

## CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AND CHRISTIAN EUROPE AS REFLECTED IN THE MONUMENTS

As the illegitimate son of Emperor Constantius Chlorus and *stabularia* (“stable-maid”) Helena<sup>1</sup>, a native of Bythnia, Constantine took over the western part of the Roman Empire after the death of his father (in 306). He was confirmed as emperor in 307 in Trier. The victory over his brother-in-law Maxentius in 312 was followed by the miraculous sign of the Christian God<sup>2</sup> at the Milvian Bridge in Rome, an event also known as the Constantinian Turn.<sup>3</sup>

As a highly-skilled politician with a far-reaching vision, Constantine recognized the increasingly growing strength latent in Christianity and availed himself of this situation. Christianity in the meantime was well-organized and moreover intellectually unique among its contemporary “religions.” For this reason the Emperor is depicted with the christogram on his helmet (Fig. 1)<sup>4</sup> on a silver medallion dating to 315.

In this way Constantine professed himself to Christ in full public view. The emperor also endorsed the new religion, especially through the foundation of churches<sup>5</sup>. Such support simultaneously impacted church architecture by imparting an imperial influence, exemplified in the tradition of the imperial

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<sup>1</sup> Further details on Helena in H. Schlange-Schöningh, *Helena im Heiligen Land. Pilgerreisen oder politische Mission?* In: K. Ehling – G. Weber (Hg.), *Konstantin der Große. Zwischen Sol und Christus* (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie = Sonderbände der Antiken Welt). Darmstadt – Mainz 2011, 100–109.

<sup>2</sup> Compare also Euseb., *Vita Const.* (Introduction by B. Bleckmann, translation and commentary by H. Schneider. Fontes Christiani 83. Turnhout 2007).

<sup>3</sup> On this event see, for example, B. K. M. Girardet, *Die Konstantinische Wende. Voraussetzungen und geistige Grundlagen der Religionspolitik Konstantins des Großen*. Darmstadt 2006.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the example in Munich’s National Coin Collection (Staatliche Münzsammlung von München) (RIC 7, 36) there is also one in St. Petersburg and one in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Münzkabinett Inv. - Nr. 32344).

<sup>5</sup> A detailed description can be found in L. Völkl, *Die Konstantinischen Kirchenbauten nach Eusebius*. RivAC 29 (1953) 49–66 and 187–206 as well as Th. Baumeister, *Konstantin der Große und die Märtyrer*. In: idem., *Martyrium, Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung im christlichen Altertum* (RQS Suppl. 61). Rom – Freiburg – Wien 2009, especially 123–131.



Fig. 1 Munich, National Coin Collection, (in F. A. Bauer – N. Zimmermann [ed.], *Epochenwandel? Kunst und Kultur zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie = Sonderbände zur Antiken Welt). Mainz am Rhein 2001, Back Cover

Сл. 1 Минхен, Национална збирка кованица (у: F. A. Bauer – N. Zimmermann [ed.], *Epochenwandel? Kunst und Kultur zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie = Sonderbände zur Antiken Welt). Mainz am Rhein 2001, задња страна



Fig. 2 Trier, Palace Aula, (in M. Wallraff [as in note 20], Fig. 10)

Сл. 2 Трир, Палата Аула (у: М. Валрафз [као у напмени 20], сл. 10)

aula of Trier (Fig. 2)<sup>6</sup>. This influence continued to affect church architecture a century later, such as the Church of Santa Sabina in Rom (Fig. 3)<sup>7</sup>, and even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the episcopal church, that is to say the Lateran Basilica<sup>8</sup>, the church of S. Paolo fuori le mura<sup>9</sup> and S. Croce in Gerusalemme<sup>10</sup> in Rome are named in the foundation list of the Liber Pontificalis (in the Vita of Bishop Silvester of 314 – 335) as having been established by Constantine. From these followed an entire array of ambulatory basilicas such as SS. Marcellino e Pietro, S. Agnese, S. Lorenzo f. l. m. and the *basilica apostolorum*, namely the later church S. Sebastiano; all of these churches were linked with a mausoleum<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Among others, see also E. Zahn, *Die Basilika in Trier*. Trier 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Compare H. Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen Roms vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert*. Der Beginn der abendländischen Kirchenbaukunst. Regensburg 2004, 167–176.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–54.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–90.



