

Johannes Wienand

Eusebius in Jerusalem and Constantinople: Two Cities, Two Speeches

Two of the earliest literary sources we have for the Constantinian refoundations of Jerusalem and Constantinople are from one and the same author: the bishop, theologian, and church historian Eusebius of Caesarea. In AD 335 and 336, he delivered two speeches in Jerusalem and Constantinople respectively.¹ Both orations deal, in a way, with the role of the first Christian emperor and the significance of his pious deeds. Although the speeches were given by the same orator within a short period of time, both on important ceremonial occasions, they differ significantly in content and purpose. As I will show in this paper, these differences tell us much about the different roles and settings of Jerusalem and Constantinople within the early Christian empire, about the impact of imperial absence in Jerusalem and imperial presence in Constantinople, and about the relation between church and state in the incipient Christian monarchy.

For Eusebius himself, the two speeches were so closely related that he decided to publish them as two interlinked appendices to his *Vita Constantini*.² After centuries of manuscript tradition, the orations appeared to be one coherent text, subdivided into 18 paragraphs, titled with the heading Εἰς Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν βασιλέα τριακονταετηρικός – ‘In Praise of Constantine for the thirtieth jubilee of his reign’. In some manuscripts, however, a gap survived in the middle of the text, between the tenth and eleventh paragraph, and sometimes the two halves are headed by different titles – paragraphs 1 to 10 are called τριετηρικός (‘tricennial oration’), para-

1 The standard edition of the two speeches is Heikel 1902, 193–259; Harold Drake is currently preparing a new analysis of the orations of Constantine and Eusebius for the series *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (Berlin, Akademie-Verlag) – I am grateful for the opportunity to read the manuscript. An anonymous English translation has been published by Samuel Bagster & Sons in London (Anonymous 1845, 293–380). A revised version by E. C. Richardson can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Schaff/Wace 1890, vol. 2.1, 581–610). The English translation usually used today was published by Drake 1976, 83–102 (‘In Praise of Constantine’) and 103–127 (‘On Christ’s Sepulcher’), a German translation was published by Schneider 2020, 84–175 (‘De laude Constantini’) and 178–275 (‘De verbo Dei’). I am grateful for the opportunity to consult the manuscript of Schneider’s commentary and translation before publication. In the present chapter, the translations are taken from Drake 1976 (for SC and LC) and Cameron/Hall 1999 (for VC).

2 The *Vita Constantini* was published only after Eusebius’ death, most likely by his successor Aca-cius; see Cameron/Hall 1999, 9–12, with further references. The four books of the *Vita* have been published together with three appendices: the two orations discussed here and Constantine’s *Oration to the Assembly of Saints*. Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.A makes the plausible suggestion that Eusebius was responsible for connecting the two speech manuscripts so closely that they could appear as one coherent text. Eusebius himself refers in VC 4,46 to the joint publication of his two orations.

graphs 11 to 18 bear the title βασιλικός ('imperial oration').³ On the basis of these and other discrepancies, modern philology has reconstructed the original appearances of the two orations.⁴ And since Eusebius alludes to the speeches in his *Vita Constantini*, providing additional information, it is possible to reconstruct in broad strokes their different historical settings.⁵

In the first ten paragraphs, an imperial encomium has survived in its entirety. This speech is today usually called *Laus Constantini*, *Triakontaeterikos*, or 'Tricennial Oration'. Eusebius gave this speech on the occasion of the festivities for the thirtieth jubilee of Constantine's reign, which were held on 25 July 336.⁶ In an audience chamber of the imperial palace in Constantinople, the bishop delivered his praise before the emperor himself and possibly further members of the Constantinian dynasty, flanked by the emperor's ministers and the imperial bodyguard.⁷ There seems to have been a small, select audience consisting of high-ranking notables and a number of bishops.⁸ The speech is the earliest surviving Christian panegyric in honor of a Roman monarch.⁹ Although the manuscript of this oration has survived as the *first* part of the appendix to the *Vita Constantini*, in terms of chronology it is the *later* of the two speeches.

The earlier speech, preserved in paragraphs 11 to 18, has an intricate history with at least two phases of revision.¹⁰ The core of the surviving text seems to have been part of a manuscript for a sermon-like lecture on questions of cosmology, Christolo-

3 Heikel 1902, CIV–CVI; Schwartz 1907, 1428.

4 Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.A provides an in-depth assessment of the internal structures of the speeches, their formation, their relation to one another and their historical settings, which I largely follow here. See also Drake 1970, 89 (for a different view: Schneider 2007, 466 n. 322).

5 Euseb. *VC* 4,33, 4,43–47.

6 For the date and context of the tricennial oration, see Drake 1970, 1–2 n. 1; Drake 1975; Drake 1976, 51–52 with n. 35. Eusebius himself provides additional information regarding the setting of his speech in *LC* Prol., 1,1, 2,5, 3,1–2, 6,1, 6,10, 6,18, 9,11, 9,18, 10,7. Further information can be derived from Euseb. *VC* 4,46.

7 *LC* 9,11.

8 Eusebius mentions the presence of other bishops in *VC* 4,46. "Ministers and servants" and "his faithful lifeguards" are referred to in *LC* 9,11. In 3,4 the bishop alludes to the presence of Constantius Caesar.

9 It was not the first panegyric held by a Christian on the Christian emperor, but none of the earlier encomia have survived. Eusebius of Nicomedia gave a laudatory speech on the emperor during the council of Nicaea in 325: Euseb. *VC* 3,11 and Theod. *HE* 1,7,10 (see Barnes 1978, 56–57; Brennecke 1994, 432; Cameron/Hall 1999, 265; Schneider 2007, 322 n. 184); Eusebius of Caesarea delivered ὑμνοι on Constantine on the twentieth jubilee of his reign (most likely in the emperor's absence): Euseb. *VC* 1,1,1 (for diverging interpretations, see Brennecke 1994, 436; Cameron/Hall 1999, 183–184); several orations in honor of the absent emperor were delivered during the inauguration ceremonies of the Constantinian church complex in Jerusalem in 335: Euseb. *VC* 4,45 (see below). In contrast to the tricennial oration, these earlier speeches were presented mainly in a primarily ecclesiastical context before a largely Christian audience, mostly in the emperor's absence.

10 See the lucid analyses in Drake 1976, 42–43; Barnes 1977, 344; Maraval 1997, 244; Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.A.

gy, and soteriology – a lecture Eusebius gave in the course of the *encaenia* festivities held in Jerusalem from 13 to 20 September 335, i. e. the inauguration ceremonies for the Constantinian church complex that was built over the places of Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection – and that is best known by its generic name 'Church of the Holy Sepulcher'.¹¹ The speech is today usually called *Oratio de Sepulchro Christi* ('On Christ's Sepulcher').¹² Some weeks after the event, Eusebius had the opportunity to present the oration again, this time before the emperor in the imperial palace at Constantinople, presumably when the bishop traveled to the new capital on the Bosphorus in early November 335 as part of a delegation of bishops trying to settle the dispute with Athanasius at the imperial court.¹³ When he was granted the opportunity to deliver a speech before the emperor, Eusebius seems to have reused a substantial section of his Jerusalem lecture (11,8–17,15), to which he added a newly composed introduction (11,1–7) and ending (18,1–3) specifically designed to fit the occasion in Constantinople.¹⁴ The bishop apparently made one final modification, but only a very slight one, when he prepared the text for publication as an appendix to the *Vita Constantini*: he added the first sentence to paragraph 11 in order to connect the text to the preceding tricennial oration.¹⁵

Strictly speaking, therefore, Eusebius gave *three* speeches, although the first two were closely related, apparently consisted in large parts of the same material, and survive in the form of one text only:

- (1) A lecture presented at some point between 13 and 20 September 335 in the course of the inauguration ceremonies of the Constantinian church complex in Jerusalem. A section of this speech has survived in paragraphs 11,8–17,15 of the text known today as *Oratio de Sepulchro Christi*.
- (2) A speech presented before the emperor in the imperial palace at Constantinople in early November 335. Apart from the first sentence in paragraph 11, which has been added only for publication of the text, the speech manuscript Eusebius used on this occasion seems to be identical (or almost identical) with the text today known under the title *Oratio de Sepulchro Christi*: it consists of a large section of the Jerusalem lecture with a new introduction and ending.
- (3) A panegyric oration presented before the emperor in the imperial palace at Constantinople on 25 July 336. The speech manuscript Eusebius used on this occasion seems to be identical (or almost identical) with the text today known under the title *Laus Constantini*.

¹¹ The historical context will be considered below.

¹² In view of the main focus on questions of theology, Schneider prefers the title *De verbo Dei* ('On the Logos of God'); see Schneider 2020, 13.

