

These three scenes of the underworld, painted within a decade or two and each relating in its own way to monumental painting, show Athenian vase painters making a concerted effort to return their art to the important position it had held half a century earlier. Varied experiments were being made in the middle of the fifth century to compete with the developments in monumental painting: the depiction of space, more elaborate compositions, the portrayal of ethos. The restrictions of size and color and the conflict between the two-dimensional illusionary space of the painting and the actual three-dimensional shape of the vase meant that the battle was already lost. The Niobid krater shows one of the earliest attempts to deal with the new formal vocabulary of mural painting on a vase. With its failures, the fate of Athenian vase painting was sealed.

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figures, but in different formats. The fragmentary krater by a member of the school of the Peleus Painter (Ferrara inv. 2892, T300 VT) has the figures organized in registers, that perhaps by the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs (inv. 44893) spreads them across a 'Polygotan' hillside: *ARV<sup>2</sup>* 1041.7 and 1680, *Para* 446; N. Alfieri and P. E. Arias, *Spina* (Munich 1958) p. 11. 66–7, 69–73.

It is possible that the Nekyia krater in New York may be copied from the same prototype as the Niobid krater, but this is difficult to prove. This was also suggested by Friedländer (n. 56) 23, n. 1.

### Lactantius, Hermes Trismegistus and Constantinian Obelisks

In a recent article in this journal (*JHS* cvii [1987] 51–57) Garth Fowden has argued that the obelisk from Karnak erected by Constantius II in Rome in 357 had been promised to that city by his father Constantine, as Ammianus Marcellinus states, and was not originally intended, as was claimed in the (lost) inscription on its base, for Constantine's new foundation at Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> The interesting suggestion is made that Constantine might have been in touch with Athenian religious experts over the matter,<sup>2</sup> and the project is seen as an earnest of 'his desire to conciliate the pagan Establishment of Old Rome'.<sup>3</sup> The point of this piece is to enlarge on the possible significance of the obelisk to contemporary Christians that is hinted at by Dr Fowden.<sup>4</sup>

Constantine paid three visits to Rome as emperor, in 312, after winning the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, in 315 during the celebration of his Decennalia, and in 326 for his Vicennalia;<sup>5</sup> on at least one of these occasions, he gave offence to non-Christian Romans by declining to

The authors would like to express their thanks to Dr Fowden for his kind advice.

<sup>1</sup> Garth Fowden, 'Nicagoras of Athens and the Lateran Obelisk', *JHS* cvii (1987) 51–7; *Amm. Marc.* xvii 4. 12–14; Dessau *ILS* 736.

<sup>2</sup> *JHS* cvii (1987) 51–2, 56–7.

<sup>3</sup> *JHS* cvii (1987) 56.

<sup>4</sup> *JHS* cvii (1987) 56 indicates that a phrase in *Amm. Marc.* xvii 4 recalls the Hermetic *Asclepius* 24 and points out that Hermes was much used by Christians seeking pagan witnesses to Christianity (on which see further G. Fowden *The Egyptian Hermes* [Cambridge 1986] 198–212).

<sup>5</sup> T. D. Barnes *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 71, 72, and 77 gives the sources.

perform the customary procession to the Capitol to offer sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> It was only during the last of these visits that Constantine was master of the East, and so in a position to offer an obelisk to the City. A Christian was Prefect of the City at the time; perhaps he owed his appointment to a desire by the emperor to avoid embarrassing differences of opinion over the ceremonies to be celebrated.<sup>7</sup> Certainly Constantine was well-aware of the unChristian sensibilities of traditional Romans: his *Oration to the Saints* explained that Vergil had felt himself impeded from prophesying Christ more plainly because he had been intimidated by the pagan grandees of ancient Rome.<sup>8</sup>

But Constantine may have had more in mind when he decided to offer an obelisk than a desire to keep some of the Senate happy some of the time. Christian significance may be discerned in an oblique manner. Dr Fowden points to a reminiscence in Ammianus' account of Constantine's act of a phrase from the *Perfect Discourse* attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and recalls that Hermes was a favourite prophet of Christians associated with Constantine, notably of Lactantius, once tutor to Constantine's eldest son.<sup>9</sup> Lactantius was probably dead by 326,<sup>10</sup> but Acilius Severus, Prefect of the City at the time of Constantine's visit had over the years exchanged two books of letters with Lactantius.<sup>11</sup> A distinctive view of the overall history of paganism was held by Lactantius; in this view Hermes Trismegistus and Egyptian religion occupied a particular place. It is these ideas of Lactantius which might provide a Christian rationale for the erection of an obelisk.

