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# The Origin of the Chi-Rho Monogram as a Christian Symbol

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Figure 1. A double centenionalis of Magnentius. The reverse shows the chi-rho monogram formed by intersecting the first two letters, X (Ch) and P (R), of the Greek word for Christ.

By looking at the coins from the period 250 to 400 AD we can see how the chi-rho monogram rose to prominence as a Christian symbol, and we can make a reasonable reconstruction of what actually happened on the eve of the battle of the Milvian Bridge. Constantine became the ruler of the whole Roman Empire and because he tolerated all religions, Christianity was able to spread openly throughout the empire.

Constantine I, the ruler of what is now England and France, invaded Italy in 312 AD in order to defeat Maxentius, the ruler of Rome, whom Constantine accused of being a tyrant. A great battle ensued at the Milvian Bridge on the Tiber River just north of the city and Constantine was victorious. As he had apparently embraced Christianity just before the battle, the whole Roman Empire eventually became

officially Christian.

Historians of the time give differing accounts of what happened on the day and night before the battle. According to the fifth-century historian Socrates<sup>1</sup>, Constantine saw in the afternoon sky a pillar of light in the form of a cross on which was inscribed, 'In this conquer'. He asked if those around him could see the cross and they replied that they could. During the night Christ appeared to him in a dream and told him to make a standard according to the pattern he had been shown. The fourth-century historian Eusebius<sup>2</sup>, gives a similar account; but according to the fifth-century historian Sozomen<sup>3</sup>, when Constantine saw the vision of a cross shining in the sky, 'some holy angels who were standing nearby exclaimed: "O Constantine! By this sign conquer!"'<sup>4</sup>



Figure 2. Follis of Constantine.



Figure 3. Centenionalis of Vetranio.

The standard that Constantine was commanded to make was called by the Romans, the *labarum*, a word of unknown meaning, which Professor Jones<sup>5</sup> suggests might be of Gallic or Spanish origin. The *labarum* appears on a coin of Constantine (Figure 2) and from time to time on coins of his successors till the fifth century. According to Eusebius<sup>6</sup>, who actually saw the *labarum* in Constantine's palace some years later, it consisted of a pole with a cross beam on which was hung a square of cloth embroidered with precious stones (perhaps represented by the three dots that we see on Constantine's coin) and on top of which was fixed a wreath of gold surrounding the chi-rho monogram, which consisted of the first two letters of the Greek word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ (CHRISTOS, Christ), the letter X (CH) being intersected

by P (R). Just above the cross beam and below the wreath was a gold half-length portrait of the emperor and his children. This portrait was probably a later addition to the original *labarum*. The gold wreath and portrait are not shown on the simplified form of the *labarum* that we see on Constantine's coin. After Constantine the *labarum* appears on coins in a modified form where the chi-rho monogram is contained in a square or rectangle (Figure 3). Probably the *labarum* in Figure 2 is Constantine's personal standard, whereas the chi-rho symbol in a square on top of a legionary standard is the military one.

In his book, *Constantine the Great*, John Holland Smith<sup>7</sup> argues that the accounts given by Sozomen, Eusebius and Socrates are highly unlikely to be true accounts of what happened. He says there would not

have been time on the morning of the battle to make the elaborate labarum, which was probably made at a later date. He says that the earliest and most credible version of what happened is that of Lactantius<sup>8</sup>, a Christian historian who wrote his account of the events about a year later.<sup>9</sup> He says that during the night before the battle,

*Constantine was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be marked on the shields of his soldiers, and so proceed to battle. He did as he had been commanded, and marked on their shields the letter X with a perpendicular line through it, turned over at the top, this being the monogram of Christ.*<sup>10</sup>

Even in pre-Christian times<sup>11</sup> the chi-rho monogram had been used as an abbreviation for the Greek letters,  $\chi$   $\rho$ , whenever they occurred at the beginning of a word, and quite a number of Greek words began with these letters (e.g. chrusion, gold). It has also been found in third-century Christian inscriptions in Asia Minor<sup>12</sup>, and it is possible that it had made its way to Gaul and become a familiar symbol of Christ there by about 300 AD; but the monogram would have been properly understood only by those who could read Greek. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons) in Gaul in about 185 AD, who had come from Asia Minor, wrote in Greek and would have been one of the few educated people in that area to understand it, apart from high-ranking military officers who were often quite well educated. But the period before Constantine had been one of persecution of Christians, especially under Diocletian, and the use of Christian symbols in any overt way would have been dangerous.

The language that Constantine spoke was Latin and although he had a smattering of Greek it is unlikely that he was familiar with the chi-rho monogram as a symbol of Christ.

