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THE CONSECRATION COINS OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

Patrick Bruun

The transition from paganism to Christianity in the Later Roman Empire offers a number of intriguing problems of rare complexity. The difficulty of getting a firm hold on the red tape of historical development, the precariousness in tracing the currents and undercurrents of religious thought and feeling, make any student dependent on interpretation to a very high degree. Much of the archaeological material available is not easily dated, except for the coins. Thus a series of coins struck at established dates many times forms a sound basis for any excursions into the field of religious symbolism and underlying metaphysical conceptions.

The last consecration coins of the Roman Empire can be considered very typical of the first part of the fourth century, a period of rapidly expanding Christianity and, simultaneously, of growing syncretism. Whatever may be the truth of Constantine's religious policy during his first decades of rule, he died a Christian, baptized shortly before his death. Nevertheless, his sons, all of them brought up in the Christian faith, consecrated their great father and consecration coins were struck in order to commemorate the occasion. How the pagan rite of the consecration of the emperor and the conception of the deified emperor was softened by several well-chosen allusions to the Christian world of ideas, will be shown in the following study of the fourth century consecration coins.

Now the Constantinian consecration can only be understood against the background of earlier consecrations as mirrored in the coinage. A few words about the symbolism connected with the consecrations during the early empire are therefore necessary.

The ceremonial traditions of the principate were to a very great extent based on the reign of Augustus. Thus it is quite natural that the funeral ceremonies after the death of the first *Princeps* and the consecration of Augustus were to form the pattern of later times (BICKERMANN, *Die römische Kaiserapotheose*, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 1929, p. 7). The first consecration coins were struck during the reign of Claudius (MATTINGLY, *BMCE I*, p. LXV), and later

the striking of coins honouring the new *Divus* became a normal part of the funeral celebrations. However, during the first century A.D. the consecration coins vary greatly as to symbolism (BMCE I, pp. CIV, CVII, CXXX f., CXXXIV, CXXXVII ff., CXLVI, CLXXIII, CXC VII f., CCIV f.) and are mainly characterized by the legend *DIVVS* or *DIVA* (ibid. p. LXX; BERNHART, Handbuch zur römischen Münzkunde I, p. 72). Not until the second century a change was introduced and from 119 A.D. onwards most coins of this kind carry the legend *CONSECRATIO* up to the early fourth century.¹ On many of these coins the ascension of the dead emperor to heaven was illustrated, but also an older type survives depicting the new god or some of his adjuncts, temples, altars etc. The coins with the legend *CONSECRATIO* show the funeral pyre, the *rogus*,² the eagle³ or the *quadriga*.⁴

This symbolism prevails during the 3rd century. The flight to heaven is for the last time depicted on the consecration coins of Valerianus I and II, about

¹ BICKERMANN, p. 9 f. The legend *CONSECRATIO* does appear once earlier, on the consecration coins in honour of Marciana, the sister of Trajan, dated to 112—114 A.D., but not on the coins honouring Trajan's own consecration (ibid. p. 9, note 5).

² Earlier, from Augustan times, the consecrational ceremony had taken place after the cremation. Now the apotheosis was directly connected with the cremation. Hence the frequent occurrence of the *rogus* on the consecration coins (cf. BICKERMANN, p. 10).

³ The eagle plays an important part in the consecration symbolism because during the cremation of Augustus an eagle was said to have taken flight from the pyre carrying the soul of the emperor to heaven (Dio Cassius LVI 42,3; Suet. Aug. 100,4). During the first century it was customary for a witness to swear upon oath that he had seen the soul of the dead flying from the pyre to heaven (Suet. Aug. 100,4; Dio LVI 46,2, LIX 11,4; Iust. Apol. I 21,3). The second century ties the eagle more closely to the consecration when this was performed in connection with the cremation (cf. BICKERMANN, p. 10).

⁴ Being a symbol of the sun the *quadriga* frequently appears on the coins, but not until the death of Trajan as a part of the consecration symbolism (cf. BICKERMANN, p. 4 ff. The theory with regard to the part played by the wax doll during the consecration seems very unconvincing). From now on the triumphal chariot is seen in the consecration symbolism standing on the top of the pyre. The pyre with the *quadriga* is to be found for the first time on coins of Antoninus Pius (BICKERMANN, p. 17 ff.; Dio LXXIV 5,3. Cf. STRACK, Untersuchungen zur römischen Reichsprägung des zweiten Jahrhunderts, III, Die Reichsprägung zur Zeit des Antoninus Pius, p. 91; BERNHART I, p. 73). The *quadriga* drawn by four elephants on coins from the years 34—37 A.D. and on the Neronian coins in honour of Claudius are to be interpreted differently (BMCE I, pp. CXXXVII, CLXXIII). Metaphorically crammed is the wellknown 5th century diptych in BM showing the *pompa funeralis*, »The colossal statue of an Imperial *divus* is sitting enthroned in a temple-like sanctuary with two columns in the front; the whole building is placed on a raised structure resting on wheels, and drawn by a quadriga of elephants, with mahouts on their backs. The emperor appears in his *pompa funeralis*; in the background rises his *rogus*. The eagles flying up from the *rogus*, the horse quadriga galloping into the heavens with the transfigured deceased, the Wind Gods bearing the imperial *divus* through the ether into the heavenly spheres beneath the signs of the zodiac, and finally the emperor being accepted amongst the celestial *divi* — everything is an expression of his ascension to the stars» (H. P. L'ORANGE, Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship, p. 60, fig. 36). The diptych is published on p. 23.

