

CONSTANTINE'S PORPHYRY COLUMN: THE EARLIEST LITERARY ALLUSION*

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(Plate IX)

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to what I believe to be the earliest surviving allusion to Constantine's porphyry column in Constantinople. Although the proposition that the *Life of Elagabalus* in the *Historia Augusta* alludes to the porphyry column is incapable of strict proof, it has, at the very least, considerable heuristic value. By focusing our attention on, for example, the column's Theban origin or the fact that it is not a monolith, it enables us to propose a narrative of the progress of Constantine's project which does much to illuminate the monument's significance. The passage under consideration also provokes a new look at the old debate about the origin of the statue on top of the column — had it or had it not once been an image of Apollo? This idea or suspicion has played an important role in all discussions of Constantine's 'ambiguity' in religious matters.

I. THE LIFE OF ELAGABALUS

Late Latin literature is traversed by a rich vein of humour: one thinks of Macrobius' collection of jokes by the emperor Augustus,¹ not to mention Tacitus' 'liber facetiarum' known to us only from Fabius Planciades Fulgentius.² The author of the *Historia Augusta* — and I shall assume there was but one, though the individual lives are attributed to several different writers — was likewise endowed with a sense of humour.³ Some of it is slapstick, some allusive. The *Life of Elagabalus* contains much of both. The emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus, commonly called Elagabalus after the Emesene sun-god whom he served as priest, ruled from 218 until 222, when he was murdered at the age of 18. His tastes were undeniably adolescent:

His chariots were made of jewels and gold, for he scorned those that were merely of silver or ivory or bronze. He would harness women of the greatest beauty to a wheel-barrow in fours, in twos, or in threes or even more, and would drive them about, usually naked himself, as were also the women who were pulling him.⁴

Another chariot, 'drawn by four elephants, he drove on the Vatican Hill, destroying the tombs which obstructed the way'.⁵ This is curiously specific. If it is an allusion to more recent history, Constantine is probably the intended victim. Our author is, after all, a polytheist and a Roman.⁶ Perhaps his ancestral tombs had lain under what was now, in the late fourth century,

* The germ of this article was first tried out on a graduate seminar at Princeton in the spring of 1990. It was further developed in a lecture to the Department of Classics, University of Toronto, 30 November 1990, and reached its final form while I was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 1990–1. Drafts have been read and improved by Glen Bowersock, Alan Cameron, Elizabeth Key Fowden, Christopher Jones, Ann Kuttner, and Cyril Mango. To all I am much indebted. None of them is responsible, though, for any errors of judgement that persist. My use of 'polytheist' in place of 'pagan' may need explanation. First, it is inappropriate to use a term derived from Christian apologetic to denote a religious culture whose study is struggling to emerge from Christian stereotypes. 'Polytheist' too was used pejoratively by Christian apologists, in antithesis to 'monotheist'; but polytheists did after all believe in the existence of many gods, even though some subordinated them to a higher power. Secondly, classical and Christian scholars' persistence in using 'paganism' is one more sign of their isolation from other disciplines, particularly anthropology, where 'polytheism' is the norm: see the studies collected in F. Schmidt (ed.), *L'impensable polythéisme. Etudes d'historiographie religieuse* (1988). 'Paganism' can still

though be used to refer to Christian representation of polytheism.

¹ Macr., *Sat.* II.4.

² Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, *Exp. serm. ant.* 54.

³ R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography: Studies in the Historia Augusta* (1971), 261–2, 273–4; and cf. *V. Aurel.* x.1: 'frivola haec fortassis cuipiam et nimis levia esse videantur, sed curiositas nihil recusat'.

⁴ *V. Heliofab.* xxix.1–2 (trans., here and elsewhere, D. Magie). R. Turcan, *Héliogabale et le sacre du soleil* (1985), 178 and fig. 27, claims to find the scene represented on a cameo in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

⁵ *V. Heliofab.* xxiii.1. For elephant-drawn chariots in triumphal contexts, see Plut., *Pomp.* xiv.4; G. Fuchs, *Architekturdarstellungen auf römischen Münzen der Republik und der frühen Kaiserzeit* (1969), pl. 8, nos 99–100 (these two references courtesy of Ann Kuttner); Zonaras xii.27. In the context of the present article, the solar symbolism of the elephant should perhaps be noted: R. Turcan, *Les sarcophages romains à représentations dionysiaques* (1966), 466.

⁶ R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (1968), 192–202; A. Momigliano, *Quinto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (1975), 78–81.

the Basilica of St Peter. We know that the tomb of St Peter had been surrounded by burials of polytheists as well as Christians.⁷

Interestingly, the *Life of Elagabalus* presents itself as having been commissioned by Constantine:⁸

It may perhaps seem strange to some, revered Constantine, that such a scourge as I have described should ever have sat on the throne of the emperors and, moreover, for nearly three years . . . I ask for pardon for having set down in writing what I have found in various authors, even though I have passed over in silence many vile details and those things which may not even be spoken of without the greatest shame . . . So much concerning Elagabalus, the details of whose life you have wished me, though unwilling and reluctant, to gather together from Greek and Latin books and to set down in writing and present to you . . .

Several other biographies in the *Historia Augusta* — those of Clodius Albinus, Geta, Alexander Severus, the two Maximins and the three Gordians — pretend to be addressed to Constantine or to have been stimulated by his curiosity. But none goes in for the elaborate charade of which the above is only a sample. The very idea that Constantine could have ordered research into the details of Elagabalus' life is so preposterous as to be an obvious hint. So too, perhaps, is the failure of the *Historia Augusta* to associate Constantine with the biographies of certain 'good' emperors, the Antonines, for example, or Claudius II Gothicus (268–70), Constantine's admiration for and claim of descent from whom our author mentions at both the beginning and the end of the *Life of Elagabalus*.

Not surprisingly, the *Life of Elagabalus* has been held to be full of barbs against Constantine.⁹ The passages adduced are indeed striking. Elagabalus' mother, for example, reminds us of Helena: 'he did no public business without her consent, although she lived like a harlot and practised all manner of lewdness in the palace'.¹⁰ Elagabalus' unsuccessful attempt to murder his adopted son Alexander Severus¹¹ recalls Constantine's murder of his son Crispus. A recurrent theme of the *Life of Elagabalus* is its subject's inordinate luxuriousness (*luxuria*, τρυφή), which besides being standard in the criticism of tyrants is also one of the major charges levelled against Constantine by polytheist writers such as Julian and the historian Zosimus.¹² In matters of religion, a central preoccupation of both emperors, we read of Elagabalus that

it was his desire to abolish not only the religious ceremonies of the Romans but also those of the whole world, his one wish being that the god Elagabalus should be worshipped everywhere.¹³

For 'Heliogabalus deus' read 'Christianorum deus', and one has the polytheists' basic complaint against Constantine. Like Constantine, Elagabalus refused to ascend the Capitol and perform customary ceremonies, in his case those connected with his assumption of the consulate in 222.¹⁴ Like Constantine, Elagabalus not only sought to impose his own god, but also accumulated other gods' *sacra* in order to underline and reinforce the triumph of the new cult.¹⁵ In particular he took the Palladium, the ancient image of Athena that Aeneas had supposedly brought from Troy, and which was kept in the *penus Vestae*, and installed it in his god's new temple on the Palatine.¹⁶ We know nothing for certain about its subsequent history;

⁷ J. Toynbee and J. Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (1956), 109–17.

⁸ *V.Heliogab.* II, xxxiv, xxxv.

⁹ Most recently by R. Turcan, 'Héliogabale précurseur de Constantin?', *BAGB* (1988), 38–52. More generally, the *V.Heliogab.* is widely regarded as a tract against (Christian) intolerance: M. Pietrzykowski, 'Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal', *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986), 1809; M. Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal* (1989), 11–12.

¹⁰ *V.Heliogab.* II.1. On Helena's reputation, see Turcan, op.cit. (n. 9), 47–8, also pointing out that her residence, the Sessorian Palace, had been the scene of Heliogabalus' debauches.

¹¹ *V.Heliogab.* XIII–XIV.

¹² *V.Heliogab.* XVIII.4; Jul., *Caes.* 336a; Zos. II.32.1, 34.2.

¹³ *V.Heliogab.* VI.7.

¹⁴ *V.Heliogab.* XV.7. T. D. Barnes, *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire* (1984), v.71, denies any allusion to Constantine — apparently because he thinks the story about Elagabalus is true. But that would make the allusion all the more pointed. Constantine: Zos. II.29.5, with Paschoud's note.