<sup>6</sup> Zosimus ii 29.5 places this incident in 326, which accords with the late date he accepted for Constantine's conversion to Christianity. F. Paschoud, 'Zosime 2, 29 et la version paienne de la conversion de Constantin', *Historia* xx (1971) 334–53 (=his *Cinq études sur Zosime* [Paris 1975] chapter 2) prefers 315, and T. D. Barnes *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981) favours 312.

<sup>7</sup> A. Piganiol *L'empereur Constantin* (Paris 1932) 112 ff. argued that Constantine's benefactions to S. Peter's Rome (*Liber Pontificalis* 34) included lands in the East, and so they too must date from after the victory over Licinius in 324. The City Prefect of 326 was Acilius Severus, on whom *PLRE* I, s.n. Severus 16. Hitherto ignored in the controversy over Constantine's failure to sacrifice at the Capitol has been a small piece of a glass souvenir plate, showing Constantine and Severus in front of a façade bearing an inscription commemorating the Vicennalia. This was first published by L. Bruzza 'Frammento di un disco di vetro che rappresenta i vicennali di Diocletiano', *Bull. Com. Rom.* x (1882) 180–90, and correctly identified by H. Fuhrmann 'Studien zu den Consulardiptychen verwandten Denkmälern I: eine Glaschale von der Vicennalienfeier Constantins des Grossens zu Rom in Jahre 326 nach Chr.' *RomMitt* liv (1939) 161–75. In front of Severus, as Dr Anna Wilson points out to us, is part of a garland like those put round the necks of sacrificial animals (as, for instance, on the Tetrarchic Decennalia base from the Roman Forum); one must suppose that the makers of souvenirs showed Constantine as about to offer sacrifice whether he did or not. Severus was not the first Christian Prefect; he was preceded by Ovinus Gallicanus, Prefect in 316–17, on whom, E. Champlin, 'Saint Gallicanus (Consul 317)' *Phoenix* xxxvi (1982) 71–6.

<sup>8</sup> *Oratio ad sanctos* 20. The emperor praises Vergil's proper use of poetic licence; on this notion Lactantius also had ideas: *Divine Institutions* (Inst.) i 11.24.

<sup>9</sup> Above note 4. For Crispus and Lactantius, Jerome *Chron.* ad ann. 317 AD; Jerome *de viris illustribus* 80.

<sup>10</sup> E. Heck *Die Dualistische Zusätze und die Kaiserreden bei Lactantius* (Abhandlungen Heidelberg Akad. 1972) 167 ff. suggests that Lactantius died before completing his revisions of *Inst.* for the second edition dedicated to Constantine.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome *de viris illustribus* 80 and 111.

For Lactantius ancient paganism, so far from being the immemorial religion of the Mediterranean world, was a relatively recent innovation; Melissea, king of Crete and foster-father of Jupiter, had been the first to offer sacrifice to the Gods, and Jupiter had lived on earth only in the second millennium BC.<sup>12</sup> The original religion of mankind had been monotheism: 'God made man to serve and worship him',<sup>13</sup> indeed man had been made to walk upright on two legs precisely so that he could acknowledge his maker whose seat was in Heaven.<sup>14</sup> It was only slowly that polytheistic error and the worship of earthly things had overtaken the world; the last place in the Mediterranean where primaeval innocence was subverted seems to have been Rome in the time of Numa.<sup>15</sup>

Ancient men were agreed that the Egyptians had the oldest Gods.<sup>16</sup> To Lactantius this meant that they were the first to be duped into idolatry. In the years after the Flood, Ham had quarrelled with his father Noah and his descendants the Canaanites were the first people to lack natural knowledge of the Most High God.<sup>17</sup> It was the Egyptians who first began to worship the heavenly bodies. Later, inspired by the fallen angels and their demonic offspring, they fashioned for themselves animal-headed Gods.<sup>18</sup> The process must have been well advanced by the time of the Exodus, which Lactantius placed late in the third millennium BC<sup>19</sup>—the Golden Calf worshipped by the Jews in the wilderness was Apis.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the plagues which preceded the Exodus were in part God's punishment on the Egyptians for their idolatry, Lactantius implied.<sup>21</sup> The Emperor Constantine affirmed that he had himself

seen the ruins of Memphis, and was deeply moved by the evidence of God's anger.<sup>22</sup>