257 A.D.¹ The legend *CONSECRATIO* appears for the last time on the consecration coins of Constantius Chlorus of 306 A.D. and so does the funeral pyre.² Later coins show that the conception of the consecration has become obscured: »die Zeitgenössigen Rhetoren sprechen noch vom 'Übergange im Himmel', verstehen aber darunter sicher die seelische Unsterblichkeit».³

During the first two decades of the 4th century the consecration coins carry legends mainly of two types — with the exception of the coins of Constantius Chlorus mentioned. The one is *REQVIES OPTIMORVM MERITORVM* with a number of different abbreviations, the other is *MEMORIA* with the varieties *AETERNAE MEMORIAE*, *AETERNA MEMORIA*, *MEMORIAE AETERNAE*, *MEMORIA* (or *MEM*) *MAXIMIANI* or *CONSTANTI* and finally *MEMORIA FELIX*.

The Requies-issues were all struck in the Western part of the Empire in series of three different obverses with Claudius Gothicus, Constantius Chlorus and Maximianus Herculus (the well known »*Abnenmünzen*», to quote VOETTER). The reverse of all these coins shows the emperor seated on a *sella curulis*, holding a sceptre. On the obverse the portrait of the emperor shows a head draped with the *toga* carrying a laurel wreath.⁴ (Fig. 2 b).

The *Aeternae Memoriae* and *Aeterna Memoria* issues were struck in the mints of Rome and Ostia by Maxentius. The reverses have a temple of varying design with an eagle standing on the roof. All obverse busts except for those of the emperor's young son, the Caesar Romulus, show a draped head.⁵ (Fig. 1 a and 2 a).

The *Aeternae Memoriae Gal Maximiani* are slightly different. The reverse has an altar with a burning fire, the basis of the altar is decorated with a laurel branch whereupon stands an eagle. The obverse busts have a draped head with a laurel wreath.⁶

¹ COHEN V, p. 541, note; RIC V 1, p. 38, No. 4, p. 117, No. 9, Pl. IV 66 (cf. BICKERMANN, p. 18 f.).

² MAURICE, Num.Const. I, p. 383 f., Pl. XXII 8; BERNHART I, p. 158 f.

³ BICKERMANN, p. 18. Cf. Paneg. VI (VII) 7,3 (ed. BAEHRENS) and KANIUTH, Die Beisetzung Konstantins d.Gr., p. 69.

⁴ Struck in the mints of Roma (MAUR. I, pp. 211, 235 f., Pl. XVIII 1), Aquileia (MAUR. I, pp. 314, 326, Pl. XX 9), Treveri (MAUR. I, p. 406, Pl. XXII 13), Arelate (MAUR. II, p. 170, Pl. VI 7), Siscia (MAUR. II, p. 347, Pl. X 12) and Thessalonica (MAUR. II, p. 450).

⁵ MAUR. I, pp. 191 f., Pl. XVII 10—12, 195 f., 266 ff., Pl. XIX 1—2, 276 f., Pl. XIX 9, 280 f., Pl. XIX 10.

⁶ Struck in the mints of Cyzicus (MAUR. III, p. 100 f., Pl. IV 9) and Alexandria (MAUR. III, pp. 249 f., 255, Pl. X 3).



Fig. 1. a) Bare-headed Romulus consecrated, type *Memoriae Aeternae* (cf. Maur. I, p. 192, rev. XIII,1), struck in Roma. b) The consecration of Constantius illustrated by a burning altar and eagles, type *Memoria Felix*, struck in Treveri (cf. Maur. I, p. 382, rev. X,2). — I am greatly indebted to the Department of Coins of the British Museum for all the casts published in this study.



Fig. 2. a) The consecration of Constantius commemorated by Maxentius in Rome, head without laurel wreath, a temple with eagle on the reverse (cf. Maur. I, p. 192, rev. XII,3). b) A later consecration coin struck by Constantine in Rome in honour of Constantius. Reverse showing seated emperor with the legend *Requies Optimor Merit* (cf. Maur. I, p. 211, rev. IV,2).

