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MONUMENTS

‘IN HOC SIGNO VINCES’:

THE VARIOUS VICTORIES COMMEMORATED THROUGH THE *LABARUM**

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The Battle at the Milvian Bridge?

On 28 October 312, Constantine won a decisive battle over the then-ruler of Rome, Maxentius. This victory, according to the likes of Lactantius and Eusebius, marked the beginning of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity. It is one of the canonical battles of Roman Antiquity, represented in some detail through contemporary reliefs on the Arch of Constantine. These reliefs include a famous scene showing Maxentius’s troops drown next to a collapsed bridgehead, possibly even depicting Constantine’s vanquished opponent.¹ The story as it is often told holds that Maxentius planned for a Constantinian siege of Rome, but at the last moment decided to face his enemy outside the city wall. To do so, he had to construct a temporary bridge over the Tiber, having demolished the permanent structure in anticipation of Constantine’s attack of the city. Making his stand in front of this pontoon bridge, Maxentius was surprised by the onslaught of Constantine’s soldiers, and had to hurriedly retreat, causing the collapse of the wooden structure. Maxentius and his most loyal troops drowned.² Constantine could enter Rome in victory.

Though the story is well known, it is probably not exactly true. To be more precise, the brunt of the battle is unlikely to have been fought at the Milvian bridge. It is highly improbable that Maxentius lined up his troops with the Tiber at the rear, which would have been tactically insane.³ Moreover, we know that Constantine set up camp about 20 kilometres outside of Rome, at Malborghetto, a site which he afterwards commemorated through the construction of a quadrifons arch, the remains of which were later integrated into various buildings.⁴ Combining some of the ancient authors, a likely reconstruction assumes that Maxentius’s troops marched in the direction of Malborghet-

to, and aimed to confront Constantine at the strategically much more relevant Saxa Rubra, nine miles outside of Rome. Perhaps Maxentius left the city to assuage riotous Romans who did not like the prospect of a prolonged siege, or perhaps he was encouraged by a prophecy from the Sibylline books which stated that ‘the enemy of Rome would be killed that day’. Eusebius interprets Maxentius’s infelicitous decision to engage Constantine outside of Rome as an act of God, who ‘drew [Maxentius], as if bound in chains, some distance outside of the gates’.⁵

The battle at Saxa Rubra was won by Constantine’s troops, who forced Maxentius and his soldiers towards the city. When they reached the Tiber, they had to flee over the pontoon bridge, and it is probable that Maxentius died there. That was the moment which Constantine chose to commemorate later on, and which came to be depicted in monuments like the Arch of Constantine, and in panegyric texts. Whether Constantine also had a monument constructed near the site of the bridge is unknown. No reference to such a building, if it ever existed, has survived. But in whatever mode the new emperor focused attention on the events at the Milvian bridge, attention to that moment of the battle gave the death of Maxentius central stage. This allowed Eusebius (c. 260/65–339), for example, to describe events in biblical terms in his *Church History*, which was written not long after the events took place:

Thus, as in the time of Moses himself and of the ancient God-beloved race of Hebrews, ‘he cast Pharaoh’s chariots and host into the sea, and overwhelmed his chosen charioteers in the Red Sea, and covered them with the flood,’ in the same way Maxentius also with his soldiers and body-guards ‘went down into the depths like a stone,’ when he fled before the power of God which was with Constantine, and passed

through the river which lay in his way, over which he had formed a bridge with boats, and thus prepared the means of his own destruction.⁶

The death of Maxentius at the Milvian bridge, in this reformulation of memory, was an act of God, rather than a harshly fought civil war just outside of the capital.

The Labarum and the Battle at the Milvian Bridge

The possible reformulation of the location of Constantine's final battle against Maxentius was certainly not the most prominent *post hoc* re-adjustment of events. In almost all discussions of Constantine's struggle with Maxentius, there is explicit emphasis on the importance of the divine favour that was bestowed upon Constantine through this major victory. This was not simply a victory of man over man, or even of rightful emperor over unjust usurper; this was a decisive victory of a ruler supported by the Christian God. The different narratives in Antiquity and later times about the mode through which the (Christian) God had expressed that support differ markedly, and show various moments in which memory must have been manipulated. As is well known, Constantine is said to have had a dream or vision in which he was told to use the sign of the cross against his enemies. About which sign of the cross, how to use it against his enemies, and when he had the dream (or vision) the sources disagree.⁷

The main ancient literary sources are Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325) and Eusebius. Lactantius states that Constantine had a dream on the night before the battle whilst encamped 'opposite to the Milvian bridge'. In this dream, he 'was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be delineated on the shields of his soldiers, and so to proceed to battle'. This sign in question was 'the letter X, with a perpendicular line drawn through it and turned round at the top'. Eusebius gives an extended account in his *On the Life of Constantine*, written toward the end of the 330s, although his much earlier *Church History* mentions no vision or dream. Nor did a panegyric oration celebrating Constantine's vic-

tory over Maxentius in Trier in 313 mention any vision or dream.⁸ In his *Life*, however, Eusebius claims to have heard from Constantine himself that he had a vision sometime well before the battle: 'About the time of the midday sun, when the sky was just turning, [Constantine] said he saw with his own eyes, up in the sky and resting over the sun, a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, *Εν Τούτῳ Νικᾷ* (By this conquer). This vision was followed by a dream in which Christ appeared telling Constantine to use the sign against his enemies. The next morning, Constantine set out to represent the image; a representation which Eusebius stresses he himself 'had an opportunity of seeing'. This *labarum*, as Eusebius calls it:

