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**IMAGE AND RHETORIC. MEDALLIONS
FROM THE PERIOD OF THE CONSTANTINIAN DYNASTY
AS A PROPAGANDA MEDIUM**

ABSTRACT: The subject examined in the article is the propaganda programme of emperors, members of the Constantinian dynasty, as documented by inscriptions and iconography of medallions. These the author proposes to analyse in the context of late-antique rhetoric texts (*Orationes* of Themistius, *Panegyrici Latini*) and ideas of Eusebius Pamphilius contained in *Vita Constantini*. The conclusion furnished by this analysis is that the propaganda content broadcast in the works of rhetoric is closely related to the message communicated by the medallions and is an expression of a coherent ideological programme.

One of principal sources useful for understanding imperial images and ideology are late-antique medallions.¹ In making their analysis it is worth examining their iconography and ideological message within a broad political, religious, cultural and artistic context of Late Antiquity. The common denominator for the propaganda message communicated by all these medallions, one that explains the choice of wording and iconographic designs, is late-antique rhetoric, then the main branch of propaganda. At the same time, when interpreting images present on the medallions we need to take into account the surviving works of antique art

¹ The author extends his cordial thanks to Professor Aleksander Bursche for his material guidance and assistance offered while the present article was written. To Professor Adam Łajtar he is indebted for translating the passages in Greek included used in this text. The present article bases on a more extensive study of Constantinian dynasty medallions contained in my MA thesis, defended in 2010 at the University of Warsaw, and is designed to outline the main arguments of this thesis using the most instructive examples.

because they may supply further important interpretative context. Sometimes we can make use of information contained in contemporary written sources on works of art that no longer survive.

THE AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The author of the present article wishes to present, using some selected examples, the relationship between the propaganda content present in the medallions of the sons of Constantine (and usurpers) and the rhetoric of Late Antiquity. The key aim of the article is to discover some general ideas pertaining to the person of the ruler that appear in both these forms of communication.

SOURCES

The term ‘medallions’ describes coins of a weight which is the multiple of the regular, basic standard coins and are also referred to as multiples. They display careful craftsmanship and are high in artistic value. Their content was addressed at the social and intellectual elite of the Roman state, consequently they contain many references to history, more distant and current, as well as to mythology and philosophy.² Using a number of examples we hope to demonstrate the relationship between the traditions of rhetoric writing and visual art visible in on the medallions.

In his analysis of the role played by Roman medallions in societies within Barbaricum A. Bursche³ examined in detail traces of use-wear retained by the multiples discovered on the territory outside the limes, and also, the archaeological context of these finds and written sources which mention the medallions. Within Barbaricum medallions were provided with suspension loops⁴ added in barbarian workshops above the portrait of the emperor so as not to obscure his image.⁵

Medallions described here were selected for the presence of some specific ideas and patterns established in propaganda. Accordingly, analysis was made of images associated with the Empire’s two capital cities, images testifying to the process of sacralisation of the person of the emperor and the ruling dynasty, and images evidently associated with Christian ideas. The main object of analysis are the images and inscriptions on medallions, especially of their reverse, which

² Salamon 1999, p. 505.

³ Bursche 1998.

⁴ Bursche 1998, p. 165.

⁵ Bursche 1998, p. 165.

convey an express propaganda content, one that the author proposes to juxtapose with the content of works of late-antique rhetoric, i.e., orations of Themisthius, *Panegyrici Latini*, and works of Eusebius Pamphilius. This exercise is not wholly free of difficulties in interpretation. Not infrequently, similar content may be expressed in the works of rhetoric and in iconography in an entirely different manner. Now and then, the rhetoricians placed emphasis on content different than the one highlighted by the coin die engravers.

FUNCTION OF THE MEDALLIONS WITHIN THE EMPIRE AND BARBARICUM

The medallions did not participate in regular circulation of currency.⁶ Most often, they were used as occasional gifts. The emperor distributed medallions on more important occasion as e.g., accession to power, military victories, birthday of the successor to the throne, etc. He offered them to senior Roman officials and dignitaries (military commanders in particular), and to barbarian leaders. Higher officials, officers and senators, were offered multiples as *donativa* or as souvenirs of important events. Both within the Roman Empire and outside its borders medallions were often treated as marks of prestige, status and authority, as is evidenced by the fact that they could be provided with a frame, given a form to make them suitable for suspension.⁷ Medallions were a special category of a propaganda medium addressed at members of the elite who were able to fully appreciate their message and grasp the significance of allegories and artistic means used. The message communicated by the medallions was fully comprehensible to their recipients. The makers of the medallions had to employ vocabulary and symbols generally accepted by their circle of addressees. The message and the image of the emperor, made available in this manner, were meant, first and foremost, to strengthen the loyalty of the elite of the Empire and its cohesion, by strengthening their relationship with the ruler. This was an official statement about current developments presented in propaganda form, and a manifestation of the policy and religious ideology adopted by the emperor.

THE MEDALLIONS IN STATISTICS

Jointly 163 medallion types struck by the sons of Constantine the Great are known at present (i.e., in 2010) among which we can distinguish a number of more significant categories. The percentage share of individual medallion types

⁶ Bursche 1998, p. 14.

⁷ Salamon 1999, pp. 503–505.

is a valuable source of insight on the propaganda programme of the Constantinian dynasty. The largest group are images associated with anniversaries of reign – jointly, 46 types, or 28%. The next largest group are designs meant to commemorate triumphs and theology of victory (32, i.e. 19%). There is also a large group of medallions with personifications of the two capital cities of the Roman Empire (31, i.e. 19%). Relatively frequent are allusions to dynastic propaganda (12, i.e. 7%) and Christian symbolism (15–9%). Pagan deities and personifications are represented a total of 12 times (7%). Finally, there is a small group of medallions with images commemorating the imperial *adventus* (9, i.e. 5%) and consulships (6, i.e. 3%), their number is so small presumably because the iconography of multiples issued on the occasion of consulship refer directly to this event only when there no other designs were being used. Categories listed here were identified mainly basing on the images seen on the medallion reverses, and also, basing on inscriptions accompanying these images. On some medallions several themes may be represented in combination. If, for instance, a design related to a triumph or the theology of victory features personifications or unambiguous images of pagan deities, in this these are classified in the group of designs associated with these deities. The same was done for medallions containing Christian symbolism.

ROMA AND CONSTANTINOPOLIS ON MEDALLIONS AND IN RHETORIC

The motif noted most often on medallions are personifications Roma and Constantinopolis. The subject of the two capital cities of the Empire was made use of by rhetoricians and authors of visual propaganda alike. One example is a multiple of Constantius II⁸ with the inscription FL IVL CONSTANTIVS PERP AVG and diademed bust of the emperor. The medallion was issued in 346 by the mint at Antioch to commemorate the joint consulship of Constantius II and Constans.⁹ On its reverse is an inscription GLORIA ROMANORVM and the personification Constantinopolis enthroned holding orb with Victory who is holding a laurel wreath. Constantinopolis is holding a long sceptre – the *thyrsos*. Wearing a long robe, with elegantly dressed hair, she rests her foot on the prow of a ship adorned with an effigy of an eagle. What is characteristic is that instead of a *corona muralis* Constantinopolis has a laurel wreath. Based on the presence of the thyrsos, the figure on the medallion has been identified with Anthousa. G. Bühl rejected this hypothesis as poorly documented.¹⁰ The presence of the orb with

⁸ RIC VIII, 517, 69–70; Fig. 1.

⁹ Bastien 1988, p. 86.

¹⁰ Bühl 1995, pp. 56–57.

Victory has been interpreted as indication of evident increase in importance of Constantinople in relation to the city of Rome. Alternately, this could be indication that the status of the two capital cities had become equal. From Roma the personification of Constantinople has taken over the orb as insignia of dominion over the world.¹¹



Fig. 1. Multiplum of Constantius II, Antioch mint, 4 1/2 solidi, 346 AD, RIC VIII, 517; 69–70.

Most often the personifications Constantinopolis and Roma occur together but, on occasion, they appear on their own.¹² It is notable that among the medallions with these personifications anniversary issues with inscription VOTA, within wreath or on shield, are rare.¹³ The depictions of Roma and Constantinopolis holding this type of anniversary inscriptions are known from gold coinage. Usually, these two figures are accompanied by an inscription GLORIA REI PUBLICAE. In this type of design the personifications play the same role as Victories on medallions and bronze coins where they are depicted holding the anniversary shield. They personify not only the two cities but also the emperor's fortune and are a guarantor of his victories.¹⁴ This type of design is seen for the first time during the reign of Constantius II. A combination of goddess Roma with the anniversary shield appears e.g., on the Decennalia Base in Rome from the reign of Diocletian. Thus, at this time goddess Roma, and later, the personification of the city of Rome, took the place of Victory as guarantor of prosperity of the future

¹¹ B ühl 1995, 52–54; A similar iconographic programme is seen on the multiple RIC VIII, 525; 159. Both medallions may be linked to the consulship of Constantius II and Constans of 346. The two Augusti took up the office 1 January 346 which event was commemorated with a series of medallions. Other medallions related to this event depict on their reverses the two emperors in consular *trabea*, with insignia (B a s t i e n 1988, 86; B e y e l e r 2011, 132).

