears all the more likely, since it is from that very year that Maxentius once more allowed a bishop to be appointed in Rome, on the 18th of April, shortly before the city's birthday¹⁰⁶. There seem to be two possible reasons for a change in religious policy by Maxentius in 308, both connected to Maximian's leaving Rome. The first is a strategic one: with Maximian gone, Maxentius was in sore need of new supporters. The Christians, who were a strong, and wealthy, minority in the important areas of Rome and Africa, would be logical choice. A second possibility is that, through the absence of his father, Maxentius was finally free to distance himself from the tetrarchy, which had so strongly opposed Christianity. In either case we can see once more the importance of the break of 308 for defining Maxentian policies.

Constantine, however, had to present Maxentius as an anti-Christian oppressor if he was to manifest himself as a liberator. «The idea of Constantine as the champion for Christianity in 312 implies that Maxentius was at that stage an enemy and persecutor of Christians»¹⁰⁷. After Maxentius' emphasis on traditionalism and the usage of the 'standard' traditional gods by both himself and the tetrarchs, Constantine would want to present Christ emphatically as his patron. The numerous appearances of *Sol* on Constantinian coinage may indicate that Constantine was (at least in the early stages of his reign) mainly looking for a *comes* that had not been extensively used in the ideological policies of one of his immediate predecessors. «This new emphasis on the solar deity, who on the coinage of Constantine totally replaces Jupiter as the dispenser of the globe certainly

¹⁰⁵ Optat. 1, 18; Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, cit., 73.

¹⁰⁶ LP, *Vita Eusebii*, 1, 1; Kriegbaum, *Religionspolitik*, cit., 22-36; A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike. Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian. 284-565 n. Chr.*, München 1989, 66: «Den römischen Christen hatte Maxentius 308 nach fast vierjähriger Unterbrechung wider die Wahl eines Bischofs gestattet».

¹⁰⁷ Pezzella, *Politica religiosa di Costantino*, cit., 443.

is ... as well a proclamation of his break with the system of Diocletian»¹⁰⁸. Diana Bowder even believes that «in Constantine's mind a gradual transformation into Christ the Sun of Righteousness» had not taken place until the 320s¹⁰⁹.

There are also indications that whereas the historical record appears to have underestimated the importance of Maxentius in establishing a pro-Christian climate, it has also overestimated the actual Constantinian efforts to transform Rome into a Christian capital. Some of the churches that the *Liber Pontificalis* attributes to Constantine, can, as we have seen, be connected to Maxentius. Others (the mausoleum of Constantina and the cemetery of S. Agnese) were apparently only started after Constantine's death¹¹⁰. This could be a result of a willing attempt by a sixth-century composer of the *Liber Pontificalis* to emphasise the importance of the first Christian emperor. Alternatively, it could simply be contamination into the standard text: «the name of [Constantine and] Constantius, and indeed that of Constans, may once have occurred elsewhere; manuscripts confused such names only too easily»¹¹¹.

In either case, history seems to have exaggerated Constantine's munificence in the matter of building churches. It may be well worth investigating other measures which Constantine is supposed to have taken to make Rome a Christian capital too. If indeed Constantine had decided to abandon and 'punish' Rome in the direct aftermath of Maxentius' defeat, one could well imagine that he would not have spent too much time in 'Christianising' Rome.

Still, punishing Rome did not mean that Constantine wanted to surrender the capital. Since many of the military would not have liked the disbanding of the praetorians and the horse guard, and many of the civilians would have been disappointed in Rome's loss in status after six years of Maxentian *romanitas*, Constantine needed firm support from a strong group: the Chris-

¹⁰⁸ Fears, *Princeps*, cit., 300-301.

¹⁰⁹ Bowder, *The Age of Constantine*, cit., 91; Beard - North - Price, *Religions of Rome*, I, cit., 366 state on the numerous problems connected to Constantine's conversion that: «the questions are unanswerable». There are of course also strong links between Christ and the very traditional *comes Hercules*: M. Simon, *Hercules et le Christianisme*, Paris 1959, notably 116-117.

¹¹⁰ Heres, *Paries*, cit., 114: «The list of churches attributed to Constantine in the *Liber Pontificalis* is remarkable: observation of the masonry has indicated that several were completed or even initiated after the death of Constantine».

¹¹¹ R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis)*, Liverpool 1989, XIX-XX.

tians. «Constantine in 313 defined a new category as performing essential services for the state, namely the Christian clergy»¹¹². Christianity would turn out to be the stone on which Constantine could build his new city. Constantine had freed the world of Maxentius the tyrant, so he could hardly continue the tyrant's policies. The traditionalism which Maxentius had promoted was abandoned, and Maxentius himself posthumously transformed into a persecutor. As Constantine had opposed the tetrarchs, he could not go back to the policies Maxentius had opposed either. Only by fully renouncing Rome and her traditions could Constantine become the first Christian emperor.

Olivier Hekster

¹¹² F. Millar, *Empire and City, Augustus to Julian*, JRS 73, 1983, 76-96, 83.

The City of Rome in Late Imperial Ideology: The Tetrarchs, Maxentius, and Constantine. Jan 1999. 717. Maxentius erected an impressive trio of monuments along Rome's Sacra Via--the Basilica Nova, the templum Romae, and the Rotunda Complex ("so-called Temple of Romulus")--within his brief, six-year reign. Despite their prominent locale and obvious architectural value, these three buildings remain poorly understood in their Maxentian phase. In what comprises the first extended appraisal of Maxentius' architecture and patronage, I present new restorations of these monuments with especial attention to their architectural design. Maxentius left Rome for meeting with Constantine in the famous Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. One day before the battle, Constantine saw in the sky the sign of the cross superimposed over the sun. Moreover, he saw an inscription under it: "In Hoc Signo Vinæ," which meant "conquer by this sign." Later during the night, Constantine had a dream with the sign's explanation, where Christ appeared in front of him telling to carry the sign of the cross into the battle. Next day, the old banners were changed with new ones with the sign of the cross. The emperor realized that Old Rome is not the city that he wants to see as a capital and he changed it to Byzantium. Constantine showed his religious tolerance with both Christians and pagans. Constantine I, also known as Constantine the Great, was a Roman emperor from 306 to 337. Born in Naissus, Dacia Mediterranea (now Niš, Serbia), he was the son of Flavius Constantius, an Illyrian army officer who became one of the four emperors of the Tetrarchy. His mother, Helena, was Greek and of low birth. Constantine served with distinction under emperors Diocletian and Galerius campaigning in the eastern provinces against barbarians and the Persians, before being recalled west in 305 to fight The Tetrarchs, Maxentius, and Constantine*. Olivier Hekster. Groaning, Diocletian declared, You are not giving me men fit to be entrusted with the care of the state. The city remained of primary importance. Though the inhabitants of Rome will have noticed that the bulk of imperial attention went to other cities, the tetrarchs would be justified in pointing at the attention they gave to Rome nevertheless. The baths of Diocletian are the grandest of Roman public buildings, and brick stamps mentioning AUGG ET CAESS may indicate that the tetrarchs actively supported the production of building material, of which there seems to have been a shortage¹⁷. Judaism and Rome. Re-thinking Judaism's Encounter with the Roman Empire. Home. About the project. Resources. Bibliographical references. Ancient sources. Architecture. Bronze depicting the head of Maxentius and the emperor together with Roma (307 CE). Search. Search. Search. How to search. Basic Search. Advanced search.