

THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

Second Edition

Hans A. Pohlsander



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THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

The Emperor Constantine provides a convenient and concise introduction to one of the most important figures in ancient history. Taking into account the historiographical debates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Hans A. Pohlsander assesses Constantine's achievements.

Key topics discussed include:

- How Constantine rose to power
- The relationship between church and state during his reign
- Constantine's ability as a soldier and statesman
- The conflict with Licinius.

This second edition is updated throughout to take into account the latest research on the subject. Also included is a revised introduction and an expanded bibliography.

Hans A. Pohlsander is Emeritus Professor of Classics and Religious Studies at the State University of New York at Albany. He is the author of *Helena: Empress and Saint* (1996).

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CHRONOLOGY

CHIEF DATES OF ROMAN HISTORY, 235–337

235–84	The soldier emperors
244–9	Philip the Arab
249–51	Decius
249	Persecution of the Christians
253–60	Valerian
257	Renewed persecution of the Christians
268–70	Claudius II Gothicus
270–5	Aurelian
283–4	Numerian
284–305	Diocletian
285	Maximian appointed Caesar
293, 1 March	Establishment of the First Tetrarchy: Diocletian and Maximian Augusti; Galerius and Constantius Caesars
301	Edict on Prices
303	The Great Persecution launched
305, 1 May	Diocletian and Maximian retire; Galerius and Constantius become Augusti
306, 25 July	Constantius dies at York; Constantine acclaimed emperor
307	Marriage of Constantine to Fausta, daughter of Maximian
308, 11 Nov.	Meeting of Diocletian, Maximian and Galerius at Carnuntum; Licinius appointed Augustus
310	Death of Maximian
311	Galerius' "edict of limited toleration"
311, 11 May	Death of Galerius
312, 28 Oct.	Battle at the Milvian Bridge
313, (?) Feb.	Meeting of Constantine and Licinius at Milan; marriage of Licinius to Constantia, half-sister of Constantine
313	"Edict of Milan"; Donatist controversy
314	Council of Arles

315	Constantine observes his <i>decennalia</i>
316	First war between Constantine and Licinius
317, 1 March	Crispus, Constantine II, and Licinius II appointed Caesars
324	Second War between Constantine and Licinius
324, 8 Nov.	Constantius II appointed Caesar
325, Spring	Death of Licinius I and Licinius II
325, 20 May– 26 July	Council of Nicaea; adoption of the Nicene Creed
325–6	Constantine observes his <i>vicennalia</i>
326	Death of Crispus and Fausta; pilgrimage of Helena to the Holy Land
330, 11 May	Dedication of Constantinople
333, 25 Dec.	Constans appointed Caesar
335–6	Constantine observes his <i>tricennalia</i> ; Council of Tyre
335, 13 Sep.	Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem dedicated
335, 7 Nov.	Athanasius exiled to Trier
337, after Easter	Constantine baptized by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia
337, 22 May	Death of Constantine at Nicomedia
337	Army coup in Constantinople
337, 9 Sep.	Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans assume the title of Augustus

1

INTRODUCTION

The emperor Constantine has been called the most important emperor of Late Antiquity. His powerful personality laid the foundations not only of St Peter's Basilica in Rome and of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but of post-classical European civilization; his reign was eventful and highly dramatic. His victory at the Milvian Bridge counts among the most decisive moments in world history.

But Constantine was also controversial, and the controversy begins in antiquity itself. The Christian writers Lactantius and Eusebius saw in Constantine a divinely appointed benefactor of mankind. Julian the Apostate, on the other hand, accused him of greed and waste, and the pagan historian Zosimus held him responsible for the collapse of the (Western) empire.

It is the positive view which generally, but not universally, prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, prompted numerous rulers to cast themselves in Constantine's image, and inspired countless works of art. Otto Bishop of Freising (c. 1114–58), in his *Chronica* or *History of the Two Cities*, is full of enthusiasm, writing: "When his associates had reached the end of their reign, and in consequence Constantine was now ruling alone and held the sole power over the empire, the longed-for peace was restored in full to the long afflicted Church. . . . Since wicked men and persecutors had been removed from the earth and the righteous