

THE MAKING OF AN IMPERIAL DYNASTY.
OPTATIAN'S *CARMINA FIGURATA* AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE CONSTANTINIAN *DOMUS DIVINA* (317-326 AD)

Optatian's Panegyrical Pattern Poems and the Constantinian Dynasty: The Problem

Emperor Constantine I (A.D. 306-337) decided surprisingly late to share power with members of his own family¹. Not until March 1, 317, almost eleven years into his reign, did Constantine elevate his two oldest sons Crispus and Constantinus Iunior to the rank of Caesar. The two younger sons followed, Constantius on November 8, 324, and Constans on December 25, 333. On September 18, 335, Constantine also raised Dalmatius to the rank of Caesar, the oldest son of his half-brother Flavius Dalmatius. Important roles within the Constantinian *domus divina* were assigned to further family members also quite late. In particular, to his mother Helena, his half-brothers Flavius Dalmatius and Iulius Constantius, and Hannibalianus, the second son of Flavius Dalmatius. Some of Constantine's family members were able to assume eminent positions within the *apparatus imperii*, even if they cannot, strictly speaking, be described as part of the imperial college². Only the female mem-

* I am grateful to the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel for permission to publish the illustration taken from *Codex Augustaneus 9 Guelferbytanus*. Study of the manuscripts in Bern and Munich, as well as the reproduction, were made possible through the generous financial support of the Heidelberger Sonderforschungsbereich 619 ('Ritualdynamik') and 933 ('Materiale Textkulturen'). I am especially grateful to John Noël Dillon for translating this text. It is particularly gratifying to present my theses about Optatian in a journal coedited by Giorgio Bonamente, a distinguished scholar of the *aetas Constantini*, and Giovanni Polara, probably the most influential scholar of Optatian of our time.

¹ From the endless literature on the historical events, see Barnes 1981, 3-77; Grünewald 1990: 13-162; Barnes 2011: 27-172. For historical persons named below, see also the relevant entries in PLRE vol. 1; on Helena in particular, see also Drijvers 1992.

² Only those who appear as the signatories of imperial constitutions may be considered members of the imperial college; on this see Barnes 1982: 9. The panegyrist of 311 identifies as the *apparatus imperii* the leading circles of the Constantinian civil and military administration: *Pan. Lat.* 5(8).2.1. Usually members of the ruling family both directly and indirectly involved in ruling the empire are considered part of the *domus divina*.

bers of the house of Constantine, i.e. the imperial mother Helena, Constantine's wife Fausta, and his half-sister Fl. Iulia Constantia, were involved in the emperor's dynastic politics before 317.

The late date for the construction of a truly Constantinian *domus divina* and a college of dynastic rulers recruited from within the imperial family is surprising insofar as Constantine already had a biological son at the beginning of his reign, whom he could have introduced as his presumptive heir over the course of his growing emancipation from the Tetrarchy. Constantine's break with Maximian in the summer of 310 or his victory over Maxentius in autumn, 312, might have been favorable moments for proclaiming his son Crispus Caesar. That Constantine let these moments pass is surprising also because he was extremely sensitive to the potential of dynastic politics and dynastic representation. This is evident already in Constantine's use of dynastic arguments to legitimate his own power from the very first day of his reign: Immediately after his elevation on July 25, 306, Constantine promoted his direct descent from Constantius I (Chlorus) as an argument for his special right to rule; his marriage to Maximian's daughter Fausta in summer, 307, served to strengthen his ties to the *auctor imperii* of his father; when Constantine ultimately distanced himself from the Tetrarchy after the attempted usurpation of his father-in-law in summer, 310, Constantine introduced Claudius Gothicus as the alleged ancestor of the Constantinian family; before the beginning of the Italian campaign in the summer of 312, he sealed an alliance of convenience with Licinius by betrothing to him his half-sister Constantia (the marriage took place in 313); and over the years 315/316, one can trace the outline of Constantine's efforts to forge what was essentially a dynastic alliance with Licinius.

However, in the first decade of his reign, where we find these situation-driven, partly ad-hoc measures of dynastic politics, Constantine still focused primarily on asserting *his own* status amid the internal wrangling of the declining Tetrarchy and on realizing *his own* insistent claims of supremacy: Constantine publicized a glorious ancestry so as to highlight his own imperial charisma, without having to found to a new, dynastically conceived imperial college. Not until Constantine has come within striking distance of seizing sole power did he begin to systematically construct a new dynastic college clearly tailored to himself. With the Treaty of Serdica on March 1, 317, Constantine and Licinius raised their sons Crispus, Licinius Iunior, and Constantinus to the rank of Caesar. The imperial college thus created clearly privileged the Constantinian side. Already

in early 321, though, it would begin to crumble. Now Constantine irrevocably supplanted the remains of the Tetrarchic ruling system with a system of his own, a system of dynastic stamp, designed to guarantee his family exclusive and perpetual power over the entire Empire. The successful transition from the Tetrarchic system based primarily on military achievement was a decisive change that would shape the late Roman monarchy for a long time to come³.

The years 317 to 326 are especially important for our understanding of this change generally and of Constantine's dynastic plans in particular. In these years, the crucial decisions of how to construct a dynastic imperial college and the *domus divina* around it were made. These same years, however, are also in a way the *dark ages* in Constantine studies⁴. A conspicuous lack of sources for this period makes it virtually impossible to establish a coherent narrative of historical events. But the period has also frequently been regarded as only marginally relevant to research on Constantine. Scholars continue to focus primarily on the *conversio Constantini*, and usually the years from 310 to 315 are viewed as the period in which the first Christian emperor supposedly took the decisive steps forward.

The years from 317 to 326, however, were a pivotal phase in the consolidation of Constantine's rule: With the creation of a Constantinian dynasty, the acquisition of sole power, and the increasing endorsement of Christianity, the appearance of the Roman monarchy changed significantly. The end of this period, though, marks a momentous setback in Constantine's efforts to put his rule over the Empire on a solid footing. The so-called 'Palace Crisis' of early 326 culminated in the execution of Constantine's oldest son Crispus. Constantine's wife, Fausta, and a series of Crispus' retainers were also killed in the course of the crisis. Constantine appears to have emerged from it stronger than before, but the conflict destroyed his original dynastic plans and forced him to realign his entire imperial house. In order to reconstruct a fully functional imperial system, Constantine found himself forced to integrate members of the lateral line of his family descended from Theodora into his

³ The impact of this transition to the dynastic principle has been treated most recently by Börm (forthcoming).

⁴ Grünwald 1990: 128 concludes: "Das Geschehen in der Zeitspanne von 321 bis 324 bleibt für uns in seinen Einzelheiten weitgehend unergründbar"; cf. *ibid.* p. 113. Barnes 2011: 1 describes the years after 324 generally as a "truly dark period, in which the course of events is often obscure, except for the emperor's movements ... and certain aspects of ecclesiastical politics".

domus divina and the imperial college—a decision that would have serious repercussions down until the reign of Julian.

The basic trends of the years 317 to 326 are known, but their significance for the conception of Constantine's rule remains largely obscure. An exceptional contemporary witness, though, might cast light on the transformation of Constantine's imperial self-conception during this decisive phase of development: the panegyric *carmina figurata* of the Latin poet Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius⁵. A selection of the poems preserved under Optatian's name was presented as a gift by high-ranking patrons of the poet from within the Roman elite to the emperor during his stay in Rome in 326⁶. Together with this unusual present, a plea for mercy from Optatian was conveyed to the emperor: Optatian had been exiled probably around 322/323, on "false charges" as he himself puts it⁷. The petition was successful: Optatian not only could return from exile, but now he also clearly benefited from imperial patronage⁸. First, probably in the years between 326 and 329, he was appointed governor of the province of Achaia⁹. He would crown his career,

⁵ The standard edition of Optatian's *carmina*, with a valuable *commentarium criticum et exegeticum*, is Polara 1973. Older editions were published by Müller 1877 and Kluge 1926. Bruhat 1999: 2–31 gives detailed treatment of the evidence for Optatian's biography.

⁶ Kluge 1922: 91f. identified Sex. Anicius Faustus Paulinus (*cos.* 325) as Optatian's spokesman, but erroneously presumed that Optatian had the corpus of poems delivered to Constantine on the occasion of his *vicennalia incipiente* in 325. It might also have been P. Ceionius Iulianus Camenius, brother of C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, to whom Optatian may have been related by marriage (the name Publilius turns up several times subsequently in the family of the Ceionii, which already Groag 1926/1927: 104 had noted). The dating of the delivery of the gift to the *vicennalia perfecta* celebrated in Rome on July 25, 326, is based on the evidence of the poems themselves. For further discussion of the date, see below, in the third section of this paper.

⁷ Opt. Porf. *carm.* 2.31f.: *Respice me falso de crimine, maxime rector, / exulis afflictum poena*. Optatian's place of exile, its date, and the reasons why he lost the emperor's trust, are not directly attested. At least the beginning and end points of his exile can be dated relatively precisely through implicit references in the *carmina*. In consequence to an article by Barnes 1975a most scholars today assume that his banishment occurred in 315 and was connected to the exile of C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, who is mentioned together with Optatian in CIL 6.41314 (already Groag 1926/1927: 108 had made this conjecture). The arguments for dating Optatian's exile, on the other hand, to 322 at the earliest are collected by Polara 1974/1975: 118 and Bruhat 1999: 9–16.

⁸ Jer. *Chron.* 329 notes: *Porfyrius misso ad Constantinum insigni volumine exilio liberatur*. Jerome has possibly erred in the year. It is more likely that Constantine reacted with a written pardon already in 326.

⁹ His proconsulate is epigraphically attested (AE 1931.6), though the date is uncertain. Most scholars date the proconsulate to the years 326 to 329: Chastagnol 1962: 82; Arnheim 1972: 62f.; Barnes 1975a: 175; Bruhat 1999: 3f.; see also PLRE 1: Optatianus 3.

though, with the office of Urban Prefect, one of the highest and most prestigious senatorial offices, which the poet was permitted to hold twice, each time for about a month, from September 7 to October 8, 329, and again from April 7 to May 10, 333¹⁰.

Optatian's spectacular career after his recall from exile is noteworthy, especially in light of the fact that Constantine apparently saw no reason at first, despite the poet's evident ambitions, to entrust him with a prestigious office. Optatian can be placed in the upper senatorial milieu of Rome already under Maxentius¹¹. Immediately after Constantine's victory over Maxentius, the poet is found attempting to win the new emperor's favor so as to make headway in circles at the court. This effort is attested in correspon-

¹⁰ Groag 1926/1927: 104 inferred from the brief terms of office that "es sich bei Porfyrius gewiß nicht um eine ernst zu nehmende Amtsführung, sondern um den sinnfälligen Ausdruck höchster kaiserlicher Gnade handelt". In general on the urban prefecture, see Chastagnol 1960; idem 1962.