¹² E.g., RIC VII, 565; RIC VIII, 69, 70.

¹³ E.g., RIC VIII, 96.

¹⁴ B ühl 1995, pp. 45–52.

years of the emperor's reign. And in the fourth century AD this function is taken over by representations symbolizing both capital cities of the Empire.¹⁵

The significance of the personifications of Rome and Constantinople on medallions is not entirely clear. Quite obvious is their relationship with the effigies of deities venerated in temples, e.g., the temple of Venus and Roma, built by Emperor Hadrian.¹⁶ The fact that the obverse image of the emperor is accompanied by the image of an enthroned personification on the reverse suggests that what is meant here is the emperor's city, i.e., the capital. This type of combination was nothing new in Roman art. The effigy of the emperor came to be depicted in combination with the personification of his capital city ever since the times of Emperor Augustus.¹⁷

Personifications had a long tradition. They represented specific abstract ideas and, on occasion, some material entities. They were provided with specific attributes. Often, they were venerated the same way as deities were. One such personification was Tyche – goddess of fortune entrusted since the Hellenistic period with guarding an individual city or people. It combined Providence and Chance, success, and failure of individuals and cities or communities. Tyche was portrayed as a woman dressed in a long chiton and cloak with a rudder, wheel of fortune, the horn of plenty (cornucopia) in her hand. The best known of these depictions was Tyche of Antioch on the Orontes. Next to the attributes already named she had a *corona muralis*. This attribute was associated also with goddess Cybele. By the time the Empire had become Christian only two depictions of personifications of cities were retained: Rome and Constantinople.¹⁸ Tyche of Constantinople was a new figure even though her attributes had been borrowed from a pagan deity. She ceased being a pagan deity and continued only as a symbol of fortune and prosperity.¹⁹

The female deity Roma, personification of the city of Rome and of the Empire, was venerated in Greek towns at the close of the Hellenistic age as an expression of loyalty to the Republic.²⁰ Roma was depicted as a woman in a chiton and cloak, seated on a throne. Often, she wore a helmet and a short tunic. She was accompanied by attributes such as the shield, sword, sceptre and spear. Greek towns in the East had a more peaceful representation of Roma wearing a *corona muralis*, holding a cornucopia. Constantine the Great had the personification of Rome represented on a series of coins issued at Ostia where it appears next to the

¹⁵ B ü h l 1995, p. 52.

¹⁶ B ü h l 1995, p. 3.

¹⁷ B ü h l 1995, pp. 21–22.

¹⁸ S h e l t o n 1979, pp. 28–30.

¹⁹ B ü h l 1995, pp. 32–33.

²⁰ B ü h l 1995, p. 4.

personification of a Roman mint.²¹ The city of Constantinople was portrayed as a woman seated on a throne wearing a long robe, with a *corona muralis* or a wreath of flowers on her head, holding a thyrsos. Her foot rested on the prow of a ship. Sometimes she holds the orb with Victory, similarly as Roma, or, a cornucopia. Zosimos²² notes that among buildings restored by Constantine there were temples of Rheia (identified with Cybele) and of Dea Roma. Constantine had the depiction of Cybele transformed into the personification of his new capital to which were added new attributes.²³

The first depictions of Tyche of Constantinople appear on silver medallions issued to commemorate the city's consecration on 11 May 330.²⁴ The designs with the personification of Constantinople contain no references to Christian symbolism.²⁵ Constantinople was supposed to be a city close to Rome, as emphasized by attributes as e.g., the sceptre.²⁶ G. Bühl stresses that Constantine was not out to establish a city which would rob the city of Rome of its capital rank.²⁷ Presumably the first personification of Constantinople, created with the help of the emperor's attendant philosopher or astrologer, was achieved by merging attributes formerly associated with several different female deities as e.g., Rhea, Abundantia, Victoria, Cybele, Fortuna and Ceres.²⁸ This type of effigy, composed of quite different elements, was meant to personify – for the purpose imperial propaganda – ideas with a decidedly positive connotations as peace, victory and prosperity.²⁹ The image of the city's Tyche was already established in Roman art so there was no need to trace it back directly to the Hellenistic tradition.³⁰ Sculptures of Tyche of Constantinople were raised in different places in the city. Imaginably, the personification of Constantinople on the medallions has the same set of attributes as those with which these statues were provided. In the city itself there were two images set in public, perhaps inside the basilica: the personification of Constantinople, and Tyche of the city of Rome.³¹ The images of Roma and Constantinopolis became the symbol of the whole Empire, one that had two capital cities. Older ideas had gained a new meaning, adjusted to the needs of a current imperial

²¹ Alföldi 1999, p. 177; Shelton 1979, p. 32.

²² *Hist.* II, p. 31.

²³ Toynbee 1947b, p. 136.

²⁴ Bühl 1995, p. 10.

²⁵ Toynbee 1947b, p. 137.

²⁶ Bühl 1995, pp. 31, 36.

²⁷ Bühl 1995, p. 40.

²⁸ Alföldi 1947a, p. 16; Bühl 1995, p. 24.

²⁹ Bühl 1995, p. 24.

³⁰ Bühl 1995, pp. 23–24.

³¹ Bühl 1995, pp. 26–31.

policy. At the same time, the old images of Tyche and Roma had lost all of their religious connotations, becoming merely personifications of the two capital cities of the Empire.³² In a later period, from the second half of the fourth century AD onwards, the effigies of Roma and Constantinople in numismatic iconography start to become increasingly similar to one another. Still, at the end of the fourth century AD attributes characteristic for Constantinople (*corona muralis, prora*) continue in the designs on coins and medallions, only to disappear during the next century. The personifications themselves disappear from coins and medallions at the close of the sixth century AD., that is, in what is now Byzantine coinage.³³

The orations of Themisthius, rhetorician and philosopher, proconsul in 358 AD, address the subject of the new capital and its relationship to the city of Rome. Themisthius praises the beauty of Constantinople and presents the two capitals as united by concord and in an alliance.³⁴ He claims that, like Constantine who had set off from Rome to free Constantinople from a tyrant, Constantius set off from Constantinople to Rome to free the old capital from the tyranny of Magnentius.³⁵ This is in correspondence with depictions of Roma and Constantinople featured on medallions where they are shown enthroned in concord.³⁶ Themisthius writes that new Rome shares with old Rome both the name and Tyche, which in this case signifies the personification of the city, also represented on the medallions.³⁷ This turn of phrase goes hand in hand with the adoption by the effigy of Constantinople, seen on the medallions, of some of the attributes of Roma.³⁸ It would appear from some multiples that the status of Constantinople was slightly lower than that of Rome.³⁹ Also, in the oration of Themisthius, Constantinople evidently takes second place.⁴⁰ Themisthius draws attention to the fact that the town Byzantium has been an ally of Rome since the time of the war with Mithridates VI Eupator and has always supplied Rome with trained sailors.⁴¹ The prow, always depicted under the foot of Tyche of Constantinople, could be a reference to the naval victory of Constantine I over Licinius nearby Byzantium in 324 AD, and — possibly — to the assistance given to Rome in the first century BC.⁴² This element

³² B ü h l 1995, pp. 33–34.

³³ B ü h l 1995, pp. 61–77.

³⁴ *Themist. Orat.* 3, Πρὸς βευτικὸς ὑπερὸν Κωνσταντινοπόλεος ..., 40c–41a.

³⁵ *Themist. Orat.* 3, Πρὸς βευτικὸς ὑπερὸν Κωνσταντινοπόλεος ..., 43a–c, 44a–b.

³⁶ E.g., RIC VIII, 221; 231.

³⁷ *Themist. Orat.* 3, Πρὸς βευτικὸς ὑπερὸν Κωνσταντινοπόλεος ..., 42a–b.

³⁸ B ü h l 1995, pp. 53–54.

³⁹ T o y n b e e 1947, p. 138.

⁴⁰ *Themist. Orat.* 3, Πρὸς βευτικὸς ὑπερὸν Κωνσταντινοπόλεος ..., 41c–d.

⁴¹ *Themist. Orat.* 3, Πρὸς βευτικὸς ὑπερὸν Κωνσταντινοπόλεος ..., 42d–43a.