¹³ The Festal Index for 335/336 dates the banishment of Athanasius to November 7, 335 (p. xvii trans. Burgess/Williams 1854).

¹⁴ Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.A. convincingly shows which portions of the SC originally belonged to the Jerusalem lecture and which passages were newly composed.

¹⁵ Maraval 1997, 240; Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.A.

In the two surviving speech manuscripts, Eusebius deals with the Christian monarchy and its implications for salvific history. Interestingly, however, the speeches take different stances on the issue. The discrepancy is instructive. It sheds light on the different circumstances under which the Roman state and the Christian church interacted in the two cities of Jerusalem and Constantinople. Closer scrutiny of the speeches within their historical settings will offer valuable insights into the role Constantine's two most important city refoundations played in the earliest phase of the Christian empire.

Eusebius in Jerusalem

The inauguration festivities of the Constantinian church complex in Jerusalem seem to have been the ceremonial climax of all the smaller and larger occasions for celebrating Constantine's commitment to the Holy Land.¹⁶ Constantine ordered the erection of a basilica over a rock that had been identified as Golgotha, and on a spot where shortly before, in the process of clearing the site, an artifact assumed to be the Cross of Christ had been found. Right next to the basilica, where later the Anastasis rotunda was to be built, the Savior's Tomb had been unearthed, the very spot of Christ's resurrection, over which an aedicula was built in Constantinian times.¹⁷ The basilica and the aedicula were connected via an open courtyard. The *martyrion* – as Eusebius calls the Constantinian church complex comprising these structures – thus marked and highlighted localities of utmost significance for Christian salvation history. At the same time, the edifice was an imperial building project in honor of the emperor's *summus deus*. Accordingly, its inauguration was an event of importance also on the level of imperial self-display.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, then, court representa-

¹⁶ On Constantine's role in the construction of a Holy Land, see Kai Trampedach's chapter to this volume.

¹⁷ In discussing the *assumed* Cross of Christ, Borgehammar 1991 found a way to avoid the fruitless question of authenticity. On the *inventio crucis*, see below. The Anastasis rotunda over the supposed burial place of Christ was probably finished and consecrated only after Constantine's death: Wilkinson 1981, 40, 313 dates the inauguration of the Anastasis rotunda to the period between 337 and 348; according to Borgehammar 1991, 98, 101, the building was completed even later, but before Egeria's pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The term *martyrion* was later used to denote the basilica only, but for Eusebius the *martyrion* is the whole Constantinian building complex (see Hunt 1982, 13; Rubin 1982, 84; Walker 1990, 268). On the Constantinian church building complex in Jerusalem, Klein (forthcoming), ch. 2 – I am grateful for the opportunity to read the manuscript – and Kelley 2019; Yasin 2012, 941–942; Avni/Seligman 2003. Older literature includes Couasnon 1974, 15; Corbo 1981; Hunt 1982, 11; Rubin 1982, 81; Kühnel 1987, 81; Ousterhout 1990; Walker 1990, 251; Patrich 1993, 103–112; Gibson/Taylor 1994, 77; Biddle 1999, 65–72, 109–119 (see also Biddle 2000, esp. 23–62). On the wider context of Constantine's church building program, see Armstrong 1974; Leeb 1992, 71–120; Krautheimer 1993; de Blaauw 2007; Lenski 2016, 179–196.

¹⁸ According to Eusebius (*VC* 4,40,2), Constantine “reckoned his own thirtieth anniversary an auspicious occasion for thanksgiving to the universal King of All, and decided that it would be fitting to

tives and clerics likewise partook in the ceremonies. Constantine dispatched a range of members of the imperial administration, first and foremost the *notarius* Marianus. Marianus was not a very high-ranking official, but he had a good reputation among Christians, making him Constantine's first choice as his prime representative on the occasion.¹⁹ According to Eusebius, Marianus was distinguished for his faith and his acquaintance with the Scriptures, and he was a confessor already during the Diocletianic persecution. Now, as the highest-ranking imperial representative in Jerusalem, he was in charge of the inauguration ceremonies. He gave a welcome address and held feasts and symposia. He also dispensed largesse to the citizens and made donations and votive offerings to the church.²⁰

Apart from the court representatives, a whole range of clerics joined the ceremonies. Constantine had asked the bishops attending the synod of Tyre, which was still ongoing in early September, to make free use of the imperial post service and travel to Jerusalem in order to participate in the festivities.²¹ Eminent bishops of all provinces, so Eusebius writes in his *Vita Constantini*, followed the emperor's call.²² In particular, Eusebius points out numerous bishops from the Eastern provinces, even a bishop from the Persian Empire, and a whole mass of attendants. Some of the clerics were actively involved in the *encaenia* ceremonies, as Eusebius relates: the servants of God (οἱ τοῦ θεοῦ λειτουργοί) adorned the festivities with εὐχαί and διαλέξεις – with prayers and lectures.²³ In view of these sermons, Eusebius emphasizes three different rhetorical genera: (1) eulogies for the Christian emperor (with particular emphasis on the emperor's commitment to Jerusalem), (2) lectures on systematic theology, and (3) exegetical readings of Scripture.²⁴ Eusebius himself gave several public talks on the occasion, among them – so he claims – *ekphraseis* of the imperial wisdom-doctrines and interpretations of biblical prophecies.²⁵

carry out the consecration of the *martyrion* which had been constructed with all artistic endeavours in Jerusalem". Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.C argues that this implies that "Constantine initially intended to coordinate the dedication with the start of his Jubilee Year on July 25". The extension of the Council of Tyre seems to have impeded this plan.

19 PLRE 1 Marianus 2; Euseb. *VC* 4,44. Eusebius does not mention Marianus by name in the passage itself, but he is mentioned in the corresponding *kephalaion* and in Sozom. *HE* 1,26. Eusebius counts Marianus among the close intimates of the emperor, but since he was just a *notarius*, this is unlikely to be true.

20 Euseb. *VC* 4,44.

21 See Drake 1987, 198–199 on the chronology of the Council of Tyre and the *encaenia* celebration.

22 Euseb. *VC* 4,43.

23 Euseb. *VC* 4,45,1.

24 Euseb. *VC* 4,45: "(1) ... Some praised the Godbeloved Emperor's devotion to the Savior of all, and recounted in detail the magnificent work connected with the *martyrion*; some with festive sermons based on divine doctrines provided a variety of intellectual delights for all to hear. (2) Others gave expositions of the divine readings, disclosing hidden meanings ...".

25 Euseb. *VC* 4,45,3: "This was the occasion when we also, being honored with favors beyond us, graced the feast with various addresses to those assembled, at one time interpreting in a written

The text that has survived in paragraphs 11,8 to 17,15 seems to be a substantial portion of the original manuscript of one of these sermon-like lectures. The text is devoted to cosmological, Christological, and soteriological discussions. The arguments are partly composed as a diatribe: Eusebius defends the core aspects of the Christian doctrines of God and salvation against a fictitious pagan opponent. At least in the surviving section of his lecture, Eusebius decided not to praise the material properties of the acclaimed church building, nor to pay tribute to the classical virtues of its pious builder, *pietas* and *munificentia*. Rather, Eusebius focused on the religious significance of the acts of divine salvation that occurred at the Christian *loca sancta* which the Constantinian basilica and the aedicula over the Tomb of Christ were meant to highlight, but Eusebius did not talk about the localities itself or about the imperial edifice. The exclusive focus on Christian theology and the absence of any allusions to the role of the first Christian monarch as a church builder are not self-explanatory – even less so since the inauguration ceremony at which Eusebius delivered his speech was obviously meant to bring together the two fields of church and state.

In the fourth book of his *Vita Constantini*, Eusebius describes the inauguration ceremonies in detail. Eusebius explicitly calls the festivities in Jerusalem a ‘synod’, which he parallelizes with the council of Nicaea that took place ten years earlier:

(1) This second synod, the greatest of those we know, the Emperor assembled in Jerusalem, following that first synod, which he had brilliantly celebrated in the capital of Bithynia. That one however was a celebration of victory, which offered prayers of thanksgiving in the twentieth year of his reign for the defeat of enemies and foes at the very Palace of Victory (Nicaea); this one beautified the third decade, as the Emperor consecrated the *martyrion* to God, the Giver of all good things, as a peace-time dedication around the Savior’s tomb.²⁶

The two synods, so Eusebius says, were the most considerable gatherings of Christian bishops convoked by Constantine. The council of Nicaea, which was held in connection with the emperor’s *vicennalia*, is characterized as ἐπινίκιον, i.e. as a victory celebration after the end of the civil war against Licinius in 324. The synod for the dedication of the Constantinian church complex in Jerusalem, in contrast, was held in connection with the tricennial celebrations under the heading of ‘peace’. In this sense, Eusebius understands the Constantinian edifice as εἰρήνης ἀνάθημα – as an imperial votive offering given by the Christian emperor to God as a reward for the enduring peace within the Roman Empire. By this is meant the inner stability that characterized Constantine’s regime since he has attained sole rule more than ten years earlier. In the same way as the closing ceremonies of the council of Nicaea were substantially subjected to court etiquette and to the logic of monarchic repre-

work the elaborate descriptions of the Emperor’s philosophical ideas, at another making figurative thoughts from the prophets apply to the symbolic rites presently in hand.”