Fig. 3 Rome, S. Sabina (Photo: R. Pillinger)  
Сл. 3 Рим, С. Сабина (Фото: Р. Пилингер)



Fig. 4 Rome, Old-St. Peter: Column bases, (in H. Brandenburg [see note 7], 279, Fig. 14)

Сл. 4 Рим, Св. Петар Стари: База стуба колоне, (у: Х. Бранденбургу, [видети напомену 7], 279, сл 14)

Fig. 5 Sofija, Sv. Sofija (Photo: R. Pillinger)

Сл. 5 Софија, Св. Софија (Фото: Р. Пилингер)



Fig. 6 Murigiol/Halmyris: Basilica (Photo: R. Pillinger)  
Сл. 6 Муригиол / Халмирис: Базилика (Фото: Р. Пилингер)







Fig. 7 Murigiol/Halmyris:  
Basilica crypt (Photo: R.  
Pillinger)

Сл. 7 Муригиол / Халмирис:  
крипта базилике (Фото: Р.  
Пилингер)



Fig. 8 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: Vat. Gr. 1613 f. 353 (in M.  
Bagnoli – H. A. Klein – C. G. Mann – J. Robinson (ed.), *Treasures  
of Heaven. Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe.*  
Exhibition Catalogue. New Haven 2010, 10, Fig. 6)

Сл. 8 Апостолска библиотека Ватикана: Ват. Гр. 1613, ф. 353 (у  
М. Бањоли – Х.А. Клајн – Ц.Г. Ман – Ј. Робинсон (ур.), *Блага  
раја. Свечи, реликвије и посвећеност у средњовековној Европи*  
Каталог изложбе. Nju Hejven 2010 10, сл. 6)

Much larger and of an entirely different nature was the monumental five-naved basilica in honor of the Apostle Peter *in Vaticano*, for which sub-structures many meters high had to be erected because of the slope on one side of the site while on the other side the slope had to be leveled. Unfortunately only a few of the massive column bases of the main and side aisles (Fig. 4) and foundation walls remain *in situ*<sup>12</sup>.

In 324 Constantine annexed the eastern portion of the Roman Empire from his third brother-in-law Licinius, and with this the former unity of the Empire was restored.

Particularly brilliant is also the Emperor's next action step: the decision to rename Byzantium to Nova Roma, thereby bringing Christianity to eastern Europe, such as regions including today's Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Constantine especially enjoyed staying in Sirmium and in Serdica, today's Sr. Mitrovica and Sofija, respectively. From there comes also, for example, the oldest precursor of the later Sophia Church (Fig. 5) from the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, in which presumably also the Council of Serdica of 342 met<sup>13</sup>. Moreover it must be noted that in Sirmium is the church of Irenaeus, the first bishop and martyr<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–102.

<sup>13</sup> Further detail on the individual construction phases can be found in G. Fingarova, *Die Baugeschichte der Sophienkirche in Sofia*. Wiesbaden 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Compare B. Малбашић [V. Malbašić], *SIRMIUM и на небу и на земљи* [Sirmium in Heaven and on Earth] (1700 година од страдања хришћанских мученика [1700 Years after the Death of the Christian Martyrs]. Ср. Митровица [Sr. Mitrovica] 2004, 58–62.