¹⁵ *V.Heliogab.* III.4, VI.7–VII.5. Turcan, op. cit. (n. 9), 45, points out that Herodian and Dio Cassius do not support the *V.Heliogab.* 'Le rédacteur tendancieux n'a grossi et multiplié ces exemples de cleptomanie culturelle que pour suggérer au lecteur d'évidentes analogies.' Constantine: Eus., *V.C.* III.54.

¹⁶ *V.Heliogab.* III.4, VI.9.

but the Byzantines maintained that Constantine took it to his new capital of Constantinople and buried it along with an assortment of Christian relics under a porphyry column which he erected in the Forum of Constantine.¹⁷ Atop the column was placed a statue of Constantine himself.

According to the *Life of Elagabalus* xxiv.7, Elagabalus

planned to erect a single column of enormous size which could be ascended inside, so as to place on its summit the god Elagabalus, but he could not find so large a stone, even though he planned to bring it from the district of Thebes.¹⁸

This passage has never before been adduced in support of the contention that the *Life of Elagabalus* is, at least episodically, a satire on Constantine. W. Hartke thought it a double allusion to Constantius' obelisk in the Circus Maximus and Theodosius' column in the Forum Tauri at Constantinople.¹⁹ But Elagabalus' alleged column-project presents much more striking parallels with Constantine's. In fact this passage, our only source for Elagabalus' project, makes much better sense if read as a satire on Constantine.

In the first place, Elagabalus wanted his column to be a monolith, like Antoninus Pius' column of red granite, but also to have an internal staircase, like the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Staircases by which one could ascend to the top of a monumental column and gain a view out over the whole city were highly esteemed,²⁰ but such an arrangement would of course be impossible if the column were a monolith.²¹ The apparent confusion is explained only when one recalls that Constantine's column is made of porphyry drums, and therefore has the worst of both worlds: it is not a monolith, nor does it possess the staircase by which one ascends the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius.²² Our author comically supposes that Elagabalus = Constantine wanted a monolith with stairs inside it, in order to draw attention to the ineptness of Constantine's much-vaunted monument.

Secondly, Elagabalus' column was to be of stone from Egyptian Thebes. It should be noted that our author does not at first sight seem very interested in telling us the stone's type and provenance, only that it was to be a large monolith. The reference to Thebes is primarily intended to impress on us the effort Elagabalus was prepared to make in order to find the right size of stone. But in an author who takes considerable interest in different types of stone and their decorative value, this is not neglect but deliberate allusiveness. In the previous two sentences he has just described the 'saxa Lacedaemonia ac porphyretica' with which Elagabalus had paved 'the open spaces in the palace', so the less direct allusion to 'Theban' stone in the sentence that concerns us has stylistic justification too. We should take the hint that the column was to be of porphyry, the best-known and, because of its colour, most distinctively imperial of the stones that one had to go to the Thebaid to find.²³

But in Elagabalus' day there was little if any precedent for setting up a monumental porphyry column.²⁴ Antoninus Pius' monolith, for example, had been of red Aswan granite. So too the column that Diocletian erected at Alexandria ('Pompey's Pillar'), though the statue

¹⁷ Procop., *BG* I.15.11-14; Barnes, *op. cit.* (n. 14), v.68. On Constantine's porphyry column see M. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (1977), 255-7, to be corrected and supplemented by reference to C. Mango, 'Constantinopolitana', *JDAI* 80 (1965), 306-13, and 'Constantine's porphyry column and the chapel of St. Constantine', *Δελτ.Χρ.Ἀρχ.Ἐτ.* 10 (1980-1), 103-10. The relics are listed by M. Karamouzi, 'Das Forum und die Säule Constantini in Konstantinopel: Gegebenheiten und Probleme', *Balkan Studies* 27 (1986), 222, n. 19. With Müller-Wiener's photograph of 1880/90 compare mine of 1989 (pl. IX).

¹⁸ 'Constituerat et columnam unam collocare ingentem, ad quam ascenderetur intrinsecus, ita ut in summo Heliogabulum deum collocaret, sed tantum saxum non invenit, cum id de Thebaide adferre cogitaret.'

¹⁹ W. Hartke, *Römische Kinderkaiser. Eine Struktur-analyse römischen Denkens und Daseins* (1951), 342-3.
²⁰ See e.g. Amm.Marc. xvi.10.14 on the 'elatos ... vertices qui scansili suggestu consurgunt / elatos ... vertices scansili suggestu concharum' admired by Constantius at Rome; G. Becatti, *La colonna coelide istoriata* (1960), 99-101, on the column of Theodosius at Constantinople.

²¹ S. P. Kyriakidis, 'Ἱστορικά σημειώματα', *Ἑλληνικά* 17 (1962), 234, ridiculously suggested, on the basis of the *Tabula Peutingeriana's* somewhat distorted depiction of the porphyry column, that the shaft was encased in a wooden structure which contained a staircase.

²² 'Haec columna porphyretica non gradibus pervia est, sed solida. Itaque falso tradit Fulvius antiquarius coelide esse': P. Gyllius, *De topographia Constantinopoleos, et de illius antiquitatibus* (1562), 141.

²³ *Chron.Pasch.* I.528 (Dindorf) says Constantine's porphyry column is λίθου Θηβαίου. For the HA's interest in marbles and their decorativeness, see also *V.Alex.Sev.* xxv.7 (contradicting the passage from the *V.Hellogab.* here discussed).

²⁴ Discussing a papyrus that mentions the transportation of a monolithic column measuring 50 Roman feet (14.69 m), J. T. Peña, *P.Giss.* 69: evidence for the supplying of stone transport operations in Roman Egypt and the production of fifty-foot monolithic column shafts', *JRA* 2 (1989), 127, 130-1, has shown that shafts of this size are very rare in Roman architecture, and were probably never made of porphyry (though there was a 'great Theban column' (cf. n. 23) bearing a bronze statue of Tiberius at Antioch: Ioan.Mal. x.233).

atop it was of porphyry.²⁵ In fact, Diocletian had a special weakness for the purple stone from Egypt, and his reign saw a striking growth of activity at the unique source, 'Mons Porphyrites' in the eastern desert, north-east of Thebes.²⁶ Diocletian placed images of himself and the other Tetrarchs on small porphyry columns such as those still preserved in the Vatican Library,²⁷ and it has even been suggested that the drums that make up Constantine's porphyry column were originally prepared for Diocletian.²⁸ Constantine's single column in the forum of New Rome probably alluded to the 13.6 m white marble 'Column of Phocas' that Diocletian, it now seems, was responsible for erecting on a high base at a focal point in the Forum Romanum.²⁹ This column, which presumably bore a statue, is in turn closely linked to the Tetrarchic monument behind the adjacent Rostra, whose five monumental columns of red granite bore porphyry statues of the four emperors and of Jupiter. A relief on the Arch of Constantine in which Constantine addresses the Roman people (the 'oratio' panel) suggestively places him directly in front of the Jupiter column.³⁰ But whatever the partial antecedents under the Tetrarchy, Constantine's single monumental 23.4 m porphyry column, standing altogether some 37 m above the level of his new capital's forum, was in practice an innovation, something never before seen. Late-fourth-century readers associated monumental porphyry columns with Constantine, not Elagabalus.

Thirdly, we learn that Elagabalus' column was to be topped by an anthropomorphic statue of the god Elagabalus — or such at least would have been a Roman reader's most natural interpretation of this passage. Remarkably, there is not so much as a passing allusion in the *Life of Elagabalus* to deter this interpretation. No reference whatever is made to the basic fact, which Herodian for example had carefully underlined for the benefit of his readers, that the cult of Elagabalus was usually addressed not to a manufactured statue bearing an image of the god like those the Greeks and Romans were familiar with, but to a betyl, an aniconic stone, which in the surviving depictions is often surmounted by an eagle.³¹ And indeed, coins of the emperor Elagabalus show both the betyl and a conventional anthropomorphic Sol with the legend CONSERVATOR AUG, so it seems that the god Elagabalus could be represented in either guise.³² All the more probable, then, that the late-fourth-century reader, who is anyway unlikely to have been well-informed about such arcane matters, will have envisaged an anthropomorphic statue. Since he was used to thinking of the emperor too as 'Elagabalus',³³ rather than as M. Aurelius Antoninus (which could equally have been Caracalla), he will have realized that there was something ambiguous about the image — Elagabalus the god or Elagabalus the emperor? A similar doubt attached to the statue on Constantine's porphyry column.