In order to understand the background of Constantine and his men on the eve of the battle of the the Milvian Bridge we need to look at some of the coins that circulated in Britannia and Gaul in the preceding decades. A prominent deity on coins at this time was Sol, the sun-god. He appears on coins very infrequently until 198 AD when after Roman campaigns in the East, the cult of Sol Invictus, the Unconquered Sun, was brought to Rome. It was particularly popular with the soldiers, and there is evidence that this cult was syncretised with that of Mithras, which had also come from the East. In the cave-temples of Mithras which were often near Roman forts, especially on the northern frontiers along the Rhine and Danube, inscriptions such as SOL INVICTVS MITHRAS have been found, indicating that Sol Invictus and Mithras were considered to be the same deity. Mithraism was a mystery cult whose secrets, which included promise of life after death, were revealed only to initiates. Mithras protected the righteous and fought against the evil powers in the world, and was therefore the god of battles and victory. No wonder he was popular among the soldiers, whose lives must have been very precarious at this time!

The legends that are found with the Sol type include ORIENS AVG (the rising of the Augustus), SOLI INVICTO (to the unconquered sun), and just simply INVICTVS (unconquered). The latter occurs on one of the common coins of Victorinus (268-270 AD) who ruled



Figure 4. Reverse of a follis of Fausta.



Figure 5. Reverse of an antonin-ianus of Victorinus.



Figure 6. Reverse of a follis of Constantine.

the Gallic empire until assassinated in Cologne (Figure 5). On this coin we see Sol advancing to the left with a whip. He is preceded by a star in the left field. The significance of the star is unknown. It may represent the planet Mars, the war-god of the standard Greco-Roman pantheon, or the morning star, which precedes Sol as he rises every morning in the eastern sky; or it may simply represent the sun. It probably had special significance in the cult of Sol Invictus Mithras because astrology was very important in its doctrine.<sup>13</sup> If we look at the coins that Constantine issued from London during the two years before 312 AD we see that Sol was still a prominent type, which leaves little doubt that Constantine was at this time a devotee of Sol Invictus Mithras.

Before returning to the eve of the battle of the Milvian Bridge let us look briefly at some of the coins that Constantine issued at various times after he had won the battle and become ruler of the whole Roman Empire. First there are the coins that have on the obverse the head of Fausta, Constantine's wife, or the head of Helena, his mother. They were issued in 318 AD and have on the reverse an eight-pointed star in a wreath (Figure 4). The star on these coins is very precisely made and consists of four

lines that intersect at a central point. Its significance is unknown, but it is not a Christian symbol at this time. Secondly, there is the coin issued in 324 AD that has on the reverse a watch tower over which a prominent star shines (Figure 6). Could this star be a symbol of Sol Invictus Mithras protecting the tower? Thirdly, there are the coins that were issued from about 316 to 321, which show Sol presenting Victory to Constantine, Sol crowning Constantine, and Sol standing. The last coin has the legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI (to the unconquered sun, companion<sup>14</sup>; Figure 7). Finally there is the magnificent solidus minted at Ticinium in northern Italy in 313 AD. The reverse shows Sol in a chariot being crowned by Victory. The chariot is a beautifully stylised one with prancing horses. Notice especially the spoked wheels (Figure 8). The reverse legend is SOLI INVICTO AETERNO AVG (to the unconquered sun eternal Augustus). All these coins demonstrate that Constantine certainly did not abandon the sun-god after the battle of the Milvian Bridge.

Constantine entered Italy via the Mount Cenis Pass, and before doing so, his army would have traversed the Lugdunum area, a region that was one of the earliest and strongest centres of Christianity in the



Figure 7. Reverse of a follis of Constantine.



Figure 8. Reverse of a solidus of Constantine.

western part of the Roman Empire. In 177 AD under the emperor Marcus Aurelius a large number of Christians had been martyred at Lugdunum. Whether or not Constantine was aware of this as he made his way into Italy we do not know; but we can be sure that many of the soldiers who were marching with him were Christians. Diocletian in 302 AD had tried to purge the army of Christians, which suggests that many of the soldiers had converted to Christianity. There may even have been a bishop, Hosius of Cordova, in Constantine's retinue, whose function was presumably to advise Constantine about Christian matters. The majority of the soldiers, however, would have been pagans from the areas under Constantine's control and from the tribes of southern Germany. As the army moved southwards to confront the forces of Maxentius, Constantine felt uneasy. He knew that the army of Maxentius was much larger than his. He told several witnesses<sup>15</sup> that he was tired, confused and anxious. He probably could not sleep on the night before the battle.