was made in the following manner. A long spear, overlaid with gold, formed the figure of the cross by means of a transverse bar laid over it. On the top of the whole was fixed a wreath of gold and precious stones; and within this, the symbol of the Saviour's name, two letters indicating the name of Christ by means of its initial characters, the letter P being intersected by X in its centre: and these letters the emperor was in the habit of wearing on his helmet at a later period. From the cross-bar of the spear was suspended a cloth, a royal piece, covered with a profuse embroidery of most brilliant precious stones; and which, being also richly interlaced with gold, presented an indescribable degree of beauty to the beholder. This banner was of a square form, and the upright staff, whose lower section was of great length, bore a golden half-length portrait of the pious emperor and his children on its upper part, beneath the trophy of the cross, and immediately above the embroidered banner.⁹

There have been many attempts to square the different accounts, or try to find the 'true' version. If one believes in an actual vision, the argument of Peter Weiss, who argues that Constantine experienced a 'solar halo phenomenon' in Gaul in 310, is probably the most convincing.¹⁰ If such a vision took place, it was re-interpreted in (or after) 312 to argue in favour of Constantine's divine support. In terms of a historical (re) construction, the best point to start is still Henk

Singor’s excellent 2003 article, in which he argues in favour of the introduction by Constantine of ‘a new military banner, not for any particular army unit but one closely bound to his own person and one that by its design pointed to the emperor’s special relationship with his protecting divinity, for it had the sign of his divine *comes* or companion on its drapery. The divinity it at first referred to was the Sun’.¹¹ As has been regularly asserted, such a military banner (a *vexillum*) was ideally suited as a symbol of the sign of the cross, since the banner hung from the crossbar of what was effectively a cross. A *vexillum*, then, was probably put in the hand of the giant statue of Constantine that was placed in the Basilica of Maxentius, renamed as Basilica of Constantine.¹² In later times, the cross-form of the *vexillum/labarum* could be emphasized to show the Christian sign under which Constantine had fought – making the symbol on the banner (possibly a solar sign) of lesser importance.

Looking back with hindsight, it would not prove too difficult to show how the Christian God had protected Constantine, and that the *labarum* had always formed clear evidence for it. Yet, numismatic representations of the *labarum* only start in 326.¹³ Just to make clear, the point here is not to discuss whether or not there *was* an association of Constantine with Christ from 312 onwards or not. Whatever the ‘true’ reconstruction of events, the important point for the purposes of this contribution is that briefly after the battle, the vision/dream was not deemed to be of major importance, whilst a generation later it was of the utmost importance. In the direct aftermath of the battle against Maxentius, the new *vexillum* was sufficiently important to place in the hand of a massive commemorative statue – but the ‘Christian’ element was not emphasized. Years later, when Constantine either took up the support of Christ or felt sufficiently confident in his power to express that support, that *vexillum* retroactively became an unequivocally Christian-shaped *labarum*. Eusebius could now write down that Constantine made copies of the *labarum* and sent these to his armies, though of course the *labarum* that he described seeing was presented as the original one.¹⁴

To reiterate, the emphasis here is not on what really happened in 310 or 312. Instead, we would like to focus on the possible shifts in what the *labarum* meant, and on the certain developments in its importance from an unremarked-upon *vexillum* in 312 to a monumental image in the 320s and 330s. It seems clear from Eusebius’s comment that Constantine himself had told him the ‘true’ account of the vision and the importance of the Christian sign, that the emperor was actively involved in this reformulation of memory. The vision, and the *labarum* through which the sign was ‘used against the enemy’ obtained a new importance. This ‘divine standard’ became a commemorative marker of Christian support; a marker, moreover, of which copies were sent out to various armies. From the late fourth century onwards, the meaning of the *labarum* shifted once again, away from a victory that was no longer relevant, to a more general image of triumphal Christian emperorship. For a long time, that image would remain relevant. In the ninth century, two *labara* still ‘flanked the imperial throne’, whilst Christograms are visible on the shield of the palace guards as depicted on the S. Vitale mosaics.¹⁵ After the ninth century we lose the scent of the Byzantine (original Constantinian?) *labara*. Apparently, two *labara* were kept in the imperial palace at Constantinople.¹⁶ But even if copies of the *labarum* did not survive, the memory of the *labarum* did. The literary tradition by Lactantius and Eusebius was firmly rooted; moreover, golden coins depicting the *labarum* must have circulated for centuries, at least in the Mediterranean. Yet the memory which the *labarum* evoked had moved massively away from Maxentius and his defeat at the Milvian bridge

An Imperial Reinvention of the Labarum

The descriptions by Eusebius and Lactantius of Constantine’s vision and the *labara* in the battle on the Milvian Bridge may have been firmly rooted in the late antique and early medieval world, by the nineteenth-century critical research by philologists and historians had reduced the literary tradition of which the early Christian authors formed part to sheer propaganda, and relegated

their accounts to the realm of fiction.¹⁷ Scholarship denied the existence of any *labarum* in the age of Constantine. Yet in the early twentieth century, the *labarum* was to make a comeback. The dismissive attitude towards the written sources changed after the turn of the century. To a large extent, this change in the sceptical or even negative position of scholars that had marked the nineteenth century, was linked to the festive commemorations of the events of 312 and 313 in the approaching years 1912-13.