II. THE PORPHYRY COLUMN

Constantine erected the porphyry column in the middle of his new capital's circular forum, and alone among the definitely Constantinian monuments it still stands more or less intact today.³⁴ But for most of its history it has seemed more impressive and mysterious than aesthetic. It has suffered sadly from the passage of time, partly from numerous fires in its neighbourhood, but also from the effect of earthquakes and lightning on both individual

²⁵ P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (1972), 2.85–90.

²⁶ R. Delbrueck, *Antike Porphyrrwerke* (1932), 24–6; A. Dworakowska, *Quarries in Roman Provinces* (1983), 95–7. For an up-to-date general account of the quarries, see M. J. Klein, *Untersuchungen zu den kaiserlichen Steinbrüchen an Mons Porphyrites und Mons Claudianus in der östlichen Wüste Agyptens* (1988); also (especially for its photographs) G. Fuchs, 'Die arabische Wüste (Ägypten) und ihre historische Bedeutung von der Vorgeschichte bis in die Römerzeit', *Antike Welt* 19.4 (1988), 15–30.

²⁷ Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 26), 91–3, pls 35–7.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 144.

²⁹ C. F. Giuliani and P. Verduchi, *L'area centrale del Foro Romano* (1987), 174–7, 187, and figs 233, 262.

³⁰ H. Kähler, *Das Fuenfsaekulendenkmal fuer die Tetrarchen auf dem Forum Romanum* (1964). The four

columns that bore the imperial statues seem to have been almost 20 m high. My thanks to Ann Kuttner for drawing my attention to the Diocletianic remodelling of the Forum Romanum.

³¹ Herodian v.3.5; C. Augé and P. Linant de Bellefonds, 'Elagabalos', *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* 3 (1986), 1.795–8, 2.542.

³² H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* 5 (1950), 560, nos 197–200; H. Usener, 'Sol invictus', *RhM* 60 (1905), 470–1.

³³ Aurel. Vict., *Caes.* xxiii.1–2; *V.Heliogab.*, *passim*.

³⁴ To it we may add the Column of the Goths, if it is indeed Constantinian: C. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople (IV^e–VII^e siècles)* (1985), 34. C. Barsanti, 'Note archeologiche su Bisanzio romana', *Milione* 2 (1990), 45–9, tentatively assigns the column to Claudius Gothicus.

drums and the pillar as a whole.³⁵ The gradual disintegration of the drums meant that, as early as 416, they had to be held together by iron hoops; Constantine's statue and apparently also the capital on which it stood fell in a storm in 1106; and in 1779 the lower part of the column had to be encased in a 'tapering sheath of stonework'³⁶ in order to support it. Looking at the elegant, intact and stable obelisk of Theodosius not far away in the Hippodrome, one can well imagine that Constantine would have preferred a monolith. But monoliths of any stone, and *a fortiori* of rare Egyptian porphyry, could not just be picked up on demand. Not surprisingly, Constantine 'tantum saxum non invenit', as the *Life of Elagabalus* puts it — despite the mistaken impression of some later Byzantines that the porphyry column was indeed a monolith.³⁷ But the *Life of Elagabalus* implies that, before settling for a column of drums, Constantine sent a mission to Thebes itself to see whether a suitable monolith could be found there, at the source.

Of this mission we perhaps have evidence in the graffiti left by Nicagoras, the torch-bearer of the Eleusinian mysteries, in the tomb of Ramses VI in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes. One of the graffiti is dated 326, and thanks 'the most pious emperor Constantine, who has granted me this'. I have suggested elsewhere that Constantine had sent Nicagoras to negotiate the removal from the temple of Amun at Karnak of both the great obelisk eventually erected by Constantius in the Circus Maximus at Rome, and now standing in the Piazza S. Giovanni in Laterano,³⁸ and the obelisk which still stands where it was erected by Theodosius I in the Hippodrome at Constantinople.³⁹ We now learn that Constantine also enquired at Thebes for a monolithic porphyry column. We should not be tempted to confuse this with either of the obelisks. Obelisks played an important part in Egyptian Sun-cult, a fact that was still understood in the fourth century.⁴⁰ Constantine may not have cared much about this,⁴¹ and was certainly quite capable of tampering with the objects of polytheist cult that he accumulated at Constantinople in order to adjust them to his own purposes.⁴² But aesthetic considerations alone would have prevented him, as they prevented all subsequent re-users of obelisks, from cutting off the obelisk's especially sacred tip⁴³ in order to use the shaft as a statue-base. It is reasonable, then, to suppose that Nicagoras was charged with securing a monolithic porphyry column as well as the obelisks.

The quarries at Mons Porphyrites were still functioning in this period, and an inscription found there suggests that columns were cut for the church-building programme at Jerusalem (εἰς τὴν χάλασιν τῶν κίωνων Ἱεροσολύμων), perhaps under Constantine.⁴⁴ Constantine was the sort of person who habitually planned ahead. Eusebius remarks with reference to the construction of the Anastasis basilica at Jerusalem that 'this object he had indeed for some time kept in mind, and had foreseen, as if by the aid of a superior intelligence, that which was to come to pass'.⁴⁵ The acquisition of the obelisks and the porphyry monolith was no less prestigious a project, that Constantine will already have had in mind before his conquest of the East in September 324. Indeed, he had been embellishing the Circus Maximus since 312,⁴⁶ but obviously could not provide it with an obelisk until he had conquered Egypt. About the porphyry column in particular, Constantine must have felt a great sense of urgency, since it

³⁵ For references, see above, n. 17.

³⁶ C. Mango, *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 10 (1980-1), 104.

³⁷ References collected by Karamouzi, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 226, n. 29.

³⁸ 'Nicagoras of Athens and the Lateran obelisk', *JHS* 107 (1987), 51-7.

³⁹ 'Obelisks between polytheists and Christians: Julian, *ep.* 59', in *Polyphonia Byzantina. Studies in Honour of W. J. Aerts* (1991).

⁴⁰ As e.g. by Constantius, or at least his Prefect of Rome Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus, according to A. Ragona's analysis, 'I tre indubbi segni di riconoscimento dell'obelisco di Costanzo II nel mosaico del Circo di Piazza Armerina', *Cronache di Archeologia* 23 (1984) [1988], 127-8, of the 'Lateran' obelisk's orientation when it was set up in the Circus Maximus.

⁴¹ *Amm. Marc.* xvii. 4. 12-13.

⁴² See below, p. 130, on a statue of Rhea-Cybele.

⁴³ On which see *Jul., ep.* 59.

⁴⁴ A. Bernand, *Pan du désert* (1977), 70-3; cf. T. Kraus, J. Röder, and W. Müller-Wiener, 'Mons

Claudius — Mons Porphyrites. Bericht über die zweite Forschungsreise 1964', *MDAI(K)* 22 (1967), 196. Our knowledge of this lost inscription is defective and its interpretation controversial. Bernand's commentary is best ignored. Χάλασις can perfectly well allude to the lowering of columns: cf. D. Dimitrakos, *Μέγα λεξικόν τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης* (1949-51), s.v. χαλώ (4). Bernand's attempts to deny the reference to a Christian project in Jerusalem are groundless. Unfortunately *Eus., VC* iii. 34, says of the Anastasis church no more than that it was adorned ἐξαιρέτως κίοσι κόσμῳ τε πλείστῳ (the latter phrase rendered by Bernand 'de partout'). Work was far from complete at Constantine's death: G. Kretschmar, 'Festkalender und Memorialstätten Jerusalems in altkirchlicher Zeit', in H. Busse and G. Kretschmar, *Jerusalem Heiligtumstraditionen in altkirchlicher und frühislamischer Zeit* (1987), 43-4.

⁴⁵ *Eus., VC* iii. 29 (trans. E. C. Richardson, amended).