Fig. 9 Istanbul, Aya Sofiya: Narthex door (in a guide)

Сл. 9 Истанбул, Аја Софија: врата наоса (у водичу)

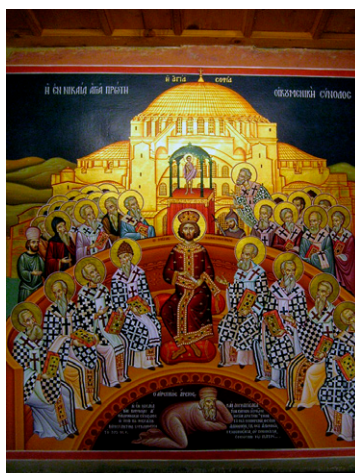
Fig. 10 (at [http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Datei:Nicaea\\_icon.jpg&filetimestamp=20110610210806](http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Datei:Nicaea_icon.jpg&filetimestamp=20110610210806))

Fig. 11 Meteora (in a guide)

Сл. 11 Метеори (у водичу)

Fig. 12 Bačkovski Manastir: Refektorium (in И. Дуйчев [I. Dujčev] [as in note 19], 63)

Сл. 12 Бачковски Манастир: Рефекториум (у И. Дуйчев [И. Дуйчев] [као у напмени 19], 63.)



In the case of Romania, the basilica in Halmyris honoring the martyrs Epiktetos and Astion (Fig. 6 and 7)<sup>15</sup> must be mentioned as of Constantinian origin.

In the new capital Constantinople the episcopal church Hagia Irene<sup>16</sup>, among others, was enlarged. Plans were drawn up for Hagia Sophia and especially the so-called Church of the Apostles; the latter was intended as the mausoleum of the emperor, who placed his own sarcophagus in the middle of twelve

<sup>15</sup> See M. Zahariade, *The Basilica Episcopalis and the Martyr's Tomb from Halmyris*. In: C. C. Petolescu – T. Teoteo (Hg.), *Studia Historica et Theologica*. Omagiu Profesorului Emilian Popescu. Iași 2003, 157–162.

<sup>16</sup> On Hagia Irene compare U. Peschlow, *Die Irenenkirche in Istanbul. Untersuchungen zur Architektur* (IstMitt Beih. 18). Tübingen 1977 and idem., *Die Baugeschichte der Irenenkirche in Istanbul neu betrachtet*. In: *Architectural Studies in Memory of R. Krautheimer*. Mainz 1996, 133–136.



Fig. 13 Aladža Manastir  
(Photo: R. Pillinger)

Сл. 13 Алаџа Манастир  
(Фото: Р. Пилингер)

kenotaphia<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately nothing remains preserved, though it has been depicted multiple times as a cruciform domed church, as in the Menologion Basilii, specifically in Vat. Gr. 1613, such as folio 353 (Fig. 8) showing the translation of the relics of St. Chrysostomos.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century Constantine is shown in the mosaic above the south entrance in the narthex of Hagia Sophia (Fig. 9) as founder of the city, already among the saints: ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ Ο ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΙΣ.

With the unification of Church and State the emperor naturally regarded himself as the supreme bishop<sup>18</sup>. On account of the internal discord with so-called Arianism, in 325 Constantine called the first Ecumenical Council in Nicea, today's İznik in Turkey, which established an authoritative Creed.

Fig. 10 shows Constantine on an icon with the opening words of this statement of faith.

A painting in Meteora (Fig. 11) depicts the emperor seated among the fathers of the Council in front of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. As in the refectory of Bačkovski Manastir (Fig. 12<sup>19</sup>), the heretic Areios is shown curled up at his feet.

In the year 321, Sunday was declared a day of celebration<sup>20</sup>. Even the birthday of Sol Invictus on December 25, the day of the winter solstice, became the birthday of Jesus in the Christian festal calendar of the chronographer Furios Dionysius Filocalus<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Further detail in Euseb., *Vita Const.* 4, 58 – 60, P. Speck, *Konstantins Mausoleum. Zur Geschichte der Apostelkirche in Konstantinopel*. Varia 7 (= Poikila Byzantina 18). Bonn 2000, 113–166 and Th. Baumeister (note 5 above), 131–137.