²⁶ Euseb. *VC* 4,47.

sentation, so also the synod of Jerusalem seems to have been closely bound to imperial protocol.²⁷

Eusebius describes the ceremonies against the backdrop of this idiosyncratic mélange between Christian religion and Roman state. Interestingly, he does not recount Christian services conducted by clerics, but refers to certain persons who took an active role although, so he claims, they were unable to make their own contribution to understanding Christian philosophy. Instead, they appealed to God by means of bloodless and mystical sacrifices, praying for lasting peace throughout the Roman Empire and for divine protection of the church, the emperor, and his sons.²⁸ Eusebius implies that the *encaenia* festivities have been organized along a series of religious performances conducted primarily by court representatives. In this peculiar Constantinian blend between the imperial cult and Christian observances, religious performances with Christian overtones filled the gap caused by the incipient dissolution of pagan emperor worship, while Christian clergy members were still far from having a monopoly of defining and conducting the official religious observances for the emerging Christian monarchy.²⁹

Thus, a variety of actors from different backgrounds joined the inauguration ceremonies of the Constantinian church complex in Jerusalem to celebrate the completion of an imperial building project. The festivities thereby served as a platform for various representatives of state and church to mediate and negotiate the image of the Roman ruler whose religious role was more ambiguous than ever before. The most contested aspect was the position of the Roman ruler in the cosmological fabric of Christian philosophy and in salvific history. While some seized the opportunity to praise God for His authorship of salvation, others praised the emperor's closeness to his protective deity and lauded his victories, his dynasty, and his construction works. Consequently, the ceremonial character of the festivities oscillated between the celebration of imperial power and success on the one hand and salvific history and theology on the other.

This ambivalence is manifest also on the level of time. The chronology of the *encaenia* festivities is characterized by a remarkable amalgam of Christian memorial culture and court culture, i.e., by peculiar overlaps between religious and imperial calendars. According to the Armenian Lectionary, the *encaenia* celebrations began on 13 September; Egeria tells us that the festivities were celebrated for eight days, which means they ended on 20 September.³⁰ Within this week of celebrations, two

27 Eusebius, who partook in the events, describes in great detail the closing ceremony of the council of Nicaea in *VC* 3,10–15. For the council in general, see Kim 2020; older literature includes Luibhéid 1982 and Brennecke 1994; for the wider context: Hanson 1988.

28 Euseb. *VC* 4,45,2. On the wider context of the end of pagan sacrifice in late antiquity, see Stroumsa 2009.

29 On the role of bishops in the incipient Christian monarchy, see Drake 2000; Rapp 2005; Fear 2013.

30 See Renoux 1969; Borgehammar 1991, 99–103; van Tongeren 2000, 27–37; Findikyan 2010; *Itin. Eg.* 48–49.

days seem to have been the most important ones: 14 and 18 September. Both dates have a deep meaning for Constantine's standing as a sole ruler over a reunited and peaceful empire, for the Constantinian dynasty, and for the emperor's relation to his protective deity.

From the Armenian Lectionary we know that on 14 September the commemoration of the Cross was liturgically celebrated in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher;³¹ Egeria also reports that the *encaenia* festivities took place "on the very date when the Cross of the Lord was discovered".³² This means that the consecration proper of the church building was linked to the anniversary day of the finding of the True Cross. The *inventio crucis* seems to have been the most important liturgical celebration within the course of the *encaenia* celebrations.³³ The available sources imply that the 'discovery' of the Holy Cross was a major symbolic event in the course of the urban restructuring of Jerusalem under Constantine.³⁴ The relic contributed to a significant transformation of the city's sacred topography which now centered around a new focal point: Golgotha and the nearby tomb of Christ. Both sites were revealed when Constantine had earlier structures removed, first and foremost the Hadrianic temple of Jupiter.³⁵

Now, in Constantinian times, the newly recovered sites of Golgotha and Christ's Tomb were located *within* the city. This was considered by some to be out of line with what the Gospels say about their locations – but there seems to have been a tradition connecting the spots in question to New Testament salvation history, and "with his spirit moved by the Savior himself" Constantine knew where "against all expectations" he could expect the Rock of Calvary and the Tomb of Christ to appear.³⁶ Po-

31 *Arm. Lect.* II, 225 ed. Renoux (English translations in Conybeare 1905 and Aivazian 2021).

32 *Itin. Eg.* 48,1.

33 See Borgehammar 1991, 99–103, and Tongeren 2000, 27–37, with further references.

34 All later authors ascribe the discovery to Helena, but Eusebius says nothing about the discovery of the cross or a potential role of Helena; for a possible explanation, see Heid 2001. For a critical assessment of the sources, see Klein (forthcoming), ch. 2. On the tradition of Helena and her finding of the relic of the cross, see Drijvers 1992. It is not easy to assess the role of the cross for the Constantinian monarchy more generally. On the coins, other Christian symbols (above all the Chi-Rho) are clearly more important. All in all, there is only limited evidence as to how Constantine exactly used the sign of the cross as a symbol of divine power and success for his own monarchic representation; see Dinkler 1965.

35 Euseb. *VC* 3,25–28 claims it was a temple for Aphrodite/Venus, but Jer. *Ep.* 58,3 and other evidence suggests that it was the Hadrianic temple of Jupiter; see Klein (forthcoming), ch. 2; for the archaeological situation, see Rubin 1982; Gibson/Taylor 1994.

36 Euseb. *VC* 3,25 and 28. The sites were almost certainly located outside the second wall, and the area where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was later erected was used as a quarry in the early first century AD. The German Protestant Institute of Archaeology (in cooperation with the Technische Universität Ilmenau) has conducted several geomagnetic surveys that suggest a possible trajectory of the second wall east of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (see Vieweger et al. forthcoming; I am grateful for the opportunity to read a draft of the article). On the archeology and early history of traditional Golgotha, see also Gibson/Taylor 1994.

tentially on purpose, the sites (and in consequence also the Constantinian church complex) occupied the formerly pagan religious center of the city (just as the Hadrianic structures might have superimposed a spatial reference point of earlier Jewish/Christian memorial culture). Furthermore, Golgotha and the tomb of Christ were also located opposite the Temple Mount, a fact Eusebius thought worth emphasizing in his *Vita Constantini*.³⁷ In the same breath, Eusebius called the Constantinian church ἡ νέα Ἱερουσαλήμ – “the New Jerusalem” – in direct opposition to the “Jerusalem of old”.³⁸ This strongly suggests that the Constantinian church complex was conceived as a Christian counterpart to the Jewish Temple. Constantine thus appears as a new Salomon, erecting the Temple of the New Covenant – a reading supported by the fact that the date of 14 September was also considered to be the anniversary of the inauguration of the Solomonic Temple.³⁹ The inauguration of the edifice thus symbolizes the dawn of a new salvific era.

Further religious overtones in the anniversary of the *inventio crucis* and the day of the dedication of the church might be seen in the fact that in the year 335, the date of 14 September fell on the *dies Solis*, the day of the Sun. Among the regular days of the week, it was certainly the most important day for Constantine, devoted to his former protective deity Sol invictus, which he had chosen as a personal companion in 310. When the pagan sun god became more and more problematic in the course of the intensifying Christianization of the Roman monarchy, Constantine increasingly abandoned explicit references to his divine companion in the early 320s, but at the same time he reinforced the image of a ruler endowed with solar power.⁴⁰ In the context of this development, the *dies Solis* was promoted by means of certain judicial regulations to serve as the prime day of the imperial cult.⁴¹ Against this background, the day of 14 September 335 was certainly a day of particularly intense religious and imperial connotations.

The second most important day in the course of the *encaenia* festivities of 335 was the date of 18 September. On this very day, Constantine raised Dalmatius, the eldest son of his half-brother Flavius Dalmatius, to the rank of Caesar.⁴² Dalmatius was the only member of the lateral line of his family whom Constantine invited to

37 Euseb. *VC* 3,33,1 (ἀντιπρόσωπος).

38 Euseb. *VC* 3,33; see Wilkinson 1979, 351–352; Ousterhout 1990.

39 Euseb. *VC* 3,33,1; see Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.C; see also Schwartz 1987.

40 On this development, see Wallraff 2001; Berrens 2004; Wienand 2011 and 2012, 296–335; on solar power in particular, see Drake 2009.