Indeed, in October 1913 the manufacturing of an actual replica of the *labarum* was ordered by the German Emperor Wilhelm II as an explicit and tangible memory of the jubilee. In the early spring of 1914 the Kaiser even ordered a second copy. Both replicas were ready in May 1914; one was kept by the emperor himself, whereas the other new *labarum* was sent to Rome in July as a present for Pope Pius X, though the papal nuntius was first cautiously sounded out as to whether the Holy Father would appreciate such a present.¹⁸ Apparently, the nuntius answered positively. Deciding to make a replica on the *labarum* was one thing; designing them quite another. The memory of the monument had faded through decades of scepticism. To solve some of the problems, the renowned scholar Joseph Wilpert, who was a specialist of early Christian art, was asked to advise on the design of these replicas. Wilpert did so willingly, not least since Wilhelm II had generously supported Wilpert's monumental publication on the paintings of the catacombs of Rome some ten years earlier.¹⁹ Wilpert decided to take Eusebius as his guide for the reconstruction and consulted his friend Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, a well-known philologist. Franchi de' Cavalieri made a new translation of the above-cited passage on the *labarum* of Eusebius's text. He also published a thorough commentary on the text in 1913, when the collective memory of the events of 312 and 313 had been 'activated' for months already, not only in Italy, but in the Catholic world as well.²⁰ Based on this interpretation of Eusebius, the new *labara* were designed, of which only one still exists. It can be found in S. Croce al Flaminio at Rome (Fig. 1). Wilhelm's personal copy was probably lost in the Second World War.²¹



Fig. 1. The *labarum*, ordered by Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1914, now in Rome: S. Croce al Flaminio. Photo: Bibliotheca Hertziana Roma, Fototeca.

Wilhelm did not only order the reinvention of the Constantinian *labarum*; he seems to have been closely involved in its construc-

tion. This is illustrated by a drawing made by the emperor. A sheet dated some years later (6. V. 1919) shows his sketches of various types of crosses and their development, but also a faithful reproduction of the *labara* of 1914.²² Imperial intervention is also suggested by the manufacturing of the *labara* in the workshop of the Benedictine monks at Maria Laach. The needlework for the expensive cloths, set with precious stones, was furthermore done by Benedictine sisters of the Abbey St Hildegard near Rüdesheim. Wilhelm II had maintained strong ties with the Abbey of Maria Laach. He had signed the resolution to grant the right to Benedictines to live in this ancient monastery again, a monastery with a rich history going back to the twelfth century. After the expropriation of the buildings, however, the community had ceased to exist and the monks had moved to the Abbey of Beuron. But thanks to the benevolence of the emperor, the monks started to live in Maria Laach again, bringing the monastery to prosperity again within a few decades. Moreover, Wilhelm had donated 30,000 Mark for the ciborium of the monastery church.²³ The Kaiser was present at the inauguration of the renovated church and expressed on that occasion his admiration for the many merits of the Benedictine monks, placing them even under his direct protection.²⁴ His enthusiasm for the Romanesque architecture of the Rhine region presumably contributed to the emperor's moral and financial support as well. All this may not be very surprising for a monarch who was very much interested in history and archaeology. Wilhelm II travelled extensively in the Mediterranean, visiting ancient sites and actively supported excavation projects, for example on Corfu. Moreover, he stimulated archaeological and historical research in Germany.²⁵ Still, the *labarum*-project requires a more precise explanation than the Kaiser's general interest in history and his enthusiasm for crafts, art and archaeology. It is likely that the heightened interest for Constantine, both in Italy and elsewhere in the Catholic world, had inspired the emperor. With all the attention paid to the sixteenth century of Constantine's rise to power (306),

his victory over the usurper Maxentius (October 312), and the Edict of Milan some months later (February 313), he can hardly have failed to take notice of the various commemorations that took place.

In fact, the Hohenzollern dynasty had actively promoted the Constantinian heritage in Trier before, also emphasizing the fact that the Hohenzollern were the legitimate successors of the Hohenstaufen and thus formed a continuation of the Holy Roman Empire. Wilhelm II took much effort in stressing both the dynastical 'continuity' and the fact that he reigned *Dei gratia*.²⁶ This supposed continuity between the Hohenstaufen and the Prussian, Protestant Hohenzollern was anchored in the common early Christian roots of all Christian denominations. Moreover, the age of Constantine, 'the first Christian ruler' and an *exemplum* for all later sovereigns, was the shared heritage of all of Wilhelm's subjects, a past they all could subscribe to. Constantine had even resided in Germany (Trier, AD 307) which presented the Constantinian example with a German touch.