⁴² A l f ö l d i 1947b, p. 138.

appears not only in the iconography of medallions and coins but also in sculpture. Both the iconography of the medallions and the content of orations delivered by rhetoricians clearly indicate a close relationship of Rome with Constantinople as two capital cities of the Empire. The status of Constantinople and its depiction in propaganda have a close connection with the city of Rome. The new capital gained its importance through its direct relationship with the old capital having highlighted by the propaganda.⁴³ The personifications of the new capital were a combination of the traditional, universally recognizable elements of iconography of the city's Tyche with new attributes. On medallions the effigies Roma and Constantinopolis are accompanied most often by the inscription GLORIA ROMANORUM. Thus, we can agree with the conclusion of G. Bühl that they were meant to symbolize none other but the glory of the Romans. But we cannot draw the conclusion that the two capital cities were not equal in rank or define their hierarchy with respect to one another.⁴⁴ Only in the orations of Themistius can we discern some degree of differentiation between the status of the two cities. What the images represented on the medallions were meant to do was, presumably, to indicate the relationship of the person of the Emperor with the capital cities of the Empire.⁴⁵

SACRALISATION OF THE IMPERIAL IMAGE

The medallions and the surviving works of rhetoricians alike present a coherent propaganda image of the emperor. The ruler is usually represented as a holy personage, outstanding military commander and legitimate heir of the dynasty. A gold medallion of Magnentius issued by the mint at Aquileia⁴⁶ has on its obverse the inscription IMP CAES MAGNENTIVS AVG and the bust of the emperor wearing a *paludamentum*. The reverse is features the inscription LIBERATOR REIPUBLICAE and the effigy of Magnentius with a nimbus, on horseback, and a female figure with a palm branch and cornucopia, personification of *Res Publica*, i.e., Roman state. M. Beyeler suggested that the female figure on the medallion personifies Aquileia but the inscription of the reverse clearly shows that this must be the personification of *res publica* i.e., of the Roman state.⁴⁷ We have here an evident depiction of Emperor Magnentius as liberator coming to the aid of the Roman state. He is inspired by a divine force, indicated by the nimbus around his

⁴³ Bühl 1995, p. 78.

⁴⁴ Bühl 1995, p. 78.

⁴⁵ Bühl 1995, p. 78.

⁴⁶ RIC VIII, 326; 122; Fig. 2.

⁴⁷ Beyeler 2011, p. 134.

head. We could look here for an analogy with the depiction seen on a 10-aureus medallion of Constantius Chlorus from the Beaurains treasure hoard where the emperor is represented on horseback, as the expected liberator of Londinium from the rule of the usurper Allectus.⁴⁸ Here, Magnentius is rescuing the Empire from the rule of Constantius. Presumably, the multiple was struck to commemorate the elevation of Magnentius to the rank of Augustus on 18 January 350.⁴⁹ The nimbus around the emperor's countenance is more a symbol of a general idea of divinity, possibly even, with a Neoplatonic overtone. Like all usurpers before him, Magnentius presented himself as a liberator of the state (LIBERATOR REIPUBLICAE) from tyranny. His victory was synonymous with liberating the Romans (VICTORIA AVG LIB ROMANOR). These notions are juxtaposed with a depiction of the victorious emperor on horseback coming to rescue the female figure, the embodiment of *Respublica*.



Fig. 2. Multiplum of Magnentius, Aquileia mint, 3 solidi, 350 AD, RIC VIII, 326; 122.

Source: Numismatica Ars Classica

A gold multiple issued in Constantinople⁵⁰ depicts on its obverse the diademed bust of the emperor in a cuirass, with gorgoneion, in *paludamentum*, and inscription FL CONSTANS NOB CAES. The emperor is raising his hand. This gesture originally was the mark of respect expressed by the worshipper towards a deity. Later, it became a symbol of the force of the Sun god in the cult of Mithras – Sol Invictus. Throughout the third century, as the solar iconography became incorporated into the imperial image, the raised hand became a symbol of the emperor's highest authority, often represented in tandem with an orb, held in the other hand.⁵¹ On the reverse is an inscription SECVRITAS PERPETVA and the effigy of Constantine I in a laurel wreath holding a *labarum*, flanked on his left by Constantine II and Constans, on his right by Constantius II. All are cuirassed and hold a shield (except for Constantine I). The faces of the sons are turned towards the father.

⁴⁸ Kolb 2008, pp. 206–207.

⁴⁹ Beyeler 2011, p. 134.

⁵⁰ RIC VII, 580, 67; Fig. 3.

⁵¹ Brilliant 1963, pp. 208–211.

This representation is a propaganda image of the Constantinian dynasty. We see here the victorious emperor (as emphasized by the legionary standard he is holding), towards whom his sons are facing. Presumably this particular medallion was issued to commemorate the victory of Constantine the Great over the Goths in 332, similarly as a series of solidi dating from the same period.⁵²



Fig. 3. Multiplum of Constans, Constantinople mint, 4 1/2 solidi, 333 AD, RIC VII, 580; 67.

The designs often highlight the hierarchy of power held of the co-emperors. Depicted on the reverse is the emperor holding the highest authority (*potior auctoritas*) with his subordinate Caesars and Augusti. On depictions predating 337 we often see Constantine I flanked by his sons who hold the office of Caesars.⁵³ Higher stature emphasizes the dominant position of Constantine. It is similarly with multiples of co-emperors Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans. The dominant position of Constantine II is emphasized by scenes in which he is shown seated on a throne between his brothers and with a nimbus around his head.⁵⁴

Emphasis on the rulers' suitable family background and praise given to their ancestors is to be found also in the works of rhetoric. Constantine's sons are described as being his reflection.⁵⁵ References to the traditions of the ruling family are to be found in Constantine I's family also earlier, in a panegyric celebrating his marriage to Fausta of 307, where it is expressly stated that Constantine inherited his right to rule from his father: (...) *cum tibi pater imperium reliquisset*.⁵⁶ According to a panegyric work from 310 Constantine I was a born Emperor, which set him apart from his contemporary co-rulers: (...) *imperium nascendo meruisti*.⁵⁷ Frequent depictions of *concordia* of the co-emperors featured on multiples⁵⁸ are

⁵² Bastien 1988, p. 80; Beyeler 2011, p. 123.

⁵³ E.g., RIC VII, 580; 67.

⁵⁴ RIC VIII, 352; 41.

⁵⁵ *Pan. Lat.* X (4), III, 4–7.

⁵⁶ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), V, 3.

⁵⁷ *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), II, 2–III, 1.

⁵⁸ E.g., RIC VIII, 18; RIC VIII, 20, 21.

the legacy of the propaganda from the period of the Tetrarchy. The rhetoric of that period often addresses the subject of concord between the co-reigning rulers, as exemplified by e.g., the panegyric honouring Maximian from 291: *Clamare omnes prae gaudio, iam sine metu vestri et palam manu demonstrare: Vides Diocletianum? Maximianum vides? Ambo sunt, pariter sunt! Quam iunctim sedent! Quam concorditer colloquantur! Qam cito transeunt! Nemo studio suo par fuit oculis ad intuentum, dumque vos alterna cupiditate mirantur, neutrum satis videre potuerunt.*⁵⁹ The rulers sit in harmony, immobile. This does not correspond directly with static depictions observed on medallions in which the rulers are shown standing or seated on a throne. But what is meant here is a general idea of unity and concord of the co-reigning emperors. This idea was expressed using a variety of means; communicated differently in works of rhetoric than in works of visual art.

The medallion from Antioch⁶⁰ is with an obverse inscription D N CONSTANTIVS MAX AVGVSTVS and image of a diademed bust of the emperor holding a celestial orb and Victory. On the reverse is seen inscription is D N CONSTANTIVS VICTOR SEMPER AVG and the image of Constantius in quadriga facing, with nimbus, flanked by Victories with wreaths (Fig. 4). What we see here is a clear reference to the emperor's triumphal entry into the city. He is depicted as an ever victorious emperor (*victor semper*), consequently it is hard to establish which particular triumph is meant here. This medallion was issued in 345, possibly 346, to commemorate the joint consulship of Constantius II and Constans.⁶¹ The gesture of the emperor's raised hand, combined with the inscription, creates an impression of an invincible ruler with indomitable power.⁶² The inscription may refer to the titlature of Constantius II, one he used in a letter to Shapur II, cited by Ammianus Marcellinus: *Victor terra marique Constantius semper Augustus.*⁶³

This remarkable type which shows the emperor in a quadriga or a triumphal car, with nimbus around his head, being crowned by Victory, has been interpreted in relation to earlier depictions of solar deities. The nimbus is basically a modified radiate crown and has to do with the identification of the ruler with the rising Sun. The connection of the ruler with *Sol* had been portrayed in Roman art since the times of Emperor Augustus.⁶⁴ Coins minted to commemorate the *consecratio* of Constantine the Great show him riding in a chariot of Helios. The triumphal entry of emperors shown on multiples described here may be interpreted alternately as

⁵⁹ *Pan. Lat.* III (11), XI, 4–5.