¹¹ Optatian's early career can be reconstructed only approximately. Some scholars have connected the horoscope of an anonymous person and his father as found in Firm. Mat. Math. 2.29.10–20 to Optatian. Polara 1973: vol. 2, 1–3 and idem 2004: 25f., in particular, traced Optatian's career in detail on this basis. Most recently, Pipitone 2012 had followed this proposal. However, as Barnes 1975a: 173f. and esp. idem 1975b has shown, the horoscope rather belongs to C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus and his son Ceionius Rufius Albinus. Crucial for our knowledge of Optatian's early career is above all the fragment of the inscription CIL 6.41314-a list of names that was most likely published under Maxentius. On the date and context of the inscription, see Groag 1926/1927; Polara 1974/1975: 118; Barnes 1975a: 176; Bruhat 1999: 2f. Besides Optatian, the inscription also names L. Turranius Gratianus (*praefectus urbi* 290/291; see PLRE 1: Gratianus 3 [potentially identical with PLRE 1: Gratianus 4; cf. Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, no. 3302 with n. 2]), Crepereius Rogatus (inter al. *pontifex Solis*; see PLRE 1: Rogatus 2; Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, no. 1408), C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus (inter al. *pontifex Solis*, *consul* 311/314, *praefectus urbi* 310/311, 313–315; see PLRE 1: Volusianus 4; Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, no. 1130), Iunius Anicius Paulinus (*consul* 325, *praefectus urbi* 333; see PLRE 1: Paulinus 13; Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, no. 2105; perhaps identical with PLRE 1: Paulinus 14, 15, or 17) and Maecilius Hilarianus (*corrector Lucaniae et Bruttiorum* 316, *proconsul Africae* 324, *consul* 332; see PLRE 1: Hilarianus 5; Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, no. 2319). The seventh name cannot be reconstructed with certainty. The precise purpose of the list is controversial. Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, 1079 understand the inscription as a list "die vielleicht eine gemeinsame Dedikation eines Zirkels von sieben hochgestellten Priestern darstellt". They also concede (*ibid.* n. 1), however, that the list "keinerlei Rückschlüsse auf das Kollegium zulässt". The view taken in PLRE 1: Volusianus 4 that the seven persons named belonged to the college of *septemviri epulonum* is rejected by Rüpke/Glock 2005: vol. 2, 868 n. 4 as uncertain. The inscription may be an excerpt of a list of senatorial sponsors (perhaps in a priestly function) who contributed financial support for a public building. Along these lines, already Groag 1926/1927 interpreted the inscription as evidence of the financial burdens imposed on the Roman senatorial class by Maxentius, which are mentioned in various literary sources (Aur. Vict. 40.24; Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 8.14; Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 1.35; *Pan. lat.* 12[9].3.5–7; *Pan. lat.* 4[10].33.6f.; Zonar. 12.33).

dence between Optatian and Constantine¹²: A letter of Optatian's to Constantine from the fall or winter of 312/313 shows the poet striving to inform Constantine that he had dedicated a poem to him¹³. In a letter to Optatian from the same time, potentially the reply to the letter just described, Constantine addresses the poet as *frater carissime*, which indicates that the poet enjoyed an eminent position¹⁴. O. Seeck accordingly conjectured that Optatian numbered among Constantine's *comites*, though this is not supported by any further evidence¹⁵.

Optatian nonetheless held no prestigious offices in the following decade. We find the poet, however, in Constantine's retinue during his stay on the middle Danube in the early 320s. Optatian thus will have moved in court circles at the time, which suggests that he enjoyed imperial favor at least to some extent¹⁶. Whether this favor was the result of Constantine's interest in Optatian's poetry remains an open question. As is obvious from Optatian's poems, he certainly had the opportunity during this time to gain insight into the Constantinian court culture. Even during his exile, when most of the figurative poems preserved were created,¹⁷ Optatian was well informed about Constantine's imperial self-representation, not merely in outline, but in detail. As will be shown in more detail below, he was able in his *carmina* to react instantly to changes in courtly representation. This, too, is a sign that the poet had succeeded to build close contacts to well-informed members of the court.

¹² The dating, chronology, and authenticity of the letters have been and remain controversial; for the earlier scholarly debate, see Polara 1974/1975. Barnes 1975a: 185 and idem 2011: 84 dates the letters to the months November/December 312. This proposal is followed by Van Dam 2011: 158-170. Various doubts have been cast on the authenticity of the letters. Bruhat 1999: 23-31 offers a comprehensive discussion of the arguments. Barnes 2011: 209 n. 34 rejects the arguments against authenticity raised by Polara 1973: vol. 1, xxxif. Since no coherent scenario has been proposed that would justify assuming they are spurious, we may continue to regard the letters as genuine.

¹³ Opt. Porf. *Ep. ad Const.* (ed. Polara 1973: vol. 1, 1-3).

¹⁴ Const. *Ep. ad Opt. Porf.* (ed. Polara 1973: vol. 1, 4-6).

¹⁵ Seeck 1908: 272.

¹⁶ The detailed treatment of the Sarmatian war in *carm.* 6 suggests that Optatian was present on the Danube in Constantine's retinue in 322. Kluge 1926: 325 has viewed the expressions *factorum gnarum* and *testis* in this poem as indications that Optatian was an eye-witness of the events; cf. also Helm 1959: 1930, who believes that Optatian "im Lager Constantins geweilt hat". The closeness to the imperial court implied in these references would suggest that Optatian had, with imperial support, climbed to become one of the "Männer aus der ersten Gesellschaftsklasse Roms" (Groag 1926/1927: 102).

¹⁷ An overview of dates proposed thus far may be consulted in the "tableau chronologique" of Bruhat 1999: 495-501.

Since Optatian's poems were composed predominantly in the years 317 to 326, since they in part may be dated even more precisely within this period, and since they attest close proximity to imperial self-representation, the poems furnish a great wealth of detail to analyze the transformation of Constantine's self-representation during this period. Poetic engagement with the Constantinian dynasty occupies a prominent place in the *carmina*: The Constantinian dynasty is the central theme of no fewer than nine of the 31 poems usually associated with Optatian¹⁸. *Carmina* 5, 8, 9, 10, and 15 are dedicated to the subject particularly extensively, with approximately a third to a half of each poem reserved for discussion of the Constantinian dynasty. The following members of the Constantinian dynasty are mentioned by name in Optatian's *carmina*: (1) Claudius Gothicus as (fictional) ancestor of the family; (2) Constantine's father, Constantius I; (3) Constantine himself; and (4) his oldest son Crispus. Reference is also implicitly made to Constantinus and Constantius, Constantine's other two sons after Crispus, who were elevated to the rank of Caesar by 326. Alongside Constantine's sons, the anticipated grandsons of the emperor are also discussed. In total, Optatian's *carmina* thus refer to no fewer than five generations of the Constantinian dynasty.

Optatian employs established compositional techniques to communicate the excellence of the Constantinian dynasty to his audience: The greatness and glory of both ancestors pass directly to Constantine and likewise are joined to the glory of the Caesars. Constantine assumes an axial position within the dynasty: His imperial authority and the glory of his *imperium* derive from his ancestors and now, augmented by Constantine's own achievements, are passed on to the following generations with even greater splendor¹⁹. A passage in *carmen* 8 makes explicit this complex interplay between the various generations within the Constantinian dynasty (*carm.* 8.2-33):

*Claudius invictus bellis insignia magna
virtutum tulit Gothico de milite parta,
et pietate potens Constantius omnia pace
ac iustis auctus complerit saecula donis:
haec potiore fide, meritis maioribus orta
orbi dona tuo praestas, superasque priora,
perque tuos natos vincis praefratria magna.*

¹⁸ Specifically *carm.* 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, and 20a.

¹⁹ This aspect of the *carmina* is also discussed by Van Dam 2007: 99.

Constantine is thus both retrospectively embedded in a dignified series of ancestors, and himself celebrated as future ancestor of a great dynasty. In the first three generations (i.e. from Claudius Gothicus to Constantius I to Constantine) the line of ancestors is constructed in a linear dynastic sequence, whereas from Constantine on the imperial dynasty is based on a dynastic sharing of imperial power. Optatian conceives of this dynastic division of power in functional terms: The Caesars participate in Constantine's rule, whereby Constantine can undertake military actions jointly with his sons (*carm.* 5.1f.: *Victor sidereis pollens virtutibus ibis, Persica cum natis Latio confinia reddens*), so his rule may be present to his subjects everywhere at once (*carm.* 10.24-28):

*En, Auguste, tuis praesens et tantus ubique,
imperiis fecunde, paras nunc omine Crispi
Oceanî intactas oras, quibus eruta Franci
dat regio procul ecce deum, cui devia latis
tota patent campis.*

Precisely by incorporating his sons into his regime as Caesars, Constantine is "everywhere so rich in supreme commands" and now can exercise power "under the auspices of Crispus" even where he is not physically present.

Optatian's sketches of the individual members of the Constantinian dynasty exhibit characteristic differences that capture the specific internal structure of the ruling house. The merits of Crispus specifically are lauded at length, which is of particular interest to Constantine scholarship. The steep rise and sudden fall of the Caesar still presents a riddle. Optatian's *carmina* provide decisive, but all but neglected, evidence for the status of the ambitious Caesar within the Constantinian ruling house. Analysis of the poems accordingly gives us detailed insight into the conception of the imperial college and allows us to assess the nature of the conflict between Crispus and Constantine in greater depth.

These introductory remarks will have already made it clear that the *carmina* are particularly well-suited to an analysis of the development of the Constantinian court culture during a decisive period of transition. Yet the potential of the *carmina* as a source of historical information has hardly been exploited. Philologists have focused their efforts largely on textual criticism and the place of the figurative poems in literary history²⁰, while ancient historians have

²⁰ This is true not only of the critical editions, but also even of such compelling

limited themselves almost exclusively to extracting positivistic data²¹. However, analyzing the panegyric content of the *carmina* enables us to gain broader insight into the constitution of the Constantinian monarchy at this time²². Thus, for the questions posed here, the *carmina* constitute a veritable treasure trove.

The goal of this paper accordingly is to carve out what Optatian's *carmina* can tell us about the formation of the Constantinian dynasty as one of the most profound development processes of the *aetas Constantini*. So as to reach an exact understanding of how the poems deal with the transformation of Constantine's dynastic politics, the following section will establish how the Constantinian dynasty is conceived in the *carmina* by analysis of the three most significant cases: Claudius Gothicus, Constantius I, and Crispus. The final section will analyze the panegyric character of the *carmina*, so as to assess the communicative functions of Optatian's *carmina figurata* within Constantinian representation. This paper shall thus contribute to our understanding of the literary and performative dimensions of Optatian's *carmina figurata* as one of the most extraordinary works of late antique poetry.

analyzes as Ernst 1991 or Rühl 2006. It is telling that until today only a single translation of the *carmina* into any modern language has been published (Polara 1976, in a slightly revised version republished by Polara 2004). An unpublished French translation of *carm.* 1-21, 23, and 25-30 is provided in Bruhat 1999: 463-493. This situation will, however, improve in the coming years: Linda Jones Hall is working on an English translation, and I am presently preparing a German translation and historical commentary together with John Noël Dillon.

²¹ The poems contain little chronologically useful information about Constantine's reign, for which reason the interest of positivistic historiography in the *carmina* has remained limited. The unsatisfactory state of historical analysis has affected even recent scholarship, exemplified for example by the fact that C. Odahl fails to mention the *carmina* in the introductory overview in his monograph *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (Odahl 2004: 1-2), or Grünwald does not mention Optatian's works where he explicitly poses the question of sources for the years 317 to 324 (Grünwald 1990: 113).

²² The only study to assess the poems systematically as evidence of court culture is the hitherto unpublished French dissertation of M. O. Bruhat from 1999 in Lille (Bruhat 1999). Two articles have thus far been published from this work: Bruhat 2008 and eadem 2009. Bruhat's study is a extremely helpful, but since the author does not develop a systematic approach to Constantine's dynastic politics and dynastic representation, she overlooks some vital characteristics of the contents of the poems. Optatian received a brief subchapter of his own in a monograph on Constantine for the first time in Van Dam 2011: 158-170. Van Dam concentrates on the question how Christianity may have affected Optatian's interaction with the emperor through his work. Finally, I undertook a comprehensive analysis of the *carmina* with respect to Constantine's military representation in my dissertation: Wienand 2012. The reflections presented in the present paper further develop ideas that derive from this latter study.

Concepts of Dynastic Representation in Optatian's carmina figurata

a) Claudius Gothicus and Constantius Chlorus

In *carmina* 8 and 10, Claudius Gothicus is described as *proavus* (*carm.* 8.11), *atavus* (*carm.* 8.14, 10.29), and *avus* (*carm.* 10.v.i.). He is thus understood as ancestor of the Constantinian family. The glory of the entire dynasty is traced back to him: *His decus a proavo* (*carm.* 8.11). *Carmina* 8, 9, and 15, moreover, refer to Constantius I and identify him as Constantine's *pater* (*carm.* 10.v.i., 15.13) and Crispus' *avus* (*carm.* 9.24). Optatian traces Constantine's *imperium* back to Divus Constantius: [*superi*] *sidera dant patri, et patris imperium, / sancte, tibi*²³. Exactly what role do both rulers have in the dynastic representation of Constantine, and how do Optatian's *carmina* relate to it?