The personal involvement of the Kaiser in the construction of a 'new' *labarum* may, finally, have resulted from his interest in early Christianity. He was active as a church builder, not only in Germany, but also in Rome,²⁷ and even in the Holy Land, where he commissioned a number of both Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches.²⁸ Interestingly enough, according to the tradition, Constantine had been a church builder in Jerusalem as well: he had ordered the building of the Holy Sepulchre Church in 325-26 and it was during the building of this church that Constantine's mother Helena had discovered the True Cross.²⁹ All of this was part of Wilhelm's policy to present himself as the emperor of *all* Germans, both Protestants and Catholics, and to erase the last displeasing memories of the German *Kulturkampf*. In the ordering of the *labara* all these motives seem to come together, Wilhelm sought to emphasize his own, God-given legitimacy as the emperor of all Christians in his *Reich*, by a determined use, even appropriation of Constantinian motives. Seeking rapprochement with the pope of Rome was a way of showing his inviolable posi-

tion as a monarch in a long-standing tradition shaped by Constantine. The meaning of the memory that the *labarum* evoked had changed again.

Monumentalizing Memory: S. Croce al Flaminio

The present of the German emperor could not have come at a more suited moment for Pope Pius X. Just as the Kaiser, Pius X had good reasons for a clearly marked commemoration of the sixteenth centenary. On 17 October 1912, the foundation stone was laid of a new church, S. Croce al Flaminio, some two kilometres to the north of the Porta del Popolo (Porta Flaminia) and in an area that was for a large part still uninhabited at that moment but was to become a lively neighbourhood from the 1920s onward.³⁰ In the same period (1914), another church that was built on the order of Pius X was completed and dedicated to S. Elena on the Via Casilina, near Helena's mausoleum in the rapidly growing *quartiere* Casilina.³¹

The erection of these two new churches that were somehow linked to Constantine was of course not a coincident but part of a large festive programme in Rome celebrating the sixteenth centenary of Constantine's victory over Maxentius in 312, and especially of the release of the Edict of Milan in February 313. The jubilee was commemorated in various parts of the Catholic world, gaining special significance in Italy for devoted Catholics, and especially for men of the Church. To many of them, the year 1911 had been their *annus horribilis*, the year in which the Kingdom of Italy had ostentatiously – at least in their view – glorified the fiftieth anniversary of the Kingdom of Italy and hence the birth of the modern Italian nation state. And if this was not enough, the fact that forty years had passed since Rome had become the capital of modern Italy in 1871 (*Roma Capitale*) was stressed time and again. The conflict between the pope, no longer 'ruler' over the now dismantled Papal State, and the successive Italian governments striving for a modern, secular nation, was deep. Bitterness about the unsolved *questione romana* (the 'Roman question') and about the harm done to the Church, to its

members, its ideas and its possessions speaks clearly from the words of Pope Pius X at the closing of the year 1911:

The year that is now approaching its end has been particularly mournful for Us, as everybody will understand. We will not dwell upon revealing the deep pain that the clamorous commemoration of events has caused to Us and to every pious child of the Church; events, as is clear to all of us, that were the start of the many and so serious violations of the rights of the Apostolic See as were inflicted to this very day.³²

Given these tense relations between the Italian state and the ecclesiastical authorities, it is hardly surprising that the Holy Father had welcomed an initiative taken early in 1912 by the *Primaria Associazione della Santa Croce* and the *Collegium cultorum martyrum* to form the *Consiglio Superiore per le feste commemorative del XVI centenario della pace della Chiesa*.³³ The *Consiglio Superiore* formulated two objectives: firstly, to build a sacred monument near the Milvian Bridge, where Constantine had beaten Maxentius, as a lasting reminiscence and at the same time meeting the spiritual needs of the future inhabitants of the neighbourhood. This idea for a monument near the Milvian Bridge was already put forward in an article in *La Civiltà Cattolica* of January 1912, expressing the wish for a *monumento perenne*.³⁴ The second aim of the *Consiglio Superiore* was the promotion of the celebration of the years 312–13 throughout Italy (and even abroad). Moreover, bishops were invited to install local committees in their dioceses to organize pilgrimage and to collect money for the 'sacred monument near the Milvian Bridge'.³⁵

A board was formed, consisting of both Italians and foreigners, men of the Church and laymen, but all of them *eccellenti cattolici*. Anton de Waal, the rector of the Campo S. Teutonico, was one of them, as was the archaeologist Orazio Marucchi.³⁶ Another renowned scholar of early Christian archaeology, Bartolomeo Nogara, took a seat on the board of the *Comitato romano*, the local committee that operated under the aegis of the *Consiglio Superiore*. Of course the 'black nobility' of Rome was well-represented



Fig. 2. Rome, *S. Croce al Flaminio*, interior, modern lamps of the ‘corona-type’. Photo: Nathalie de Haan.



Fig. 3. Rome, *S. Croce al Flaminio*, façade with the mosaic of the triumphal cross in the centre, flanked by the *labarum* on the right and Emperor Constantine on the left. Photo: Nathalie de Haan.

in both the *Consiglio* and the *Comitato romano*, through members of the Colonna and Chigi families. On 1 March 1912 the *Consiglio Superiore* presented the outline of the programme commemorating the significance of the Edict of 313 and the freedom and peace offered to the Church by Constantine, a fact worth recording, 'especially in our days'.³⁷ The Edict was also the subject of a passionate speech delivered by the pope in February 1913 to an audience of the faithful gathered in Rome, commemorating, again, Constantine's Edict of tolerance, and contrasting the situation of freedom and peace in 313 in bitter tones to the present situation of 1913, in which the Church was the victim of injustice and insults, and freedom hard to find.³⁸ A few weeks later, the importance of the celebrations were underlined once again, when Pius X announced in an apostolic letter of 8 March 1913 the possibility of plenary indulgence in the form of a special jubilee (Holy Year) from Low Sunday (the first Sunday after Easter, i.e. 30 March 1913) until the feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December).