At that time most of the soldiers of Constantine would have been depending on Sol Invictus Mithras to help them, and

these very superstitious men would have been readying themselves by marking their shields and perhaps even their bodies with symbols of that cult, although their shields may already have displayed such symbols as permanent fixtures. Even the Christians may have marked their shields with pagan symbols because many of them would have had a syncretistic attitude to religion; but more probably the Christians were reluctant to join their fellow soldiers in using these symbols and this uneasiness would have been detected by the officers.

Let us consider what the shields of Constantine's soldiers might have looked like on the morning of the battle, before they were marked by Constantine. We know from his coins that they were oval and that they had a knob in the centre (Figure 9). This knob is very important. It was of metal, probably bronze, which would have had a bright yellow, shiny appearance, like the sun. Anyone putting markings on the shield would have to take this 'sun' into account. A possible marking is, of course, a simple circle drawn around the knob to represent the solar disc, but this is a rather bland symbol, and something with radiating arms would

be much more exciting. Accordingly, the most likely symbol to have been on the shields of Constantine's soldiers was some sort of sunwheel (Figure 10).

Sunwheels had been used as symbols of the sun in northern Europe from very ancient times. They can be seen on Celtic coins (Figure 12). According to Nigel Pennick<sup>16</sup> the sunwheel originated in a type of halo phenomenon that can occur when the sun shines through airborne ice crystals, and four or more reflections of the sun appear in a circle around the sun, which radiates beams of light to these reflected suns, forming a cross pattern with the sun in the centre. This type of meteorological phenomenon should not be confused with the simple halo phenomenon that occurs fairly commonly all over the world. Such a halo phenomenon as Pennick describes might have been seen by Constantine and his soldiers as they traversed the Mount Cenis Pass, but it is very unlikely that it would occur in Italy. The usual form of sunwheel has four spokes, but the number varies. The radiate markings on the shields may not have been enclosed in a circle as on the sunwheel, in which case they would have looked like a star; but Eusebius describes the chi-rho on Constantine's standard as being in a wreath, which suggests the sunwheel form.

Another possible marking is a swastika, which was the sign of Thor, the Teutonic god of war. According to Tacitus (65-120 AD) the Germans invoked Thor and chanted his praises when they marched into battle. By 300 AD, however, his cult was probably overshadowed or assimilated by that of Sol Invictus Mithras, at least in the Roman army. At this time the religions of northern Europe were undergoing a

process of syncretism. Thor was equated with Jupiter by the Romans because of his association with thunder. Like Sol, Thor had a chariot and according to Teutonic mythology it was the rolling of its wheels on the vault of heaven that made the sound of thunder. Pennick<sup>17</sup> describes 'Jupiter Columns' in Germany where Jupiter is depicted as the god with the wheel. On one column he carries a wheel as a shield. Pennick<sup>18</sup> says that by themselves, wheels appear as an attribute of the thunder-and-lightning god, Taranis, 'The Thunderer', whom the Romans assimilated with Jupiter. Cumont<sup>19</sup> gives us the additional information that in the region of the Rhine the Celtic divinities were worshipped in the crypts of the Persian god, Mithras, or at least alongside them.

So it seems that the symbol of Sol Invictus Mithras that was most likely to have been on the shields of Constantine's soldiers on the morning of the battle was some sort of sunwheel. The shields probably also had simple slogans written on them, and because most of the men were illiterate, the spelling and formation of the letters would have left a lot to be desired. Because space was limited on the shields only simple terms would have been used and the simplest would have been the one that Victorinus used on his coin: INVICTVS, and even this was probably abbreviated to INVIC, an abbreviation that we find on coins of Carus 282-283 AD. Possible markings on a shield before the battle of the Milvian Bridge are shown in Figure 11. There may have been some meteorological phenomenon in the sky on an afternoon sometime before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, and it would have been perceived as a favourable sign from



Figure 9. Æ 3 of Constantine.

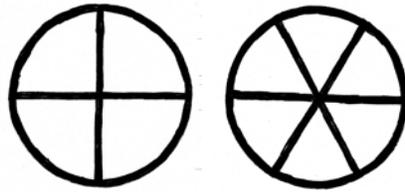


Figure 10. Two sunwheels

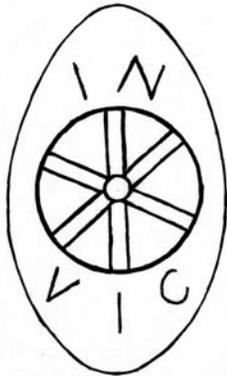


Figure 11. Possible markings on shield.