⁴⁶ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (1986), 129.

was destined for the central position in the new capital and for a major role in the ceremony of dedication in 330.⁴⁷

For this reason, Nicagoras will probably not have been expected to commission a new order, and may even have been spared the exhausting 165 km desert-journey from the Nile to Mons Porphyrites.⁴⁸ His job was simply to enquire whether there was available a ready-cut porphyry monolith of the size required — an improbable but not fantastic idea, as witness the 18.4 m, 240-ton monolithic column still to be seen waiting on the ground at the nearby Mons Claudianus granite-quarries.⁴⁹ Admittedly there is no parallel to this at Mons Porphyrites, or evidence that porphyry columns of comparable size were ever produced.⁵⁰ And abandoned columns were usually anyway defective. Constantine's advisers were no doubt well aware that Nicagoras was unlikely to be lucky, but the project was about as important as a project could well be, it was felt to be at least worth asking, and Nicagoras may also have been told to keep a look-out for suitable drums as a second-best option. When he reported back that the quarries could not help, Constantine turned to the empire's main centre for the accumulation of high-quality and rare stone, the city of Rome.⁵¹

In the second century Rome had been able, on at least one occasion, to supply a surplus giant Egyptian monolithic column for an urgent imperial project, the column of Antoninus Pius.⁵² In the fourth century this was perhaps inherently less likely to happen; and Constantine was indeed once more unlucky. Byzantine sources of the ninth century onwards do, though, assert that the drums that made up the porphyry column were found in Rome, and took three years to travel by sea to Constantinople.⁵³ The determined sceptic can point to the Byzantine habit of calling porphyry the 'Roman' stone *par excellence*.⁵⁴ He might also point to the Byzantines' undoubted taste for symbolic links between the Old Rome and the New. But porphyry was called 'Roman' stone precisely because it so often actually was imported from the old capital.⁵⁵ And unlike the Palladium, on which the burden of doubt has rightly been felt to rest rather heavily, the porphyry column neither played (so far as we know), nor is assigned by the Byzantines, any symbolic role in Old Rome, of the sort that could be portentously transferred to Constantinople. The Byzantines make nothing of the porphyry column's Roman connection — they just mention it in passing, as if it were a widely known fact. We may accept the Roman provenance, then, and perhaps also Delbrueck's suggestion that the column had originally been commissioned by Diocletian.⁵⁶ It was perfectly normal, especially at Rome, for stone to lie around in storage-yards for decades or even centuries before it was used.⁵⁷

Constantine's sense of urgency about the porphyry column was wholly vindicated by the subsequent history of the two obelisks, neither of which reached its destination until long after his death.⁵⁸ The porphyry column, by contrast, was erected between the years 328 and 330.⁵⁹ Since it took three years to travel from Rome, it may conceivably have set out as early as 325. But Nicagoras' graffiti at Thebes are dated 326. He could of course have arrived at Thebes and reported his failure to find a suitable monolith there in 325 or even late 324, and then stayed on.

⁴⁷ G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (1974), 39–40; but also Averil Cameron and J. Herrin (eds), *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (1984), 35.

⁴⁸ On the road, see Klein, op. cit. (n. 26), 18–20.

⁴⁹ T. Kraus and J. Röder, 'Mons Claudianus. Bericht über eine erste Erkundungsfahrt im März 1961', *MDAI(K)* 18 (1962), 113 and pls xxiii, xxvi; Kraus, Röder and Müller-Wiener, op. cit. (n. 44), pl. XLIIb; Fuchs, op. cit. (n. 26), 23, pl. 16.

⁵⁰ Peña, op. cit. (n. 24), 127.

⁵¹ J. B. Ward-Perkins, 'Nicomedia and the marble trade', *PBSR* 48 (1980), 24–7. I am grateful to Caroline and Oliver Nicholson for comment on this point.

⁵² J. B. Ward-Perkins, 'Columna divi Antonini', *Mélanges d'histoire ancienne et d'archéologie offerts à Paul Collart* (1976), 345–52.

⁵³ *Geo.Monach.*, p. 500 (de Boor); T. Preger (ed.), *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* (1901–7), 257.

⁵⁴ *Const.Porph.*, *Caer.* II.42; C. du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis* (1688), 1311.

⁵⁵ Anna Comnena VII.2.4.

⁵⁶ Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 26), 144. Granted the length of his reign, his passion for porphyry, and the stylistic argument adduced by Delbrueck, Diocletian is certainly the strongest candidate.

⁵⁷ Ward-Perkins, op. cit. (n. 51), 26.

⁵⁸ With Ammianus' account (xvii.4.13–14) of the Lateran obelisk's thirty years and more of tribulation on the way into exile, cf. Ward-Perkins's estimate, with reference to the transportation of a giant monolithic column from Egypt to Rome in the second century, that 'allowing for the hazards of seasonal shipping and for the time needed for the actual quarrying and dressing of one of these huge monoliths, one would have had to reckon on at least two years between ordering and delivery' (op. cit. (n. 52), 351). This is perhaps some measure of the changes that had come about in the empire since its Golden Age.

⁵⁹ *Chron.Pasch.* I.528 (entry s.a.328 but of more general import); Theoph., *Chron.*, p. 28 (A.M. 5821 = A.D. 329); V. Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines 1: La chronologie* (1958), 95–6, 240; Dagron, op. cit. (n. 47), 39–40 (placing of statue on column in 330).

But it is perhaps more likely that the column was erected in 329 or 330, in which case Nicagoras may be supposed to have arrived at Thebes nearer the date of his graffiti. History does not of course relate whether Constantine was pleased with the rather unusual column he finished up with. It rapidly came to be treated with great reverence — on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, whose iconography probably reached its final form in the later fourth or earlier fifth century, it stands alongside the city's personification, a seated female figure, as Constantinople's visual symbol.⁶⁰ But that was of course no judgement on its aesthetic merits. Such a judgement is implied, though, by Theodosius I's decision not to follow his illustrious predecessor's example. When he in turn erected a monumental column in the new forum he provided for Constantinople, the Forum Tauri, he reverted to the well-tried formula established by Trajan: a marble column carved with reliefs celebrating his martial exploits, and containing a staircase.⁶¹ Only the *Life of Elagabalus* preserves a hint of real scorn for the porphyry column — and indeed for the statue, but here there is corroboration in the Byzantine sources.

III. THE STATUE

As part of the new capital's dedication ceremonies in 330, the porphyry column was topped off with a statue. There was absolutely nothing unusual about the erection of an imperial statue on a column at the central point of one of the empire's great (or even lesser) cities.⁶² But everything to do with Constantine was and is looked at twice. Just as the *Historia Augusta* hints at some ambiguity about the personage — emperor or god? — represented by Elagabalus' statue, so too the literary sources for Constantine's column speak with two voices about the identity of the image it bore. The earliest direct reference, by the Arian ecclesiastical historian Philostorgius (died c. 439), speaks straightforwardly of 'the statue of Constantine on the porphyry column';⁶³ but by the time of the Justinianic chronicler Malalas, an extra element has been added:

On this column he [Constantine] set up a statue of himself (ἑαυτῷ ἔστησεν ἀνδριάντα), having seven rays on its head. He had this bronze statue brought from where it had stood in Ilium, a city of Phrygia.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ On the *Tabula Peutingeriana* see Dagrón, op. cit. (n. 47), 57; E. Weber, *Tabula Peutingeriana, Codex Vindobonensis 324* (1976), 22; J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (eds), *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (1987), 238–42. On reverence for the column see also Philostorgius, *HE* II. 17.

⁶¹ S. Sande, 'Some new fragments from the column of Theodosius', *AAAH* I (1981), 1–78 (with earlier bibliography); Mango, op. cit. (n. 34), 43 ('Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une imitation, mais d'une copie qui n'aurait pu être réalisée qu'à l'aide d'un dessin exécuté à Rome: cas unique, si je ne me trompe, dans toute l'histoire de l'art byzantin. Le motif de cette duplication est évident: Théodose, espagnol d'origine, était censé descendre de Trajan. Tout en exprimant sa légitimité, ses monuments proclamaient en même temps sa romanité.'). *ibid.*, 45. But smaller, more practical porphyry columns continued to be erected, as for the empress Aelia Eudoxia's silver statue in 403 (Socrates, *HE* VI. 18), following the example of the 'low porphyry column' set up for Helena by Constantine (Ioan. Mal. XIII. 321). And elements of a later fifth-century honorific column (of Leo I?) recently discovered in the Topkapi Sarayı do reveal the influence of Constantine's porphyry column, especially in the design of the shaft: U. Peschlow, 'Eine wiedergewonnene byzantinische Ehrensäule in Istanbul', in *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet* I (1986), 21–33.

⁶² Becatti, op. cit. (n. 20), esp. 84–5; also John Rufus, *V. Petri Iberi* (ed. R. Raabe, *Petrus der Iberer* (1895)), 62 (Oxyrhynchus), 73 (Alexandria).