The building of the Church of S. Croce in Flaminio had started in February 1913, some months after the first stone was laid, 'due to deliberate and malicious slowness of the opposing authorities that had to grant the building permit'.³⁹ In spite of this delay, the church was solemnly inaugurated ten months later, at the closing of the Constantinian jubilee, on 29 December.⁴⁰ The Roman architect and civil engineer Aristide Leonori (1856-1928) had been responsible for the building and designed a church in the style of the early Christian basilicas in Rome (the so-called *stile basilicale romano*). Leonori devoted his long career to the building of churches, chapels and hospitals, not only in Rome but in other parts of the world as well. He worked in Egypt, Sudan, Mauretania, and the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and India.⁴¹ Moreover, he was involved in a number of restoration projects in early Christian and medieval churches such as S. Sisto Vecchio, S. Clemente (crypt) and S. Maria in Trastevere; he was the architect of the chapter of the latter church from 1890 till 1923.⁴² Leonori was also a man of learning and published numerous arti-

cles in the bimonthly *Vox Urbis*, a periodical in Latin, founded (and to a large part financed) by Leonori himself.

Leonori was a devout Christian and certainly an *eccellente cattolico*, being a tertiary of the Franciscan order. It seems that the early Christian period appealed to him for both spiritual and aesthetic reasons, as a number of his new church buildings show.⁴³ For the exterior of S. Croce al Flaminio, notably the façade, the Church of S. Lorenzo fuori le mura must have been his main source of inspiration. The *campanile* resembles the ones of S. Maria in Cosmedin and S. Maria in Trastevere. The interior of S. Croce reflects the inspiration of early Christian architecture as well: the arcades, for example, resemble those of the Church of S. Sabina. The lamps are modern versions of the *corona*-type (Fig. 2) and point at Leonori's knowledge of ancient sources, notably the *Liber pontificalis*.⁴⁴ The altars were designed by Leonori as well. Flanking the high altar are the chapels dedicated to St Mary and to St George respectively. Both altars are executed in a neo-Byzantine style.

The mosaics on the façade and the chapels of the Virgin Mary and St George date back to 1915-16 and were executed after a design by Biagio Biagetti, a famous painter at the time.⁴⁵ A mosaic inscription of gilded *tesserae* set in a blue background on the architrave reads as follows:

An. Chr. MCMXIII PIVS X P. M. IN
MEMOR. PACIS A CONSTANTINO
ECCL. DATAE CRVCI SS. DD. AB EDIC-
TO A. MDC

In the year of the Lord 1913 Pope Pius X Pontifex Maximus dedicated [this church] to the Holy Cross in memory of the peace given by Constantine to the Church 1600 years after the edict.

In the upper zone of the façade a depiction of the triumphal cross is central. The cross is flanked by the *labarum* on the right and Constantine on the left (Figs 3 and 4), apparently with the text of the Edict on the book roll in his right hand. The first two words of the Latin text of the Edict (*Cvm feliciter*) are clearly visible (Fig. 5). The



Fig. 4. Rome, S. Croce al Flaminio, exterior, detail of the mosaic: the *labarum*. Photo: Nathalie de Haan.

emphasis on the edict and the resulting peace reveal once again the motifs of Pius X for the building of this church: a monument that com-

memorated first of all the edict, more than the victory of Constantine over Maxentius, even if the location was deliberately chosen. The *laba-*



Fig. 5. Rome, S. Croce al Flaminio, façade, detail of the mosaic: the Edict of Milan with the first two words ‘Cum Feliciter’. Photo: Nathalie de Haan.

rum had changed meaning once again, and now commemorated the Edict of Milan. In this way, it symbolized the intended restoration of the Church’s dominance; a supremacy which had originated with Constantine. Commemorating the Edict, after all, was a plea for *pax* and *libertas* for the Church and as such a direct address to the Italian authorities to do the same as Constantine had done sixteen hundred years before.

The link between *labarum*, pope, and Christian claims are best shown in the Chapel of St George in the church. The mosaic underneath its calotte shows the saintly knight on horseback between personifications of the virtues, depicted in a style imitating the mosaics of Ravenna (Fig. 6). The chapel is the focal point of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George that has its base in S. Croce al Flaminio. It was built with money collected by the knights of the

order and consecrated in 1915 by Pope Benedict XV. But it had been Pope Pius X who, two years before, had reacted positively to the wish of the Constantinian Order to have their chapel in S. Croce, then still under construction. He received the knights in a private audience a week before the inauguration of the church (December 29) and blessed on that occasion the *labarum* he had received as a gift from the German emperor earlier that year.⁴⁶ The *labarum* was finally transferred to S. Croce al Flaminio in 1962, shortly before the church was promoted to *basilica minor* where it is still kept.⁴⁷ Memory may have changed over time, but the *labarum* ultimately arrived near the place with which it had been closely linked, and in the direct context of the emperor who had so cultivated its status. At the end of the ceremony celebrating the inauguration of the church in 1913, Vincen-