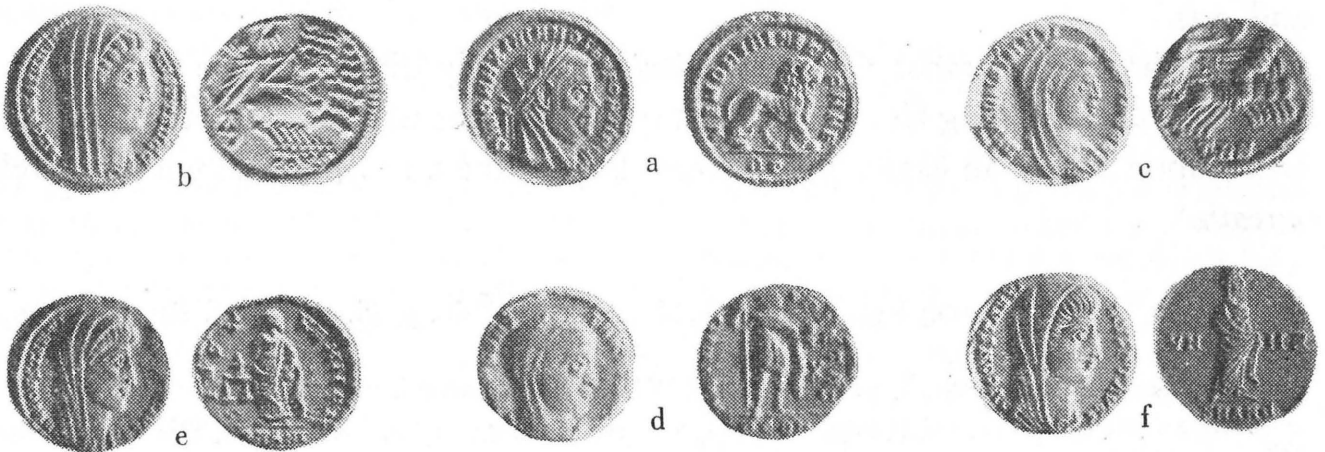
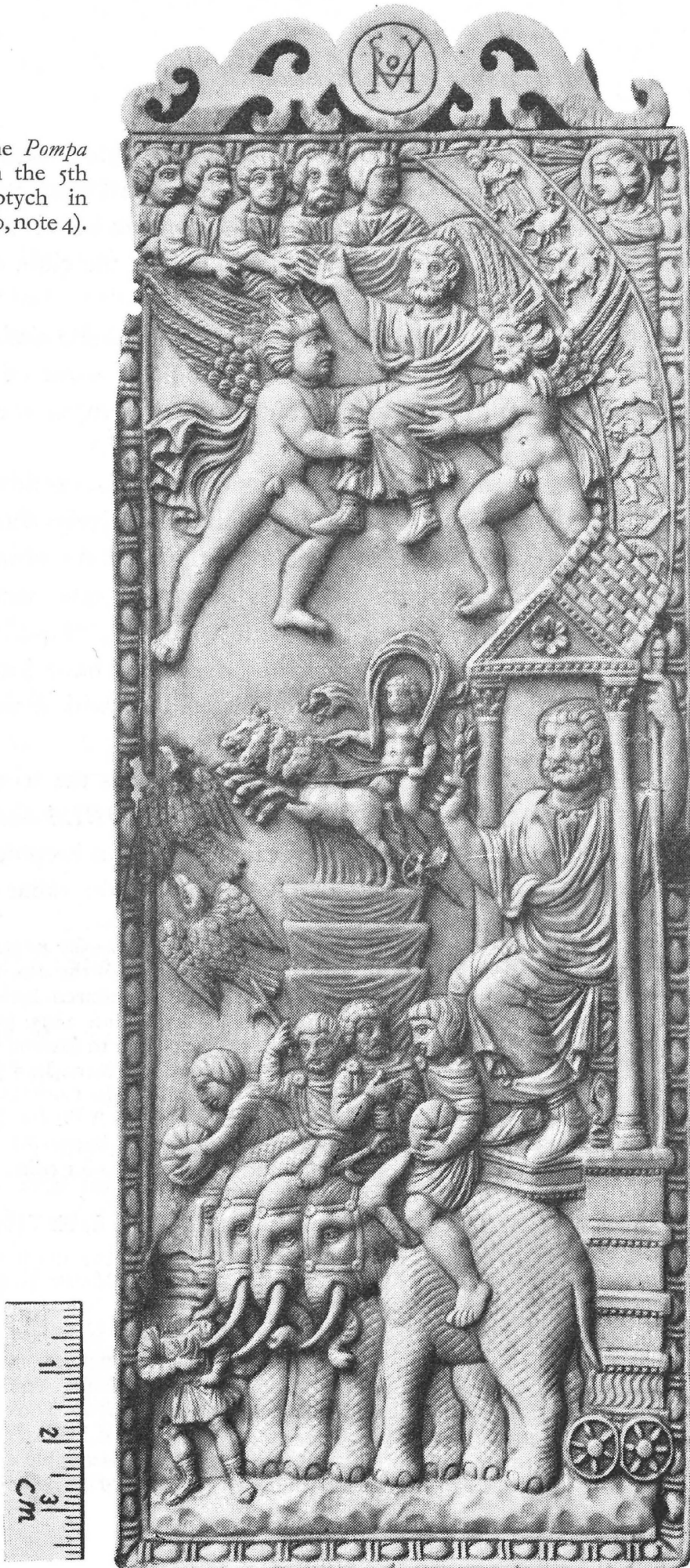