Constantine's descent from Claudius Gothicus is pure fiction²⁴. The alleged ancestry was introduced in summer, 310, when Constantine was forced by the collapse of his alliance with Maximian to reformulate the dynastic legitimation of his rule. Up until this moment, Constantine's self-representation had been connected directly or indirectly to Maximian in the following aspects: Maximian had conferred the rank of Augustus on Constantine in 307 and betrothed his daughter Fausta to him, thus leaping back onto the political stage after his formal retirement in 305 and enabling Constantine to go his own way within the Tetrarchy largely independent of Galerius. Maximian was not merely the *auctor imperii* of Constantine's father Constantius I; with the conclusion of their alliance, he became Constantine's *auctor imperii*, father-in-law, and senior partner. Thus, Maximian's attempted usurpation against Constantine, which caused the collapse of the alliance and ul-

²³ Opt. Porf. *carm.* 15.11-14; cf. also *carm.* 15.3-6: *Constantine ... quem divus genuit Constantius induperator, aurea Romanis propagans saecula nato*.

²⁴ In Hist. Aug. *Claud.* 13, it is alleged that Constantius I was the son of a niece of Claudius Gothicus. Since a retrospective connection of the Constantinian dynasty to its supposed ancestors appears first in the speech of 310, the reference in the *Historia Augusta* may well also derive from discourses from after the downfall of Maximian. Lippold 1981: esp. 357-360, on the other hand, has tried to argue that the passage in question reflects knowledge in the year 297. This, however, is doubtful, not least because Diocletian would have taken no small risk by admitting to his college of generals with humble backgrounds the descendant of a deified emperor. It is unlikely that Constantius I invented his descent from Claudius Gothicus, since he behaved with conspicuous loyalty toward the other Tetrarchic rulers. The most substantial effort to prove Constantine's descent from Claudius Gothicus has been made by Chausson 2007: 25-98.

timately Maximian's death, directly shook central pillars of the legitimation of Constantine's rule²⁵.

Constantine's need to legitimate his rule dynastically did not diminish after Maximian's fall. On the contrary, it increased dramatically. In order to continue convincingly down the path he had taken after Maximian's inglorious end, he needed the legitimacy of a glorious dynasty more than ever. In this regard, it was essential to redefine the role of Constantius I-for with the loss of so prestigious an *auctor imperii*, father-in-law, and adoptive grandfather as Maximian had been, Constantine's ancestral lineage shrank to only his father. Constantine's ancestry was thus not only relatively insignificant compared to the elaborate dynastic system of the Tetrarchy, but it was also more explicitly tied to the Tetrarchy than ever before: Constantius I had legitimated his own status precisely with his role in the Tetrarchic system.

The creation of a fictitious ancestry presented a way out of this dilemma. Claudius Gothicus appears as *auctor generis* of the Constantinian family first in the panegyric of 310, which was delivered in Trier shortly after Maximian's failed usurpation²⁶. We may safely exclude the possibility that this new accession to Constantine's ancestors is the invention of the orator, but it was the orator's honor to be one of the first to communicate this new aspect of Constantine's imperial self-representation. The panegyrist himself says that most people had been ignorant of Constantine's descent from Claudius Gothicus so far, but that the genealogical connection had already been known to the emperor's closest companions: *plerique nesciunt – qui te amant sciunt* (2.1). Why, though, did Constantine choose precisely Claudius Gothicus?

Claudius Gothicus was one of few emperors of the third century whose *memoria* had remained largely untarnished. The *Historia Augusta* describes him as *vir sanctus ac iure venerabilis et bonis omnibus carus, amicus patriae, amicus legibus, acceptus senatui, populo bene cognitus*²⁷. Numerous parallels to Constantius I also recommended

²⁵ In general on the consequences of the usurpation for Constantine's imperial representation, see Wienand 2012: 143-194. The magnitude of the crisis can be glimpsed also in the references in *Pan. lat.* 6(7).21.1-3, in which the orator discusses the consequences of the exposure of the Rhine frontier, which Constantine had to accept in order to suppress the usurpation. Exactly which units defected and how large the number of disloyal troops was remains unclear.

²⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).2f.; on the date of the speech, see Nixon/Rodgers 1994.

²⁷ Hist. Aug. *Gall.* 15.4. Claudius Gothicus was cited as a positive example also dur-

Claudius Gothicus as new *parens*. Like Constantius I, Claudius Gothicus had been deified and thus numbered among the *divi* – the ultimate proof of a positive *memoria*. Aside from the two Tetrici (over whom Aurelian had triumphed, though he nonetheless permitted them to live out their days in peace), Claudius Gothicus was the last emperor before Constantius I whose life had not ended in murder or suicide²⁸. Also like Constantius I and Constantine, Claudius Gothicus came from Illyricum, was a successful general, and won a magnificent victory over Gothic tribes right in Constantine's birthplace Naissus, for which he received the epithet *gothicus*.

For Constantine (and consequently for his encomiasts) recourse to Claudius Gothicus made it possible to sever the justification of Constantius I's reign from the Tetrarchy and his nomination by Maximian completely. Constantine's lineage could thus be anchored outside the Tetrarchy altogether, which allowed the orator to formulate for the first time explicit antagonism between the ancestry of Constantine, on the one hand, and the "sharers of your imperial dignity" (i.e. the Tetrarchic coregents), on the other: *Inter omnes, inquam, participes maiestatis tuae hoc habes, Constantine, praecipuum, quod imperator es natus, tantaque est nobilitas originis tuae ut nihil tibi addiderit honoris imperium nec possit Fortuna numini tuo imputare quod tuum est ...*²⁹

However, Optatian's *carmina* 8 and 10, in which the references to Claudius Gothicus appear, were composed some seven to ten years after these events, in the years 317–321 and 320/321, respectively³⁰. The basic circumstances of Constantine's dynastic representation had changed significantly in the meantime. Citing Claudius Gothicus as the ancestor of the Constantinian family no longer served to legitimate Constantine's rule independently of the Diocletianic Tetrarchy in general or Maximian in particular. This problem had long since ceased to be relevant. Thus, the references to the illustrious ancestor that appear in *carmina* 8 and 10 cannot refer to the conflict with Maximian; they must be interpreted in light of the new alliance that Constantine and Licinius had concluded on March 1, 317. Nonetheless, even under changed conditions, Constantine could still profit from his alleged descent from Claudius Gothicus.

ing the first Tetrarchy: in *Cod. Iust.* 2.13.1 from the year 293, the Tetrarchs refer to *divus Claudius*, call him *consultissimus princeps*, and describe him as *parens noster*.

²⁸ In 310, Diocletian was presumably still alive.

²⁹ *Pan. lat.* 6(7).2.5.

³⁰ On this see the "tableau chronologique" in Bruhat 1999: 494–501.

Ratification of the new alliance ended the civil war that the two emperors had fought in the years 316/317. Since Constantine had won a partial victory in the conflict, he was able to dictate his own terms to his opponent at the conclusion of the peace treaty of Serdica on March 1, 317. The treaty fixed the boundaries of Constantine's and Licinius' areas of influence and spelled out the formal basis of a new alliance between them. Licinius was forced to cede most of his Illyrian and Pannonian provinces to Constantine and largely withdraw from Europe. Only the provinces on the Black Sea in the diocese of Thrace remained under Licinius' control. A broad stretch of the Danube frontier and the military units stationed on it thus fell to Constantine³¹. Licinius' former chief residence, Sirmium, and the mints in Siscia and Thessalonica, as well as Constantine's birthplace Naissus, also passed to Constantine after his victory. Besides this new territorial division, which entailed a significant shift of political and military power, the treaty of Serdica also revised the internal structure of the imperial college. Constantine and Licinius recognized one another again as Augusti; Crispus, Licinius Iunior, and Constantinus were elevated to Caesars, and the series of consuls for the following years was fixed³².

The agreement shows the great importance Constantine placed on dynastic politics. Constantine had even chosen the date for concluding the treaty with care: March 1 was the *dies imperii* of Constantius I. Thus, by cementing the new alliance, the 25th anniversary of his elevation to Caesar was celebrated also as the *dies imperii* of Constantine's sons Crispus and Constantinus³³. Already through his choice of the date, Constantine could invest the alliance with allusions to the victorious charisma of the Constantinian dynasty. Also with respect to the internal hierarchy of the new system, Constantine evidently attached great importance to the conspicuous preeminence of his dynasty: Constantine himself held the *titulus primi nominis* and thus notional authority over the entire imperial college; and he was able to elevate two of his sons simul-

³¹ According to the *Notitia Dignitatum*, 14 legions were stationed in this area at the beginning of the fifth century, which will have corresponded roughly to the order of magnitude of the early fourth century; cf. Jones 1964: vol. 3, 368–375 (table ix).

³² On the arrangement of consulates for the years 318 to 320, see Grünwald 1990: 116f.

³³ The number of regnal years was reckoned inclusively, so that the *dies imperii* of Crispus and Constantinus on March 1, 317, coincided with the 25th anniversary of Constantius' I elevation to Caesar.

taneously, Crispus and Constantinus, while Licinius could contribute only one Caesar, his son Licinius Iunior. The projected succession of consulates also clearly shows the superiority of members of the Constantinian dynasty to Licinius and his son: In the years 318 to 320, Licinius and Licinius Iunior held only two of the six available ordinary consulates, whereas Constantine and his sons held four. Constantine obviously strove to trump Licinius with these symbolic political gestures and ostentatiously demonstrate his dominance over his eastern partner.

In this general context, reference to his famous ancestry again took on great importance to Constantine. By referring to his illustrious pedigree, Constantine could credibly demonstrate the superiority of his family over Licinius and his son. Due to the great importance of Constantine's dynastic representation in the years from 317 to 321, Optatian's *carmina* are not the only evidence in which an intensification of references to Constantine's glorious ancestry can be perceived. The importance of the Constantinian dynasty within the new imperial college was confirmed particularly impressively in the years 318/319 in a noticeably prolific issue of memorial coins for Constantius I and, for the first time, also for Claudius Gothicus and Maximian³⁴. The coins in question were produced in bronze in great numbers at the mints of Trier, Arles, Aquileia, Rome, Siscia, and Thessalonica. They bear the portrait of the deified emperor *capite velato* with the epithets *optimus imperator*, *pius princeps*, or (in Maximian's case) *senior fortissimus imperator*³⁵. Two different reverse legends were used for the memorial issues: *memoriae aeternae* (eagle or lion) and *requies optimorum meritorum* (the deified emperor *capite velato* on *sella curulis*).

The surprising appeal to the deified Maximian, who had been subjected to a degrading *damnatio memoriae* after his failed usurpation against Constantine in 310, can be explained by the fact that he still possessed positive qualities that were useful to Constantine in many ways: Maximian was *auctor imperii*, father-in-law, and

³⁴ RIC 7 erroneously places the beginning of this series in the period before the coinage reform of 318; against this, see Depeyrot 1996 (for the coinage produced in Arles).

³⁵ DIVO CLAUDIO OPTIMO IMP: RIC 7 Treveri 203, 207; Arelate 173, 176; Aquileia 23, 26; Roma 106, 109, 112, 115f., 119, 122, 125, 128; Siscia 43, 45; Thessalonica 26. DIVO MAXIMIANO OPTIMO IMP bzw. SEN FORT IMP: RIC 7 Arelate 174, 177; Treveri 200, 204f.; Roma 104, 107, 110, 113, 117, 120, 123, 126; Siscia 41, 44; Thessalonica 24. DIVO CONSTANTIO OPTIMO IMP bzw. PIO PRINCIPI: RIC 7 Treveri 201, 202, 206; Arelate 175, 178; Aquileia 22, 25; Roma 105, 108, 111, 114, 121, 124, 127; Siscia 42, 46; Thessalonica 25.

adoptive father of Constantius I, as well as *auctor imperii*, father-in-law, and adoptive grandfather of Constantine. Constantine was still married to Fausta, Maximian's daughter, who moreover had borne him two sons in the years 316/317, the older of whom had been declared Caesar at the tender age of less than one year; and both sons could be considered potential successors. To this extent, Maximian could still be evoked so as to confirm the dynastic legitimacy of future generations of the Constantinian dynasty. Moreover, Maximian had not supported the elevation of Licinius to emperor at the Conference of Carnuntum in 308. The anonymous panegyrist of 307 had already emphasized the connection between the Herculan emperors, Maximian, Constantius I, and Constantine, and had completely ignored the Jovian emperors (at the time, Galerius and Maximinus Daza)³⁶. More than ten years later, dissociation from the Jovian Licinius is stressed in a quite similar manner by Constantine's reference to Maximian³⁷.