Fig. 6. Rome, S. Croce al Flaminio, mosaic underneath the calotte of the Chapel of St George, detail: St George. Photo: Nathalie de Haan.

zo Bianchi-Cagliesi, member of the *Consiglio Superiore* spoke the following words, illustrating the new memory that the *labarum* was expected to symbolize: ‘The basilica will be a sign of the

victory, and as a whole will be a triumphal *labarum*, with the Tree of Life standing in its centre, the Cross in bronze, strong as our hope, immense as the love of God.’³⁸

Notes

- * It is our great pleasure to contribute to a volume in honour of Sible de Blaauw, who has been our friend and colleague for many years. Throughout these years, he has encouraged us as ancient historians not to forget ‘his’ early Christian Rome. Sible’s fascination for Christian religious architecture has taught us much of a city we thought we knew. Hopefully, this contribution is some small repayment for Sible’s continuous inspiration.
- 1 Michael P. Speidel, ‘Maxentius and his ‘Equites Singulares’ in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge’, *Classical Antiquity*, 5 (1986), 253–62.
- 2 *Panegyrici latini*, XII (9). 16. 3–4 and IV (10). 28. 1–5, with Charles E. V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegy-*

- rici Latini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 319.
- 3 Aurelius Victor, *Caesaribus*, XL. 23, with W. Kuhoff, ‘Ein Mythos in der römischen Geschichte: Der Sieg Konstantins des Grossen über Maxentius vor den Toren Roms am 28. Oktober 312’, *Chiron*, 21 (1991), 127–74.
- 4 Carmelo Calci and Gaetano Messineo, *Malborghetto, lavori e studi di archeologia pubblicati dalla Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma* (Rome: De Luca Edizioni d’Arte, 1989).
- 5 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IX. 9. 4 (cf. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, I. 38); Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, XLIV. 4; XLIV. 8; Zosimus, *Historia nea*, II. 16. 1; Aurelius Victor, *Caesaribus*, XL. 23; Noel Lenski,

- 'The reign of Constantine', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, ed. by Noel Lensky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 69–70 with nn. 53–59. cf. Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, II. 49 and Cicero, *Philippics*, II. 3. 1.
- 6 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IX. 9. 5.
- 7 The rest of this section draws heavily upon the excellent discussion by Henk W. Singor, 'The Labarum, Shield Blazons, and Constantine's caeleste signum', in *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power: Proceedings of the Third Workshop of the International Network 'Impact of Empire' (Roman Empire, C. 200 BC–AD 476)*, ed. by Lukas de Blois and others (Amsterdam: Gieben, 2003), pp. 481–500.
- 8 Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum; Panegyrici latini*, XII(9), with noticeable references to Constantine's deity in II. 4–5, III. 3, IV. 1, XIII. 2, XVI. 2, XXVI. 1. See the comments in Nixon and Rodgers, pp. 292–93.
- 9 Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, transl. by Averil Cameron and Stuart. G. Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), lines 28–32.
- 10 Peter Weiss, 'The vision of Constantine', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 16 (2003), 237–59, revised translation of 'Die Vision Constantins' (1993). The literature on the vision(s) is sheer endless; see for a recent interpretive overview Johannes Wienand, *Der Kaiser als Sieger: Metamorphosen triumphaler Herrschaft unter Konstantin I* (Berlin: Akademie, 2012), pp. 254–80, with full references.
- 11 Singor, p. 484.
- 12 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IX. 9, x–XI, with Andreas Alföldi, 'In hoc signo victor eris': Beiträge zur Geschichte der Bekehrung Konstantins des Grossen', in *Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums, Franz Joseph Dölger zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Theodor Klauser and Adolf Rucker (Munster: Aschendorff, 1939), pp. 1–18 (reprinted in *Konstantin der Grosse*, ed. by Heinrich Kraft (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), pp. 224–46 (p. 237 and Abb. 3,4)). Cf. Olivier Hekster, 'The City of Rome in Late Imperial Ideology: The Tetrarchs, Maxentius and Constantine', *Mediterraneo Antico*, 2 (1999), 717–48, and Raymond Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 63.
- 13 Rudolf Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus: Die Verchristlichung der imperialen Repräsentation unter Konstantin dem Grossen als Spiegel seiner Kirchenpolitik und seines Selbstverständnisses als christlicher Kaiser* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), pp. 43–48. But note the miniature Christogram on the depiction of Constantine's helmet in a Ticinum silver medallion from 315; Konrad Kraft, 'Das Silbermedallion Constantins des Grossen mit dem Christusmonogramm auf dem Helm', *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte*, 5–6 (1954–55), 151–78.
- 14 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, I. 31, possibly indicating that Christograms were placed on the standards instead of depictions of the pagan gods.
- 15 Singor, pp. 498–99, with references.
- 16 Gerhard Wirth, 'Labarum', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 10 vols (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977–99), v, col. 1601, in *Brepolis Medieval Encyclopaedias – Lexikon des Mittelalters Online (LexMA)* <<http://apps.brepolis.net/lexiema/test/Default2.aspx>> [accessed 6 July 2016]; Yann Le Bohec, 'Labarum', in *Der Neue Pauly*, ed. by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, 16 vols (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003), VI (1999), col. 1028.
- 17 Jürgen Krüger, 'Wilhelms II: Sakralitätsverständnis im Spiegel seiner Kirchenbauten', in *Wilhelm II und die Religion*, ed. by Stefan Samerski (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 235–64 (p. 256); Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen, 'Das Bild Konstantins in der Neuzeit', in *Konstantin der Grosse: Geschichte – Archäologie – Rezeption. Internationales Kolloquium vom 10.–15. Oktober 2005 an der Universität Trier zur Landesausstellung Rheinland-Pfalz 2007 "Konstantin der Grosse"*, ed. by Alexander Demandt and Josef Engemann, Schriftenreihe des Rheinischen Landesmuseums Trier, 32 (Trier: Rheinisches Landesmuseum, 2006), pp. 285–97, with references.
- 18 Jürgen Krüger, *Rom und Jerusalem: Kirchenbauvorstellungen der Hohenzollern im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), p. 234.
- 19 Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1903), p. xii (Vorwort): 'An erster Stelle fühle ich mich zum lebhaftesten Danke seiner Majestät dem deutschen Kaiser Wilhelm II verpflichtet [...] mir einen reichen Beitrag zu gewähren geruht haben'.
- 20 Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, 'Il labaro descritto da Eusebio', *Studi romani*, I (1913), 161–88, reprinted in Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Scritti agiografici*, Studi e Testi, 222, 2 vols (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1962), II, pp. 201–27.
- 21 Krüger, 'Wilhelms II', p. 257, with n. 38.
- 22 See Jan Werquet, 'Konstantin in der Tradition der Hohenzollern', in *Konstantin der Grosse – Imperator Caesar Flavius Constantinus*, ed. by Alexander Demandt and Josef Engemann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), pp. 467–69 (p. 469, with Fig. 4).
- 23 Krüger, *Rom und Jerusalem*, pp. 219–21.
- 24 Max Heimbucher, *Die Orden und Kongregationen der katholischen Kirche*, 2 vols (Munich: Schöningh, 1933; repr. 1965), I, pp. 259–64 (p. 261: 'Ich haben Ihnen den Hochaltar geschenkt in Erinnerung an die großen Verdienste, welche die Benediktiner um Wissenschaft und Kunst allzeit sich erworben haben [...]. Seien Sie überzeugt, daß auch in Zukunft Meine kaiserliche Huld über Ihrem Orden schweben wird, und überall, wo Männer sich zusammentun, um die Religion zu pflegen, und auch hinauszutragen in die Völker, werden sie Meines Schutzes sicher sein').
- 25 See for an overview John C. G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 3 vols (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1993–2008), II (2001), pp. 984–1016.