Fig. 3. a) Struck in honour of Maximianus Herculus in Roma of the type *Memoriae Aeternae* (cf. Maur. I, p. 211, rev. V,1). b–c) The galloping quadriga, above the beckoning hand, struck in honour of Constantine the Great in the East (e.g. Constantinopolis) as well as in the West (e.g. Treveri). Cf. Maur. II, p. 548, rev. I,1 and I, p. 497 f., rev. II. d) The *Aeterna Pietas* struck in Constantina (cf. Maur. II, p. 195, rev. V). e) The *Ivst Ven Mem* struck in Antiochia (cf. Maur. III, p. 217, rev. III). f) The *Veneranda Memoria* (VN MR) also struck in Antiochia (cf. Maur. III, p. 217, rev. II).

Fig. 4. The *Pompa Funeralis* on the 5th century diptych in BM (cf. p. 20, note 4).



The *Memoriae Aeternae* coins with similar obverses were issued to honour three *Divi*, Claudius Gothicus, Maximianus Herculus and Constantius Chlorus, and constitute another type of »*Abnenmünzen*«. The reverses are clearly tetrarchic showing the Herculean lion, occasionally connected with the club, or the eagle of consecration.¹ (Fig. 3 a).

The comparatively few coins of the type *Memoria Divi Maximiani* (or *Constanti*) are fairly heterogeneous with regard to symbolism; some of them show altars decorated with a bull's or a lion's head together with an eagle, others a temple with an eagle. The obverse bust has a draped head.²

Finally we have the type *Memoria Felix* honouring Constantius. The most frequent symbol is the altar with a burning fire, alternatively decorated with garlands.³ (Fig. 1 b). In either case an eagle is standing on the ground on both sides of the altar. The temple with the eagle occurs on one issue. Also the obverse is fairly varied. The draped bust with a laureate, draped head is the most frequent. Some of the coins struck in Lugdunum have just a laureate head and the third variety shows a laureate, draped bust with *trabea* holding a laurel branch.

Now one of the most striking features of this coinage is the wording of the reverse legends. *REQVIES* and *AETERNA MEMORIA* are typical expressions of the syncretism of the early 4th century, well in keeping with other contemporary legends.⁴ This language of the legends at the same time consti-

¹ All struck in Roma (MAUR. I, p. 211 f.). Except for the »*Abnenmünzen*« the dates of the consecration coins are fairly easy to establish. The two different sizes of these coins (the *Requies* type as well as the *Memoriae* type) have caused VOETTER (*Ahnenmünzen Kaiser Constantin des Grossen, Mittheilungen des Clubs der Münz- und Medaillenfreunde* 1895, p. 77) and later MAURICE (I, Introduction p. XCIV f. and CXXVI; pp. 211 f., 235 f.) to assume that they were struck on two different occasions, immediately before the two Civil Wars. In a previous study I have tried to show that the first Civil War was fought 316 A.D. (The Constantinian Coinage of Arelate, pp. 17–21) and that the *Abnenmünzen* were struck 317 A.D. (ibid. pp. 39–44). During a recent visit to Vienna I was able to ascertain that it is impossible to distinguish between different standards of the *Memoriae* coins and that the *Requies* coins of the heavier denomination were issued in the mint of Rome only.

² Struck in Aquileia (MAUR. I, p. 300), Ticinum (MAUR. II, p. 222 f., Pl. VII 5) and Thessalonica (MAUR. II, p. 427).

³ Struck in Treveri (MAUR. I, p. 382 f., Pl. XXII 7), Lugdunum (MAUR. II, p. 76, Pl. III 5, p. 84 f., Pl. III 10) and Londinium (MAUR. II, p. 12).