The consecration issues were thus unambiguously tailored to the Constantinian part of the new imperial system and introduced a marked asymmetry between the Constantinian and Licinian dynasties in Constantine's imperial self-representation, despite the fact that Constantine also had issues for Licinius and Licinius Iunior produced in his mints from 317 to 321. The rehabilitation of Maximian also reveals that reference to Claudius Gothicus now no longer was conceived as a means of distancing Constantine from Maximian. All three deified emperors now served Constantine equally as tokens of his noble birth and his indisputable right to rule, though reference to the deified Maximian appears only in the Constantinian coinage, but neither in surviving inscriptions nor in Optatian's *carmina*.

After the peace treaty of Serdica, Constantine apparently mobilized all available dynastic arguments to express his privileged status over Licinius. He unabashedly pointed to three generations of extraordinarily famous ancestors: Claudius Gothicus, Maximian, and Constantius I. Unsurprisingly, Licinius did not adopt these references to Constantine's ancestors in his own minting program.

³⁶ *Pan. lat.* 7(6).

³⁷ Also Eutropia, Maximian's widow and Fausta's mother, appears to have received new honors in this context. This is at least suggested in a letter from Constantine to Macarius and the other bishops of Palestine from the years 324 to 326, cited in the *Vita Constantini*, in which Constantine calls Eutropia *ὁσιωτάτη κηδεστρία*: Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 3.52. In this time, Eutropia even officially represented the Constantinian dynasty in the Eastern provinces: cf. RE Eutropia 1; PLRE 1 Eutropia 2.

And since he did not advertise his own *auctores imperii* Diocletian and Galerius, he could offer nothing comparable to Constantine's densely packed dynastic self-representation³⁸.

References to Constantine's famous ancestry thus set Constantine apart from his eastern rival Licinius. However, Optatian's *carmina* depart noticeably from the iconographic and textual program of the consecration issues. The coinage honors the *memoria* of the deified emperors, whereby they are summarily described as *optimus imperator* or *pius princeps*. In the consecration issues, the individual accomplishments of each ruler are not treated specifically. Only Maximian is set apart from Claudius Gothicus and Constantius I by the title *senior fortissimus imperator*, which reflects the official title Maximian assumed after his abdication in 305. Optatian's *carmina*, in contrast, contain references only to Claudius Gothicus and Constantius I, while Maximian is not mentioned at all. Optatian also clearly differentiates between Claudius Gothicus and Constantius I for their role within the Constantinian dynasty. In the *carmina*, Claudius Gothicus basically stands for military and Constantius I for civil accomplishments. Optatian's treatment of Claudius Gothicus as Constantine's ancestor conspicuously celebrates his military ability: Claudius is *invictus bellis* and bore *insignia magna virtutum*, whereby Optatian alludes primarily to his victory over the Goths at Naisus and his subsequent assumption of the triumphal title *gothicus maximus*³⁹. Constantius I, by contrast, is praised less for his military strength than for his civil achievements for the good of the *res publica*. In the case of Constantius I, one primarily encounters, not *virtus*, but rather *pietas* and *liberalitas*, as well as his dedication to *pax* and *iustitia*: *et pietate potens Constantius omnia pace / ac iustis auctus complerit saecula donis*⁴⁰. Optatian's reason for passing over the military achievements of Constantius I may be that Constantine's father had won his greatest victory in a *bellum civile*, thus in a victory *ex sanguine Romano* that Roman tradition rendered far less suitable a subject for the glorification of the military accomplishments of the victor than a victory over external enemies. Claudius Gothicus, on

³⁸ The typical reverse legends for Constantine, Crispus, and Constantinus in Licinius' coinage are IOVI CONSERVATORI (with the addition AVGG or CAESS) as well as PROVIDENTIAE CAESS. An exception is RIC 7 Nicomedia 22, an *aureus* for Crispus with the reverse legend SOLI INVICTO (A.D. 319).

³⁹ Opt. Porf. *carm.* 8.27f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 8.29f. *Auctus* stands for *augustus* here (cf. Polara 1973b: vol. 2, p. 64). As Polara (*ibid.*) does, I also understand *omnia saecula* here in the sense *cum orbi universo*.

the other hand, had won a magnificent victory over barbarians and could be praised for it comprehensively. The military achievements of Claudius Gothicus and the civil achievements of Constantius I are thus intended to complement one another in Optatian's *carmina*, together completing a picture of the comprehensive efforts of the Constantinian dynasty for the good of the Roman people. The glory of his distinguished ancestors shines both on Constantine and on his sons and grandsons and makes them seem to carry the hopes of the entire Empire.

The references to Constantine's father focus on the facts that Constantius I has conveyed the *imperium* on his son in the summer of 306 and was deified immediately after his death. Constantine could thus quite rightly be viewed as the biological son of a deified Augustus who even was his *auctor imperii*. In the case of Claudius Gothicus, matters were not so clear-cut. As *carmen* 8 shows, Constantine's claim to descend from Claudius Gothicus remained somewhat problematic even in the years 317 to 321, the period in which the poem was most probably composed. With the verses *His decus a proavo, et verae conscia prolis / Roma cluit, princeps invicto militis, alma, / otia pacis amans* (*carm.* 8.11-13) Optatian suggests that Roma is aware that Constantine's sons are "true descendants" from Claudius Gothicus. But this phrase also implies that Constantine's alleged ancestry still had not convinced every inhabitant of the Empire. Without postulating a direct reference, the verse echoes a passage from the panegyric of 310 mentioned above, that most people were still ignorant of the emperor's descent from Claudius Gothicus, but the genealogical link was already known to his closest companions⁴¹. Since it was obviously not possible to manipulate public discourses about the emperor *ad libitum*, it is not surprising that Claudius Gothicus only ever played a subordinate role in Constantine's dynastic representation. Optatian's *carmina* are among the most important evidence in which this retrospective construction of the emperor's ancestry appears.

b) Crispus

As a result of the peace treaty of Serdica, the two oldest sons of Constantine were elevated to Caesars. Optatian's depiction of their roles within the imperial college is not entirely uniform: In some *carmina* that celebrate the Caesars' accomplishments, Optatian

⁴¹ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).2.1: *plerique nesciunt – qui te amant sciunt*.

forebears to name the sons explicitly, and he gives no indication of the difference in status between the two Caesars (thus in *carm.* 7, 8, 16). In other *carmina*, however, only Crispus is mentioned by name and placed prominently before his half-brother, whose name is omitted (5, 9, 10, 20a).

The *carmina* that refer to Crispus' accomplishments emphasize his military accomplishments in particular. This rests on a *fundamentum in re*: Since his nomination as Caesar, Crispus had played a prominent part in the defense of the Rhine frontier and as commander of the Constantinian fleet in the war against Licinius. In *carmen* 5, which can be dated quite securely to early 326, Optatian expects Crispus to resolve the constantly problematic situation on the Rhine once and for all by military means, to inflict harsh terms of peace on the Franci, and thus to stabilize the Gallic provinces lastingly⁴²: *sed Crispi in fortia vires / non dubiae ripa Rhenum Rhodanumque tueri / ulteriore parant et Francis trista iura / Iam tu, sancte puer, spes tantae rite quieti / missa polo*.

The glory of the ancestors also passes particularly to Crispus as the oldest son of Constantine's and is augmented by Crispus' own achievements. Crispus is also described as *avis melior* (*carm.* 9.24) and *atavo summo melior* (*carm.* 10.29). Optatian thus explicitly has him surpass the great and glorious deeds of Claudius Gothicus and Constantius I. But the glory of the family does not merely pass to each succeeding generation, as discussed at length above. The Caesars' glory also, vice versa, magnifies the glory of Constantine. Through his sons, the emperor merits lavish praise: *perque tuos natos vincis praeconia magna*⁴³. Here too, Crispus is praised especially as the noble decoration for his father: *nobile tu decus es patri*⁴⁴.

The reference to the generation of Constantine's grandsons in *carmina* 16 and 19 also elevates particularly Crispus' status: as a holy ancestry, Constantine shall some day, after a thousand victories, hand over the scepter to his grandsons: *tuque, o sancte parens, olim post mille tropaea, / o lux Ausonidum, dispone sceptrum nepotum*⁴⁵, and the successful deeds of the grandchildren will be bound up with the deeds of their ancestors: *Iudice te vel teste pio condigna parentis / iungentur titulis felicia facta nepotum*⁴⁶. At the time when the poems were composed, Crispus

⁴² Opt. Porf. *carm.* 5.30-34.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 8.33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 9.26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 16.37f.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 19.37f.

already had a son of his own, Constantine's first grandson (whose name is unknown): In 322, Crispus' wife Helena had given birth to a potential heir to the throne. The two poems in which Constantine's grandchildren are mentioned can be dated to the years 321-324 or 326, respectively. Optatian must have known of the existence of Crispus' son at the time when he composed the verses in question⁴⁷. That the young family of Crispus played a key part in Constantine's dynastic plans is not merely a literary construction of the poet. One can see this already in the fact that Helena was raised to the rank of *nobilissima femina* and even honored with her own series of bronze coins probably in the years 319/320⁴⁸.

How then should one explain that in several poems Crispus is mentioned by name and given clear priority over his half-brother and fellow Caesar Constantinus, whereas in other poems Crispus and Constantinus appear to be equals? This seeming contradiction can be solved by considering the differing dates at which the *carmina* were composed. In *carmen* 10, which almost certainly was composed before March 1, 321, only Crispus' deeds are praised in particular. In *carmina* 7, 8, and 16, which were composed between March 1, 321, and the final victory over Licinius in 324, there is no discernible difference of status between the two Caesars. Finally, in *carmina* 5, 9, and 20a, which were written after victory over Licinius, Crispus again is given clear preference⁴⁹. Optatian is here reacting to a significant change in the official representation of the Constantinian dynasty, as will be shown in the following.

Decisive for our understanding of Constantine's dynastic plans during the years 317 to 326 is the question of the official hierarchy of ranks among the Caesars, in particular between Crispus and Constantinus. When Constantine named his two oldest sons Caesars on March 1, 317, he conferred political power on two conceivably unequal figures: Crispus was already about 15 years old at the time. His younger half-brother, however, had presumably not yet reached the tender age of even one year old (four years later, the panegyricist Nazarius would praise the younger Caesar for being

⁴⁷ See the "tableau chronologique" in Bruhat 1999: 495-501.

⁴⁸ RIC 7 Thessalonica 48-50; see Drijvers 1992: 39-41, who however comes to the conclusion that the series was issued in honor of the emperor's mother, Helena, not for Crispus' wife. The portrait, however, differs significantly from issues for Constantine's mother, who in other issues is never styled *nobilissima femina*, but rather constantly *augusta*.

⁴⁹ For the dates, see Bruhat 1999: 495-501.

able to write his own name already)⁵⁰. It is no surprise, then, both Caesars were integrated into the imperial college in very different ways, despite their simultaneous elevation and equal *tribunicia potestas*: The earlier *dies natalis* marked Crispus as the preferred Caesar, not only over his half-brother Constantinus, but also over Licinius Iunior, Licinius' first son, to whom Constantine's half-sister Constantia had given birth probably in late summer, 315 (Licinius Iunior was thus only slightly older than Constantinus and had not yet celebrated his second birthday at the time of the conclusion of the renewed alliance between Constantine and Licinius)⁵¹. As epigraphic sources unambiguously show, Crispus occupied third place within the five-headed imperial college: As the highest ranking Caesar, he was placed formally immediately after the Augusti and was always named before Licinius Iunior and Constantinus. After the breakdown of the alliance between Constantine and Licinius, Crispus continues to be named always before Constantinus in the inscriptions. No further differences (for instance, of titulature) can be found in the inscriptions⁵².