41 The Constantinian regulations regarding the *dies Solis* are preserved in *Cod. Iust.* 3,12,2 (3 March 321) and *Cod. Theod.* 2,8,1 (3 July 321); see Dörries 1954, 181–182, 226, 322, 345–346; Bacchiocchi 1977; Cameron/Hall 1999, 317; Wallraff 2001, 96–109, with further references on p. 96 n. 31; Girardet 2007, 285–287.

42 *Chron. Min.* 1,235; see RE Dalmatius 3; PLRE 1 Dalmatius 7; Barnes 1982, 43; Klein 1979, 106–109; Barnes 2011, 162; Wienand 2013, 40.

join the imperial college.⁴³ Dalmatius descended from Theodora, the second wife of Constantine's father Constantius.⁴⁴ The emperor apparently chose the day for elevating Dalmatius primarily because it was the anniversary of the battle of Chrysopolis. His victory in this decisive confrontation of the civil war against Licinius had made Constantine sole ruler in 324. Quite obviously, both events (the anniversary and the elevation) have purposefully been connected, and it was certainly not by chance that Constantine chose the year of his *tricennalia* (which ran from 25 July 335 to 25 July 336) for this significant reconfiguration of the imperial college:⁴⁵ even Eusebius clearly points out the connection between the three ten-year-cycles of Constantine's rule on the one hand and the elevation of his Caesars on the other.⁴⁶ Even more, the bishop closely connected the dedication of the *martyrion* church with the celebration of the Constantinian dynasty, suggesting that the elevation of Dalmatius (which most likely was carried out in Constantinople) was reflected in one way or another also in the *encaenia* ceremonies. Again, the leading concept seems to have been the notion of 'peace,' which stood at the center of a triadic concept composed around the emperor's victoriousness (battle of Chrysopolis), the universal concord within the im-

43 Within the imperial college, Dalmatius held the lowest rank. He was granted his own images on the imperial coinage; on the epigraphic record, which is more ambivalent, see Grünewald 1990, 152–153. According to Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 41,15), the promotion of Dalmatius was conducted *obsistentibus valide militaribus* – a view that is obviously influenced by hindsight. In 336, Dalmatius probably married Helena, Constantine's youngest daughter. Nevertheless, the decision to include Dalmatius in the ruler college led to a grim rivalry between the two family lines, foremost the bloody purges after the emperor's death in 337, in which almost all members of the lateral line including Dalmatius were killed on the orders of Constantine's sons (on the events of 337, see Burgess 2008). These events had serious repercussions down until the reign of Julian (360–363), see Baker-Brian/Tougher 2020.

44 PLRE 1 Theodora 1; Wienand 2013, 24–26, 39, 40–41.

45 It was not the first time Constantine chose meaningful dates for rearranging the imperial college: when he raised Crispus and Constantinus to Caesars, he chose 1 March 317 – the 25th *dies imperii* of his own father Constantius I (according to inclusive reckoning). Constans was elevated to the rank of Caesar on 25 December 333, i.e. on the *natalis invicti* or *natalis Christi*.

46 Euseb. *VC* 4,40,1–2. The bishop is notoriously imprecise regarding the accession dates and even abstained from mentioning Dalmatius, who suffered a *damnatio memoriae* after he was murdered in the political purges of 337. Eusebius also ignored Crispus, Constantine's oldest son, who was put to death on the emperor's command in the course of the so called 'palace crisis' of 326 and who was also subjected to a *damnatio memoriae*. Thus, Eusebius only mentions three Caesars: Constantine Iunior, elevated "at the time of his father's tenth anniversary", Constantius "about the time of the twenty-year celebration", and Constans, "promoted about the end of the third decade". Eusebius is quite imprecise regarding the dates of the Caesars' appointments. Crispus and Constantinus Iunior were promoted on 1 March 317, i.e. on the 25th *dies imperii* of Constantius I; Constantius Iunior was elevated on 8 November 324; and Constans was appointed on 25 December 333 (i.e. the *natalis invicti* or *Christi*). Thus, Dalmatius was the only Caesar who was actually elevated in the course of one of Constantine's major ruler anniversaries. However, the fact that Eusebius takes for granted the connection between Constantine's *tricennalia* and the expansion of the imperial college suggests that this was an aspect of Constantinian representation familiar to his contemporaries.

perial dynasty (elevation of Dalmatius), and the divine support of the Constantinian monarchy (dedication of the *martyrion* church).

Now, in the lecture-sermon Eusebius delivered on the occasion of the *encaenia* ceremonies, the bishop significantly departed from the Constantinian interpretation of the building and its religious context. First of all, the bishop completely ignored all the intricate layers of meaning just carved out – although the fact that he refers to these aspects in his *Vita Constantini* clearly shows that he was well aware of them. He also abstained from praising Constantine's Christian-friendly religious policy in his speech, and he did not even highlight the emperor's pious church-founding activity. Instead, Eusebius at first retraced the conceptual foundations of Christian cosmology, then – in a Christological middle part – he discussed the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and finally he dealt with the soteriological ramifications of divine revelation up to his own time. Instead of praising the Christian emperor and his church building activity, Eusebius chose to focus on the corresponding doctrines of Christian belief: the Christological middle part of the lecture specifically refers to the salvific events that were supposed to have happened on the very spot where now Eusebius was giving his talk in the newly built Constantinian church.

As it seems, Eusebius made no efforts to link his discourse to the official reading of the *encaenia* ceremonies. Quite the contrary: the way in which Eusebius, in his speech, depicted the Christian God, differed in various respects from the way the *summa divinitas* usually appeared in Constantinian representation. In the cosmological part of his speech, Eusebius introduced the proposition that God alone was the cause of all historic development. From this premise the bishop then deduced – in the soteriological part of the oration – the provocative conclusion that God alone fought the enemies of Christianity and eliminated the error of polytheism, that he alone gave new hope to the Christians, and that he alone rebuilt their churches – accomplishments Constantine undoubtedly claimed for himself:

(5) Now let anyone who so wishes come forth and explain who it was who, after such destruction and ruin, restored the sacred buildings from top to bottom; who, after the loss of all hope, decided on a second rebuilding, even greater than the former? And, surely the greatest marvel of the account, He [= God] did rebuild, not after the demise of those persecutors, but while these very exterminators were yet alive, so that through their own mouths and their own writing they should themselves sing the recantation of what they had done.⁴⁷

Eusebius then even drew an unflattering comparison between the power of an earthly ruler on the one hand and the power of God and Christ on the other:⁴⁸ “What sovereign ever wielded power for so many ages? Who else continues to command after death, to raise trophies over his enemies, and to subordinate every land and country and city, both Greek and barbarian, subduing his adversaries with an invisible and

⁴⁷ Euseb. SC 17,5.

⁴⁸ Euseb. SC 17,11.

hidden hand?" Eusebius knew very well that Constantine put himself on a par with Christ – just about a year later, in his tricennial oration, the bishop himself reinforced the idea of a close companionship between a semi-divine emperor and Christ. His Jerusalem lecture, however, Eusebius delivered in an environment more strongly influenced by the ecclesiastical sphere, at a certain distance from the imperial court. Here he pointed out and emphasized not the parallels but rather the fundamental differences between the ruler of All and Christ on the one hand and the ruler of the Roman state on the other.

In the cosmological passages of the lecture, Eusebius argued that the true source of divine power did not lie in the sun, but in the one God of All.⁴⁹ The bishop here implicitly addressed the persistent impact of the sun-cult on the religious image of the Christian monarch: a topic that was of great importance to the bishop precisely because solar symbolism had a late heyday in the last decade of Constantine's rule.⁵⁰ In the early 320s, solar and Christian facets of imperial representation had begun to merge – a process that formed a new image of the Roman monarch who now himself appeared as highly charged with solar power. On the imperial coins and medallions, where this process can be traced most accurately, Constantine was now regularly portrayed with a nimbus – a solar aura – and with the traditional gesture of *Sol invictus*: raising the right hand and holding a globe in the left.⁵¹

The formation of a new *imago* of the Roman emperor went hand in hand with the formation of a new state and ruler cult, which can best be seen in the military sector, but which has also transformed religious observances at court and in the provinces: new military rites to be held on the *dies Solis*, the day of the Sun, went without pagan sacrifices and were thus open to Christian interpretations, but they also incorporated traditional aspects of sun worship. The soldiers were supposed to assemble on a sacred site outside the *castra*, raise their hands towards the sun and recite a prayer to the *summus deus* on behalf of the emperor and his dynasty.⁵² At that time, explicitly pagan imagery had largely disappeared from imperial representation, while Christian symbols adorned the military standards and the emperor's dress uniform.⁵³ In this distinctively Constantinian *mélange*, traditional and innovative tendencies intermingled and formed a new image of the Roman emperor – an image that clearly appealed to Christian religion, while still depicting the monarch as a semi-divine entity with privileged access to the divine, as a figure transcending earthly limitations, and as an object of human veneration. Devotion to the sun was probably the most persistent aspect of pagan tradition within Constantine's monarchic representation. In re-

49 Euseb. SC 11,8.

50 On the cult of the sun in Eusebius' writings, see Amerise 2007. On the role of solar power for the late antique Roman monarchy more broadly, see Wallraff 2001 and 2011 and Drake 2009.