⁴ MAUR. II, Introduction, Chap. V: Les abstractions divinisées et les types symboliques de revers des médailles, p. CXI ff. MAURICE regards these and similar expressions as New-Platonic. *Aeternitas*, Eternity, however, as such is nothing new on Roman coins. *Aeternus* on consecration coins appears at first particularly in connection with *Memoria*. The concept *Aeterna Memoria* and other related phrases correspond far better to the pagan idea of the immortality of the soul than to the Christian. This difference of conception is discernible even in the two Christian writers most influenced by Hellenistic thought, Clement of Alexandria and Origen

tutes a break with the preceding times and the consecration coinage of Constantius can be regarded as a mediatory link; to some extent the influence of century-old traditions can be traced, but the main part carries the imprint of the new terminology. One is entitled to speak of a new consecrational symbolism.

The majority of the coins have the temple of Rome on the reverse. The temple is known from coins throughout the empire even if not from consecration coins (DONALD F. BROWN, *Temples of Rome as Coin Types*). The eagle occurs on all coins except those with Herculean lions.¹ The use of the altar is restricted to the coins of Constantius from Treveri, Londinium, Lugdunum and Aquileia and to the issues *Aeternae Memoriae Gal Maximiani* struck by Daza in Cyzicus and Alexandria. It is particularly interesting to see that the altar is known from coins of Constantius with the reverse *CONSECRATIO*, an apparent transition from the terminology and symbolism of older times to that of the early 4th century syncretism.

About ten years later — six years if the coins struck in honour of Galerius are taken into account — are the *Requies Optimorum Meritorum* issues. These few years have brought about a fundamental change of the consecrational reverses; the break with old Roman traditions is palpable; altars, temples, pyres and eagles have been abolished and the coins show the emperor seated on a *sella curulis*.

The obverses are more difficult to grasp; they speak a language of their own. Most of the obverse busts have a veiled head, some of them are laureate in addition. The exceptions are few in number, i.e. the Romulus coins (easy to understand because the young son of Maxentius was a Caesar only when he died. However, on two coins his head is veiled), all coins with the reverse legend *CONSECRATIO* and some *MEMORIA FELIX* issues (all struck in Lugdunum). To these can be added the coins of the type *AETERNAE MEMORIAE GAL MAXIMIANI*. Thus also the obverses speak of a transition from traditional religious ideas to the syncretism of late antiquity.

The coins mentioned above form the necessary background for a study of the consecration coins struck after the death of Constantine the Great 337 A.D.

(NYGREN, *Den kristna kärlekstanken* II, pp. 142—188). Thus the impact of Christianity had not as yet made itself felt; on the contrary pagan thought very likely influenced the Christians in this respect. Likewise it is wrong to regard *Aeternitas* here as originating in New-Platonism. The Eternal God is known from a number of Oriental religions (CUMONT, *Les Religions Orientales*, p. 119 ff.), was with those brought to Rome, inaugurated in late Roman thought and connected with the deified emperor.

¹ MAURICE (I, p. 212, Note 1 and p. 384) tries — not very convincingly — to distinguish between the consecrational eagle and the eagle representing the Iovian dynasty.

When describing Constantine's death and funeral Eusebius mentions that coins were struck in honour of the emperor:» Ἦδη δὲ καὶ νομίσμασιν ἐνεχαράττοντο τύποι, πρόσθεν μὲν ἐκτυποῦντες τὸν μακάριον ἐγκεκαλυμμένου τὴν κεφαλὴν σχήματι, θατέρου δὲ μέρους ἐφ' ἄρματι τεθρίππῳ ἠνιόχου τρόπον, ὑπὸ δεξιᾶς ἄνωθεν ἐκτεινομένης αὐτῷ χειρὸς ἀναλαμβάνομενον» (Vita Constantini IV 73). Not only are coins corresponding to Eusebius' description known, but also three other types of consecration coins. The Eusebian type with the *quadriga* has no reverse legend, the others have the legends *AETERNA PIETAS*, *VN MR* (*Veneranda Memoria*) and *Iusta Veneranda Memoria*, abbreviated either *IVS VEN MEM*, *IVST VEN MEM* or *IVST VENER MEMOR*.

The *AETERNA PIETAS* type was struck in the three Western mints Treveri, Lygdunum and Constantina¹ (Arelate was thus renamed 328 A.D.; cf. The Coinage of Arelate, p. 48). The reverses show the emperor standing in military dress, the cloak spread, holding spear and globe, the obverse bust has a draped head and the legend reads simply *DIVO CONSTANTINO*.² (Fig. 3 d).