Crispus was not, however, distinguished only by pride of place according to protocol. Probably from as early as 317, he resided as Caesar in Trier in Constantine's absence and could win some prestige and a name for himself locally with victories over the Franci and Alamanni in the years 320 and 323⁵³. Constantinus, however, still a minor, remained near Constantine during this time and could not yet undertake anything on his own initiative. In light of these clear differences, it is no surprise that Crispus is clearly preferred to Constantinus in Optatian's *carmen* 10, which may be dated to 320/321 (the earliest poem to mention Crispus). It is all the more striking that in the next three poems that address the deeds of the Caesars – specifically, *carmina* 7, 8, and 16, which can be dated to the period 321–324 –, Crispus no longer is given preference over his

⁵⁰ Crispus was born ca. 302; see Nixon/Rodgers 1994: 195 n. 10. For the date of the birth of Constantinus, see Barnes 2011: 102 with n. 19. Various scholars have claimed that Constantinus was not the son of Fausta, but rather that of a concubine of Constantine's (thus e.g. PLRE 1 Constantinus 3). The hypothetical illegitimacy of Constantinus' birth has been rejected with good reasons; see Guthrie 1966: 330f.; Barnes 1973: 36 n. 71 and 38 n. 110; idem 1982: 45; idem 2011: 212 n. 19. The quotation: *Pan. lat.* 4(10).37.5: *iam maturato studio litteris habilis, iam felix dextera fructuosa subscriptione laetatur*.

⁵¹ On the date of the birth of Licinius Iunior see *Epit. de caes.* 41.4; Zos. *Nea Hist.* 2.20.2; Barnes 2011: 102.

⁵² Cf. Grünwald 1990: Nr. 124, 269, 277, 339, 381f., 384, 479b, 480b.

⁵³ Nixon/Rodgers 1994: 382 n. 165.

half-brother. This does not seem to be mere coincidence. Optatian rather reflects a change in Constantine's dynastic representation, for there is some indication that after March 1, 321, Constantine had attempted to level the differences of rank between his two Caesars and to constrain the pre-eminent position of his oldest son⁵⁴.

The Constantinian coinage virtually ceased to attribute Crispus any special role that would have gone beyond his formal priority according to protocol. Whereas even Crispus' wife Helena had been honored with her own coinage issue (as discussed above), from early 321 there is no evidence that Constantine's oldest son and his young family were particularly privileged any longer. The coin issues from Sirmium in particular show how the official relationship between Crispus and Constantinus was conceived over the years from 321 to 324 (similar attempts to specify the relationship between the two Caesars appear also at the other mints). The following options were chosen: (a) in some issues, there is no perceivable difference of status between the Caesars. The Caesars are cited in the plural in legends such as *VIRTUS AVG ET CAESS* without drawing attention to their exact rank⁵⁵. (b) Frequently the very same reverse type is used to produce different issues for both Caesars, on which merely the appropriate name is matched with the obverse portrait⁵⁶. Here too there is no detectable difference of status between the two Caesars. (c) Several issues show the portraits of both Caesars on the same obverse, on which Crispus is always named first and is usually depicted left, i.e. on the iconographically privileged side. While the busts are almost indistinguishable in design, Crispus is usually depicted a bit larger. The difference, though, is minimal, precisely so that a difference can just barely be perceived⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Constantine's tendency to ensure a balanced treatment of both Caesars is particularly revealing in the synchronization of the Caesars' consulates: Whereas Crispus and Constantinus held the consulate in the years 318 and 320 without the other Caesar, they now held only joint consulates: For the second time in 321 and for the third time in 324. One important effect was that Crispus could no longer cite a higher number of consulates to claim a higher rank. More indications for this change in protocol are discussed in the following paragraphs.

⁵⁵ Cf. e.g. RIC 7 Sirmium 17.

⁵⁶ So for example in the case of the *solidi* RIC 7 Sirmium 26f. with the legends *VICTORIA CRISPI CAES //* *VOT/X* OF *VICTORIA CONSTANTINI CAES //* *VOT/X*.

⁵⁷ For example, the 1½ *solidus* RIC 7 Siscia 26, which shows the busts of the Caesars facing one another with the reverse legend *CRISPVS ET CONSTANTINVS NOBIS CAESS*, or the series of lighter *miliarenses* from Sirmium (RIC 7 Sirmium 11–14), on the reverses of which the

In this context, it is also striking how Constantine staged his victory over the Sarmatians in 322. Here too we can observe the goal of a symmetrical dynastic representation. On the occasion of the Sarmatian victory, a celebratory gold issue was produced that referred to Constantine's *victoria sarmatica*, including besides *solidi* also multiples of 1½, 2, and 3 *solidi* and corresponding fractional denominations, altogether a notably rich celebratory issue⁵⁸. It is remarkable that these pieces were minted only in Trier, but not in Sirmium, which alongside Trier was Constantine's only other mint at the time to produce gold coins. The obverses of the gold coins bear the portrait and titulature of Constantinus. The reverses depict the prince in military dress, holding a *hasta* in the left hand and a *globus* in the right, as he steps upon a supplicating enemy (a depiction of *calcatio*). The legend reads *PRINCIPIA IVVENTVTIS*. In the field below the scene, the text *SAMARTIA* makes explicit reference to Constantine's Sarmatian victory. It is remarkable that the issues do not depict Constantine, the actual victor, but rather the portrait and titulature of Constantine's son and Caesar Constantinus. The Caesar, however, had only just turned six years old at the time of the victory and cannot have had any influence on the course of events. And neither Constantine nor Constantinus resided at that time in the West, where the coins were issued.

The issues were presumably coined for donatives and largesses that followed Crispus' victory over the Alamanni in summer, 323. The gold pieces were thus distributed jointly with the victory issues for Crispus and so contributed a symbolic counterbalance to the victory of the elder Caesar. This was obviously meant to create the impression of a neat equilibrium in the overall conception of Constantine's dynastic representation. The fact that Constantine

Caesars flanked the emperor with the legend *FELICITAS ROMANORVM*. Similar iconography underlies the design of the 1½ *solidus* RIC 7 Sirmium 20, which displays in its obverse the facing busts of the Caesars, who jointly hold a *victoriola*, with the titulature *CRISPVS ET CONSTANTINVS NOBB CC COSS II*. Probably related is the unusual 2 *solidi* multiple from Trier with the legend *FELIX PROGENIES CONSTANTINI AVG* (RIC 7 Treveri 442), which was coined in 324, showing both Caesars in slightly differing size with a gesture of *concordia*, accompanied by Fausta; see also R.-Alföldi 2001: 14f. As the light *miliarensis* from Sirmium illustrates, the varying body sizes are made clearly visible only when the older Caesar is depicted on the right rather than on the left.

⁵⁸ RIC 7 Treveri 358-361, 364A (*PRINCIPIA IVVENTVTIS / SARMATIA*); Treveri 364, 367; Depeyrot 1995: Trèves 29/2 (*GAVDIVM ROMANORVM / SARMATIA*). The types RIC 7 Treveri 532f. and 536 (*PRINCIPIA IVVENTVTIS / SARMATIA*), erroneously dated by Bruun to the year 322, also belong to the victory series.

promoted his second Caesar so intensely precisely in Trier, Crispus' residence, clearly shows that Constantine saw it necessary to counteract, at least on a symbolic level, the rapid rise of his oldest son and the growing asymmetry between the two Caesars⁵⁹.

A variety of evidence thus shows that Crispus and Constantinus were treated in Constantine's imperial representation over the years 321 to 324 in as balanced a way as possible. This demands explanation, in particularly in light of the fact that Crispus previously had so conspicuously been preferred to his half-brother. With the breach between Constantine and Licinius in early 321, Constantine had the opportunity to elevate Crispus, so as to create a new second Augustus at Constantine's side. Constantine decided, however, to go the other way. Instead of promoting Crispus, he confined Crispus' role and thereby emphasized the status difference between himself as Augustus and his two oldest sons as Caesars. Apparently, Constantine intended to reserve the rank of Augustus to himself for the foreseeable future. The palace crisis of 326, which will to be discussed in greater detail below, may indicate that Crispus had other plans.

After his victory over Licinius, Constantine was forced to partially abandon his efforts to slow the rise of his oldest son. Although even after 324 Crispus and Constantinus are generally treated equally in the iconography and legends of Constantine's coinage, still this period also exhibits signs that Crispus had been able to turn his part in the civil war into political capital. Constantine had been able to defeat Licinius not least with the aid of a massive fleet that he had built in Thessalonica and in Piraeus over the years before 324⁶⁰. He had entrusted Crispus with the command of the fleet, who successfully defeated Licinius' fleet in the Battle of Chrysopolis on September 18, 324, contributing decisively to Constantine's victory. This event was intensively utilized in Constantine's imperial representation, in a style with striking Augustan echoes: *Rostra* are ubiquitous in Constantine's coinage after the victory over Licinius, just as they had been in Augustus' self-representation after the Battle of Actium. The goddess Victory, who sets her foot on the prow of a ship, steers a trireme, or, standing on a ship, raises a crown of victory, is an unmistakable symbol for the naval victory at Chysopolis.

⁵⁹ Bruun 1966: 146 also suggests this: "it would have been tempting to interpret the whole issue in the light of the tragedy of 326, with Crispus possibly a trifle too independent".

⁶⁰ On the outfitting of the fleets, see Zos. *Nea hist.* 2.22.1f.; Bruun 1961: 74ff.

However, Constantine's coinage also shows that the Caesar's spectacular success was not only celebrated abstractly, but was quite concretely credited to Crispus. Immediately after the victory, the mints of Nicomedia and Thessalonica issued a special *solidus* series almost exclusively for Crispus with the legend *VIRTUS CAESARI N.*⁶¹. The gold coins were probably given to the soldiers and officers as gifts from Crispus, when Constantine and his sons accepted Licinius' capitulation in Nicomedia in September, 324, and, when Crispus on his way back to Trier stopped at Thessalonica, where his fleet had set sail against Licinius only a few weeks before. The naval victory at Chrysopolis had evidently raised Crispus' status within the imperial college so decisively that he now had new options for his self-representation as Caesar within the dynastic ruler college. These developments are also reflected in Optatian's *carmina*: in *carmina* 5, 9, and 20a, which can be dated securely to the period after Constantine's victory over Licinius, Crispus is now again explicitly set above his half-brothers. As already discussed, Optatian has the Caesar surpass the great, famous deeds of Claudius Gothicus and Constantius I and appear as his father's presumptive heir. This too is a clear indication that after the victory over Licinius, Constantine had to concede his oldest son significantly more options for his self-representation. At the same time, however, Constantine introduced measures that were not in Crispus' favor: On November 8, 324, a further son of Constantine's, Constantius, the second son of Constantine's wife Fausta, was raised to Caesar. Roughly at the same time Fausta was raised to Augusta. She now played a far more crucial role in Constantine's dynastic politics than before, which again raised the status of her sons, as well. Minervina, however, Crispus' mother, still played no part in Constantine's imperial representation. Crispus will have realized that these measures would sooner or later weaken his position. The palace crisis of 326 potentially resulted from tensions between Constantine and Crispus based on divergent ideas of the Caesar's future within the imperial college. The crisis was undoubtedly the severest blow to Constantine's dynastic politics and fundamentally changed not only the *domus divina* but also the imperial college. The conflict continues to be interpreted differently, not least because the ancient sources do not present any

⁶¹ RIC 7 Nicomedia 84f.; Thessalonica 136. Neither Bastien 1988 nor Beyeler 2011 recognized the issues as a distinct donative.

plausible reasons for the drastic changes made.⁶² So what can be said about the events?

The year 326 was supposed to be a magnificent jubilee year, in which the successes of the Constantinian dynasty were to be celebrated. The *decennalia incipientia* of both Caesars Crispus and Constantinus fell on March 1, 326, Constantine's *vicennalia perfecta* on July 25, 326. Several pieces of evidence suggest that both jubilees were to be celebrated in a joint festival in Rome on July 25, 326⁶³. The plans would not be carried out, though: just weeks before the planned festivities (presumably in April or May 326) en route to Rome in Pola (today Pula in Croatia), Constantine's oldest son and most successful Caesar, Crispus, was condemned to death and executed on Constantine's orders⁶⁴. The trial in which Crispus was condemned was apparently led by Constantine himself together with some of his closest advisors⁶⁵. Eutropius reports that *numerosi amici* also fell victim to the palace crisis⁶⁶. Constantine thus appears to have instituted a purge of his son's supporters. This must have affected the civil and military ruling class of Gaul in particular, where Crispus had, with few interruptions, resided as Caesar from 317 to 326, and where he won a reputation as a promising heir to the throne in his successful campaigns against the Franci and Alamanni⁶⁷. Which persons or groups of persons were affected beyond this remains open to conjecture. T. D. Barnes has plausibly argued

⁶² Among various reconstructions, see Jones 1964: 85; Guthrie 1966; Austin 1980; Barnes 1981: 220f.; Pohlsander 1984; Drijvers 1992: 60-63; Clauss 2005: 50; Elliott 1996: 233; Woods 1998; Van Dam 2007: 110f.