⁶⁰ RIC VIII, 517; 68.

⁶¹ Bastien 1988, pp. 86–87; Beyeler 2011, p. 132.

⁶² Brilliant 1963, p. 180.

⁶³ *Amm. Marc., Rerum Gestarum* XVII, 5, 10; cf. Brilliant 1963, p. 181.

⁶⁴ Kantorowicz 1963, pp. 119–120.



Fig. 4. Reverse of a multiplum of Constantius II, Antioch mint, 9 solidi, 347 or 350 AD, RIC VIII, 517; 68.

oriens Augusti. An interesting analogy to these images would be the mural from the temple at Dura Europos (Fig. 5) showing Zeus Theos in imperial garb, with nimbus, standing in a chariot, crowned from the air by two Victories.⁶⁵ We have here an often encountered case of the emperor's iconography being modelled on the images of gods, and of the lingering of Hellenistic traditions into the times of the Christian Empire. The meaning of similar designs has been linked with political theology. The emperor as the rising Sun was supposed to defeat enemies and demons of darkness and bring peace to the Earth.⁶⁶ The images exude charisma and admiration for the imperial dignity itself. The ruler, enthroned and with a nimbus around him, is becoming increasingly similar to the old effigies of pagan gods.⁶⁷ In ancient tradition and art the nimbus used to be a ring of light around a divine being.⁶⁸ Most often, this attribute was associated with solar deities and, after their example, to other gods also.⁶⁹ Since Alexander the Great ruler were portrayed in a radiate crown, like Helios. In some depictions the rays of this crown fused and, with time, developed into a nimbus.⁷⁰ For Constantine and his Christian successors the nimbus became a symbol of the emperor's power, authority and holiness.⁷¹ Perhaps, this change of image has something to do with the family tragedy of Constantine the Great, i.e., the deaths of his wife Fausta

⁶⁵ Kantorowicz 1963, pp. 122–129, Fig. 28.

⁶⁶ Kantorowicz 1963, p. 130.

⁶⁷ Alföldi 1999, p. 179.

⁶⁸ Tavenor-Perry 1907, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Tavenor-Perry 1907, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Tavenor-Perry 1907, p. 21.

⁷¹ Tavenor-Perry 1907, p. 21.

and son Crispus in unclear circumstances in 326.⁷² Introduction of the nimbus to the canonical iconography of Roman emperors in the time of the Tetrarchy definitely is associated with oriental influence, including Mithraism.⁷³ Originally, in Roman tradition the supernatural radiance was reserved for gods only.⁷⁴ On Roman coinage the nimbus is rarely encountered before the Constantine period. On a coin issued c. 118 by Hadrian in honour of Trajan, a phoenix is represented with a halo around its head.⁷⁵ The depictions of the emperor with a nimbus were associated with solar theology in which the ruler was *pacator orbis*, likened to the Sun itself.⁷⁶ Starting from around 327, it is the emperor, rather than specific actions taken by him as a ruler of his country, who becomes the main subject of iconography on gold Constantinian issues.⁷⁷



Fig. 5. Painting from the temple of Zeus Theos at Dura Europos, third century AD., reconstruction Kantorowicz 1963, fig. 28.

In the context of sacralisation of the imperial image of great interest is a multi-ple of Constantine II⁷⁸ issued at Nicomedia, with a reverse inscription FELICITAS ROMANORVM and a depiction of Constantine I and his sons standing beneath a two-columned archway. All hold sceptres and orbs. Dated to 330 this medal- lion was issued presumably to commemorate the consecration of Constantinople although this dating has been questioned by M. Beyeler.⁷⁹ The representation of the rulers standing beneath an archway is related to a special form of imperial cult which has roots in eastern Hellenized provinces of the Empire. Gymnasia and pal-

⁷² Alföldi 1999, pp. 179–180.

⁷³ Bastien 1992, p. 167.

⁷⁴ Bastien 1992, pp. 168–169.

⁷⁵ Bastien 1992, pp. 169–170.

⁷⁶ Kantorowicz 1963; Bastien 1992, p. 171.

⁷⁷ Alföldi 1999, p. 179.

⁷⁸ RIC VII, 169.

⁷⁹ Bastien 1988, p. 80; Beyeler 2011, p. 122.

aestrae had special monumental courts surrounded by colonnades, designated by modern researchers as *Kaisersäle*.⁸⁰ This is where normally the statue of the emperor stood (often in an exedra or apse), where homage was paid to it.⁸¹ In front of the statue there could be an altar for the offering of sacrifices. The cult of hero and of the emperor practiced in gymnasia goes back in its roots to Hellenistic times. During that age this is where Seleucids, Ptolemies and Attalids were worshipped. Statues were raised to the divine kings and many feast days were celebrated. Sometimes, a gymnasium would be renamed, as e.g., *Antiocheion*, *Ptolemaion*.⁸² During the first century AD the cult of divine rulers was replaced by the cult of Roma and of the emperor. With time separate buildings were developed for this form of worship known as *augusteion*, *sebasteion* or *kaisareion*, similar to the earlier temples dedicated to the worship of heroes.⁸³ More often as not the worshipped effigy was housed in an exedra or in a recess flanked by columns.⁸⁴ The pedestal on a column, with a canopy, had a profound symbolic meaning. Like any the temple building it manifested the divine and earthly power of the emperor. The 'celestial' canopy was associated with the concept of the ruler's divinity and represented a magnificent setting for his cult.⁸⁵ Because statues of Dionysus standing in theatres were given a similar architectural setting some researchers have suggested that the emperor was worshipped as a new Dionysus.⁸⁶ On coinage the first depictions of the emperor in this type of setting go back to the reign of Antoninus Pius and Commodus. The tetrarchs also made use of this motif in iconography, as indicated by murals in the temple of the imperial cult at Luxor.⁸⁷ Depictions of this type, deriving from images of *epiphaniae* of Hellenistic rulers, could be associated with the imperial *adventus*.⁸⁸ A common point here would be the canopy, symbol of the heavenly firmament, which provided gave the imperial epiphany with its celestial setting. During Late Antiquity this construction developed into an *aedicula*, where the emperor would sit in state. It had now lost its pagan connotations becoming only a setting for the divine majesty of the emperor.⁸⁹

A characteristic insignia represented on medallions was the orb, symbol of the terrestrial globe and of the celestial sphere.⁹⁰ The orb signified the emperor's

⁸⁰ Yegül 1982, pp. 8–9.

⁸¹ Yegül 1982, pp. 10–12.

⁸² Yegül 1982, pp. 13–14.

⁸³ Yegül 1982, pp. 16–17.

⁸⁴ Yegül 1982, pp. 15–16.

⁸⁵ Yegül 1982, pp. 20–21.

⁸⁶ Yegül 1982, p. 26.

⁸⁷ Yegül 1982, pp. 21–22.

⁸⁸ Yegül 1982, pp. 22–23.

⁸⁹ Yegül 1982, p. 29.

⁹⁰ Bastien 1992, p. 491.

dominion over the world, and was an emblem of a deity – *kosmokrator*, ruler of the Universe.⁹¹ It took its origin from models of a spherical Universe known to the Greek philosophers. The depictions of this type of orb often include meridians, parallels and stars.⁹² The orb, as a symbol of dominion over the world, appears for the first time on coinage from the period of the Republic. Julius Caesar is supposed to have made a special reference to the ideology of the *kosmokrator* by having his statue, feet on a globe, place among statues of Roman gods and goddesses in the temple of Jupiter.⁹³ Since the times of Augustus the emperors accepted the symbolism of the orb and the celestial sphere.⁹⁴ As a symbol of universal power the orb was depicted in the context of *Genio Populi Romani* and of goddess Roma.⁹⁵

There are a good many medallions with the portrait of the emperor with nimbus around his head, symbol of the ruler's divine status. The emperor's divine nature is a subject frequently addressed by rhetoricians. Themisthios stresses that a good ruler, guided by a love for this people, is a living image of God.⁹⁶

Praising Maximian, a panegyrist speaks of a lighted circle surrounding the divine countenance of the emperor: (...) *et illa lux divinum verticem claro orbe complectens vestorum*.⁹⁷ A panegyric from 291 describes the sojourn of Diocletian and Maximian in Italy, using the symbolism of light: *Nunc autem, ut primum ex utrisque Alpium iugis vestrum numen effulsit, tota Italia clarior lux diffusa omnibus qui suspexerant aequae adivinatio atquae dubitatio iniecta est quinam dei illis montium verticibus orientur an his quadibus in terras caelo descenderunt*.⁹⁸ Nazarius speaks of a gentle radiance surrounding the countenance of Constantine the Great: (...) *Obtutus hominum benignus receptas nec intuentem iniquus fulgor retundit, sed serenum lumen inuitat*.⁹⁹ We find the motif of the nimbus both on medallions and in works of rhetoric. As an attribute of divinity the nimbus was a universal symbol.