The *Veneranda Memoria* and *Iusta Veneranda Memoria* types were struck at the same time in the six Eastern mints.³ The obverse busts are similar to those of the previous type, on the reverse of the former of these two types (*VN MR*) a goddess, probably *Pietas*, is standing, her head draped with her dress, her hands hidden in folds of her dress. (Fig. 3 f). The reverses of the latter type show *Aequitas* standing holding a balance and a sceptre (on the coins of Constantinople and Alexandria) or with her other hand hidden in her dress. (Fig. 3 e). The fourth type, finally, as described by Eusebius has a veiled head on the obverse, and the emperor standing in a galloping *quadriga* on the reverse. The emperor raises his hand towards heaven. In the upper part of the coin a hand is seen pointing down. These coins were struck in all the mints except Constantina.⁴ The obverse legend of all these three coin types reads *DV* (or *DIV*) *CONSTANTINVS PT AVGG* (*Pater Augustorum*), except on the coins from Lugdunum, where the legend is *DIVO CONSTANTINO*. (Fig. 3 b-c).

¹ Treveri: MAUR. I, p. 497, Lugdunum: II, p. 136, Pl. IV 25 and Constantina: II, p. 195, Pl. VI 27.

² The reading *DIVO CONSTANTIO* given by MAUR. (I, p. 497) must be a slip.

³ MAUR. for Constantinople: II, p. 548, Pl. XVI 17, Heraclea: II, p. 607 f., Pl. XVII 25, Nicomedia: III, p. 81 f., Cyzicus: III, p. 141, Antioch: III, p. 217, Pl. VIII 27, Alexandria: III, p. 281.

⁴ MAUR. for Roma: I, p. 262, Pl. XVIII 19, Treveri: I, p. 497 f., Lugdunum: II, p. 136, Constantinopolis: II, p. 548, Pl. XVI 16, Heraclea: II, p. 608, Pl. XVII 26, Nicomedia: III, p. 82, Pl. III 26, Cyzicus: III, p. 140 f., Antiochia: III, p. 217, Alexandria: III, p. 282, Pl. X 28.

The coins are, indeed, remarkable in many ways. The language of the legends has already been touched upon. Another significant detail is the veiled head of the obverse, common to the Constantinian consecration coins and those of the first quarter of the 4th century; the quotation above shows that even Eusebius paid attention to this. Now Constantius is the first *Divus* to be depicted with a draped head, though some 2nd century portraits of *Divae* have draped heads (e.g. Sabina and Faustina, cf. MATTINGLY, *Roman Coins*, Pl. XXXVI 8—9). Gradually introduced on the coins honouring Constantine's father this portrait gains ground until it is the sole type in use from 317 A.D. onwards.

The significance of the draped head is not quite clear, but it seems logical to connect it with the well known reproductions of the emperor sacrificing as *Pontifex Maximus* (cf. *Ara Pacis*). What is quite certain is that the *Caput velatum* is of pagan origin, as is amply demonstrated by Tertullian's words: »... *Christiani ... capite nudato, quia non erubescimus ... oramus.*»¹

The reverses of all four types except the one mentioned by Eusebius have but little interest in this context were it not for the fact that the neutral tone of their metaphoric language has succeeded the familiar phrasing of old Roman traditions. The standing emperor on the *AETERNA PIETAS* corresponds to the seated emperor on the *Requies* issues, Piety and Equity on the *Veneranda* and *Iusta Veneranda Memoria* are exceedingly noncommittal to have been struck in honour of the first Christian emperor; neither pagans nor Christians could have found anything offensive in their appearance on the coins.

All the more interesting is the fourth type with the *quadriga*, a consecrational symbol that disappeared from the coinage more than thirty years earlier. Now it stands to reason that the Christian panegyrist Eusebius would not have paid much heed to these coins had he not looked upon them or interpreted them as Christian. And, in fact, the sun chariot turns out to be a reminiscence of the ascent of Elijah in the eyes of the Christians²; hence Eusebius' interest in these coins with complete disregard of the other consecration coins also struck in the Eastern mints.

In order to understand both Eusebius' reactions to the coins and the religious policy dictating the composition of the coins, it seems justifiable to give a brief account of what is known of the use of Elijah symbolism in the early Church.

¹ Tert. Apol. 30,4. Cf. also DÖLGER, *Vorbeter und Zeremoniar, Antike und Christentum II*, pp. 241—251.

² E.g. MATTINGLY, *op.cit.* p. 249; KANIUTH, *Die Beisetzung Konstantins des Grossen*, p. 8 and note 56 on the same page; PIO FRANCHI DE' CAVALIERI, *Constantiniana*, note 158, p. 126 ff.