- 26 Krüger, ‘Wilhelms II’, pp. 235–38; Werquet, pp. 467–69. The Kyffhäuser or Barbarossa Monument in Thuringia, built in the years 1890–96, is a striking example of the identification by the Hohenzollern with the Hohenstaufen.
- 27 The Lutheran Evangelical Church in Rome (Via Sicilia) built between 1910 and 1922, cf. Andreas Puchta, *Die deutsche evangelische Kirche in Rom: Planung, Baugeschichte, Ausstattung*. Studien zur Kunst der Antike und ihrem Nachleben, 2 (Bamberg: Weiß, 1997).
- 28 The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem was built between 1893–98 and inaugurated in presence of the Kaiser during his visit in 1898. During the same visit he bought a piece of ground on Mount Zion (directly from Sultan Abdul Hamid II, whom the Kaiser knew personally) and gave the land on loan to the *Deutscher Verein vom Heiligen Land* (founded in 1855 in Cologne). The Abbey of the Dormition that housed Benedictine monks from Beuron since 1906 was built in the years 1900–10, just outside the walls of the Old City. The location was, of course, well chosen: according to the tradition St Mary had died on that particular spot. In the same year 1910 a guesthouse for pilgrims and a hospital (Kaiserin-Auguste-Victoria-Stiftung) was opened on the Mount of Olives, together with the Church of the Ascension (inaugurated four years later).
- 29 Cf. Sible de Blaauw, ‘Konstantin als Kirchenstifter’, in *Konstantin der Grosse: Geschichte – Archäologie – Rezeption*, pp. 163–72; Paolo Liverani, ‘L’architettura costantiniana, tra committenza imperiale e contributo delle élites locali’, in *Konstantin der Grosse. Geschichte – Archäologie – Rezeption*, pp. 235–44; David Hunt, ‘Constantine and Jerusalem’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48 (1997), 405–24; Fulvia Ciliberto, ‘Il complesso degli edifici costantiniani al Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme’, in *Costantino 313 d.C.: L’Editto di Milano e il tempo della tolleranza*, ed. by Gemma Sena Chiesa (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2012), pp. 150–53. Ancient sources: Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, II, 25–29; *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, ed. by Paul Geyer and Otto Cuntz, in *Corpus Christianorum. Series latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–), CLXXV: Itineraria et alia geographica (1965), p. 17: ‘Inde quasi ad lapidem missum est cripta, ubi corpus eius positum fuit et tertia die resurrexit; ibidem modo iussu Constantini imperatoris basilica facta est [...]’.
- 30 Giulio Bosi and Mario Bosi, *S. Croce al Flaminio*, Le chiese di Roma illustrate, 86 (Rome: Marietti, 1965), p. 7. Cf. ‘La nuova basilica costantiniana – la posa della prima pietra’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 18 October 1912.
- 31 Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Commentarium Officiale*, Annus VI Volumen VI: Acta PII X Apostolicae sub plumbo litterae 9 (die 12 Iunii 1914): ‘eriguntur parociae ss. Crucis Via Flaminia et S. Helenae Via Casilina’.
- 32 Speech delivered on 27 November 1911 and published in an extra edition of *L’Osservatore Romano* of the same day, cited in Francesco Tacchi, ‘Il XVI Centenario Costantiniano del 1913: Cronaca e significati di un evento’, *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà*, 27 (2014), 244–80 (p. 249). The Italian text reads: ‘L’anno che ormai volge al tramonto è stato per Noi, in modo particolare luttuoso: e tutti lo intendono. Non ci fermeremo qui a rilevare il profondo dolore che a Noi ed a ogni devoto figlio della Chiesa ha recato la clamorosa commemorazione di avvenimenti dai quali, come è a tutti manifesto, ebbero principio tante e sì gravi offese ai diritti della Sede Apostolica, quante ne furono inflitte fino ad oggi’.
- 33 The *Primaria Associazione della Santa Croce* (with a see in S. Croce in Gerusalemme) was founded in 1896 to commemorate the eighth centenary of the First Crusade (1096–99). The *Collegium cultorum martyrum* was founded in 1879 and was made into the Pontificia Accademia Cultorum Martyrum in 1995, see <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/cult-martyrum/index_it.htm> [accessed 21 June 2016].
- 34 Francesco Tacchi hypothesized that this idea published in January was picked up by the *Consiglio* which is certainly possible (Tacchi, p. 251 with n. 28). Anyhow, the attention paid to Constantine in this periodical of the Jesuits shows the impact of the upcoming events.
- 35 Tacchi, p. 251.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 250–51. President was Prince Mario Chigi. The pope nominated Cardinal Francesco di Paola Cassetta as the patron of the *Consiglio Superiore*. In 1913, Anton de Waal celebrated the golden anniversary of his ordination, an anniversary that was commemorated with a *Festschrift: Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit. Gesammelte Studien. Festgabe zum Konstantins-Jubiläum und zum goldenen Priesterjubiläum von Mgr. Dr. A. de Waal*, ed. by Franz Joseph Dölger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder’sche Verlagshandlung, 1913).
- 37 ‘XVI Centenario della Pace della Chiesa’, *Bollettino del Consiglio Superiore per le feste commemorative del XVI centenario della pace della Chiesa*, 1 (September 1912), 3–4: ‘Nell’anno 1913 ricorrerà il XVI Centenario della libertà e della pace donate alla Chiesa mediante il riconoscimento ufficiale del Cristianesimo e dei diritti più essenziali inerenti alla società Cristiana, proclamato dall’Imperatore Costantino con l’Editto di Milano nella primavera del 313. Questo gran fatto, preceduto dalla vittoria riportata da Costantino sopra Massenzio presso le mura di Roma il 28 ottobre del 312, ebbe un’importanza ed un significato altissimo nella storia ed è degno che sia ricordato, specialmente ai nostri giorni’.
- 38 ‘Discorso del Santo Padre Pio X ai fedeli convenuti a Roma in occasione del XVI Centenario della promulgazione dell’editto di Costantino, Domenica