51 See Wienand 2012, 296–335.

52 Euseb. VC 4,18–20 and LC 9,9–10; see Wienand 2012, 319–328.

53 Euseb. VC 4,18,3–20,2 and LC 9,9–10; see Wienand 2012, 319–328. The prayer has overtones of a religious confession.

defining the cosmological significance of the sun, Eusebius obviously intended to advance and disseminate a reading of the Christian emperor more plainly pertaining to cosmological conceptions of the Christian tradition.

Finally, Eusebius also provided a keen reinterpretation of the concept of ‘peace’ in his Jerusalem lecture – the official motto of Constantine’s tricennalia and his church building program in the Holy Land. According to Eusebius, the *δύναμις* of the cosmic ruler alone brought about universal peace on earth, and God alone can ensure persistent peace. For Eusebius, this insight was the *kephalaion* of his lecture, the focal point of his whole argument.⁵⁴ In the bishop’s account of peace, there was not much room for the praise of the emperor’s accomplishments.

Given that a Christian bishop was speaking and not an imperial official, the obvious discrepancies between the official conception of the *encaenia* ceremonies and Eusebius’ account are not peculiar *per se*, but they are striking in so far as Eusebius was here speaking in a ceremonial environment largely governed by court etiquette, and that he intended to be heard also by those close to the emperor. Several passages show that Eusebius did not exclusively address the devoted Christians among his audience or the members of the local parish.⁵⁵ Eusebius obviously seized the favorable moment when more public attention than ever was being paid to Jerusalem and when relevant parts of the imperial administration, up to the emperor himself, directly or indirectly partook in the events. The speech is remarkable in that it provides a Christian reasoning about the relation between divine providence and salvific history to be heard at least by some of the many ears of the Roman emperor – a reasoning that in various respects departed intentionally from what Eusebius could expect the emperor to want to hear.

However, Eusebius did not intend to draw a dividing line between the emperor’s conception of state religion on the one hand and ‘true’ Christianity on the other. Rather, the bishop seems to have tried to make his audience believe that his reasoning represented the religious knowledge and understanding of Constantine himself: in this sense, the speech apparently belongs to the speech genre that Eusebius has called “*ekphraseis* of the imperial wisdom-doctrines”.⁵⁶ Eusebius attributed the theological insights carved out in the lecture to the pious church builder himself. At least this is what Eusebius did when – two months later – he presented parts of his lecture again, this time before the emperor in Constantinople: in the newly added preface (SC 11,1–7) Eusebius claims to be an interpreter and enunciator of the true religious beliefs of the emperor. Eusebius may have pursued this rhetorical strategy already in his Jerusalem lecture, potentially in the original introductory or concluding passages (that were omitted when Eusebius revised the manuscript and added the new intro-

54 Euseb. SC 17,12.

55 The fact that the text is composed as a diatribe suggests that the bishop addresses an audience that consists not only of Christians. The political impact of his argument implies that he intended to reach the imperial representatives.

56 Euseb. VC 4,45,3.

duction and conclusion for his speech to be delivered before Constantine in the imperial palace at Constantinople). The self-portrayal as interpreter of Constantine's religious understanding allowed Eusebius to portray his own interpretation not as an external ascription by an outsider, but rather as the proper intention of the benefactor himself, which Eusebius merely had to explicate. An orator who portrays himself as an interpreter of the emperor's religious beliefs is obviously pursuing a rhetorical strategy to render credible his own interpretation, and – which is even more important – this allowed Eusebius to manipulate the conception of a Christian ruler from within.

Why did Eusebius think such a modification was necessary? At court, the traditional ruler qualities of *virtus*, *humanitas*, *providentia* and *pietas* still served as the cornerstones of imperial self-display, while Christian layers of meaning were only employed selectively, and they were cautiously embedded into the traditional modes of interaction.⁵⁷ But this consensus-oriented adjustment of Constantine's religious approach was not unproblematic for the most ambitious Christians, even if they appreciated the official recognition of Christianity overall. To be sure, most Christians attending Eusebius' lecture will have embraced the end of persecution and the emperor's endorsement of Christianity, but some of them were likely irritated by the emperor's idiosyncratic approach of merging monarchic representation with Christian religion. Such an ambivalent assessment of Constantine's religious policy can also be seen in Eusebian thought: in his writings, a basic inclination to support the recent developments interferes with more or less explicit criticism of certain aspects of Constantine's self-depiction as Christian monarch.⁵⁸

This ambivalent assessment can clearly be seen also in the Jerusalem lecture, where Eusebius undermined basic axioms of Constantine's religious self-conception as a Christian ruler. Although the bishop received with great enthusiasm Constan-

57 A nice example of the resulting *mélange* in courtly representation is provided by the figure poems of Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius, a Roman senator who put his remarkable poetic ability into the service of Constantine; on Optatianus and his poems, see Polara 1973; Polara 1976; Bruhat 1999; Wienand 2012, 355–420; Squire/Wienand 2017; Körfer 2020. In his highly artistic *carmina figurata*, Optatianus combined Greco-Roman mythology with set-pieces of Christian thought and symbolism to create a novel form of imperial eulogy. *Carmen* 19 is a particularly elaborate figure poem. In the ground text of the poem, Optatianus celebrates the emperor's virtues in a quite traditional manner. The colored intext verses that are woven into the ground text depict the Christian monogram Chi-Rho, Constantine's victorious sign, within an image that stands for the emperor's military prowess: a war ship can be seen with oars and a helm and a ram. The sails are drawn in the form of the Chi-Rho, and a letter combination stands for the *vota vicennialia*, the public vows for the twentieth jubilee of the emperor's reign. In Optatianus' poems, Christian elements are not in conflict with references to the pagan tradition. For Optatianus, the religious transformation of the Roman monarchy was fairly unproblematic. These poems clearly show that at the imperial court, where the *carmina* have been presented and received, the religious transformation proceeded harmoniously.

58 Eusebius' stance towards Constantine was long viewed as purely affirmative, but over the past decades, scholarship has developed more subtle approaches; see, for instance, Corke-Webster 2019; Inowlocki 2011.

tine's renunciation of polytheism, he had certain reservations regarding the concrete design of Constantine's Christian monarchy. However, it was not the bishop's intention to organize resistance against the Roman ruler, or simply to criticize him for his views. Eusebius seems to have aimed at contributing to the development of a Christian monarchy that could keep up with the demands of even its most ambitious and challenging Christian subjects. Eusebius had obviously understood that the image of a Christian emperor could only be formed and transformed from within. This is probably the most important reason why the aged bishop ventured to join the inauguration ceremonies in Jerusalem: this spectacular encounter between state and church offered Eusebius an excellent opportunity to communicate his views about the religious development of the Roman Empire vis-à-vis an audience composed of state representatives as well as Christian clerics and parishioners.