A panegyric delivered in Trier on 21 April 289 in honour of Maximian described emperors as those who reign over heaven and earth: *Vos vero, qui imperium non terrae, sed caeli regionibus terminatis*¹⁰⁰, making an allusion to their

⁹¹ Bastien 1992, pp. 492–493.

⁹² Bastien 1992, pp. 494–495.

⁹³ Bastien 1992, pp. 498–499.

⁹⁴ Bastien 1992, pp. 499–503.

⁹⁵ Bastien 1992, p. 498.

⁹⁶ *Themist. Orat.* 1, Πέρι Φιλανθρωπίας..., 9a–c.

⁹⁷ *Pan. Lat.* II (10), III, 2.

⁹⁸ *Pan. Lat.* III (11), X, 4.

⁹⁹ *Pan. Lat.* X (4), V, 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Pan. Lat.* II (10), X, 1.

divine nature. Another panegyric, from 291 AD, describes the emperor using the name *sacratissimus imperator*.¹⁰¹ This is also the title used by an anonymous panegyrist with reference to Constantine I in 310.¹⁰²

Imperial insignia were one of the main elements of power legitimacy during the period of Late Antiquity. An item seen most often on medallions is the diadem, a regular feature in imperial portraits. Modelling himself on Alexander the Great, Constantine took to wearing the diadem, which became one of the imperial power insignia.¹⁰³ In more ancient times the diadem used to be a symbol of authority of the monarchs especially popular among the rulers of the Hellenistic East and rulers of Persia. It was one of the attributes in the cult of Dionysus, popular in Macedonia and of great consequence for the Argead dynasty. In this context it becomes clear that the diadem – emblem of cult – was adopted by Alexander the Great as a power insignia.¹⁰⁴ It would develop negative connotations with “oriental despotism” only in the eyes of historians of the Hellenistic age. The diadem evolved from a simple headband for the hair to a wreath richly decorated with gold, jewels or pearls.¹⁰⁵ The diadem worn by Hellenistic kings was, together with the purple robe, a symbol of autocracy.¹⁰⁶ It was suggested that the attribute of the Hellenistic monarchy may have been worn in some cases by the Romans during the period of the Republic but this is not confirmed.¹⁰⁷ At the time of the Republic the diadem as a symbol of monarchy was regarded as a mark of ignominy by the Senate and the Roman people at large.¹⁰⁸ It was then a band tied on the nape, with two ribbons hanging down at the back and a gem over the forehead.¹⁰⁹ The lower border of the band often was decorated with pearls, and with time the two ends of the band developed into ornamental pendilia.¹¹⁰ In the Blacas Cameo Emperor Augustus is depicted wearing the diadem decorated with jewels.¹¹¹ Aurelius Victor and Suetonius report that Caligula wore the diadem and this was interpreted as an attempt to introduce an oriental theocratic monarchy in Rome.¹¹² In a portrait of the family of Emperor Septimius Severus known as the Berlin Tondo, all its members are wearing a diadem. The Emperor’s piece is decorated in front with

¹⁰¹ *Pan. Lat.* III (11), II, 3.

¹⁰² *Pan. Lat.* VII (6), I, 1.

¹⁰³ Kolb 2008, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Fredricksmeier 1997, pp. 102–103.

¹⁰⁵ Kolb 2008, pp. 77–78.

¹⁰⁶ Schramm 1954, p. 381; Bastien 1992, pp. 143–144.

¹⁰⁷ Brendel 1967, pp. 407, 409.

¹⁰⁸ Bastien 1992, p. 143.

¹⁰⁹ Schramm 1954, p. 381.

¹¹⁰ Schramm 1954, p. 381.

¹¹¹ Bastien 1992, p. 144.

¹¹² Bastien 1992, p. 144.

three gems.¹¹³ The private nature of this particular portrait suggests that the diadem had not yet become an element the emperor's official image.¹¹⁴ Medallions of Constantine I commemorating his *vicennalia* (325–326) present the diadem in its three basic forms: pearl, rosette, and plain band introducing them to the Roman coinage as official imperial insignia.¹¹⁵ Soon enough, several different types of diadem appear in portraits on the coins: with a gem over the forehead of the wearer, with ornamented borders, decorated with gems and pearls.¹¹⁶ The plain headband seen in the portraits of Constantine the Great was a direct borrowing from the iconography of Alexander of Macedon and the Diadochi.¹¹⁷

Often, the ruler was depicted wearing an ornate helmet, set with gems and coloured glass. Sometimes this is a helmet of a form known as *Spanghelhelm*, one worn also by the imperial guard. The same type of helmet is known from finds from Deurne and Berkasovo. It was part of the emperor's image as military commander and soon was united with the diadem.¹¹⁸

Describing the figure of the emperor a rhetorician makes note of his subject's garments and attributes, which are also depicted on the reverses of medallions. He admires the diadem, cloak, belt and shiny robes, making an allusion to the ceremony of *adoratio*.¹¹⁹ But he is quick to remind the ruler that the diadem, gold sceptre and fine clothes cannot take the place of character and virtues.¹²⁰ For Themistius the emperor's attire was not the primary element of his image. He valued more highly the qualities of mind and spirit of his ruler. The insignia and attire stay on the margin of his interest. Other rhetoricians devoted somewhat more attention to the emperor's dress. A panegyric in honour of Maximian from 291 describes the consular garb of the emperor and the insignia of his authority, i.e., *fasces* and the curule seat: *Trabeae vestre triumphales et fasces, et sellae curulis*.¹²¹ In a panegyric dated to 321 Nazarius describes the emperor's dress and weapons: *Fulget nobilis galea et corusca luce gemmarum divinum verticem monstrat. Auro clipeus, auro arma collucent*.¹²² In a panegyric honouring Emperor Julian the Apostate Claudius Mamertinus claims that it is meet for the emperor to sit enthroned dressed in purple, with a diadem ornamented with jewels: (...) *sed amicatam purpura,*

¹¹³ Bastien 1992, p. 146.

¹¹⁴ Bastien 1992, p. 146.

¹¹⁵ Bastien 1992, p. 147.

¹¹⁶ Bastien 1992, pp. 147–152.

¹¹⁷ Bastien 1992, p. 157.

¹¹⁸ Schramm 1954, p. 382.

¹¹⁹ *Themist. Orat.* 1, Πέρι Φιλαντροπίας ..., 2a.

¹²⁰ *Themist. Orat.* 1, Πέρι Φιλαντροπίας ..., 11c–d.

¹²¹ *Pan. Lat.* II (10), III, 2.

¹²² *Pan. Lat.* X (4), XXIX, 5.

*auro gemmisque redimitam in regali solio collocasti.*¹²³ On the obverses of some medallions the ornate imperial helmet can be seen.¹²⁴ A panegyric in honour of Maximian and Constantine, written in 307 AD, describes the plumed helmet, decorated with jewels and gold, that Constantine received from Fausta, his betrothed: (...) *galeam auro gemmisquae radiantem et pinnis pulchrae alitis eminentem.*¹²⁵ As we can see, rhetoricians make note of this element of the emperor's image, i.e., his ceremonial attire. Nevertheless for them it is not the main object of interest. More often, they emphasized the ruler's qualities of character. It was differently with authors of the designs on the medallions. The die engravers carefully represented the items of emperor's garb, weapons and insignia. These belong among the principal elements of the propaganda statement of the coins and medallions, as dictated by the very nature of iconography represented on coinage. Moreover, it stands to reason that the engravers were constrained by strict guidelines as to the ideological message conveyed by medallions. Not so the rhetoricians who had more freedom in formulating their praise for the emperor and could distribute the accents of their message, differently than the engravers.

IMAGES ASSOCIATED WITH CHRISTIANITY

Medallions issued by sons of Constantine I feature some remarkable designs that find reference both in the written sources and in works of rhetoric. Some of them reveal unexpected analogy with artworks now lost, especially those described in the writings of Eusebius Pamphilus. A gold medallion from the mint at Aquileia¹²⁶ celebrates the military prowess of Constans. This is clearly indicated by the bust of the emperor, diademed and in military garb (*paludamentum*) seen on the obverse and by the reverse depiction of Constans, cuirassed and holding labarum, crowned by two Victories. What is striking here is that the symbolism of the pagan goddess of victory is shown in combination with the *signum* featuring the Christogram. The medallion dates from late 337 and presumably was issued to commemorate the elevation of Constans, Constantine II and Constantius II to the dignity of Augustus after the death of Constantine the Great.¹²⁷ The standard (*signum* or *vexillum*) is often represented on Roman coinage. It appears close to emperors discharging official military functions.¹²⁸ This was a

¹²³ *Pan. Lat.* XI (3), XXIII, 4.