Figure 12. Celtic coin c.40 BC.

a god, but the god most likely to have been recognised as its creator would have been Sol Invictus Mithras, at least for the majority of those who saw it. A more likely scenario is that when Constantine saw the sunwheel on the shields (the sun in the sky) an idea came to him, perhaps during the night, or more likely some of his Christian officers or advisers ('some holy angels standing by') suggested it to him. By simply adding a loop to one of the spokes, the symbol could represent both Sol Invictus Mithras and Christ. Moreover the letters scrawled on the shield could be an abbreviation for INVICTVS or IN [HOC] VINC[E] (in this conquer). The combined symbol became Constantine's

own sign of power and unity. When the event was later commemorated on coins issued by Vetrano in 350 AD, the legend reads HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS (in this sign you will be the victor; Figure 13). 'Victor' was Constantine's favourite title for himself. On a gold medallion struck by Constantine at Ticinium in 312 AD after the battle of the Milvian Bridge, the legend has INVICTVS (Sol's characteristic epithet) as Constantine's prenom. The medallion shows jugate busts of Constantine and Sol with Constantine holding a shield ornamented with Sol's chariot.

With the small addition to the sunwheel, everyone would have been satisfied. Those Christians who could not compromise

their faith by acknowledging another god could accept the symbol as being exclusively Christian. Those Christians who were syncretistic in their attitude would have been happy to acknowledge Sol as an aspect of Christ. That there were such Christians is shown by the pictures in Rome that portray Christ as the sun-god. For the devotees of Sol Invictus Mithras their religion was already a syncretistic one, and they would have been pleased to absorb Christ who, like Mithras, promised life after death and fought for the righteous against evil. Being in the last group, Constantine's attitude would also have been syncretistic<sup>20</sup>, as revealed by the coins he issued after 312 AD. But by tolerating the Christians, Constantine allowed them to become very influential in the affairs of the empire so that within about ten years of the battle of the Milvian Bridge all references to other gods disappear from the coinage to be replaced by types that seem to be promoting Christianity. Such a coin is the one that was produced by certain mints during the period 330 to 346 AD. It shows, not Sol, but a winged Victory (later to be seen as an angel) standing on the prow of a vessel travelling left, and instead of a star in the left field, the chi-rho symbol (Figure 9).

An objection to this theory could be made on the grounds that even if a loop was added to a six-pointed star, the symbol would still not mean anything to most of the soldiers who, as well as their native language, might have known Latin, but not Greek. A possible way around this objection is to suppose that, for them, the chi-rho monogram was interpreted as a monogram of the Latin word, PAX, peace.

The soldiers would have been familiar with the word PAX because Pax as a type was common on coins of Carausius (287-293 AD), Allectus (293-296 AD) and other rulers of the region.<sup>21</sup> On these coins PAX is shown as PAX. The Christians in the army would have been particularly satisfied with this explanation because their aim was to bring justice and peace to the world, and they would have understood this as Christ's peace. The Spanish bishop, Hosius, might have been involved in these machinations because according to Sozomen, Constantine called 'the priests of Christ' to him at daybreak and questioned them about their teachings, which they expounded in some detail. But it is unlikely that this occurred because Eusebius, the fourth-century church historian, does not mention it in his account.

Some editions<sup>22</sup> of Lactantius give a different description of the sign that Constantine marked on the soldiers' shields: a simple X with one of the top arms looped over into a P. This symbol occasionally occurs on coins, e.g. on the standard that Constantius II holds on the reverse of a centenionalis issued in about 348-350 AD (Figure 14). To those who knew Latin this would have looked like a monogram of PAX, not a monogram of the Greek name of Christ. Lactantius spoke and wrote in Latin, and it is tempting to think that the monogram of PAX was intended for the Latin West, while the chi-rho monogram was intended for the Greek East. A simple cross without a loop may have been too nondescript a symbol for the Christians at this time, or more likely it was already a symbol of the sun god<sup>23</sup>; and a cross with an elongated



Figure 13. Reverse of a follis of Vetricano.



Figure 14. Reverse of a centenio-nalis of Constantius II.

lower arm was probably an unacceptable sign because crucifixion was still being used as a method of execution. This latter sign did not appear on coins until the fifth century, many years after crucifixion had been banned. In any case the six-armed form of Constantine's symbol became dominant and this is the form that we usually see on the coins of Constantine and his successors.