The corruption of Egypt was only the beginning of the spread of paganism, but the process was gradual; not all innocence was lost at once.<sup>23</sup> Lactantius' view of the history of the world enabled him to find in ancient authors memories, more or less distorted, of primitive monotheism. Poetry was the oldest sort of literature,<sup>24</sup> and Orpheus the oldest of the poets; as a contemporary of Hercules and the Argonauts he must have lived about 1200 BC.<sup>25</sup> He sang of 365 gods,<sup>26</sup> but he also testified to one true and great God, the first origin of all things.<sup>27</sup> Similarly the Seven Sages of ancient Greece retained memories of the wisdom which had in primitive times been the property of all God's people;<sup>28</sup> they too testified to a single providence as the source of everything.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, they and Plato after them conducted research among the Persians and Egyptians to find further treasures of truth and wisdom.<sup>30</sup>

Among these witnesses to primitive monotheism, Hermes Trismegistus held a special place, on account of his considerable antiquity.<sup>31</sup> The Hermes whose teachings Lactantius admired was of the family of Uranus and Saturn,<sup>32</sup> his wisdom was recorded in the *Perfect Discourse* by his grandson, also called Hermes, as a dialogue with Asclepius, grandson of the god Asclepius.<sup>33</sup> As the god Asclepius was a grandson of Jupiter,

<sup>22</sup> *Oratio ad sanctos* 16.

<sup>23</sup> The reference to the sudden way that 'by the folly of a single age' polytheism was introduced (*Inst.* iv 1.1) must refer to the activities of the family of Saturn and Jupiter in the Greek world. Lactantius was able to perceive wisdom surviving even in those who had begun the process of corruption: Solomon made the serious mistake of founding a temple and a city (*Inst.* iv 13.24) which marked a stage in the Jews' falling away from the religion of the Most High God, yet he was still 'sapientissimum regem' (*Inst.* iv 6.6) and an important prophet.

<sup>24</sup> *Inst.* vii 22.2: 'Licet sint multo antiquiores quam historici et oratores et cetera genera scriptorum . . . eam vero temere ac leviter auditam in modum commenticiae fabulae prodiderunt'.

<sup>25</sup> *Inst.* i 5.4: 'vetustissimus poetarum'; for the date *Inst.* i 22.17 with i 9.10, and *JTS* xxxvi (1985) 302. Also he was of a generation to be the first to introduce the worship of Liber in Boeotia where that son of Jupiter was born: *Inst.* i 22.15–16. Orpheus illustrates well the piecemeal way that polytheism supplanted man's original innocent religion; he was well aware that Saturn and Jupiter were mortal monarchs (*Inst.* i 13.11; i 5.7), and could witness to the Most High God.

<sup>26</sup> *Inst.* i 7.7.

<sup>27</sup> *Inst.* i 5.4–7.

<sup>28</sup> For the process by which wisdom because the property of a few, and then only the object of desire for philosophers, *studiosos sapientiae*, *Inst.* iv 1.9–14, with iii 16.7–17.

<sup>29</sup> *Inst.* i 6.15–19.

<sup>30</sup> *Inst.* iv 2.4, a tradition studied by H. Dörrie, 'Platons Reisen zu fernen Völkern—Zur Geschichte eines Motives der Platon-Legende und zu seiner Neuwendung durch Laktanz' in W. den Boer et al. (ed.) *Romanitas et Christianitas: studia J. H. Waszink oblata* . . . (Amsterdam and London 1973) 99–118.

<sup>31</sup> *Inst.* i 6.1. For a list of Lactantius' references to Hermes A. Wlosok (n. 13) 261–2. *Ira* 11.12 places Hermes 'long before' any philosopher, or even the Seven Sages.

<sup>32</sup> *Inst.* i 11.61: 'Trismegistus . . . Uranum Saturnum Mercurium nominavit cognatos suos'. On the five Mercuries of Cicero *de Natura Deorum* iii 56, *Inst.* i 6.2–4.

<sup>33</sup> *Asclepius*, the Latin version of the *Perfect Discourse* which survives in full, makes Hermes, the founder of the city which bore his name (cf. *Inst.* i 6.3), the grandfather of the teacher of the *Perfect Discourse* (*Asclep.* 37).

<sup>12</sup> *Inst.* i 22.19–20. For Jupiter's own first sacrifice, *Inst.* i 11.63–5. In general on Lactantius' view of world history O. P. Nicholson, 'The Source of the Dates in Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*' *JTS* xxxvi n.s. (1985) 292–310; F. Wehrli, 'L. Caelius Firmianus Lactantius über die Geschichte des wahren Gottesglaubens', in R. B. Palmer and R. Hamerton-Kelly (eds.) *Philomathes* Fs R. Merlan (The Hague 1971) 251–63; J.-C. Fredouille, 'Lactance historien des religions', in J. Fontaine and M. Perrin (eds.) *Lactance et son temps* (Paris 1978) 237–52.