¹²⁴ E.g., RIC VIII, 99.

¹²⁵ *Pan. Lat.* VI (7), VI, 2.

¹²⁶ RIC VIII, 314; 1 and 1A; Fig. 6.

¹²⁷ Bastien 1988, p. 82; Beyeler 2011, p. 126.

¹²⁸ Rostovtzeff 1942, p. 93.

standard in the form of a rectangular piece of cloth fastened to a staff by means of a horizontal crossbar.¹²⁹ Sometimes *phalerae* were attached to the staff, which is more typical for *signum* standards than for *vexillum*.¹³⁰ A bronze plaque attributed to *legio XX Valeria Victrix* and *legio II Augusta* shows a *vexillum* with attached *phalerae*.¹³¹ In the times of Constantine the Great the staff of the *vexillum* had attached to it similar *phalerae* with images of the emperor's sons.¹³² Presumably, this type of standard is present in the majority of the described designs on medallions. On some standards there is a pattern of five spheres.¹³³ This is a *quincunx* which has an evident religious significance.¹³⁴ A standard of this form could have been presented in the nature of *dona militaria*, or a military award for valor.¹³⁵ In the army standards were regarded as sacred objects and were venerated as such.¹³⁶



Fig. 6. Multiplum of Constans, Aquileia mint, 2 solidi, 337 or 340 AD, RIC VIII, 314; 1 and 1A.

The image of the emperor, cuirassed, holding a labarum, is not only the presentation of the new theology of victory, associated with Christianity. Depictions of this sort reproduce the iconographic form of the statue Constantine the Great raised in Rome after his victory over Maxentius. This sculpture is described by Eusebius Pamphilius: *Moreover, by loud proclamation and monumental inscriptions he made known to all men the salutary symbol, setting up this great trophy of victory over his enemies in the midst of the imperial city, and expressly causing it to be engraved in indelible characters, that the salutary symbol was the safeguard of the Roman government and of the entire empire. Accordingly, he*

¹²⁹ Rostovtzeff 1942, p. 93.

¹³⁰ Rostovtzeff 1942, p. 96.

¹³¹ Dixon, Southern 2000, p. 125, fig. 59.

¹³² Rostovtzeff 1942, p. 96.

¹³³ RIC VII, 112.

¹³⁴ Rostovtzeff 1942, p. 104.

¹³⁵ Rostovtzeff 1942, p. 106.

¹³⁶ Dixon, Southern 2000, p. 125.

*immediately ordered a lofty spear in the figure of a cross to be placed beneath the hand of a statue representing himself, in the most frequented part of Rome, and the following inscription to be engraved on it in the Latin language: BY VIRTUE OF THIS SALUTARY SIGN, WHICH IS THE TRUE TEST OF VALOR, I HAVE PRESERVED AND LIBERATED YOUR CITY FROM THE YOKE OF TYRANNY. I HAVE ALSO SET AT LIBERTY THE ROMAN SENATE AND PEOPLE, AND RESTORED THEM TO THEIR ANCIENT DISTINCTION AND SPLENDOR.*¹³⁷ Consequently, every image of this type brings to mind both the form of the statue and the inscription with which it was provided. We have to do here with a distinct type of depiction modelled on an existing sculpture.

A multiple¹³⁸ struck at Mediolanum has on its obverse the diademed bust of the emperor and inscription FL IVL CONSTANTIVS PERP AVG. On the reverse is seen the inscription DEBELLATORI HOSTIVM and Constantius on horseback, galloping left with, under his horse, a serpent. This medallion dates from 353.¹³⁹ What we see here is a depiction of Emperor Constantius II as a conqueror of enemies, symbolized by the serpent trampled by the horse's hooves. The enemy in question may have been Persians against whom Constantius had campaigned repeatedly during his reign. Nevertheless, these wars were fought constantly in Armenia and Mesopotamia and this disagrees with the place of issue of this particular medallion. It is more likely that the enemy in question is Magnentius, defeated in 352.¹⁴⁰ Thus, we can narrow down the dating of this medallion to 353 AD, the year after the defeat of Magnentius when Constantius was celebrating his tricennialia.¹⁴¹ The gesture of the emperor's raised hand signifies the end of struggle, achievement of the highest authority in all spheres, the ruler's strength and prowess.¹⁴² The identification of the serpent with the enemy made here is an example of adaptation of Christian symbolism, where the snake stands for an evil spirit and enemy of mankind. We see here the blending of an old motif of a victorious horseman, going back a long way back, to the Hellenistic period (referred to by modern researchers as *Reitersieger*), symbol of courage and success in battle or hunt, with biblical iconography.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ *Eusebius Vita.*, I, 40, The Bagster translation, revised by Ernest Cushing Richardson, Ph.D., Librarian and Associate Professor in Hartford Theological Seminary. Full ref at end, Volume I, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, Edinburgh: repr. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955.

¹³⁸ RIC VIII, 233; 1.

¹³⁹ Beyeler 2011, p. 137.

¹⁴⁰ Bastien 1988, p. 89.

¹⁴¹ Beyeler 2011, pp. 137–138.

¹⁴² Brilliant 1963, p. 184.

¹⁴³ Brilliant 1963, p. 181.

What is characteristic is that a Christian symbol of evil has been adopted to represent the enemies of the Empire being vanquished by the ruler.¹⁴⁴ This is proof that Christian symbolism, biblical in its origin, was being accepted in the elite circles, gradually but inexorably. In this case also, we can indicate analogies in the visual art from the period of reign of Constantine the Great. Eusebius Pamphilius mentions a painting placed before the entrance to the emperor's palace: *And besides this, he caused to be painted on a lofty tablet, and set up in the front of the portico of his palace, so as to be visible to all, a representation of the salutary sign placed above his head, and below it that hateful and savage adversary of mankind, who by means of the tyranny of the ungodly had wasted the Church of God, falling headlong, under the form of a dragon, to the abyss of destruction. For the sacred oracles in the books of God's prophets have described him as a dragon and a crooked serpent; (1) and for this reason the emperor thus publicly displayed a painted (2) resemblance of the dragon beneath his own and his children's feet, stricken through with a dart, and cast headlong into the depths of the sea.*

*In this manner he intended to represent the secret adversary of the human race, and to indicate that he was consigned to the gulf of perdition by virtue of the salutary trophy placed above his head. This allegory, then, was thus conveyed by means of the colors of a picture: and I am filled with wonder at the intellectual greatness of the emperor, who as if by divine inspiration thus expressed what the prophets had foretold concerning this monster, saying that "God would bring his great and strong and terrible sword against the dragon, the flying serpent; and would destroy the dragon that was in the sea." (3) This it was of which the emperor gave a true and faithful representation in the picture above described.*¹⁴⁵ Thus, the depiction of the enemy as a serpent or a dragon would be a reference at once to the biblical passage¹⁴⁶ cited given by Eusebius Pamphilius and to the painting on the palace of Constantine I. The secondary nature of the image depicted on the medallion to the iconography described in the work of Eusebius seems obvious.

A significant shift in the official imperial image was its gradual Christianization, this occurred during the fourth century in the wake of the conversion of Constantine the Great. This ruler, who was actually a usurper proclaimed by the army in 306, attached great importance to a scrupulous adherence to ceremonies associated with the assumption of power and its proper legitimization.¹⁴⁷ The usur-

¹⁴⁴ RIC VIII, 233; 1.

¹⁴⁵ *Eusebius, Vita.*, III, 3, The Bagster translation, revised by Ernest Cushing Richardson, Ph.D., Librarian and Associate Professor in Hartford Theological Seminary. Full ref at end, Volume I, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, Edinburgh: repr. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955.