Above all it has to be kept in mind that the Church, originally, did not speak of the immortality of the soul but of the resurrection of the flesh on the Day of Judgement. This conception was in fact one of the corner-stones of old Christian belief. Christian writers of the 2nd and 3rd century defend with fervour this doctrine (cf. NYGREN, *op.cit.* II, p. 65 f.; Iustinus, *Dial.* 80,3—4; Tatianus, *Oratio ad Graecos* 13,1). The opposite of this was the Hellenistic conception — to be found also in Manicheism and Mithraism — of the immortality and ascent to heaven of the soul after death. This Hellenistic belief was strongly attacked by Christian theologians with the exception of those influenced by Hellenistic thought. (In this context it is worth while stressing that Eusebius was considerably affected by Origen, one explanation of his pro-Arian standpoint). It is significant that the New Testament only occasionally speaks of the ascent of the soul to heaven.¹ Again in Judaism the ascent of Moses, Enoch and Elijah was neither the ascent of the soul nor — as in Christianity — the resurrection of the flesh; all three were carried to heaven body and soul. Nevertheless, among other things Irenaeus' defence of the Christian doctrine about the resurrection of the flesh suggests that he regarded Elijah as some sort of prototype of the Christian resurrection (*Adv. haeres.* V 5,1—2, cf. NYGREN, *op.cit.* p. 202 f.).

However, regardless of resistance the doctrine of the immortality of the soul asserted itself also within the church, partly alongside of the belief in a resurrection e.g. in Clement and Origen and later, during the 4th century, in Gregory of Nyssa. This trend owes its strength to Hellenistic influence, it grew on Hellenistic soil. Speaking of Elijah Gregory asks for the heavenly ladder that like the flaming chariot of Elijah shall carry the soul to heaven (*De Beatitudinibus*, *Oratio* VI, Migne, PG 44, p. 1272 D).

All this suggests that the consecration coins with the *quadriga* and the hand beckoning from heaven are more closely related to Hellenistic thought than to Christian. This view is confirmed if we consider the significance of the hand. It is a well-known fact that the outstretched right hand of a king and a god had magic powers (L'ORANGE, *Cosmic Kingship*, p. 139). From the god depicted with the right hand raised (like Constantine standing in the *quadriga* on the coins), the gesture of power of Oriental origin (L'ORANGE, *op.cit.* pp. 153—159), artistic reproduction arrives at the symbolic simplification of showing the hand alone. DE' CAVALIERI (*Constantiniana*, p. 129) points out that the celestial

¹ Paul, II Cor. 12,2 ff., but clearly contrasting e.g. to I Cor. 15,35 ff. Cf. DIETERICH, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, p. 208 f. and BERTHOLET, *Himmelfahrt I*, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* II², col. 1898.

hand on Christian monuments is unknown until the 4th century (cf. WILPERT, *Roma sotterranea*, pp. 32,42) but is known from the synagogue of Doura from the first part of the 3rd century; also he records the custom in Asia Minor and in Syria of offering votive hands of bronze to *Sabazius*, *Iuppiter Dolichenus* and *Iuppiter Heliopolitanus* owing to old Semitic and Hebraic traditions. The use of the symbol of the hand was not restricted exclusively to the East; 310 A.D. the panegyrist in Gaul speaks of the father of Constantine: »*illi superum templa patuerunt receptusque est concessu caelitem, Iove ipso dexteram porrigente*» (Paneg. VI(VII) 7).

Against this background the real meaning of the consecration coins becomes apparent. The dominating feature is the Hellenistic conception of the immortality of the soul combined with the traditional consecrational symbolism. The parallel to the ascent of Elijah, an image influenced by Hellenism and in reality alien to the essence of the Christian resurrection of the flesh, was the link to Christendom. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the celestial hand. Eusebius' readiness to stress the Christian character of the coins is probably due to his own dependence upon Origen. Simultaneously the passage in *Vita Constantina* quoted goes to prove how the church gradually was hellenized and that not even prominent representatives of Christianity reacted against this slow evolutionary process. What was unacceptable to a church father of the 2nd century was now approved with satisfaction.

The paramount importance attached to the reign of Augustus for the ceremonial of the principate was in a way equalled by the importance of the reign of Constantine with regard to the early Byzantine empire and to Christian art. The metaphorical language spoken by the Constantinians was later accepted as unquestionably Christian and has accordingly made its impact felt right up to the present day. The composition of the reliefs of the arch of Constantine recurs on later Christian mosaics (CARL-OTTO NORDSTRÖM, *Ravennastudien*, p. 30) and in the same way the celestial hand occurs on a mosaic in S. Apollinare in Classe from about 549 A.D. (*ibid.* p. 123, Pl. 31a).¹ These are two instances only, but there are numerous others,² and one of the most interesting is surely the popul-

¹ Nordström's reference to the Gospels does not seem to be a sufficient explanation. He omits the whole previous history of the Cosmocrator's sign (L'ORANGE, *op. cit.* Chap. 16).