<sup>13</sup> *Inst.* vii 6.1, on the theological implications of which A. Wlosok *Laktanz und die philosophische Gnosis* (Abhandlungen Heidelberg. Akad. 1960) 192 ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Inst.* ii 1.14–19; ii 2.19–24; ii 5 ff.; *de ira Dei* (*Ira*) 20.10–11; *de opificio Dei* (*Opif.*) 8.1–3: 'hominem . . . ad caeli contemplationem rigidum erexit bipedemque constituit' (2). On Lactantius' anthropology, M. Perrin, 'L'homme antique et chrétien' (Paris 1981); on *rectus status* and *contemplatio caeli*, A. Wlosok *op. cit.* (n. 13)

<sup>15</sup> *Inst.* i 22.1–8 describes Numa's activities in Rome; *Inst.* i 22.9–15 the earlier importation of pagan religion into Latium by Faunus, grandson of Saturn.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Herodotus ii 53 ff., ii 144 ff.; Iamblichus *de mysteriis* vii 5. Porphyry thought the Egyptians 'the most learned nation of all': *de abstinentia* ii 5 (quoting Theophrastus, and in turn cited by Eusebius *Prep. Ev.* i 9).

<sup>17</sup> *Inst.* ii 13.5–7: 'haec fuit prima gens quae deum ignoravit' (7).

<sup>18</sup> *Inst.* ii 13.10–11; Lactantius expands on the agency of the demons, the fallen angels and their offspring, in devising pagan cults in *Inst.* ii 16. He had disdain for the animal-headed gods of Egypt: *Inst.* ii 5.35–6; v 20.12; cf. iii 20.16.

<sup>19</sup> *Inst.* iv 5.6: 'about 900 years before the Trojan War'. Cf. *JTS* xxxvi n.s. (1985) 305–6.

<sup>20</sup> *Inst.* iv 10.12.

<sup>21</sup> *Inst.* vii 15.6 interprets the plagues of Egypt as signs of what was to come, a mere foretaste of the Last Times when 'Egypt shall suffer punishment for her foolish superstitions and will run with blood as with a river' (10). *Inst.* vii 18.3–4 reinforces the prophecy by quoting the Hermetic *Asclep.* 26.

the *Perfect Discourse*, on Lactantius' reckoning, preserved wisdom from the middle of the second millennium BC.

Hermes asserted unequivocally the unity of God.<sup>34</sup> He was credited with knowing about the demons, the fallen angels who with their offspring had given the original incitement to idolatry.<sup>35</sup> He vigorously condemned sacrifice, even of incense; what God wanted was not material offerings but human thanks and praise.<sup>36</sup> The words of Hermes were for Lactantius not isolated *testimonia* torn from their original context, they were fragments of evidence which guaranteed the validity of a larger pattern. Christianity was no novelty, it was the reassertion of the original religion of mankind, the worship of the Most High God. If, as Dr Fowden proposes, Hermes was quoted when Constantine promised Rome an obelisk in 326, the occasion would have been laid open to this Christian interpretation.<sup>37</sup> The obelisk represented worship older than any of the venerable cults of Rome, and the era from which it came was one when men had not wholly forgotten the Most High God, the divinity of whose primacy Christians were now trying to remind them.

A further feature of the obelisk might recommend it to Christians as a survival of this primitive age. Obelisks were commonly associated with the Sun.<sup>38</sup> Few notions are harder for us to grasp than the various religious significances of the Sun, the greatest power in heaven.<sup>39</sup> But Lactantius pointed to its importance for Christians: at the time of the Creation God had known that man would fall into the error of polytheism, so he made the Sun 'a singular and shining light' to remind men of his majesty, power and brightness.<sup>40</sup> An obelisk might recall the Most High God by its associations with the Sun as well as by its origins in an age before idols.

If the Rome obelisk might have had such Christian

<sup>34</sup> *Inst.* i 5.4-5; cf. iv 13.2. 'Trismegistus . . . de deo patre omnia, de filio locutus est multa quae divinis continentur arcanis': *Inst.* i 27.20.

<sup>35</sup> He called the Devil 'daemoniarachus' (*Inst.* ii 14.6). It was the demons who were responsible for instigating paganism, so Lactantius thought (*Inst.* ii 14-16); he agreed with Hermes that the knowledge of God was the only defence against them (*Inst.* ii 15.4-8).

<sup>36</sup> *Inst.* vi 25.10-11 translates the passage preserved as *Asclep.* 41.

<sup>37</sup> Of course the interpretations of events offered in official speeches could be oblique, witness the orator of 313 who alluded to Constantine's 'personal secret with the Divine Mind' (*Pan. Lat.* ix 2.5). Lactantius thought that it was the poet's job to present *res gestae* 'obliquis figurationibus' (*Inst.* i 11.24), and he thought that poetry had its beginnings in panegyrics (*Inst.* i 13.15).