But Eusebius seems to have been aware of the fact that he would not be able to decisively influence the self-conception of the distant ruler with his Jerusalem lecture alone. The monarch and his closest advisors took part in the events only indirectly, and there was no guarantee that the leading circles took note of the documentation about the speeches given on the occasion. The chances to influence the emperor via the state representatives attending the ceremonies were limited: the highest official was a *notarius*, or probably a governor. No *comes* or other high-ranking official was in Jerusalem in 335, and no member of the imperial family attended the festivities; indeed, after Helena's death in the early 330s there was not much expectation of another imperial visit to the Holy Land, although occasionally Constantine seems to have entertained the thought of being baptized in the waters of the Jordan river.⁵⁹

Eusebius knew that in the peripheral city of Jerusalem, even in such an advantageous situation, he could at best reach a handful of middle-ranking officials, apart from his fellow Christians. To be sure, even this was of great importance for him, since – according to his understanding – the endorsement of Christianity by the Roman state was of great concern to everybody. Eusebius' aim was to sensitize all social strata to the merits and detriments of the recent developments in order to influence the Roman monarchy in a way that would properly serve the interests of the church. His function as metropolitan bishop of Caesarea lent Eusebius an aura of authority, so that his auditorium certainly attached great importance to his views. But Eusebius knew that in the end the image of a Christian ruler was not framed in Jerusalem, that he instead had to advance to the very center and the ceremonial core of the Roman monarchy. He had to ascribe to the emperor his ideas of a truly Christian monarchy in the imperial palace at Constantinople – in the “adyton of the holy palace, the inner, most inaccessible of all places”, as Eusebius himself called it.⁶⁰

59 Euseb. VC 4,62.

60 Euseb. LC Prol. 4.

Eusebius in Constantinople, Take One

Only two months after the festivities in Jerusalem, Eusebius took part in a delegation of bishops who traveled to Constantine's court in Constantinople in order to inform the emperor about the outcome of the synod of Tyre and to settle the dispute with Athanasius. It was the first time the aged bishop had traveled to Constantinople. In his *Vita Constantini*, Eusebius provides a vivid account of how the metropolis on the Bosphorus developed into the urban center of the evolving Christian monarchy.⁶¹ Eusebius mentioned no biblical sites, as there were none. But in his account Constantinople was nonetheless the ideal hub of a Christian empire: Eusebius talks of “very many places of worship” and “very large martyr-shrines” and claims the city was “consecrated to the martyrs' God”.⁶² In Eusebius' account, Constantinople was not only a city with a Christian tinge, but a capital with an outright anti-pagan character:

Being full of the breath of God's wisdom, which he reckoned a city bearing his own name should display, he saw fit to purge it of all idol-worship, so that nowhere in it appeared those images of the supposed gods which are worshipped in temples, nor altars foul with bloody slaughter, nor sacrifice offered as holocaust in fire, nor feasts of demons, nor any of the other customs of the superstitious.⁶³

In his passages about the religious character of Constantinople, Eusebius is conspicuously vague about details. The only Christian building he names explicitly is a shrine (νεών) newly erected by Constantine in honor of the Holy Apostles, where Constantine was later to be buried.⁶⁴ There were other Christian buildings not mentioned by Eusebius, the construction of which might have begun under Constantine: the Church of S. Irene, a basilica outside the city walls dedicated to the martyr Mocius, and a Church of Acacius inside the walls.⁶⁵ But these buildings provided little

⁶¹ Euseb. *VC* 3,3, 48–49, 54,2–3; on Eusebius' image of Constantinople, see Drake 1988; for imperial Constantinople in late antiquity, see Rene Pfeilschifter's chapter in this volume, see also Magdalino 2022; Bauer 2001; Brubaker 2001; Dagron 1984; Janin 1964. On Constantinian Constantinople in particular, see Dagron 1974, 13–115; Olbrich 2006 and 2015; Bassett 2004, 50–78, Moser 2018, esp. 45–82.

⁶² Euseb. *VC* 3,48,1.

⁶³ Euseb. *VC* 3,48,2.

⁶⁴ Euseb. *VC* 4,58–60. According to Eusebius, Constantine has dedicated this building “to perpetuate for all mankind the memory of our Savior's apostles” and “prepared the place there for the time when it would be needed on his decease, intending with supreme eagerness of faith that his own remains should after death partake in the invocation of the Apostles”. It is not entirely clear if Eusebius is speaking about two buildings – a Church of the Holy Apostles and a mausoleum – or about one; see Downey 1951, 53–80; Krautheimer 1975, 72–73; Bonamente 1988, 118; Mango 1990, 51–61; Leeb 1992, 93–120; Winkelmann 1962, 238–239. Johnson 2020, esp. 80–81 argues that at Eusebius' time “there was a single church building, not a church and a separate mausoleum” (p. 81).

⁶⁵ Socr. *HE* 1,16; Sozom. *HE* 8,17,5; Socr. *HE* 6,23. See Dagron 1974, 388–389; Mango 1985, 35–36.

more than Christian overtones to a city which was clearly laid out primarily as a major residential city serving the needs of the court. The central focal points of the urban design were the palace/hippodrome complex, the newly erected circular Forum of Constantine around a monumental statue of the emperor on a huge porphyry column, the impressively colonnaded *Mese* (the main axis of the city), and the Constantinian city walls.⁶⁶ Constantine had filled the public spaces of his newly designed prestige city with artwork brought together from the entire empire, particularly from the East. Many religiously connoted objects originally displayed in pagan temples or sanctuaries were among the items used for embellishing the city. According to what we know about the statues and sculptures transferred to Constantinople, the items represented the whole depth of Greco-Roman history, mythology, and religion.⁶⁷ As it seems, they were meant to make visible the greatness and splendor of the Constantinian empire and the glory of Roman dominion over the *orbis terrarum*. In religious terms, the spectrum of artwork brought to Constantinople obviously conveyed the idea of a plurality of religious references, ranging from the pagan past to Christianity. For Eusebius' reading of Constantinople, this harmonious collocation of pagan and Christian references posed a certain problem. At least he thought it necessary in his *Vita Constantini* to reinterpret the pagan implications in purely Christian terms:

... the sacred bronze figures, of which the error of the ancients had for a long time been proud, he displayed as a contemptible spectacle to the viewers, in another the Sminthian, in the Hippodrome itself the tripods from Delphi, and the Muses of Helicon at the palace. (3) The city named after the Emperor was filled throughout with objects of skilled artwork in bronze dedicated in various provinces. To these under the name of gods those sick with error had for long ages vainly offered innumerable hecatombs and whole burnt sacrifices, but now they at last learnt sense, as the Emperor used these very toys for the laughter and amusement of the spectators.⁶⁸

This passage shows that Eusebius saw an emerging center of an evolving *imperium Romanum* when he came to Constantinople, but that he wanted to see an emerging center of the *orbis Christianus*. Constantine indeed stripped the statues brought to his new residential hub of their original cultic contexts, but the traditional pagan overtones were largely retained. The fact that Constantine also founded a new cult for Tyche in Constantinople – “which was anything but strictly Christian” – quite clearly shows that in the very center of his empire the first Christian monarch provided suitable room also for traditional religion.⁶⁹ Eusebius must have sensed that the emper-

66 On the hippodrome, see Akyürek 2021 and Dagon 2011; on the porphyry column, see Fowden 1991; on the walls, see the chapter by Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger and Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah in this volume.

67 On the Constantinian artwork in Constantinople, see Bassett 2004, 50–78; Berger 2021.

68 Euseb. *VC* 3,54,2–3.

69 For the quotation, see Lenski 2015, 351.

or's approach to Constantinople was significantly different from his approach to Jerusalem.

When Eusebius arrived in this emerging center of the Constantinian empire, he was summoned, together with the other bishops of his delegation, to the imperial palace in order to meet the emperor in person.⁷⁰ The prime purpose of the encounter was to resolve the conflict around Athanasius, who had left the synod of Tyre to appeal to the emperor directly. Beyond this case, Eusebius had other points on his agenda as well. Somehow he managed to be granted extra time to appear before the emperor.⁷¹ According to his own request, as he relates in the *Vita Constantini*, he was allowed to present to the emperor a theological discourse relating to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Eusebius himself described this remarkable encounter in his *Vita Constantini*:

33 (1) One other thing seems to me to be unforgettable, a deed which the marvellous man did in our own presence. On one occasion, emboldened by his devotion to divine things, we asked permission to deliver an address about the Savior's tomb for him to hear. He listened with rapt attention, and where a large audience was standing around right inside the palace he stood up and listened with the others. When we begged him to rest on the imperial throne which was nearby, he would not do so, but made a shrewdly considered critique of the speech, and affirmed the truth of its doctrinal theology. (2) Since it took a long time and the speech still continued, we suggested breaking off; he however would not allow it, but urged us to go on to the end. When we asked him to sit he kept refusing, saying at one time that when the doctrine of God was being discussed, it was wrong for him to relax while he listened, and at another that it was good and beneficial for him to stand: it was a holy thing to listen to divinity standing up. When this too came to an end, we returned home and took up our regular business.⁷²

What Eusebius recited in front of the emperor was apparently a large section of his Jerusalem lecture, to which he added a newly composed introduction and conclusion designed particularly for presentation before the emperor. It is not exactly clear why Eusebius chose not to write a completely new oration. Maybe it was only on short notice that he was granted the opportunity to appear before the emperor, so that he might not have had enough time to compose a new oration. This, at least, is implied by the fact that the newly added sections do not seem to fit very well with the main part of the speech. The passage quoted above also indicates that the bishop misapprehended how exactly his speech was expected to be delivered and received, which also points to a largely improvised situation. But the fact that he took over in

70 On the archaeology of the late antique imperial palace at Constantinople, see Westbrook 2019.

71 The encounter seems to have been of limited ceremonial character. The bishops' main task was to inform the emperor of the results of the synod of Tyre. It seems plausible to assume that they were also asked to report about the events in Jerusalem. Since Eusebius' speech does not provide details about the inauguration ceremonies or the Constantinian church building, but focuses on the salvific aspects of the biblical sites in Jerusalem, the presentation of the speech seems not to have been a regular part of the bishops' report about the *encaenia* ceremonies.