¹⁴⁶ Isaiah 27, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Kolb 2008, p. 55.

pation of Constantine in fact had exploded the system of the Tetrarchy (although the illusion of its continued existence was sustained by propaganda) which led to a search for new ideological foundations of the emperor's authority. At first, resort was made to Constantine's imperial pedigree as the son of Constantius Chlorus (293–306) and alleged grandson of Claudius Gothicus, vanquisher of barbarians, who had ruled in 268–270.¹⁴⁸ The problem of Constantine's conversion to Christianity has been discussed by researchers for more than 150 years giving rise to radically different extreme interpretations of causes and motivation for the changing of religion by the emperor.¹⁴⁹ Before his conversion Constantine I used to be a devout worshipper of Apollo, identified with the *Sol Invictus*, and regarded himself to be the incarnation of this god.¹⁵⁰ In this he followed in the footsteps of both Emperor Augustus and Claudius II Gothicus.¹⁵¹ Constantine claimed having had a vision of Apollo-Grannus in the sanctuary at Grand in Gaul.¹⁵² Constantine was regarded as a being sent by the gods, or as a son of gods.¹⁵³ Presumably Constantine's ultimate conversion had its roots in the events of the war with Maxentius (312) and the battle at Saxa Rubra.¹⁵⁴ The emperor then became the follower of a religion previously persecuted and regarded as a new superstition, which now improved its prestige and importance.¹⁵⁵ A visible mark of this shift were the triumph rites celebrated after the victory over Maxentius in 312, when at the end of the triumphal procession Constantine refused to sacrifice to *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus* in the temple on the Capitoline Hill, a flagrant violation of the traditional Roman etiquette.¹⁵⁶ This is proof of the actual conversion of the emperor. An eloquent illustration of this breakthrough is the silver medallion issued in 315 to commemorate the emperor's *decennalia*. On its obverse we see the portrait of the emperor wearing a helmet emblazoned with the Christogram (*Chi-Rho*) taking place of the gem with the image of an eagle, sacred bird of Jupiter, an important symbol of the Roman state.¹⁵⁷ Constantine had had the same symbol (*Chi-Rho*) painted on the shields of his soldiers before the battle. It soon became an important symbol associated with imperial authority and victory. The reverse of the medallion of interest bears the inscription SALVS REI PVBLICAE and the image

¹⁴⁸ Jones 1986, p. 79.

¹⁴⁹ E.g., Burchardt 1992; Ziótkowski 2005, pp. 582–594.

¹⁵⁰ Jones 1986, pp. 80–81.

¹⁵¹ Kolb 2008, p. 61.

¹⁵² Fowden 2008, p. 560.

¹⁵³ Kolb 2008, p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ Ziótkowski 2005, pp. 591–592.

¹⁵⁵ Ziótkowski 2005, p. 594.

¹⁵⁶ Kolb 2008, 61; Ziótkowski 2005, p. 591.

¹⁵⁷ Alföldi 1999, p. 190.

of the emperor speaking to the troops. The emperor making war under Christian signs has now become the liberator of the state from the tyranny of Maxentius.¹⁵⁸ Constantine based his relationship with God of the Christians on a personal relationship, as was the case of pagan deities he had worshipped earlier. At first, this was only the emperor's personal religion. With time edicts were passed banning the raising of statues of pagan deities, consulting of oracles and making pagan sacrifices. Many temples supposedly were shut down although, naturally, the traditional religions had not ceased to exist.¹⁵⁹ The process of Christianization of the emperor's policies was very slow but unremitting. Despite his refusal to enter the Capitoline Hill in 312 Constantine would continue as *pontifex maximus*. The images of Sol Invictus appear on coinage until 325 and correct relations with pagan subjects, especially in the East and in Athens, were maintained.¹⁶⁰ After the victory over Licinius in 324 Constantine began to openly favour Christianity. In the new concept of power described by Eusebius Pamphilius, the Roman Empire was the reflection of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶¹ The unity of God and His Kingdom was in correspondence with the unity of the Empire and its ruler.¹⁶² In this concept the emperor is chosen by God to lead his subjects to salvation and to rule them on Earth in Christ's stead (Jones 1986, 81). It is characteristic that in the religious iconography Christ took over the emperor's attributes, such as the nimbus, garments and insignia.¹⁶³ The ruler has actually become equal to God. He is described as "thirteenth apostle", and takes on the responsibility for resolving important religious matters.¹⁶⁴ The new concept of power resulted in a shift in the presentation of the image of the emperor. The term *invictus* (associated with *Sol Invictus*) was now replaced by the more neutral *victor*, and the word *pious* started to be associated with Christian piety. The radiate crown as imperial attribute disappears from coinage after 324 AD.¹⁶⁵

PERCEPTION OF THE IMPERIAL IMAGE BY THE ELITE

We know for certain that the iconography on coinage was noticed and commented, both by the elite of the Roman Empire and the masses at large. Of this

¹⁵⁸ Alföldi 1999, pp. 172–173.

¹⁵⁹ Fowden 2008, p. 560.

¹⁶⁰ Fowden 2008, p. 560.

¹⁶¹ Kolb 2008, p. 65.

¹⁶² Jones 1986, p. 82.

¹⁶³ Kolb 2008, p. 66.

¹⁶⁴ Jones 1986, pp. 81–83; pp. 85–90.

¹⁶⁵ Kolb 2008, pp. 70–72.

reception we are informed by Eusebius Pamphilius when he interprets the imperial images on the obverses of coins¹⁶⁶: *How deeply his soul was impressed by the power of divine faith may be understood from the circumstance that he directed his likeness to be stamped on the golden coin of the empire with the eyes uplifted as in the posture of prayer to God: and this money became current throughout the Roman world. His portrait also at full length was placed over the entrance gates of the palaces in some cities, the eyes upraised to heaven, and the hands outspread as if in prayer.*¹⁶⁷ Written sources inform about the reception of coinage of Julian the Apostate. The emperor himself wrote to the people of Antioch that by deriding his likeness stamped on coins they were insulting their sovereign.¹⁶⁸ Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen recorded the appearance of images of the bull and altar on the coinage of Julian, and the reaction of the inhabitants of Antioch to this type of iconography. The people of Antioch made jest of the iconographic designs represented on the coins, especially the image of the bull.¹⁶⁹ We may conclude that in similar manner the message conveyed by the multiples was commented upon and appraised. Regardless of their education, the people paid attention to the designs stamped on the coins and commented on them, sometimes in a less, sometimes a more refined way.

The culture of the upper ranks in the Late Roman Empire was shaped primarily by schooling. Educated pagans and Christians received a similar form of instruction.¹⁷⁰ In the traditional system of education (*paideia*) great emphasis was placed on rhetoric.¹⁷¹ Consequently, we need to examine all elements of late-antique culture, including the medallions, making reference to the education system based on rhetoric. The entire functioning of the state and of local communities based on rhetoric. Sophists, orators and grammarians who made up the group of intellectuals, enjoyed great social prestige. Rhetoric was for many a way of social advancement. The example of the career of Ausonius and Claudian is sufficiently eloquent.¹⁷² Anyone wishing to serve a public function had to prove having the qualifications of a good orator, and for this he needed to have a suitable education.¹⁷³ From Late Antiquity we have a case of an individual with connec-

¹⁶⁶ E.g., RIC VII, 520; 163 or RIC VII, 520; 166.

¹⁶⁷ *Eusebius, Vita.*, IV, 15, The Bagster translation, revised by Ernest Cushing Richardson, Ph.D., Librarian and Associate Professor in Hartford Theological Seminary. Full ref at end, Volume I, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, Edinburgh: repr. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955.

¹⁶⁸ Julian the Apostate, *Misopogon*, 355d, from: Gilliard 1964, p. 137.

¹⁶⁹ Gilliard 1964, pp. 137–138.

¹⁷⁰ Cameron 2008, p. 665.

¹⁷¹ Cameron 2008, p. 665.

¹⁷² Cameron 2008, p. 673.

¹⁷³ Cameron 1993, p. 178.

tions both to the art of rhetoric and coinage. Claudius Mamertinus, *comes sacrarum largitionum* in the reign of Julian the Apostate, is also the author of a panegyric in honour of that emperor, delivered on 1 January 362 in the Curia of the Senate in Constantinople.¹⁷⁴ The person of Mamertinus proves that people directly responsible for coinage, and as such, for the propaganda content of coins and medallions, were familiar with the rules of oratory to such an extent that they were capable of writing a panegyric. The examples given above prove that rhetoric went hand in hand with visual propaganda in praising the emperor and his qualities, in building the loyalty of the citizens to the authorities in the Late Empire. The way of thinking and imagery instilled by the education system, its roots going back to the Classical and Hellenistic age, greatly influenced the devices used to depict the person of the ruler and state ideology.

Education based on rhetoric was the only available education model. Thus, both pagans and Christians were in the orbit of one culture, of classical character. Reference was made to an entire repertory of classical authors who included Cicero, Suetonius, Salustius, Virgil, Livy and Xenophon.¹⁷⁵ Emphasis was placed more on preservation and cultivation of this tradition than on originality. Reliance on the established canon of texts resulted in a marked uniformization of culture. Rhetoric often had strongly political overtones and was an instrument of propaganda. Without invoking these facts we cannot hope to make any headway in explaining the nature of fourth-century imperial propaganda. The impact of education in rhetoric, both on the elite and the masses, is not too be disregarded. During Late Antiquity the existence of a strong connection between the rhetoric and the visual arts was universally accepted. Both the lay rhetoricians and the Christian preachers regarded the visual image as a complement of the art of oratory. The same content could be communicated in words and by using visual images. Rhetoric, as one of the foundation of the education system of the time, strongly influenced the way of thinking, not only of the elite.¹⁷⁶ The arrangement of the images on the medallions corresponds in part to the rules of rhetoric, particularly when it comes to the balance and harmony of the images, one of the fundamental qualities of late-antique, and later, also of Byzantine aesthetics.¹⁷⁷

Let us note that all portraits of rulers in the Mediterranean world were perceived in a special manner. Hellenistic kings were regarded as incarnations of the divine Logos, the Roman *virī triumphales* were said to resemble the statue of the Capitoline Jupiter — and as such, also the god these statues were meant to repre-

¹⁷⁴ *Pan Lat.* XI [3]; Bockley 1972, p. 439.