⁶³ Opt. Porf. *carm.* 5 connects the emperor's *vicennalia* explicitly with the *decennalia* of the Caesars. Constantinian medals (collected in Bastien 1988: 78-80) suggest the same. Although celebratory coins were issued for the *decennalia* of the Caesars in March, so that we may assume that distinct festivities were also held on a limited scale for the occasion, the real climax was apparently not supposed to occur until July, in a joint celebration of the Caesars' *decennalia* and Constantine's *vicennalia* in Rome. This is shown by the fact that only a few celebratory issues were distributed for the *decennalia* of Crispus (while he was still alive) and that the majority of the issues for the *decennalia* of Constantinus Iunior date after the death of his half-brother. On this question, see the discussion in the last section of this paper.

⁶⁴ Sources on Crispus' death: *Epit. de caes.* 41.11f.; *Jer. Chron.* 231^d; *Philost. Hist. eccl.* 2.4; *Sid. Apoll. Ep.* 5.8.2; *Zos. Nea hist.* 2.29.2.; *Art. Pass.* 45. On the dating of Crispus' death, see Barnes 2011: 146f. The location is reported in *Amm. Marc.* 14.11.20.

⁶⁵ Barnes 2011: 144-150 has discussed the episode again in detail.

⁶⁶ *Eutr. Brev.* 10.6.3.

⁶⁷ This is also indicated in Optatian's *carmina*. Cf. e.g. Opt. Porf. *carm.* 5.33f.: *iam tu, sancte puer, spes tantae rite quieti / missa polo; carm.* 9.23-27: *sancte, salus mundi, armis insignibus ardens, / Crispe, avis melior, te carmine laeta secundo / Clio Musa sonans tua fatur pulchra iuventae. / Nobile tu decus es patri, tuque alme Quiritum / et spes urbis eris.*

that the Roman aristocrat Ceionius Rufius Albinus was exiled in consequence to the palace crisis⁶⁸. Constantine's wife Fausta was also killed in connection with Crispus' fall, though apparently not through a regular trial procedure. Since nothing more is said of Crispus' wife Helena and their child, they were probably also killed, arrested, or exiled. Archaeological remains under the cathedral of Trier moreover suggest that Crispus' living quarters in the palace were destroyed during the conflict⁶⁹. Crispus and Fausta were subjected to a degrading *damnatio memoriae*, i.e. their *memoria* was officially disgraced after their fall by the toppling of their statues and the erasure of their names in inscriptions.

Zosimus and Zonaras present the theory accepted in some strands of Constantine scholarship that Constantine had his son Crispus and his wife Fausta killed because of an indecent relationship between the two family members⁷⁰. This does not explain, however, how the most successful and ambitious of Constantine's sons, who had counted as presumptive heir for over a decade and who had been endowed with far-reaching powers, so abruptly could lose his father's favor; why Constantine personally presided over a trial against Crispus; why not only Crispus but also *numerosi amici* fell victim to the palace crisis; why Constantine imposed a *damnatio memoriae* on Crispus and Fausta; or why the crisis occurred precisely in the year of the Caesar's *decennalia*.

The circumstances point rather to a political conflict between Crispus and Constantine: Diocletian had introduced the idea of automatic promotion to Augustus after ten years as Caesar, a precedent that a confident and successful Caesar could easily have cited. At the time of his *decennalia*, Crispus was about 24 years old and already had a four-year-old son with his wife Helena, while both his oldest half-brothers were only about 10 years old⁷¹. Thus the time slot in which Crispus could realize his claims to higher rank within the Constantinian system, without having to take his half-brothers into consideration, was clearly limited. Moreover, Crispus' half-brothers descended from Constantine's marriage with Fausta, who had been raised to Augusta after the victory over Licinius. Crispus' mother Minervina, in contrast, had not played any role in Constan-

tine's self-representation since 307 and (perhaps wrongly) appears in the late antique sources merely as a concubine⁷². Crispus must have feared that further developments would slowly but surely cost him his prominent place in the Constantinian imperial college. The circumstances thus suggest that Crispus all too confidently strove for the rank of Augustus and perhaps even showed some preparedness to assume such illustrious status even against the emperor's will. What part Fausta might have played in this context, however, remains unclear. The absence of any trace of a political dimension to the conflict between Crispus and Constantine in the ancient sources could be understood as an indication that Constantine was able to solve the problem before a military intervention became necessary.

The dynastic crisis of 326 made it necessary to rebuild the Constantinian ruling house from the ground up. This was also necessitated by the fact that Constantine did not remarry after Fausta's death and so could expect no further descendants of his own⁷³. It is obvious that Constantine now incorporated family members from the lateral line descending from Theodora much more intimately in the *domus divina*, conferred high-ranking functions on them, and provided for them in his dynastic plans. In Optatian's *carmina*, though, Crispus is celebrated posthumously in problematic fashion. The corpus of poems for which the *carmina* in question had been prepared, was presented to Constantine in Rome on the occasion of his *vicennalia perfecta* on July 25, 326, by high-ranking patrons of Optatian from within the senatorial aristocracy of Rome—just a few weeks after the dishonorable fall and death of the Caesar. This circumstance raises the question how the *carmina* were embedded in the communicative framework of Constantine's imperial self-representation, and it casts light on the performative functions of the *carmina*, which will now be treated in the final section of this paper.

The Praxeology of Optatian's Panegyric Pattern Poetry

The fact that Crispus is praised so lavishly in the *carmina* is usually taken as evidence that Optatian had the corpus delivered

⁶⁸ Barnes 1975b: 48 and idem 2011: 148f.

⁶⁹ Drijvers 1992: 24-30; the Rome with the magnificent ceiling fresco preserved under the cathedral appears to have been the bedroom of the younger Helena, Crispus' wife.

⁷⁰ Zos. *Nea Hist.* 2.29.1-2; Zonar. 13.2.38-41.

⁷¹ On the date of the birth of Crispus' son: Barnes 2011: 104.

⁷² *Epit. de Caes.* 41.4; Zos. *Nea hist.* 2.20.2; Zonar. 8.2.

⁷³ Barnes 2011: 150-152 has proven this again most recently against Chausson 2007: 107-116. A Constantia, who appears in some sources (*Philost. Hist. eccl.* 3.22, 3.28; *Petr. Patr. Frag.* 16; *Lib. Pont.* 37.4) as Constantine's daughter and thus presupposes a third wife, derives from confusion with Constantina, Constantine's oldest daughter by Fausta.

to the emperor before the palace crisis—a seemingly clear *terminus ante quem*. Most scholars assume that the poems were presented to Constantine already in 325 on the occasion of the emperor's *vicennalia incipientia* and not a year later on the occasion of his *vicennalia perfecta*. On July 25, 326, Crispus was already dead and subjected to a *damnatio memoriae*. Yet a date to the *vicennalia perfecta* can conclusively be drawn from the *carmina* themselves.

There is no doubt that the poems refer to the *vicennalia*⁷⁴. Several indications moreover suggest that Optatian had the *vicennalia perfecta* of 326 in view when he assembled his poetic corpus and composed the last poems for it. *Carm.* 20a (v. 12-26) illustrates at length how the festivities would be solemnized in the absence of the poet and in the presence of the Roman senate in Rome: *hinc ordo veste clara / cum purpuris honorum / fausto precantur ore / feruntque dona laeti. / iam Roma, culmen orbis, / dat munera et coronas, / auro ferens coruscas / Victorias triumphis, / votaue iam theatri / redduntur et choreis. / Me sors iniqua laetis / sollemnibus remotum / vix haec sonare sivit, / tot vota fonte Phoebi / versuque compta solo*. Since Constantine celebrated only the *vicennalia perfecta* in Rome, but spent the beginning of the jubilee year a year before far away in Nicomedia, the passage points clearly to the year 326. In several passages, moreover, Constantine's *vicennalia* are explicitly connected with the *decennalia* of the Caesars Crispus and Constantinus: In *carmen* 5, the colored *versus intexti* woven into the ground text connect both celebrations with the inscription AVG./XX./CAE./S.X (cf. the figure). *Carmen* 9 (v. 35f.), again, formulates the connection explicitly: *vicennia laeta / augusto et decies crescant sollemnia natis*⁷⁵. Joint celebration of both jubilees, though, was possible only in 326, since the Caesars' *decennalia* did not begin until March 1, 326.

Constantine's coinage program confirms that the *vicennalia* were to be celebrated together with the *decennalia* of the Caesars⁷⁶. First

⁷⁴ In several passages of his *carmina*, Optatian refers to the twentieth jubilee of Constantine's reign: *carm.* 4.1, 5.8, 9.35, 16.35, 19.33. The intext verses of *carm.* 5 and 19 also refer to the *vicennalia*.

⁷⁵ Cf. also *carm.* 5.26: *compleat et versu variata decennia picto*. When *carm.* 5, 9, and 20 were composed, Constantine already had four sons: Crispus, Constantinus, Constantius, and Constans, three of whom already held the title Caesar: Crispus and Constantinus since March 1, 317, Constantius since November 8, 324. The visual and textual programs of these *carmina*, however, refer only to Crispus and Constantinus, since only these two Caesars could celebrate their *decennalia* in the year 326/327; cf. *carm.* 5.28-34, 9.24-30, 9.35f.

⁷⁶ See also Seeck 1908: 276f. The relevant celebratory issues are collected in Bastien 1988: 78-80 and Beyeler 2011: 118f.

of all, celebratory coins were issued specifically for the Caesars' *decennalia*: the mint at Nicomedia put silver medallions with the legend VOTIS X CAESS NN into circulation, which celebrated the *decennalia* of both Caesars jointly with the plural *caesarum nostrorum*⁷⁷. Crispus was therefore still alive when the issues were produced. After his death, coin production swiftly adapted to the new political conditions, so that now only the *decennalia caesaris* was mentioned. There can be no doubt that the change from the plural to the singular visible in the coinage is directly related to the death of the oldest Caesar and thus datable precisely to the months between April/May 326 (Crispus' death) and July 25, 326 (Constantine's *vicennalia*). Since Crispus is no longer included in a majority of the coins minted in celebration of the *decennalia*, we must assume that by far most of the issues were produced after Crispus' death and were distributed rather in the context of Constantine's *vicennalia* than in that of the actual *dies imperii* of the Caesars in March 326. This again shows that the connection of the *decennalia* and the *vicennalia* in Optatian's *carmina* has a basis in Constantine's imperial self-representation and is not an invention of the poet.

The iconographic and textual program of the *carmina* is perfectly adapted to the planned joint celebration of Constantine's *vicennalia* and the Caesars' *decennalia* in Rome, but the poems glorify one Caesar who was already dead and subjected to a *damnatio memoriae* at the time of the celebrations. O. Seeck accordingly conjectured that Optatian had completed and sent the gift before Crispus had been killed en route to Rome or before news of his death could reach Optatian⁷⁸. If the *carmina* in which Crispus is celebrated were delivered to Constantine on July 25, 326 (and they had been composed for this purpose), the corpus of poems exhibited an embarrassing anachronism in the treatment of imperial *vota* already upon delivery. If the poems had not already been bound in a codex when Crispus' death became known, it is also possible that the problematic *paginae* were removed before the collection was presented to the emperor.

It remains debatable, however, exactly which *carmina* Optatian included in the collection he presented to Constantine in 326. The *carmina* are preserved today in over twenty manuscripts dated from

⁷⁷ RIC 7 Nicomedia 118-120.