72 Euseb. *VC* 4,33.

an unmodified form the bulk of his Jerusalem sermon also shows that Eusebius ultimately underestimated what difference it made whether he spoke in the emperor's absence in Jerusalem or in his presence in Constantinople.

It is quite clear that the bishop did not succeed in controlling the message. According to how Eusebius himself recounts the encounter in his *Vita Constantini*, Constantine omitted the usual formalities of court ceremonial when he listened to the bishop's speech. Although Eusebius repeatedly asked Constantine to take a seat on his throne, the emperor persistently – and in an increasingly disgruntled manner – refused. He rather remained standing among his friends and advisors, and he even intervened in Eusebius' speech as if it were a statement of a council member during a session of the *consilium*. This procedure inevitably led to a considerable protraction, so that Eusebius at one point even wanted to break off his talk in order to comply with the time limits set for his presentation. The emperor, however, asked him to proceed.

When Eusebius described these events, he tried to explain the emperor's unexpected behavior in terms of humility: according to Eusebius' reasoning, the situation showed the emperor's reverence for God and proved Constantine's expertise in theological matters. However, the orator and the monarch obviously had divergent ideas of how the speech should be presented and how speaker and monarch should interact. Eusebius wanted to present his speech within the framework of court ceremonial, as if he were a regular panegyrist submitting an encomium before the enthroned emperor. But Constantine had obviously been informed about the contents and nature of Eusebius' speech beforehand. The emperor dismissed Eusebius' plea to take his place on the throne with the argument that it would be inappropriate to follow a theological discourse in a relaxed position. And indeed, Eusebius' speech dealt with cosmological, Christological, and soteriological issues, but it was not an encomium. In the main part of his speech, Eusebius did not even allude to Constantine's church building program in the Holy Land. Only the newly added introduction and conclusion contained laudatory aspects referring to the emperor's pious deeds.

But it was not only content that mattered: Constantine was probably also concerned about Eusebius' conception of religious competence and authority, in particular about the bishop's self-confident appearance as interpreter of divine knowledge. In his newly added introduction, Eusebius emphasized that the subsequent considerations were not meant to instruct Constantine, who had been initiated into the secrets of the Christian faith by repeated personal revelations of God. Rather, the bishop wanted to be some kind of ὑφερμηνευτής ('interpreter') who interprets the emperor's religious insights for those not yet initiated into the divine rites. In this sense, Eusebius calls himself an ἄγγελος, a messenger of Constantine's pious soul:

(1) To this imperial composition about the Universal Sovereign, Constantine, Great Victor, let us attach for you revelations about solemn mysteries. These, of course, are not intended to initiate you, who have been instructed by God, nor to lay bare secrets for you, to whom well before our account God Himself, 'not by men nor through men' but by means of the Common Savior Him-

self and frequent enlightening visions of His Divinity revealed and uncovered the secrets of the holy rites. Rather it is to lead untaught men into light and to suggest to the unknowing the causes and foundations of your religious deeds of piety ... (17) I pray I may be a kind of interpreter of your intentions and become the reporter of your devout soul, in order to teach all that it is necessary and proper that everyone be taught in whom a desire exists to learn the principles of the power of our Savior God, for which He who long ago pre-existed and had charge of the universe at length came down to us from heaven, assumed a human nature, and underwent death.⁷³

With these introductory remarks Eusebius made plain his intention to attribute to the emperor's pious understanding the insights carved out in the main part of his oration. There, however, Eusebius retained the critical assessment of the emperor's position in a Christian cosmos which he had presented a couple of weeks earlier before a significantly different audience in Jerusalem. But now the bishop stood in front of the emperor himself when he explained that God alone fought the enemies of Christianity and eliminated the error of polytheism, that God alone gave new hope to the Christians, and that God alone had rebuilt their churches;⁷⁴ and now it was the emperor who listened when Eusebius drew an unflattering comparison between the power of an earthly ruler on the one hand and the power of God and Christ on the other.

Those who carefully listened to the bishop's words must have realized that these assertions were seriously out of line with Constantine's idea of his role as a Roman Christian emperor. And Eusebius must have known this too. But the bishop seems to have entertained the hope that in the course of this personal encounter he might be able to influence the image of a Christian emperor maintained by Constantine and his closest companions, and that his ideas about the relation of Christian cosmology and Roman dominion might ultimately find their way into the ceremonial heart of the Roman monarchy. This seems to be the reason why the bishop so eagerly wanted his speech to be delivered within the regular framework of court ceremonial: a eulogistic oration before the enthroned emperor is usually performed as a ritual of consensus. The speaker takes care that his account is closely aligned with the emperor's self-image; in return, the orator's attributions are almost automatically confirmed and endorsed merely by the fact that the emperor provides the proper ceremonial environment and dignifies the occasion with his presence.

In the case of a conventional imperial panegyric this did not pose a problem, since the emperor could rely on the strictly affirmative stance of his eulogists. However, the Christianization of the Roman monarchy substantially modified the framework conditions of imperial representation. The two Eusebian speeches – the earliest surviving Christian speeches delivered before the emperor – show that the communicative function of a Christian oration before the Roman monarch does not necessarily correspond to a conventional panegyric. The Eusebian speeches are not

⁷³ Euseb. *SC* 11,7.

⁷⁴ Euseb. *SC* 17,5.

meant as a dazzling display of the orator's virtuosic skill in praising the emperor, his dynasty, and his deeds, and they do not aim at increasing the emperor's willingness to accept a petition, as many traditional panegyric orations do.⁷⁵ The bishop had other intentions. His prime interest was to contribute to the formation of a Christian image of the Roman ruler. As a Christian orator at court, Eusebius employed his skill to communicate a *normative* model of a Christian Roman monarchy. While a typical panegyrist employed unconditional affirmation as a means to win the emperor's inclination for supporting a certain request, Eusebius primarily tried to establish specific ideological standards a Christian emperor should meet – an approach with a subversive potential.

The misunderstandings regarding the role of Eusebius' speech point to the fact that at this time it was not yet routine for a bishop to give an oration before the emperor at court. From the very beginning, in his dealings with Christian clerics, Constantine preferred ecclesiastical synods as the most functional environment for exchange between state and church.⁷⁶ Among other reasons for choosing this policy, a synod offered the bishops much better conditions than the palace for getting in contact with the center of imperial power. Successfully maneuvering within court culture was not easy, it presupposed control of extended personal networks within the Roman aristocracy, which again required a substantial financial background and the proper *paideia*, i. e., the necessary habitus including the ability to interpret the topical language and the corresponding gestures usually employed at court – abilities Eusebius (and with him other clerics) quite obviously lacked (at least this is what the curious encounter between bishop and emperor in November 335 suggests).⁷⁷

Thus, adequate communicative channels fitting the needs of clerics could not be easily implemented within the well-established and self-contained social structures of the central administration. The fact that Constantine largely confined his interaction with Christian clerics to synods was accordingly to the advantage of bishops, but at the same time this policy partly sealed off the imperial court culture from the influence of Christian agents. Very early on, Eusebius seems to have recognized that this development limited the influence of the church on the formation of a Christian ruler image. With his appearance before the emperor in the palace at Constantinople, the bishop obviously tried to pave a way for the church into the ceremonial heart of the Roman monarchy in order to occupy this crucial discursive field as well. The bishop's conspicuous efforts to enter the innermost spheres of the secluded palace thus show that he intended to transform the figure of the Roman ruler harmoniously from within, not through a conflictual process.

75 On the late antique imperial panegyrics, see MacCormack 1976; Nixon/Rodgers 1994; Whitby 1998; Lassandro 2000; Rees 2002; Wienand 2012, 26–43; Omissi 2018; Omissi/Ross 2020.

76 Girardet 1975 and 1989; Young 2021; Pigott 2019; MacMullen 2006.

77 According to Gibbon 1909–1914, II, 136, Eusebius was “practiced in the arts of courts”. At best, this is only partly true.