¹⁷⁵ Cameron 1993, p. 179; Cameron 2008, pp. 667, 668.

¹⁷⁶ Smorąg Różycka 2007, p. 166.

¹⁷⁷ Smorąg Różycka 2007, p. 175.

sent.¹⁷⁸ Ammianus described the figure of Constantius II during his triumphal entry to Rome as more like an effigy or a statue than man.¹⁷⁹ The way he held himself made him look like an effigy of himself, lending emphasis to his greatness and dignity, he himself wished to comport himself as a *tableau vivant*.¹⁸⁰ The times of Constantine I bring the development of a type of an imperial portrait designed to reproduce more the majesty of the emperor than the ruler's individual features. In the same way as late-antique lives of famous personages were supposed to describe more their true, inner and spiritual nature than personal history, which was in line with Neoplatonic ideas of the age. Writers belonging to the Second Sophistic even practiced the specific literary genre of *ekphrasis* which concentrated on description of visual works of art. In rhetoric this term was used to describe a rhetorical figure which involved making an erudite description of people or objects. Ekphrasis was one of standard rhetorical exercises.¹⁸¹ Starting from the second century AD verbal descriptions in literature and works of rhetoric begin to have an increasing connection with visual images. A good example would be the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* of Philostratus, in which the historical personage is transformed into an ideal image of qualities appreciated by the writer. The process in which a real individual is transformed into the image of specific values and ideas is characteristic both for the works of rhetoric and of visual art of Late Antiquity. In his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* Emperor Julian the Apostate expresses a view that all images are something more than just the representation of a given person. For the relationship of the onlooker and his object changes the nature of the latter. The one looking at an image of a divine being is demonstrating love for that being and also experiencing grace from the god, who looks at him (the human observer) from the invisible world. As such, images of gods carry within them a part of the nature of beings they are meant to represent. It is the same with images of emperors. This way of looking at all images was shared by pagan and Christian Romans. The former drew copiously from the arsenal of older ideas about the relationship of the divine being with its image. In describing the relationship of the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity Saint Athanasius invoked precisely the case of the imperial portrait and claimed that the image of the ruler encompasses his nature and form. Who venerates the image also venerates the emperor. It is quite telling that to illustrate his theological concepts the Church Father chose the image of the emperor, who is an expres-

¹⁷⁸ Francis 2003, p. 577.

¹⁷⁹ Amm. Marc., *Rerum Gestarum*, XVI, 10, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Francis 2003, pp. 577–578.

¹⁸¹ Smorąg Różycka 2007, p. 167.

sion of social and divine order. In Late Antiquity looking at images was an act more spiritual than an intellectual or sensual exercise.¹⁸²

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AJA American Journal of Archaeology
 AJP The American Journal of Philology
 CAH Cambridge Ancient History
 DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers
 JRS The Journal of Roman Studies
 RIC Roman Imperial Coinage: RIC VII: vol. VII, Constantine and Licinius, A.D. 313–337, ed. Sutherland C. H. V., Carson R. A. G., Bruun P. M., London, 1966; RIC VIII: vol. VIII, The Family of Constantine I, A.D. 337–364, ed. Sutherland C. H. V., Carson R. A. G., Kent, J. P. C., London, 1981.

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OBRAZ I RETORYKA. MEDALIONY Z OKRESU DYNASTII KONSTANTYNÓW JAKO MEDIUM PROPAGANDOWE

(Streszczenie)

Medaliony późnoantyczne są istotnym źródłem dla poznawania kwestii ówczesnej propagandy i ideologii władzy cesarskiej. Multipla dynastii Konstantyna I Wielkiego można osadzić w szerokim kontekście kulturowym i historycznym, który ułatwia zrozumienie ich przekazu. Jest to możliwe dzięki sporej liczbie źródeł pisanych i ikonograficznych pochodzących z omawianej epoki. Autor stara się porównywać treści przekazywane przez przedstawienia i legendy medalionów z późnoantyczną retoryką. Bierze pod uwagę szczególnie treści zawarte w zbiorze mów znanym jako *Panegyrici Latini*, oraz w dziełach retora Temistiusza. Sięga także do treści zawartych w *Żywocie Konstantyna Euzebiusza z Cezarei*.

Analiza motywów ikonograficznych i legend medalionów wykazała istnienie kilku reguł rządzących ówczesnym przekazem propagandowym. Najwięcej przedstawień na medalionach związanych jest z jubileuszami panowania władcy oraz z tryumfami i ideologią zwycięstwa. Podkreślanie trwałości rządów i legitymizowanie władzy poprzez zwycięstwa stanowiło stały element treści propagandowych rozpowszechnianych przez cesarzy i ich otoczenie. Od cesarzy oczekiwano przede wszystkim sukcesów militarnych: rozszerzania i obrony Imperium. Propaganda starała się wpajać elitom obraz władcy spełniającego te oczekiwania. Przywiązanie elit do idei stabilnej władzy i obrazu zwycięskiego cesarza potwierdzają liczne wzmianki w omawianych dziełach twórczości retorycznej. Bardzo liczne są również emisje nawiązujące do stolic Cesarstwa: Rzymu i Konstantynopola. Idea starego i nowego Rzymu jako bliźniaczych miast była mocno osadzona w świadomości ówczesnych elit. Retorzy wychwalali starą stolicę (*praepotens Roma*) i siostrzany Konstantynopol jako dwie stolice zjednoczonego Imperium. Medalio-

ny z chrześcijańskimi motywami ikonograficznymi były skierowane do schryścianizowanej części elit Cesarstwa. Prezentują one symbole wprowadzone do oficjalnej ikonografii przez Konstantyna Wielkiego, są więc pośrednio odwołaniem do postaci i dokonań tego władcy. Obecność symboli chrześcijańskich na numizmatach można rozumieć także jako publiczne wyznanie wiary cesarza, co koresponduje z przesłaniem *Vita Constantini* Euzebiusza z Cezarei.

Ikonografia medalionów dynastii Konstantyna I jest jeszcze bardzo silnie osadzona w tradycji epok poprzednich, szczególnie okresu Tetrarchii. W przeważającej mierze nadal czerpie z kultury pogańskiej. Cesarze korzystali z niej w swej propagandzie, gdyż była powszechnie zrozumiała i ugruntowana w wyższych warstwach społeczeństwa. Inne tradycje wizualne były nieliczne i marginalne. Elementy chrześcijańskie zaczynają dopiero zdobywać sobie miejsce w przedstawieniach na numizmatach. Nie dziwi to w epoce, kiedy sztuka chrześcijańska dopiero zaczyna być akceptowana przez ogół hierarchii duchownej Kościoła.

Łącznikiem przekazu ideologicznego wszystkich medalionów jest późnoantyczna retoryka. Autor starał się, posługując się podanymi w tekście przekładami, wykazać zasadniczą spójność wizualnej i werbalnej propagandy cesarskiej. Porównując legendy i ikonografię *multipla* z tekstami retorycznymi wskazał na istnienie wielu punktów wspólnych. Idee filozofów i mówców wychwalających panującego można było wypowiedzieć i napisać, ale równie dobrze przekazywał je obraz i krótkie slogany widoczne na *multipla*. Obraz i słowo niosły te same propagandowe hasła i apostrofy. Elita imperialna, dobrze obeznana z retorycznymi toposami doskonale rozumiała wszelkie aluzje.

Widać wyraźnie, że głównym zadaniem propagandy nie było głoszenie określonej religii, czy ideologii, lecz rozpowszechnianie pozytywnego wizerunku cesarza. Ten obraz panującego kształtowano za pomocą retoryki i ikonografii. Do najlepszych przykładów należą właśnie medaliony zawierające związane hasła i symboliczne przedstawienia. Wiele z opisanych przedstawień z medalionów to związane kompozycje niosące silny ładunek ideologiczny i skondensowany przekaz propagandowy. Medaliony były bardzo wyrafinowanym i skutecznym środkiem propagandowym, który prezentował ten sam przekaz, co przemówienia retorów, ale w sposób pełniejszy i lepiej trafiający do imperialnych elit.

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