⁷⁸ Seeck 1908: 275-278.

the eighth to sixteenth centuries⁷⁹. In these manuscripts, the collection of poems is often called a *panegyricus*, a title that most probably does not go back to Constantinian times⁸⁰. The collections known today from the medieval manuscripts do not derive from the *insigne volumen* sent to Constantine, but rather from later publications of the *carmina*. The later editions, however, were most probably altered in comparison to the original collection, although it is impossible to determine how extensive any changes before publication were⁸¹. The selection of poems that were sent to Constantine is thus not clearly identifiable in the manuscripts⁸². A total of 31 poems are connected to the name of Optatian. The manuscripts, however, preserve different selections of the *carmina*⁸³. A series of poems is preserved in a majority of the most important manuscripts, namely *carmina* 1-3, 5-16, and 20. The other poems appear more or less sporadically in the manuscripts. Whether further poems that subsequently were lost were originally included in the collection presented to Constantine can no longer be recovered. What is clear, though, is that the compositional complexity of the figurative poems will have prevented any revision of individual poems, as will be discussed below. Potential changes to the *carmina* for publication can only have affected the selection and arrangement of the poems within the corpus. The two letters and maybe also some of the preserved reading instructions (usually, but somewhat misleadingly, called 'scholia') were probably also added for the publication of the collection⁸⁴. The fact that the letters were published as well makes it plausible to assume that Optatian himself prepared a new

⁷⁹ The manuscripts have been studied by Havet 1877; Müller 1877; Kluge 1926; Polara 1971 (cf. also Polara 1973: vol. 1, vii-xxxiv), and Ernst 1991: 209-221. Ernst 1991: 209-211 with n. 130 relates the transmission of the *carmina* in 20 known codices, as well as three lost manuscripts and previously unnoticed transmission in four codices.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bruhat 1999: 42.

⁸¹ Schanz 1970: 11f. also supposed that the collection was revised before publication. He assumed, however, that only the two letters were added.

⁸² The corpus question is discussed by Polara 1971; Bruhat 1999: 31-43; Edwards 2005.

⁸³ An overview of the textual transmission is given by Polara 1973: vol. 1, vii-xxxvi and Ernst 1991: 209-211.

⁸⁴ Pipitone 2012: 25-30, in his study of the scholia, concludes that the scholia for *carmina* 2f., 5-8, 10, 12-16, 20f., and 25 are a unified group. The common transmission in the MSS B, P, E, T, R, J, Q, W, M and p allows us to identify a subarchetype *a* and probably also a common author, who potentially composed his reading instructions already in Constantinian time or at least made use of texts from Constantinian times. The rest of the scholia are later in date.

edition of his works at some point after his recall from exile. He might have intended to demonstrate his closeness to the emperor, while some sort of reading instructions from which the known scholia might derive were probably meant to compensate for the detailed explanations with which the poet's spokesmen will have elucidated the charm of this new form of courtly poetry for the emperor⁸⁵.

The reconstruction of the original corpus is complicated by two further problems. The authenticity of four *carmina* (nos. 17, 22, 24, and 31) is questionable⁸⁶, and some of the *carmina* addressed to Constantine (nos. 8, 10 and 15, and probably also 6 and 16) appear to date to the period before Optatian's exile, i.e. they had perhaps already been presented to the emperor, which would exclude a new dedication in 326⁸⁷. Furthermore it is unlikely that the poems that celebrate Crispus were also delivered to the emperor. Thus, the state of the tradition, as represented in the medieval and early modern manuscripts, offers limited reliable information on how the corpus of *carmina* sent to Constantine may originally have appeared. Just how many and which of the 31 *carmina* attributed to Optatian will have made up the corpus that was presented to Constantine in summer, 326, is impossible to tell with complete certainty. The pessimistic conclusion of J. Edwards, however ("all we can say with certainty is that Optatianus created an unknown total number of poems over an unknown span of time, and that some lesser portion of those poems were composed specifically for presentation to Constantine"), goes too far⁸⁸. It is clear that several *carmina* were assembled in an *insigne volumen*, as Jerome described the compilation, and that some of the surviving *carmina* with high probability, some with certainty, were among those included, while others certainly were not delivered to the emperor⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ Hose 2007: 551 assumes that Constantine had the poems published. It is more plausible that the poet utilized his work not only to raise his profile before the emperor, as also is attested for the prose panegyrist, but also as a means of aristocratic self-representation before his peers. Constantine's request that Eusebius prepare 50 deluxe codices of the Bible (*Vit. Const.* 4.36), which Hose 2007: 557 n. 80 cites as a possible parallel (in support of his thesis that the texts given to the emperor by Optatian and Juvenius were reproduced and disseminated at the court) is an altogether different case.

⁸⁶ Bruhat 1999: 36-39.

⁸⁷ See the data in the "tableau chronologique" in Bruhat 1999: 495-501.

⁸⁸ Edwards 2005: 449.

⁸⁹ When Jerome (*Chron.* ad a. 329) describes the collection as an *insigne volumen*, this does not necessarily mean a codex, though it implies a self-contained collection and

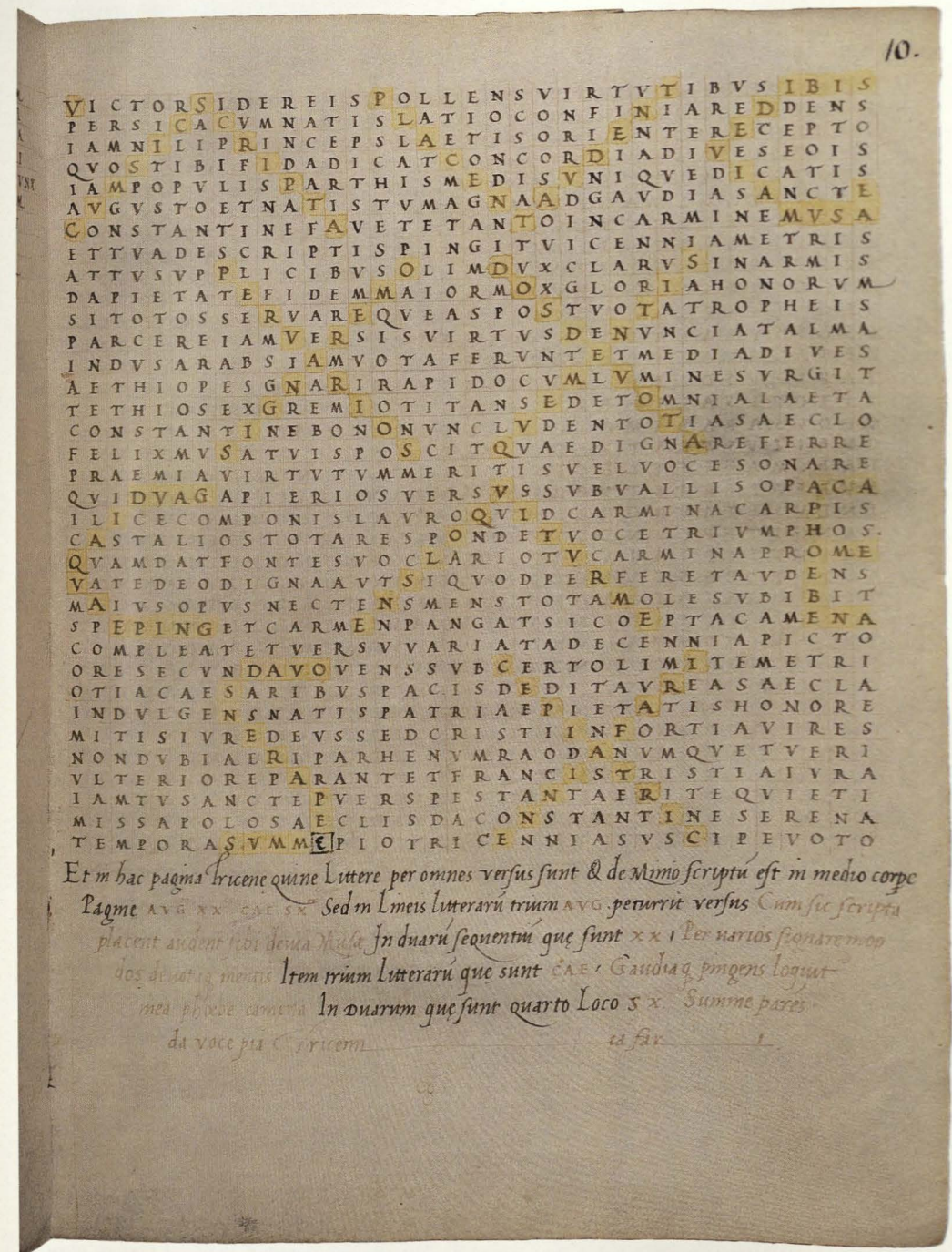
Carmina 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, and 20 all come into consideration as part of the corpus of poems, as well as potentially 6, 8, 10, 15, 16, and 24. All of these poems exhibit a panegyric character in the broadest sense; some refer directly to the *vicennalia in vota* formulae or express Optatian's plea for mercy⁹⁰. The internal structural features of various poems give further clues. Some poems – namely the *carmina* 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 19, and 24 – exhibit peculiarities that identify them as a coherent group. With few exceptions, these poems have a basic structure in the shape of a square, consisting of 35 verses of 35 letters each. The *versus intexti* of these poems are either arranged symmetrically or depict a complex figure. The texts of these poems refer to historical events of Constantine's reign, celebrate the virtue and the military and civil achievements of the emperor, are addressed to the emperor himself, and are datable to the period of Optatian's exile.

Independently of whether the poems in which Crispus is celebrated were presented to the emperor in 326 or not, Optatian (provided he was responsible for the publication) did not suppress the problematic poems in the later edition of his *carmina*, which was addressed to a broader public and from which the medieval and early modern manuscripts most probably derive⁹¹. This is remarkable, since Optatian will most likely have published the *carmina* only after his return from exile. But then it would have been necessary to accommodate the changed circumstances and political

makes one of loose leaves implausible. Optatian himself speaks of a *libellus* (*carm.* 1.1) and indicates several times that the poems stood on individual *paginae* (so, e.g., 3.33, 4.2, 7.11, 9.13, 19.4). This implies a bound form, in which different *carmina* depicted on separate pages were gathered; cf. also Rühl 2006: 90f.

⁹⁰ On the other hand, the *versus intextus* of *carm.* 21 (*Publius Optatianus Porfyrius haec lusi*) suggests that the author composed the poem for his own *delectatio*. *Carm.* 23 seems to be addressed to a Greek friend. *Carm.* 18 can presumably also be ruled out, since it may be dated after 326 with high probability.

⁹¹ It is also possible that the manuscripts derive from an edition that was prepared at a later point of time; see Polara 2004: 11: "L'antologia dei carmi tramandatici sotto il nome di Optaziano non corrisponde ad un'edizione curata e voluta dall'autore; essa infatti comprende composizioni da lui scritte in epoche e con tecniche diverse e perfino alcuni testi di altri autori, certamente posteriori alla sua morte." This hypothesis, however, also presupposes that the poet had not only presented his poems to the emperor, but had also made them available, in some form, to a wider audience. The fact that the poems in the most important manuscripts do not appear as loose occasional pieces like the figurative poems of other poets, but as the *panegiricus dictus Constantino augusto* vel sim., suggests that Optatian himself took pains not to publish the *carmina* in question individually but rather in a self-contained collection, although the title *panegiricus* seems to be later in date.



Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel (Cod. Guelf. 9 Aug. fol. 10r)

constraints. After the palace crisis, there was no latitude to refer to Crispus positively anymore. This is most obvious in the *Vita Constantini* written by the bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. Not one word is said about Crispus here, although the text deals extensively with the Constantinian family. Nonetheless, a high-ranking senator like Optatian could afford to circulate the poems in question even after 326. Only for presentation at court, Optatian most likely removed the problematic poems in time.

After his recall from exile, though, Optatian took the liberty of publishing the problematic poems as well. Most probably, Optatian reassembled his *carmina* in order to circulate them among his supporters and friends within the senatorial aristocracy of Rome. He might have intended to demonstrate the emperor's estimation of his work and his close links to the court. For this purpose Optatian also included an older letter he had written to the emperor and a letter from Constantine, probably both from winter, 312/313. In order to understand why Optatian did not remove the references to Crispus before publishing the poems, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the structural characteristics and compositional principles of the *carmina figurata*.