- 23 febbraio 1913', online accessible via <<http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/speeches.index.html>> [accessed 21 June 2016].
- 39 Tacchi, p. 257.
- 40 Bosi and Bosi, p. 8.
- 41 For Leonori see Fabrizio Di Marco, 'Leonori, Aristide', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–), LXIV (2005), pp. 626–28 with references; Liliana Mauriello, 'Aristide Leonori: architetto eclettico del XX secolo', *I beni culturali*, 18, 2 (2010), 13–23.
- 42 Di Marco, 'Leonori, Aristide', p. 626; cf. Alberto M. Racheli, *Restauro a Roma 1870–2000. Architettura e città* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), pp. 324–25.
- 43 For example, Leonori designed the Mount St Sepulchre Franciscan Monastery at Washington DC (1898–99), built in a neo-Byzantine style and resembling Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.
- 44 Cf. Herman Geertman, 'L'illuminazione della basilica paleocristiana secondo il *Liber Pontificalis*', in *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, 64 (1988), 135–60 (repr. in Herman Geertman, *Hic fecit basilicam. Studi sul 'Liber Pontificalis' e gli edifici ecclesiastici di Roma da Silvestro a Silverio*, ed. by Sible de Blaauw (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 53–73).
- 45 Bosi and Bosi, pp. 48–54 and 67–79. Biagio Biagetti (1877–1948) would become the director of the Pinacoteca of the Vatican in 1921 and he was also the founder of the Vatican studio for the restoration of mosaics and paintings. Cf. 'Biagetti, Biagio', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–), IX (1967), pp. 823–24.
- 46 Bosi and Bosi, p. 35.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 48 *Bollettino del Consiglio Superiore per le feste commemorative del XVI centenario della pace della Chiesa*, 15 (December 1913), 12–13: 'La basilica sarà segnacolo di vittoria, sarà tutta un labaro trionfale, nel cui mezzo starà l'albero della vita, la Croce, salda nel bronzo come la nostra speranza, immensa come l'amore di Dio'.