⁶³ Philostorgius, *HE* II. 17 (to what extent paraphrased by Photius?). Cf. Socrates, *HE* I. 17: Constantine places

part of the True Cross in τῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἀνδριάντι . . . ὅς . . . ἐπὶ τοῦ πορφυροῦ καὶ μεγάλου κίονος ἴδρυται. Τοῦτο μὲν ἀκοῆ γράψας ἔχω. Πάντες δὲ σχεδὸν οἱ τῆν Κωνσταντίνου πόλιν οἰκούντες, ἀληθῆς εἶναι φασί; Theodoret, *HE* I. 34. 3: εἰ δὲ τις ἐκείνους διαπιστεῖ, τὰ νῦν περὶ τὴν ἐκείνου [sc. Κωνσταντίνου] θήρην καὶ τὸν ἀνδριάντα γινόμενα βλέπων πιστευσάτω; *Chron. Pasch.* I. 573: ἐκ τοῦ πορφυροῦ κίονος, ἐν ᾧ ἐπέστη Κωνσταντίνος ὁ μέγας βασιλεὺς; and Hesychius (probably sixth-century) ap. Preger, op. cit. (n. 53), 17: καὶ ὁ πορφυροῦς καὶ περιβλεπτός κίων, ἐφ' οὗπερ ἰδρῦσθαι Κωνσταντίνον ὀρώμεν δίκην ἡλίου προλάμποντα τοῖς πολίταις. At this its first occurrence, the phrase δίκην ἡλίου is clearly unrelated to the view that the statue was one of Apollo; but it is quoted by later exponents of this identification, e.g. Preger, op. cit. (n. 53), 174 (late tenth century); A. Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinupoleos* (1988), 50–85, 187–96), Leo Grammaticus (early eleventh century) 87 (Bekker) and Geo. Cedrenus I. 518. These last two sources assert that the statue was a Pheidias work from Athens; and A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora xxiv: Late Antiquity: A.D. 267–700* (1988), 76, follows Overbeck in suggesting that it may have been Pheidias' Apollo Parnopius from the Acropolis. See rather T. Preger, 'Konstantinos-Helios', *Hermes* 36 (1901), 457–62. Mango, op. cit. (n. 34), 44, suspects Cedrenus had access to an early source on the monuments of Constantinople; but here he merely follows the earlier chroniclers: cf. Preger, op. cit., 460.

⁶⁴ Ioan. Mal. XIII. 320. Cf. *Chron. Pasch.* I. 528: ἔστησεν ἑαυτοῦ ἀνδριάντα μέγαν, ἔχοντα ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ αὐτοῦ ἀκτίνας, ὅπερ χαλκούρηγμα ἤγαγεν ἀπὸ τῆς Φρυγίας; and likewise Geo. Monach., p. 500.

This implies that the statue did not originally represent Constantine; and later Byzantine tradition was indeed virtually unanimous in asserting that Constantine had reused a statue of 'Apollo'. Thus Anna Comnena:

In the centre of Constantine's Forum there was a bronze statue, facing the east and standing on a conspicuous column of porphyry, holding in its right hand a sceptre and in its left a globe (σφαῖραν) made of bronze. It was said to be a statue of Apollo, but the inhabitants of the city called it, I think, Anthelios. The great emperor Constantine, father and lord of the city, altered it to his own name, calling it the Statue of the emperor Constantine. But its original title persisted, and it was known by everybody as Anelios or Anthelios.⁶⁵

Almost none of the numerous scholars who have discussed this supposed image of Apollo metamorphosed into Constantine, and used it to illustrate *ambiguitas Constantimiana* in matters religious,⁶⁶ have paid attention to the story's evolution through time.⁶⁷ And though it would be easy to assert that the form of the story that is attested earlier must have preceded that attested later, and that the Constantine = Apollo idea is therefore an accretion, the fact is that Constantine did associate himself with Apollo.⁶⁸ We may not therefore exclude the possibility that the Constantine = Apollo idea goes right back to the date of the statue's dedication. It seems best then to take the story's developed form so we know what to look for, and work backwards in order to see how close we can get to Constantine's day. Then we will be in a better position to understand how the story developed.

Despite an abundance of references to Constantine's statue, the assertion that it was a reused image of Apollo is not clearly attested before the tenth century.⁶⁹ But our lack of earlier testimonies does not necessarily mean that the story entered circulation that late. Important evidence is contained in the antiquarian, pseudo-learned text of the early eighth century known as the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*.⁷⁰ The *Parastaseis* concerns itself with one of the Byzantines' perennial fascinations, the history — or more usually mythology — of Constantinople's monuments, especially its statues. There was no shortage of speculation about the numerous polytheist and iconographically often puzzling works of art with which Constantine and his successors had adorned the city, and which were assumed to contain reminiscences of antiquity and prophecies of events to come. Since it was the city's centre-piece, the origin of the statue on the porphyry column was probably discussed with particular interest. In fact the *Parastaseis* says less about the porphyry column than one might expect; but it does specifically reject the idea that the statue represents a 'Hellene', that is a polytheist. That alone proves that some such story was circulating; and its influence is indicated by the fact that the denial in the *Parastaseis* is not categorical.⁷¹ Elsewhere the *Parastaseis* asserts that as part of Constantinople's annual birthday ceremonial a statue of the city's Tyche, borne by Helios, was carried into the Hippodrome on the 'chariot of Helios'.⁷² We know about the same ceremony from Malalas and from the *Chronicon Paschale*, composed c. 630; but these two sources say that the statue that held the Tyche was commissioned by Constantine and represented himself.⁷³

⁶⁵ Anna Comnena XII.4 (trans. E. R. A. Sewter, with adjustments); and cf. (e.g.) Zonaras XIII.3.25–6.

⁶⁶ e.g. Dagron, op. cit. (n. 47), 38; and the very uncritical article of M. DiMaio, J. Zeuge and N. Zotov, 'Ambiguitas Constantimiana: the caeleste signum Dei of Constantine the Great', *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 333–60, esp. 354–7, with bibliography.

⁶⁷ An exception is Alan Cameron, who kindly showed me a draft of his forthcoming *Constantinople: Birth of a New Rome*, and whose views on the statue are briefly mentioned in Cameron and Herrin, op. cit. (n. 47), 217, 264. These latter, while sensitive to the evolutionary approach, are less sceptical about the possibility that the statue was indeed of Apollo: 36, 216–17, 219, 243, 263–4.

⁶⁸ See below, pp. 128–9.

⁶⁹ See above, n. 63.

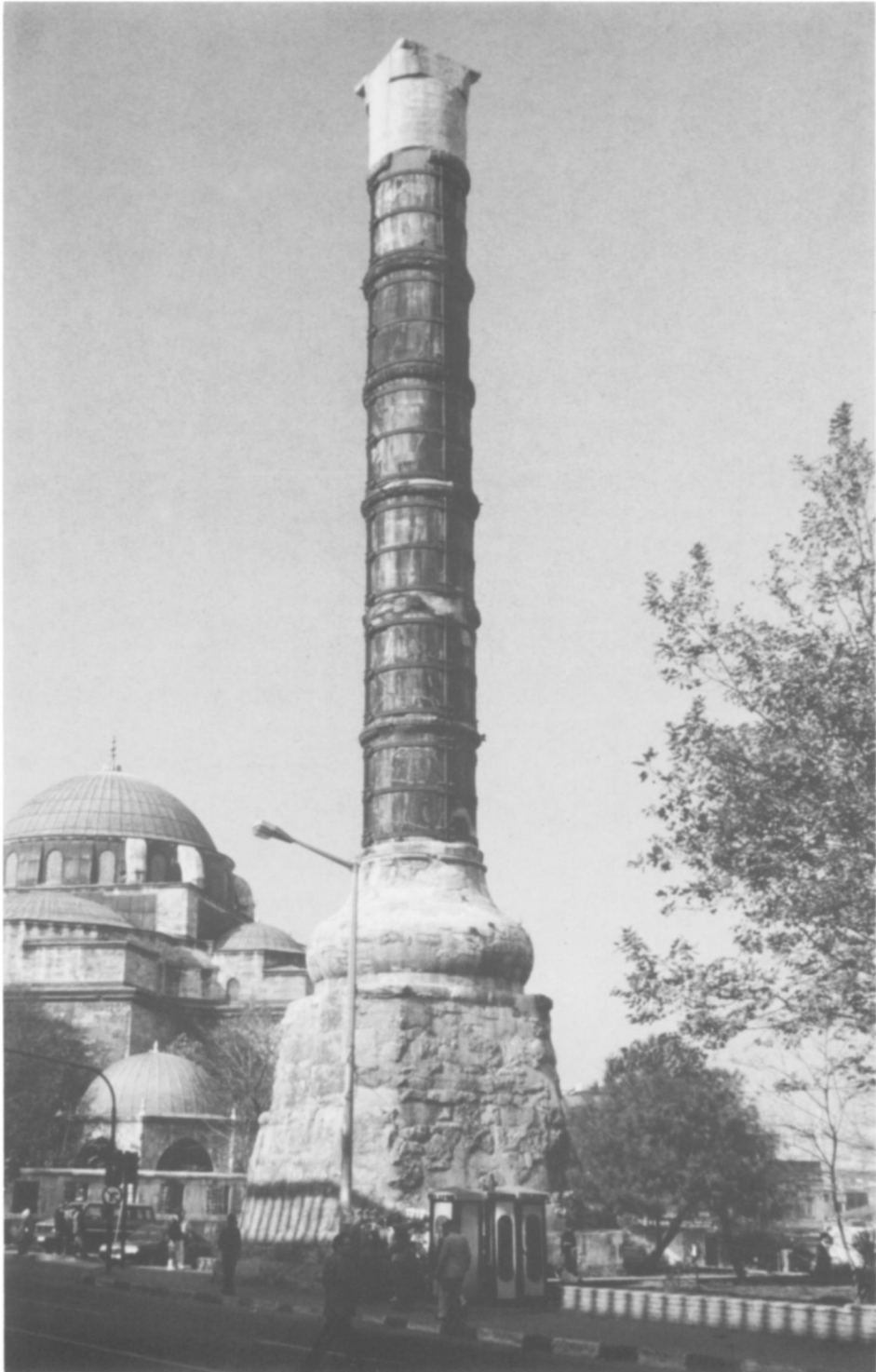
⁷⁰ Ed. Preger, op. cit. (n. 53), 19–73 (repr. in Cameron and Herrin, op. cit. (n. 47), 56–164).