Now, Constantine decided to grant the request of the honorable bishop and to let him deliver his speech in the imperial palace. But the emperor had also taken the appropriate measures to ensure that he himself would retain interpretive sovereignty regarding his self-conception as a Christian monarch. By omitting the usual court ceremonial, Constantine avoided an *a priori* endorsement of Eusebius' reasoning. According to the account in the *Vita Constantini*, it was Constantine who "analyzed the content of the speech with the fullest concentration of his thoughts and who confirmed the truth of the theological doctrines".⁷⁸ Thus, through his interventions in the delivery of the speech, Constantine managed to reserve for himself the final judgment about the bishop's statements. While Eusebius tried to explore the emperor's readiness to accept a role subordinate to him as a bishop as far as divine knowledge was concerned, Constantine at once turned the tables on Eusebius. The bishop seems not to have expected such a powerful neutralization strategy. The unforeseen development of the encounter obviously irritated him: he concluded his account of these events with the puzzled remark "when this too came to an end, we returned home and took up our regular business". There is no mention of positive feedback from the emperor, as Eusebius would receive one year later, when he got a second chance to appear before the emperor as an orator at court.

Eusebius in Constantinople, Take Two

On the second try, Eusebius was more successful. On 25 July 336 he once more entered the imperial palace in Constantinople – and this time officially as an imperial panegyrist. For the closing ceremonies of the thirtieth jubilee of Constantine's reign, the bishop stepped before the emperor to celebrate his *tricennalia* with a specifically composed eulogy.⁷⁹ In addition to the emperor himself and an exclusive audience, Constantine's youngest son was also present, and possibly also the other Caesars.

Eusebius' tricennial oration seems to have been the first Christian panegyric to be given on such an outstanding imperial occasion in a palatial audience chamber at court – in front of the enthroned emperor clad in his imperial garb, flanked by his sons and his closest friends and advisors. Whether Eusebius was given the opportunity for his second appearance at court due to another request of his own or whether he was specifically invited as encomiast, we cannot say. In any case, he had a second chance, and this time he had obviously obtained all necessary information about the exact procedure and about the status of his oration in advance, so he could present a fitting speech that was embedded into court ceremonial like a regular panegyric.

The imperial experiment of letting the aged bishop perform an imperial encomium on such an outstanding occasion succeeded to the emperor's satisfaction. In his

78 Euseb. VC 4,33,1.

79 On the date of Eusebius' oration, see Drake 1975.

Vita Constantini, Eusebius remarks that the emperor was full of joy after the speech, and that he expressed his sympathy towards Eusebius and other attending bishops during a subsequent banquet: “The friend of God (i. e. Constantine), while he listened to it, was like a man overjoyed; he said so himself after the hearing, when he dined with the bishops present and received them with every kind of honor”.⁸⁰

Eusebius was aware of the world-historic significance of these exceptional events. Accordingly, he did not want to leave the question of dissemination to chance. He included the account of the incident quoted above in the *Vita Constantini*, and he prepared the manuscript of his oration for publication as an appendix to his *Vita Constantini* – together with the manuscript of his first speech before the emperor and together with the text of Constantine’s *Oration to the Assembly of Saints*.⁸¹

Regarding its basic layout and its contents, Eusebius’ tricennial oration fundamentally differs from both the original Jerusalem lecture and its modified version. God is again the principal cosmic power, to which the sun is explicitly subordinate. But now the position of the earthly ruler has completely changed. In his Jerusalem lecture and thus also in his first speech before the emperor in Constantinople, Eusebius avoided ascribing salvific significance to his figure of a Christian emperor. In his tricennial oration, in contrast, Constantine appears as θεῶ φίλος, as ‘friend of God,’ who is situated on a par with Christ and who is depicted as highly charged with solar power.⁸² In this picture, the emperor is situated in the sphere of the divine, and he possesses an unrivalled proximity to God and Christ. Constantine obtains his victories with heavenly assistance, and his victory sign is a beacon of hope for all Christians.

In his tricennial oration, Eusebius obviously seeks to fulfil all formal requirements of an imperial eulogy, and to cover all traditional thematic fields of Roman panegyric – even such fields as military representation, including references to victories over barbarians.⁸³ Nevertheless, Eusebius has an idiosyncratic approach to epideictic rhetoric. Within his densely woven net of references to central aspects of Constantinian self-display, Eusebius carefully preserves the necessary room to subtly adjust the parameters of the ruler image to a Christian framework.⁸⁴ Throughout the whole speech, Eusebius thus manages to relativize the salvific significance of

⁸⁰ VC 4,46.

⁸¹ On the *Oration to the Assembly of Saints*, see Cristofoli 2005 and the introduction in Girardet 2013; see also Bleckmann 1997.

⁸² For more detailed accounts of how Eusebius construed the Christian monarch in his tricennial oration, see Drake 1976, 3–79; Wienand 2012, 421–482; Schneider 2020, 29–41 and 47–51; Drake (forthcoming), ch. II.B.3. On the wider context of the Christian emperors of late antiquity and their position toward God, see Meier 2003.

⁸³ Euseb. LC 6–7, see Wienand 2012, 444–448.

⁸⁴ On the wider context of Christian redefinition of the imperial role in the fourth century, see Drake 2015.

the earthly ruler, which – at first glance – he seems to have emphasized unconditionally.

Regardless of whether Eusebius talks about the emperor's role as a victor, about Constantine's solar power, or about the salutary sign, basically, the bishop is always concerned with one and the same aspect: the emperor's piety and his stance toward truth. As champion of the Christian God, the Eusebian Constantine does not fight for the glory and felicity of the *imperium Romanum* like the emperor of a traditional panegyric, and his victories do not stand for his unrivaled providence and virtue. Rather, Eusebius depicts Constantine even with respect to his military endeavors as "a paradigm of piety and truth for all on earth":

(3) For how could one bear the likeness of monarchical authority who has formed in his soul the myriad falsely depicted images of demons? How can he be ruler and lord of all who has bound himself to countless malignant masters, who is a slave of shameful pleasures, a slave of unbridled lust, a slave of ill-gotten gain, a slave of ill-temper and wrath, a slave of fear and frights, a slave of bloodthirsty demons, a slave of soul-destroying spirits? (4) Wherefore let the friend of the All-Ruling God be proclaimed our sole sovereign with truth as witness, the only one who is truly free, or rather truly a lord. Above care for money, stronger than the passion for women, victor of physical pleasures and demands, the conqueror, not the captive, of ill-temper and wrath, this man truly is the Autokrator, bearing the title that conforms to his moral conduct. Really a Victor is he who has triumphed over the passions which have overcome mankind, who has modelled himself after the archetypal form of the Supreme Sovereign, whose thoughts mirror its virtuous rays, by which he has been made perfectly wise, good, just, courageous, pious, and God-loving.⁸⁵

When Eusebius talks about Constantine's victories, he is primarily interested in the emperor's fight against the error of the polytheist religion and against Christian heresies. The conceptual reference point of this battle is the emperor's εὐσέβεια, his piety towards the Christian God. This allows Eusebius to formulate his concept of a Christian ruler on the basis of what might be called probationary affirmation. To be sure, Eusebius was highly interested in developing argumentative means for immunizing the Christian monarchy against the threat of subversion, as he saw the Christian monarchy as a necessary prerogative for an enduring prosperity of Christianity within the Roman state. But he also traced out the predetermined breaking points of monarchic legitimation within a Christian *orbis Romanus*: Christian piety became the most important factor, while military success *per se* loses its justificatory power. The Eusebian model of Christian panegyric, developed to provide the philosophical foundation for a novel image of a legitimate ruler, was also a benchmark for judging the Christian monarch.

⁸⁵ Euseb. *LC* 5,3–4.

Conclusion

Eusebius' endeavor of implanting his normative concept of legitimate Christian rule in the heart of the Constantinian monarchy was not in vain. His contribution to framing the Christian ruler image was probably among the bishop's most effective and lasting achievements, although he represented only one of many groups competing for influence on the emperor's self-conception. To achieve success, however, Eusebius had to make far-reaching concessions to the demands of imperial representation. His journey from the Holy Land to the center of earthly rule is indicative of the long way Christian philosophy had to go to arrive at the idea of an emperor beloved by God – even if the emperor in question was willing to cover part of the distance himself.

Constantine subjected the Roman monarchy to a profound religious transformation, but it seems he tried to keep a certain distance between church and state in order not to lose interpretive sovereignty to an institution largely unacquainted with the art of imperial politics. Eusebius, on the other hand, intended to merge the two fields, although he obviously realized that the structural differences between the two spheres could not be overcome at once. But regardless of the persistent disparity between the *orbis Christianus* and the *orbis Romanus*, the bishop's commitment and the emperor's endorsement brought closer together Jerusalem and Constantinople, the very poles of an emerging new world order.

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