<sup>18</sup> See J. Straub, *Konstantin als koinos episkopos*. In: *idem.*, *Regeneratio Imperii*. Darmstadt 1972, 134–158.

<sup>19</sup> In И. Дуйчев [I. Duǰev], *Древноезически мислители и писатели в старата българска живопис* [Ancient Pagan Philosophers and Authors in Ancient Bulgarian Paintings]. София [Sofija] 1978, 63.

<sup>20</sup> On this compare also M. Wallraff, *Konstantins <Sonne> und ihre christlichen Kontexte*. In: K. Ehling – G. Weber (Hg.), as in note 1 above, 42–52.

<sup>21</sup> Further detail in M. R. Salzman – F. Mora Rapallo, *DNP 2* (1997) col. 1172–1174 s. v. Chronograph von 354, (a new edition of J. Divjak and W. Wischmeyer is in preparation). See also A. Demandt, *Der Ursprung des Weihnachtsfestes*. In: *idem.*, *Sieben Siegel*. Essays



But Christianity exercised an impact not only in the cultural but also in the social, by observing the commandment to offer charity to strangers, the poor and the sick. This was expressed, for example, in the fellowship meal, the agape meal, or a collection of clothes as recorded in the Vita S. Severini 17.4.

Such actions of charity fulfilling the commandment continue to this day; one example is in today's Caritas, for which reason one can say that the modern social circumstances of the prosperous European countries can be traced back to these Christian roots.

In reaction to the "worldliness" of the Church the first "monasteries"<sup>22</sup> emerged as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century. These developed from settlements and very quickly grew not only to be centers of spiritual life but also as centers of culture.

Monks translated and copied important texts and produced works of art, such as manuscripts, paraments and icons. In this way monasteries progressively grew to become important institutions of education, especially for reading and writing. In addition, because of their land ownership they were also often economic engines for their respective regions.

One of the oldest ancient examples is the cave monastery of Aladža (Fig. 13) on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea, 15 kilometers north of Varna, where people settled presumably as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>.

Today entirely different institutions (businesses, schools and universities) have taken over these various tasks.

#### Abbreviations

CIAC	Congressus internationalis archaeologiae christianae
DNP	Der neue Pauly
IstMitt	Istanbuler Mitteilungen
RCI	Roman Imperial Coinage
RivAC	Rivista di archeologia cristiana
RQS	Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte

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zur Kulturgeschichte. Köln – Weimar – Wien 2005, 1–18 and H. Förster, *Die Anfänge von Weihnachten und Epiphanias: Eine Anfrage an die Entstehungshypothesen*. Tübingen 2007.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview compare R. Bratož, *Frühes Mönchtum in den Donau- und Balkanprovinzen*. Eine Bestandsaufnahme. In: R. Harreither – Ph. Pergola – R. Pillinger – A. Pülz (ed.), *Frühes Christentum zwischen Rom und Konstantinopel*. CIAC 14. Wien 19. – 26. 9. 1999 (Studi di antichità cristiana 62/1). Città del Vaticano – Wien 2006, 229–259 and F. Prinz, *Askese und Kultur*. Vor- und frühbenediktinisches Mönchtum an der Wiege Europas. München 1980.

<sup>23</sup> Further in V. Kynov, *Aladzha Monastery. Le monastère Aladja*. Rousse s. a.

Ренате Јохана Пилингер  
КОНСТАНТИН ВЕЛИКИ И ХРИШЋАНСКА ЕВРОПА  
ПРИКАЗАНИ НА СПОМЕНИЦИМА

Овај говор настоји да покаже корене хришћанске Европе који произилазе из тзв константиновске прекретнице. Он ће то документовати путем одабраних споменика, као што су црквене фондације у Риму, у новооснованој престоници Цариграду, као и оне на Балкану. Закључак ће понудити кратак поглед на прве оновремене манастире.