<sup>38</sup> e.g. E. Buchner *Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus* (Mainz 1982).

<sup>39</sup> G. H. Halsberghe *The Cult of Sol Invictus* (Leiden, EPRO 23, 1978) collects much material, some of it confusingly from the *Historia Augusta*, but is concerned more with specific manifestations of cult than with the reverence widely felt for the Sun. On Christians and the Sun F. J. Dölger *Sol Salutis* (Munster 1925).

<sup>40</sup> *Inst.* ii 5.1; ii 9.11-12. It may not be too obvious to point out that an obelisk points to the sky, a telling indication for one who like Lactantius thought that man was made for 'contemplatio caeli' (cf. note 14 above). The Phoenix, about which Lactantius wrote a poem, was also associated with the Sun: *Phoen.* 9: 'Solis nemus'; *Phoen.* 43: the Sun sets the time of its metamorphosis; *Phoen.* 58: 'Et sola arcanis conscia, Phoebe, tuis'; *Phoen.* 121: 'Solis ad urbem'. The frequent references to Phoebus (never Apollo) in the poem, might be explained by Lactantius on the lines of Orpheus' use of Phanes and Phaethon (*Inst.* i 5.4-5) combined with his theory of poetic licence (*Inst.* i 11.24-5). For a commentary on Lactantius' *Phoenix*, see the unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis of Claire Sharp (1986), on the character of the poem F. J. Bryce in *Studia Patristica* (1988, forthcoming).

associations, so might another obelisk possibly erected by Constantine in a city which lacked the powerful pagan forces present in the City of Rome. Arles in Provence was a regular residence of Constantine, and was one of the cities to which he gave his name, though it is hard to find surviving monuments with which the emperor can be securely associated.<sup>41</sup> However, it is not improbable that Constantine was responsible for the presence of a red granite obelisk disengaged in the 17th century near the site of the city's ancient circus, and subsequently re-erected in the marketplace, now the Place de la République. Unfortunately the obelisk bears no inscription, Latin, Greek or Hieroglyphic, and is mentioned in no literary source earlier than the 14th century; the current excavations in the circus have yet to uncover the *spina*, where the obelisk base might be.<sup>42</sup> But genuine Egyptian obelisks are sufficiently rare in the West to suggest that this, like that of Rome, might be the product of imperial munificence, and Constantine was an emperor closely associated with Arles.<sup>43</sup> Christians in the city which had witnessed the church council convoked by Constantine would have no reason to be offended if they looked upon it in the spirit in which Lactantius regarded Hermes Trismegistus, as a monument of the primaevial monotheism which they were trying to revive.

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<sup>41</sup> For Constantine's periods of residence, Barnes (n. 5) 68, 72-3. Constantine's renaming of the city was referred to in a letter of 450 from the bishops of Gaul to Leo the Great (*Leo ep.* 65.3; cf. *CIL* XII, p. 83-4). The comprehensive account of the monuments is still L. A. Constans *Arles Antique* (Paris 1921); for the Christian city (with bibliography) P.-A. Février in ed. N. Gauthier et J.-Ch. Picard *Topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule III: provinces ecclésiastiques de Vienne et d'Arles* par J. Biarne et al. (Paris 1986) 73-84.

<sup>42</sup> On the circus and the obelisk, J. Humphrey *Roman Circuses* (London 1984) 390-8. For the most recent excavation report, *Gallia* xlv (1986) 394-7; digging continues.

<sup>43</sup> Of other western obelisks, that at Vienne, though taller than that at Arles (and so perhaps reflecting the long-standing local rivalry) is not of Egyptian granite (Humphrey [n. 42] 402-3), and that at Merida is presumed to exist only from its base (*ibid.* 371). Apart from Constantine, the emperors most likely to have given an obelisk to Arles would be his sons, one of whom, Constantine II, was born in the city (*Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.4; Zosimus ii 22.2), while another, Constantius II, celebrated his Tricennalia there in 353 with elaborate games (*Amm. Marc.* xiv 5.1). It might be that at Arles, as at Rome, Constantius II could have carried out his father's intentions in the manner suggested by Dr Fowden and Ammianus Marcellinus: 'obelisks think nothing of lying around for decades or centuries' (*JHS* cvii [1987] 53).

## Herakles' Attributes and their appropriation by Eros

(PLATE IV)

This note discusses some of the images and ideas that led to the depiction of Eros with the attributes of Herakles (PLATE IVa), an iconographical type that was