⁷¹ *Parastaseis* 68: τὸ μέγιστον τοῦ φόρου ζώδιον, καθὰ φησι Θεοδώρητος καὶ Εὐσέβιος (ἐν οἷς δοκοῦσι

σφάλλεσθαι βιβλίους), ἔλληνος εἶναι στήλην, following the repunctuation suggested by Cameron and Herrin, op. cit. (n. 47), 262. Theodoret and Eusebius do not of course say anything of the sort.

⁷² *Parastaseis* 38.

⁷³ Ioan. Mal. XIII.322; *Chron. Pasch.* I.530. A fourth-century cameo in the cathedral treasury of Kamiń Pomorski (formerly Cammin), Poland, perhaps preserves a depiction of this statue: R. Calza, *Iconografia romana imperiale da Carausio a Giuliano (287–363 d.C.)* (1972), 235 and pl. LXXXI.286 (repeating Bruns's misguided suggestion that the cameo represents the statue on the porphyry column). The Tyche is helmeted not turreted, but this type is well attested under Constantine, at least as a bust: J. M. C. Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis in late-antique art from 312 to 365', *JRS* 37 (1947), 137, n. 17; J. P. C. Kent, 'Urbs Roma and Constantinopolis medallions at the mint of Rome', in R. A. G. Carson and C. M. Kraay (eds), *Scripta Nummaria Romana: Essays presented to Humphrey Sutherland* (1978), 105–13.



CONSTANTINE'S PORPHYRY COLUMN, CONSTANTINOPLE

Here then we have proof that at some point before the composition of the *Parastaseis*, and probably, but not necessarily, after that of the *Chronicon Paschale*, this statue of Constantine came to be regarded as an image of Helios. It has been assumed that this statue was a copy of that on the porphyry column.⁷⁴ But no source says that; indeed, it was self-evidently not the case, because the statue on the porphyry column did not hold a Tyche.⁷⁵ But since both came to be associated with the Sun, it is likely that they bore each other a general resemblance.

As is apparent from Malalas' description of it, the statue on the porphyry column had been rumoured at least since the sixth century to have been not newly made by Constantine. That is not in itself surprising. Sixth-century Constantinopolitans were adept at disinterring the image behind the image — they knew, for example, or thought they knew, that the personification of Constantinople on the coins in their purses was really Aphrodite.⁷⁶ There was perhaps also a tendency to assume that statues on pillars were 'pagan', by analogy with the Byzantine iconographic convention that 'pagan' statues stood on pillars.⁷⁷ So the citizens of Constantinople were fertile soil for the abundant iconographical hints that Constantine's statue seemed to provide of its own accord. Its head was adorned, according to Malalas (quoted above), with a seven-rayed crown;⁷⁸ while in one hand it held a spear and in the other a globe. When the spear fell during the earthquake of 554, it was replaced by a sceptre.⁷⁹ All these attributes were natural and usual in imperial imagery;⁸⁰ but the radiate crown and the globe might easily remind the viewer of Sol-Helios (who was represented in that guise on Constantine's coinage)⁸¹ and so, by association, of Apollo (who was not thus depicted), or indeed of Mithras.⁸² Even the spear would have seemed a normal accoutrement of a sun deity to those familiar with the gods of Syria.⁸³

It has to be admitted, though, that the imagery of Sol-Helios was too widespread by this date to justify our assuming that someone who saw an imperial statue that drew on its conventions must necessarily have felt that he had entered the polytheist milieu. In a famous third-century mosaic from the Vatican necropolis we find Sol-Helios wearing a radiate crown and driving the chariot of the Sun.⁸⁴ Only from the Christian context can we deduce that Sol-Helios here stands for Christ. The same iconographical type, in a version markedly imperial in costume and gesture, is to be found at Hammath Tiberias in Galilee, prominently

⁷⁴ Cameron and Herrin, op. cit. (n. 47), 172, 216–17, 242, 264.

⁷⁵ See below. *Parastaseis* 56 cryptically remarks that the statue on the porphyry column was revered 'as the Tyche of the city'.

⁷⁶ John of Ephesus, *HE* III.3.14. On confusion of polytheist and Christian iconography, cf. also Severus of Antioch, *hom.* 72, pp. 83–4 (Brière); Ioan. Mal. IV.79.

⁷⁷ W. Haftmann, *Das italienische Säulenmonument* (1939), 52–5.

⁷⁸ Note Kyriakidis's defence of Malalas, *Ἑλληνικά* 17 (1962), 225–31, against I. Karayannopoulos, 'Konstantin der Grosse und der Kaiserkult', *Historia* 5 (1956), 351–2. Melchior Lorck's drawing (1561) of the relief on the porphyry column's base indicates that Constantine was there too represented wearing a radiate crown: Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 26), 141–5 and pl. 68; E. Fischer, *Melchior Lorck* (1962), 28, 84. For caution regarding the genuineness of Lorck's drawing: Mango, *JDAI* 80 (1965), 308–10; Karamouzi, op. cit. (n. 17), 224–6.

⁷⁹ Ioan. Mal. VIII.487; Theoph., *Chron.*, p. 126 (earliest literary reference to globe, but not for that reason incredible *pace* Karayannopoulos, op. cit. (n. 78), 354, who omits to note that the late-fourth–early-fifth-century *Tabula Peutingeriana* represents the statue in its original state, holding a globe and a spear); Anna Comnena XII.4. For a bronze statuette in Copenhagen that may reflect the appearance of our statue see D. Stutzinger in *Spätantike und frühes Christentum. Ausstellung im Liebieghaus, Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt am Main* (1983), 507–8.

⁸⁰ A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (1970), 228–38, 257–63;

S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (1971), 42–5, 382–4. Cf. the statue of Trajan on his column: Becatti, op. cit. (n. 20), pl. 3. Diocletian's statue on his column at Alexandria was in military attire: Fraser, op. cit. (n. 25), 2.89.

⁸¹ M. R. Alföldi, 'Die Sol Comes-Münze vom Jahre 325', in *Mullus. Festschrift Theodor Klauser* (1964), 10–16 and pl. 3.

⁸² Apollo=Helios: Jul., *or.* XI.144ab; B. Müller-Rettig, *Der Panegyricus des Jahres 310 auf Konstantin den Grossen* (1990), 334–8. Sol with radiate crown and globe, and associated with Mithras: R. Merkelbach, *Mithras* (1984), pls 49, 139, 168. Sol's whip, and the crossing circles of the zodiac and the celestial equator on the globe in pl. 168 (and cf. D. Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (1989), 47–9, 95–9), provide further parallels — with Constantine's spear, and with the cross on the globe referred to by Nicephorus Callistus, *HE* VII.49 (*PG* 145.1325), though this was probably a later addition.