Every one of the panegyric pattern poems that Optatian had delivered to the emperor as a gift is a self-contained work of art that produces its effect through the interplay of different textual and graphic levels. The *carmina* of Optatian's that come into consideration as part of the collection for Constantine were composed as pattern poems. The individual letters that constitute the text of each *carmen* are positioned in an underlying grid so that each letter occupies a vertically and horizontally fixed position of exactly regulated breadth and height. Optatian chose two different compositional procedures: shape poems on the one hand and intext poems on the other. The outline of a shape poem retraces the contour of an object by means of varying verse lengths⁹². The genre was known already in classical Greek and Hellenistic literature⁹³. In contrast

⁹² This type of poem includes *carm.* 20, 26, and 27, which depict the outline of a water organ, an altar to Apollo, and a syrinx. Optatian himself describes these poetical pictures *metrorum imagines* (*carm.* 26.23).

⁹³ The most prominent Greek predecessors are the technopaignia of the hellenistic poets Simias of Rhodes (wings, egg, axe), Theocritus (syrinx), and Dosiadas of Crete (altar to Jason, altar to the Muses). Laevius with his poem *Pterygion Phoenicis* inspired by the wing-shaped poem of Simias of Rhodes, may be considered a Roman intermediary of the genre; see Ernst 1991: 54-96; Luz 2010: 327-353; Dencker 2011: 569-571.

to his predecessors, Optatian's shape poems are innovative in that the verses vary in length not through polymetry but through the number of letters used, while the meter remains the same. Entirely new are the grid poems with *versus intexti* called *carmina cancellata* by Optatian himself. Here Optatian can be seen as the founder of a new poetic tradition. Whereas the shape poems sketch the outline of an object with varying verse length, the basic text of the intext poems normally has a square form, thus every verse has an identical number of letters. Woven into the intext poems are *versus intexti*, which consist of differently colored letters of the base text. In the most important medieval and early modern manuscripts, the letters of the base text are usually written with black ink, those of the intext verses with red. The gift for the emperor must have been far more lavishly designed: in the prooemium to the collection (*carm.* 1), Optatian explains that the poems should ideally be written by a calligrapher on purple parchment in golden ink and framed in lavish ornamentation⁹⁴. Since the *carmina* in question were probably, as already discussed, bound in a codex, each poem will have stood on a single page. The individual artistic quality of each could thus be expressed most vividly.

In the simplest compositions, the intext verses create vertical acrostichs, mesostichs, and telestichs within the base text⁹⁵. In other *carmina*, the intext verses are woven into geometric shapes in the base text; these often function merely as ornamental designs, but some also take on emblematic significance or themselves depict letters. In *carmen* 5, discussed several times above, on a base text consisting of 35 verses of 35 letters, Optatian has arranged an intext verse of 146 colored letters that spells out the words AVG / XX / CAE / S X (cf. the figure). In the most elaborate compositions, the intext creates both graphic figures and textual elements. Optatian gives the most extensive proof of his artistry in *carmen* 19. The base text here consists of

⁹⁴ *Carm.* 1.1-6: *Quae quondam sueras pulchro decorata libello / carmen in Augusti ferre Thalia manus, / ostro tota nitens, argento auroque coruscis / scripta notis, picto limite dicta notans, / scriptoris bene compta manu meritoque renidens / gratificum, domini visibus apta sacris ... Carm.* 1.15-18: *Cum dederit clemens veniam, natumque laremque / reddiderit, comptis ibis et ipsa comis, / purpureo fulgens habitu, radiantibus intus, / ut quondam, scriptis ambitiosa tuis.* In *carm.* 1.7-14, Optatian laments the fact that he did not have the necessary materials in exile in order to put his poems in the desired form; in light of the fact, though, that the poet apparently enjoyed the support of high-ranking members of the Roman aristocracy, this should be interpreted as a topical *captatio benevolentiae*.

⁹⁵ For instance, in *carm.* 11. Here the intext verses read *fortissimus imperator / clementissimus rector / Constantinus invictus*.

38 verses, the length of which varies from 35 to 38 letters. The *versus intexti* are composed of 220 letters and can be read in a variety of ways. The shape created by the arrangement of the intext contains both graphic and textual elements. A ship is depicted with three oars and a rudder; its mast and sail appear as a Chi-Rho. Above the hull, the text VOT can be read; in the hull, the matching number xx can be seen, which stands for the *vicennalia* as in *carmen* 5. Part of the intext can be deciphered only if the Latin letters are read as Greek. The intext thus reads τὴν ναῦν δεῖ κόσμον, σὲ δὲ ἄρμενον εἶνι νομίζιν / θούροις τεινόμενον σῆς ἀρετῆς ἀνέμοις⁹⁶. The rest of the intext is in Latin, but produces a variety of different readings, depending on how the reader follows the course of the intext verses⁹⁷.

The poems are altogether composed as such elaborate, self-contained wholes that they cannot simply be reworked ad hoc. This explains why even after Crispus inglorious end Optatian published also those poems in which he posthumously and problematically glorified the disgraced Caesar. Reformulating the affected passages, as is possible in other genres, is unthinkable in the case of the *carmina figurata*. Even the slightest alteration of the text would have consequences on the placement of letters in the entire poem which it would be impossible to control. In line 24 of *carmen* 9, for example, the *e* in the vocative *Crispe* forms part of the intext verse, as does the *r* in the genitive *Crispi* in line 25 of *carmen* 10. The Caesar's name thus could not be removed without affecting the entire intext, which in turn would affect the layout of the whole base text. Within such a complex composition, the *damnatio memoriae* could not be carried out by merely removing or exchanging a name, as can be done in normal prose texts or even in inscriptions. Optatian had to ignore the *damnatio memoriae* imposed on Crispus. He had to accept the risk that Crispus is praised here posthumously in a politically embarrassing manner, unless he wanted to forego publishing *carmina* 5, 9, and 10 altogether. These intext poems are among his most elaborate compositions, and Crispus is prominently glorified in precisely these poems.

This observation calls attention to an important characteristic of Optatian's *carmina figurata*. The creation of even a single intext

⁹⁶ *Carm.* 5.v.i.

⁹⁷ Opt. Porf. *carm.* 19. v.i.: *Navita nunc tutus contemnat, summe, procellas; Nigras nunc tutus contemnat, summe, procellas; tutus contemnat summis cumulata tropaeis; pulsa mente mala contemnat, summe, procellas; spe quoque Roma bona contemnat, summe, procellas; Roma felix floret semper votis tuis.*

poem is such a time-consuming process that a corpus of several poems, such as the one that the emperor received from Optatian at the celebration of his *vicennalia*, could not be tailored completely to a particular event. This creates friction not only between different poems within the corpus, but also between the contents of older *carmina* and the current imperial self-representation. The corpus thus possesses a historical depth absent in the surviving prose panegyrics. The individual *carmina* can be dated fairly precisely on the basis of internal evidence. Thus, they constitute a series of scattered spotlights on the development of Constantine's reign over the period in question, which can be most instructive for historical research.

Although Optatian's *carmina figurata* were composed at entirely different times (some even while the poet was in exile) they are always tailored to Constantine as intended addressee and conceived for reception in the context of the imperial court. Optatian formulates his self-conception as Constantine's court poet in various passages. He sings of the laurel with a new kind of plectrum and hails with his art the dawn of an *aureum saeculum* that has come with Constantine's sole rule. His poems are composed *vario flore* (*carm.* 19.35), and his praise of the emperor is sung *novo plectro* (*carm.* 19.19). Optatian also speaks of his *laus ficta* (*carm.* 19.28) created according to the law of weaving image, text, and music (*carm.* 3.13: *nexus lege*). The poet's muse Calliope diligently weaves a song according to the colorful strains of Phoebus (*carm.* 3.15f.: *pictis Phoebi modulis*)⁹⁸. The poet sings at Apollo's behest, with the aid of the divine power of the muses and inspired by the noble deeds of the emperor. His plea for mercy, which Optatian sends to Constantine with his corpus of figurative poems, is directly connected to this poetic self-conception. If the poet's voice is untroubled, it will praise the emperor's deeds still more sublimely and magnificently, and the *paginae* adorned with purple and gold that bear Optatian's poems will celebrate the *aureum saeculum* more grandly than mere paper and vermillion, which are what the poet has available in exile.

Optatian advertises himself in his poems as the herald of Constantine's rule, a claim he emphasizes by the deliberate closeness of his *carmina* to Constantine's self-representation: Even in his exile, Optatian was astonishingly well informed about details of develop-

ments at court⁹⁹. Optatian's poetry thus assumes the character of a genuinely political performance that constantly adheres to the imperial self-representation and almost effortlessly adapts to the ritualized forms of courtly adoration of the emperor. Thereby, three complementary levels of perception and reception take center stage for Optatian: the level of panegyric, which results from the celebratory content of the poems; the musical-rhythmic level, which consists in the meticulously maintained meter of the base text; and finally the visual level, which results from the figurative design created by the colored intext verses and from the lavish ornamentation of the individual pages¹⁰⁰.

Due to this complex interdependence of textual, rhythmical, and visual levels, Optatian's *carmina* cannot be presented in a purely oral performance like a prose panegyric. Not only are the structure of the verses, the placement of the words, and the syntax of the poems too complex to comprehend the content sufficiently at a single hearing. More fundamentally, the simultaneous interplay of text and image would be lost in an oral recitation, which would necessarily force the text into a linear sequence. Optatian's corpus of panegyric *carmina figurata* thus requires a unique combination of performance and reception¹⁰¹. The poems cannot simply be recited; they have to be explained to the addressee and studied by him. The vocal level of the *carmina* is inseparably interwoven in the visual. Optatian had his reasons for characterizing the poets as *pictores*¹⁰². The poet's patrons, who brought the gift to Constantine and pled for their peer's recall from exile, presumably presented selected *carmina* to the emperor, explained the compositional principles of the poems, and recited individual passages.

In the case of Optatian's *carmina*, a presentation along these lines would have been ideal since the sequence in which the individual textual and visual levels are perceived does not adhere to any linear logic. Not even the arrangement of the individual *carmina* within the corpus does impose any particular order in which they should be read; the individual poems are not linked together in any strict sense by content or design. Each figurative poem can be enjoyed for itself, for each is a self-contained work

⁹⁹ Not least, the reflections in the second part of this paper illustrate this.

¹⁰⁰ All three levels are treated again and again by Optatian in his poems.

¹⁰¹ On this, see especially Rühl 2006.

¹⁰² *Carm.* 18.21; see Kluge 1925: 63. On the intermedial character of the *carmina*, see also Rühl 2006.

⁹⁸ In general on the metaphor of weaving and plaiting, see Scheid/Svenbro 1996.

of art. Optatian's corpus presents thematic highlights that depict an intermedial, but also an internally fragmented, picture of Constantine's reign.

So how does this all relate back to the question of the Constantinian dynasty? References to the illustrious Constantinian dynasty are consistently one of the most fundamental topics with which Optatian sketches the excellence of Constantine's monarchical rule. Besides praise for Constantine's military achievements and his justice, glorification of the Constantinian dynasty constitutes the third great theme of the *carmina*. This fact is revealing precisely because Optatian was always excellently informed of the developments at court. This said, Optatian's *carmina* show that the formation of the Constantinian dynasty in the years from 316 to 326 concerned not only the legal formalia of elevating family members to co-regents, but also brought with it far-reaching consequences for the imperial self-representation of the first Christian emperor. Thus, Optatian's *carmina* not only grant detailed insights into a process that is but vaguely perceptible elsewhere—a process, though, through which one of the most important ruling dynasties of antiquity arose. Above all, Optatian's *carmina* were, in a variety of ways, themselves part of the communicative processes by which this development came about.

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Abstract: One of the most spectacular literary sources for the reign of Constantine the Great has been largely been neglected by modern historical research: During the years 317-326 AD, the Roman senator Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius composed a series of panegyric pattern poems which were presented as a gift to the

emperor Constantine the Great on the occasion of his *vicennalia*. This collection is the only contemporary textual evidence that allows us closer insight into the development of imperial court culture in these years. The aim of this paper is to carve out what the *carmina* can tell us about the formation of the Constantinian dynasty as one of the most profound development processes of the *aetas Constantini*. This requires a detailed analysis of the literary and performative dimensions of Optatian's *carmina figurata*.

Keywords: Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, Constantine the Great, Imperial Dynasty.