² Many of these reflect the struggle between Sun worship and the Church and illustrate the partial amalgamation of Christ as *Sol Salutis* with *Sol Invictus*. There is the wheel with four spokes, an old symbol of the sun, used to brand horses (DÖLGER, *Profane und religiöse Brandmarkung der Tiere in der heidnischen und christlichen Antike*, *Antike und Christentum III*, p. 55), there is the boy's amulet (DÖLGER, *Eine Knaben-Bulla mit Christus-Monogramm*, *A. & Chr. III*, p. 256, Pl. 13—16) and apparently the famous ROTAS inscription can be added to these examples (lately interpreted by Sundwall in *Soc. Scient. Fenn.*, *Årsbok XXIII B*, No. 4, p. 16 f.).

arity of Elijah in later Christian art, particularly on Christian *sarcophagi*¹ but also on mosaics (NORDSTRÖM, op.cit. p. 122 f.). Obviously the choice of the *quadriga* for the consecration coins was a very clever and successful stroke well in keeping with Constantine's general religious policy; sun worshippers and Christians alike were able to identify it with their own religious symbols (CUMONT, *Die Mysterien des Mithra*, p. 175 f.). The situation can scarcely be better described than by KANIUTH (op.cit. p. 8): »dass man sich in Rom anscheinend nicht nur bemühte, alles zu vermeiden, was das christliche Empfinden schwer verletzt haben würde, sondern dass man sogar bei rein heidnischen Dingen Formen in der Vordergrund rückte, die auch eine christliche Deutung erfahren konnten. So ist die *quadriga* auf der Kebrseite der Konsekrationsmünzen des Konstantin für die Heiden der Wagen, der an der Spitze des Scheiterhaufens zu stehen pflegte, die Hand, die sich Konstantin von oben entgegenstreckt, versinnbildlicht Jupiter; für die Christen aber konnte diese Darstellung eine Erinnerung an die Himmelfahrt des Elias sein».

But the heavenly chariot was not the only connection between the prophet and the Sun God; also the resemblance between the names *Elias* and *Helios* simplified an identification of the one with the other as is proved by a poem by Sedulius (Paschale Carm. IV 184 ff.):

»*Quam bene fulminei praelucens semita caeli
Convenit Eliae, meritoque et nomine fulgens
Hac ope dignus erat, quoniam sermonis Achivi
Una per accentum mutetur littera, sol est.*»

Thus it is no wonder that the consecration coins with the *quadriga* were struck and distributed all over the empire; they could be accepted by everybody regardless of faith. Considering the circulation of the three other types of consecration coins one has to recall the expansion of the Christian faith. In the early 4th century the Church more or less had conquered the East, whereas the West, particularly Gaul, was almost completely pagan: »*Nous n'avons pas pour tout l'Occident, en dehors des catacombes romaines, une seule inscription chrétienne antérieure à la paix de l'Église*» (GREGOIRE, *Les Persecutions dans l'Empire Romain*, p. 17 f.). The church, even if in no dominating position, had, however, invaded North Africa, Rome, the Mediterranean coast and the Rhône Valley

¹ See particularly LECLERCQ (CABROL—LECLERCQ IV 2, col. 2670—74 s.v. Elie) who dates all sarcophags with Elijah symbolism to the 4th century, and also GERKE, *Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit*, p. 91, Pl. 9,1, and KANIUTH, p. 8, especially note 56.

(HARNACK, *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums* II⁴, pp. 801—816, 872, 879—884, 918 f., 926 f. and Map II).

Now, the bulk of the bronze coinage had a mainly local circulation as e.g. ALFÖLDI's survey of the large Nagytétény hoard shows (*Il tesoro di Nagytétény*, Riv.It.Num. 1921, p. 115). When we find that the type *Aeterna Pietas* was struck solely in Gallic mints, the *Veneranda Memoria* and *Iusta Veneranda Memoria* exclusively in the East, but the *quadriga* in all mints of the empire, that must be a reflection of imperial religious policy. It is, then, not surprising that the Gallic type with the standing emperor on the reverse had the most matter-of-fact character, whereas the Eastern types were much more ambiguous and there was no type of clearly Christian character. Rightly SCHOENEBECK (*Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius und Constantin*, p. 52) when discussing the coins with at least seemingly Christian symbols says: »*Der Befund der Münzen entspricht so voll und ganz den Feststellungen über die Ausbreitung des Christentums, die immer noch am aufschlussreichsten in der Karte von Harnack abzulesen ist.*»¹

¹ In some cases he seems too keen to interpret the symbols as pro-Christian, e.g. the cross on coins of Maxentius (p. 7). A series of coins of this type is known, many of them with crosses of Saint Andrew. It is certainly far-fetched to interpret an incidental Greek cross as Christian particularly as crosses of varying shapes were frequently used as pagan symbols above all in the *Sol* cult.