⁸³ C. Mango, *Byzantium and its Image* (1984), v.57, n. 13, noting also a relief of Apollo with radiate crown and (probably) spear from Roman Asia Minor: E. H. Kantorowicz, 'Gods in uniform', *PAPhS* 105 (1961), 383 and fig. 36.

⁸⁴ Toynbee and Ward Perkins, op. cit. (n. 7), 72–4, 116–17, pl. 32. On the basis of an inscription recorded in middle Byzantine sources and which can hardly be genuine (Dagron, op. cit. (n. 47), 38–9), T. Reinach, 'Commentaire archéologique sur le poème de Constantin le Rhodien', *REG* 9 (1896), 73, n. 1, maintained that 'dans la pensée de Constantin, la statue représentait le Christ, non l'empereur'.

displayed in the middle of the mosaic floor of a late-third- or early-fourth-century synagogue.⁸⁵ In this context, we are certainly not dealing with 'an overtly pagan image' devoid of 'religious significance' for the synagogue's users.⁸⁶ A religious building might well have a secular or abstract theme on its floor; but this particular theme, precisely because it was sacred in other contexts, is likely to have been sacred in this one as well. Jewish religious thought did not treat the sun as a divinity, but duly honoured it nonetheless as a powerful part of God's creation.⁸⁷ And the god who was being worshipped here was unmistakably the Jewish god. Even in the polytheist milieu, in Syria for example, depictions of the sun on temples were not necessarily signs that the sun was there worshipped as a distinct divinity. Rather, 'c'est un fait de langage symbolique, par lequel on veut exprimer le caractère astrologique de la religion'.⁸⁸

In such a situation, then, where the selfsame iconographic type might be taken up and used by polytheists or Jews or Christians, and depended on its context for its specific semantic content, there was plenty of room for misunderstanding or deliberate misinterpretation by beholders, but also for intentional polysemy on the part of the image. If we are to get back as far as the genesis of the Constantine–Apollo story, these two possibilities need to be discussed separately but in sequence, for they are interconnected.

A statue which was so conspicuous a specimen of Constantine's personality cult and whose iconography could be read as both imperial and solar naturally gave rise to discussion⁸⁹ and humour,⁹⁰ already (we may be sure) in the years between its erection and subject's death in 337. 'Heretics', polytheists and other victims of Constantine's religious policies will have taken a particularly malicious interest.^{90a} One might compare the way in which Constantine and Jesus Christ were sometimes linked, either as a comment on Constantine's hubris or, among non-Christians, as a slur on both. Julian, in his *Caesars*, provides a memorable example of the latter approach, inspired no doubt by such extended comparisons of Constantine to Christ as that offered by Eusebius in his tricennial oration:⁹¹

As for Constantine [Julian writes], he could not discover among the gods the model of his own career, but when he caught sight of Pleasure (Τουφή), who was not far off, he ran to her. She received him tenderly and embraced him, then after dressing him in raiment of many colours and otherwise making him beautiful, she led him away to Incontinence. There too he found Jesus, who had taken up his abode with her and cried aloud to all comers: 'He that is a seducer, he that is a murderer, he that is sacrilegious and infamous, let him approach without fear! For with this water will I wash him and will straightway make him clean. And though he should be guilty of those same sins a second time, let him but smite his breast and beat his head and I will make him clean again.' To him Constantine came gladly, when he had conducted his sons forth from the assembly of the gods.⁹²

As for hubris, it was Christians who had most reason to accuse Constantine of this particular failing. The manner of his burial in his Church of the Holy Apostles, his tomb flanked by the memorials of the apostles, provoked so immodest a comparison that his own son Constantius removed his father's body and placed it in a separate, adjoining mausoleum of its own⁹³ — almost certainly a response to ecclesiastical protest and popular derision. But this was not the only opening Constantine gave to satirists. Many remembered how he had once been or

⁸⁵ M. Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias. Early Synagogues and the Hellenistic and Roman Remains* (1983), 39–43, 66–7, 68–70.

⁸⁶ Pace Dothan, op. cit. (n. 85), 68, 88.

⁸⁷ J. Maier, 'Die Sonne im religiösen Denken des antiken Judentums', *ANRW* II.19.1, 346–412, esp. 387.

⁸⁸ H. Seyrig, *Scripta Varia* (1985), 447.

⁸⁹ See the passage from Socrates, *HE*, quoted above, n. 63.

⁹⁰ e.g. the pun Anthelios-Anelios mentioned by Anna Comnena — a 'Volkswitz in späterer Zeit, als wohl der Glanz des Goldes verschwunden war' (Preger, op. cit. (n. 63), 458).

^{90a} cf. Eus., *De laudibus Constantini* xi.3.

⁹¹ Eus., *De laudibus Constantini* II.

⁹² Jul., *Caes.* 336ab (trans. W. C. Wright). This idea too seems to have matured over the years, into the story that Constantine sought baptism because of his feelings of guilt for the murder of his son and wife: Zos. II.29.3–4 (from Eunapius), rejected by Soz., *HE* 1.5. Cf. F. Paschoud, *Cinq études sur Zosime* (1975), 34: 'dès la seconde moitié du IV^e siècle, une légende anticonstantinienne est tout élaborée; si elle n'apparaît pas avant, c'est par manque de sources'.

⁹³ Eus., *VC* IV.58–60 (implicitly admitting the surprise caused by the arrangement), 71; and cf. R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (1986⁴), 69–70; Dagron, op. cit. (n. 47), 401–9; Mango, op. cit. (n. 34), 27, 35.

at least allowed himself to be presented as an enthusiastic adept of Apollo and the Sun.⁹⁴ Even as late as 324–5, when he had long since dropped the other gods from the coinage, Sol was depicted on Antiochene solidi with the legend SOLI COMITI AUG N in celebration of Constantine's victory over Licinius, while the city of Termessus in Pamphylia set up an equestrian statue of the emperor dedicated 'to Constantine Augustus the all-seeing Sun'.⁹⁵ The radiate crown was not dropped from the coinage until 325–6.⁹⁶ To loungers in the stoas around the Forum of Constantine, especially to those bemused by the suddenness and absoluteness of the change of faith at the top since the days of Diocletian, Galerius, Maximin Daia or even Licinius, irreverent allusions to and jokes about the relationship between their Christian emperor and Sol-Apollo will have come very easily. Constantine's statue seemed to recall a solar iconography that was in no way innovative and was often by this date devoid of specific cultic association until placed in a more explicit context. But Constantine was also an aggressively Christian emperor. It was irresistibly tempting to draw attention to the oldest and best-known strand in his statue's iconographic ancestry, namely the polytheist.

Constantine's well-known devotion, especially earlier in his career, to Apollo and the Sun was the grain of truth that all good jokes contain. And this brings us to the most difficult question about the statue: Was it merely the unfortunate secondary butt of a joke whose main reference was to Constantine's earlier beliefs, or did it deliberately court as wide and varied an audience as possible? The most sensible conclusion is that it may have done, but much more subtly than has been understood by a scholarly tradition that has taken the Constantine–Apollo joke seriously.

The official line on what Constantine's imagery was supposed to look like is unambiguously stated by Eusebius:

He directed his likeness to be stamped on the golden coinage with the eyes uplifted as in the posture of prayer to God . . . His portrait also at full length was placed over the entrance gates of the palaces in certain cities, the eyes upraised to heaven and the hands outspread as if in prayer. In this manner he represented himself, even through the medium of painting, as habitually engaged in prayer. At the same time he forbade by law the setting up of any resemblance of himself in idol-temples, that not even the mere lineaments of his person might be polluted by the error of things forbidden.⁹⁷

Our iconographic evidence shows that not a few of Constantine's images conformed to this style, at least as regards the upward gaze of the eyes.⁹⁸ But the statue on the porphyry column definitely did not represent Constantine at prayer; nor is anything said in any of our sources about a heavenward gaze. At the other extreme, the popular belief that Constantine's image 'was a statue of Apollo' (in Anna Comnena's words) can hardly have reflected any early official interpretation of it, granted that our (abundant) sources do not clearly attest it before the tenth century. This story should not then be treated as a direct source for Constantine's ideology or self-image, any more than Eusebius' remarks should be treated as a normative description of Constantinian iconography.

On the other hand, there is no a priori reason to exclude the possibility that Constantine re-used an older statue, and conceivably one of Apollo. The spirit of Eusebius' remarks just quoted tells against it; but against Eusebius we can quote the rescript Constantine himself issued towards the end of his reign to the city of Hispellum in Umbria, in which he went so far as to permit the erection of a temple (and by implication of statues too) in his family's honour, and simply required that its cult be 'unsullied by the deceits of any contagious

⁹⁴ See e.g. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 36–7, 48, dismissive as ever of evidence for non-Christian aspects of Constantine; T. Grünewald, *Constantinus Maximus Augustus: Herrschaftspropaganda in der zeitgenössischen Überlieferung* (1990), 50–61, 96–7, 130–1; Müller-Rettig, op. cit. (n. 82), 330–8. Note especially the occurrence on the Arch of Constantine of the Sol-Helios and quadriga image discussed above: H. P. L'Orange, *Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-Söhnen: 284–361 n. Chr.* (1984), 53.

⁹⁵ *TAM* 3(1).45: Κωνσταντεῖνῳ Σεβ(αστῶ) Ἡλίῳ Παντεπόπτη ὁ δῆμος. Since there is no room on the base for a statue of Helios as well, Constantine and Helios are unambiguously identified. The date is not 'intra 310 et 324

p. Chr. n.' but 324, when Constantine became sole ruler of the East as well as the West, or very soon afterwards, while the new emperor's religious policies were still quite diplomatic. The Antiochene solidi are the closest analogy: Alföldi, op. cit. (n. 81); P. M. Bruun, *RIC* 7 (1966), 685, no. 49. Christopher Jones kindly points out that Helios Panteoptēs is also attested on an inscription from Gerasa: A. H. M. Jones, 'Inscriptions from Jerash', *JRS* 18 (1928), 173, no. 42 (Παντεπόπτης does not seem to be applied elsewhere to the Sun').

⁹⁶ R. Delbrueck, *Spätantike Kaiserporträts* (1933), 56.

⁹⁷ Eus., *VC* iv.15, 16 (trans. E. C. Richardson, amended).

⁹⁸ L'Orange, op. cit. (n. 94), 53.

superstition'.⁹⁹ And not all the statues of the old gods that Constantine brought to Constantinople and set up there were treated as mere works of art. Zosimus criticizes Constantine for altering the posture of a statue of Rhea-Cybele that he set up in his new capital.¹⁰⁰ But since he placed it in a temple, it was evidently neither Christianized nor regarded as purely decorative. In fact it seems to have become the Tyche of Constantinople, and so provides a striking parallel to the alleged transformation of Apollo into Constantine. In a nearby temple, Zosimus adds, Constantine set up an image of Rome's Fortuna. Clearly Constantinople was not an unambiguously Christian foundation. If Constantine did reuse an older statue on the porphyry column, we must admit the possibility of the minimalist view: that his motive was at least in part the same one that made him search at Thebes for a ready-cut column, namely the purely practical consideration of timing. But the evidence adduced above makes it perfectly conceivable that the statue on the porphyry column, reused or new, deliberately drew on or alluded to solar imagery. It will have done so with studious lack of cultic specificity. No overt link will have been made between Constantine and Apollo, any more than it is with Jupiter on the Arch of Constantine.¹⁰¹ But nor will the comparison have been excluded.¹⁰²

In short we should be prepared to admit that the most off-putting aspect of modern Constantinian scholarship, its confusion and self-contradictoriness, is an authentic reflection of the way people perceived Constantine in his own lifetime. Few if any will have been as unconfused as Eusebius. Perhaps Eusebius' Constantine would have been less black and white if the bishop of Caesarea had been addressing a less puzzled audience. Zosimus on the statue of Rhea-Cybele is our best proof that even those who knew exactly what they wanted to think could be thrown off track by Constantine. It would have suited the polytheist Zosimus' polemical purpose very well if Constantine had followed what Eusebius describes as his usual practice,¹⁰³ had taken, that is, a statue of Rhea-Cybele and put it in a Christian and therefore deliberately humiliating context. But Constantine put it in a temple, where it was perfectly possible for it to retain something of its original significance. So all Zosimus could do was criticize Constantine for changing the statue's posture and removing the lions that originally flanked it.

The similar polysemy of the statue on the porphyry column translated at street-level, among ordinary people, into confusion and, very naturally, humour. But none of this showed up in the literature of the age, which was elevated in tone even when hostile to Constantine. Julian too, though he did not suppress his bitter hatred, expressed it in literary fantasy. But if Byzantium could preserve Julian's highly offensive version of the Constantine-Jesus comparison or joke, it was not improbable that the Constantine-Apollo joke too would eventually bubble up into the literary milieu. The passage of the centuries tended to diminish the potency of the past, even of such mighty symbolic figures as Constantine.¹⁰⁴ We have seen the process at work in the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*. And as the centuries passed, sensitivity to the nuances of bygone ages and mentalities was blunted. By the eighth century the interpretation of statues could no longer in any way be a laughing matter: the authors of the *Parastaseis* 'are entirely serious about their task, recognising that the interpretations which their "research" may reveal are all too often malevolent ones'.¹⁰⁵ By the tenth century it was common 'knowledge' that the statue of Constantine had originally been a statue of Apollo; while its fall and destruction in the great storm of 5 April 1106 stimulated the interest even of such highbrow writers as Anna Comnena. By this time Apollo, unlike Aphrodite on the sixth-century coins, had lost his power to shock. A joke that once had been too blasphemous to record now not only seemed harmless but had become 'fact', indeed highly appropriate fact, a symbol of how the

⁹⁹ J. Gascou, 'Le rescrit d'HisPELLUM', *MEFRA* 79 (1967), 609-59. Socr., *HE* 1.18, says Constantine replaced cult-statues of the old gods with images of himself.

¹⁰⁰ Zos. II.31.2-3, with F. Paschoud's note ad loc. The so-called 'orans' posture to which Zosimus refers might be adopted in prayer to the many gods as well as to the one: E. von Severus, *RAC* 8.1141, 1158; J. and L. Robert, *Bull.* (1968), 535 (references courtesy of Christopher Jones).

¹⁰¹ Above, p. 122. I owe this comparison to Ann Kuttner.

¹⁰² It should be noted that the porphyry column was even more semantically neutral (in religious terms) than its statue. Perhaps it was to compensate for this that so many stories grew up about holy relics buried beneath it.

¹⁰³ Eus., *VC* III.54.

¹⁰⁴ On the lessened intensity of middle Byzantines' contact with the figure of Constantine, note the interesting recent observations of C. Mango, *Δελτ. Χρ. Ἀρχ. Ἐρ.* 10 (1980-1), 110, and A. Kazhdan, "Constantin imaginaire": Byzantine legends of the ninth century about Constantine the Great', *Byzantion* 57 (1987), 249.

¹⁰⁵ Cameron and Herrin, op.cit. (n. 47), 15. I prefer this view to that of Kazhdan, op.cit. (n. 104), 250: 'The *Parastaseis* is a work of burlesque, a bouffonade, a parody; if the author occasionally cites real names and real monuments, his factual information is perverse and playful.'

Christian empire had subsumed as well as suppressed the heathen past. As a conscious joke it survives only in the *Life of Elagabalus*, which is not only our earliest but also the most unvarnished literary allusion to Constantine's porphyry column.¹⁰⁶ Only the author of the *Life of Elagabalus* lets his readers laugh out loud at Constantine — once they have pierced his disguise. Whether it is the Constantine–Christ or Constantine–Apollo comparison (or confusion) that he has mainly in mind is of no great importance. There is no reason why both should not have been familiar or at least easily deciphered in Rome, and the joke is all the better if both are alluded to. Elagabalus was at once Sun-god and his imperial adept's *alter ego* — so the ideal comparison.

All this tells us very little about the 'veracity' of the *Historia Augusta*. Instead it points us towards these biographies' truest value as a document of a fourth-century mentality rather than of second- and third-century reality. It allows us to overhear the table-talk of the well-connected, which in all ages contains more truth than the well-weighed judgements of historians. And there is every reason to suppose that this particular Constantine joke was not just Roman salon-chat or literary invention, but authentically echoed the attitudes of Constantinople's ordinary citizens. As regards the statue itself, the judgements of historians have perhaps rested a little too heavily on a story that started as a joke and took a long time to be received in serious circles as 'fact'. Even so, the joke reflected an intended polysemy in the first Christian emperor's public image, and exposed a certain vulnerability too.

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¹⁰⁶ The earliest literary sources recognized hitherto were all of the fifth century: above, n. 63.