Another explanation for the development of this form of the chi-rho symbol (a simple cross with a loop at the top) is that it derived from the Egyptian 'ankh' sign. This sign was originally a hieroglyph meaning 'life'. The Egyptian cult of Isis became popular in the Roman Empire and it is possible that its symbolism influenced the subsequent shape of Constantine's symbol, but it is unlikely that the four-armed form was the original one because when the symbol first appeared on Constantine's coins it was the six-armed form. Perhaps the two forms of the chi-rho symbol arose because some of the shields of Constantine's soldiers had sunwheels with four spokes and some had sunwheels with six spokes.

Then there is the analogy<sup>24</sup> between Constantine's phrase, 'In Hoc Signo' (in this

sign) and 'IHS', which was an abbreviation for the name ΙΗΣΟΥΣ (IESOUS, Jesus). This abbreviation for Jesus is found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament from the second century, and one wonders if Constantine might have been attempting to hijack it for his own ideological purposes, so that instead of people thinking of the name of Jesus when they saw these letters they would think of Constantine's vision and the way he was divinely inspired in his actions.

Whether Constantine ever really became a Christian or whether he simply acted expediently, is debatable. All that Constantine did was add a loop. The loop, of course, was simply a retrograde 'C', the first letter in 'Constantine'. The labarum was a standard to be held aloft before Constantine's advancing army and the symbol on it could be viewed from either side. So, did the opposing army see the letter P (Greek R) intersected by X (Greek CH), or did they see a sunwheel (symbol of Sol Invictus Mithras) with the letter 'C' (for Constantine) attached to the top spoke of the wheel? Conversely, did Constantine's advancing army see the combined symbol of Constantine and the sun-god, or did they see the monogram of

Christ? Historians, looking back over the centuries, have seen only the monogram of Christ.

If the labarum had not existed at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, as some scholars have suggested, what did Constantine mark on his soldier's shields? Was it a monogram of Christ or did he simply modify the existing symbols of the sun god? By adding the loop to the sun-wheel Constantine probably intended to create his own personal symbol, and in the process to hijack the powerful symbolism of Sol Invictus Mithras. One suspects that the symbol was given a Christian interpretation only after the battle of the Milvian Bridge when the numbers and strength of the Christians became apparent because of Constantine's toleration of them. Mark Dunning<sup>25</sup> considers that as far as the mostly illiterate population was concerned, the Christian meaning of the chi-rho symbol would have been spread by the clergy and the imperial family and that, if not from the start, the XP on Roman coins was soon understood to be a Christian symbol. At a later date when Christianity was becoming the dominant religion of the empire, Constantine considered it advantageous to relate the story as recorded by the Christian historians, who would not have wanted to record what had really happened.

When the pagan Julian II became emperor in 361 AD he issued a large bronze coin showing a bull with two stars above. Scholars have suggested that the bull might be a sacrificial animal or the Egyptian Apis bull, but the bull's horns form an obvious crescent indicating a connection with the moon, in which case the star above its horns would be the

sun or the evening star. Whatever it was, Julian intended to bring astrology back into religion. Stars appear on the coins of Procopius, Julian's relative, who tried to seize control after Julian's death in 363 AD. Like Julian, Procopius was probably sympathetic to paganism and his coins show star or sun symbols as well as the chi-rho symbol. On the reverse of a  $\text{Æ} 3$  (RIC IX 2b) Procopius leans on a shield and holds a standard, but the three crossed lines on the standard do not have a loop at the top (Figure 15). Where the lines intersect there is a small knob, which could be either a star or the sun. These coins have a chi-rho symbol in the upper right field and the designs on the shield vary. The shield may be plain with just a knob in the centre, it may show wavy lines and dots, but most commonly there is a star pattern, which may resemble an aeroplane propeller (Figure 15) or consist simply of three crossed lines (Figure 16) as on the standard. Even though Procopius rose to power 53 years after the battle of the Milvian Bridge, it is significant that he issued a coin showing this star symbol, i.e. the chi-rho minus the loop. This shows that the symbol was not meaningless without the loop; but exactly what it signified is unknown although it was almost certainly connected with the cult of Sol Invictus Mithras. At a later date the symbol consisting of three intersecting lines was interpreted by Christians as the star that appeared over Bethlehem at Jesus' birth, or as a monogram for Jesus (I) Christ (X). The standard abbreviation for Jesus Christ that appears on early Christian manuscripts and Byzantine coins is IC XC with a bar above each pair of letters.

The theory that Constantine simply added



Figure 15. Reverse of a Æ 3 of Procopius.



Figure 16. Reverse of a Æ 3 of Procopius.

a loop to the sun symbol that was already on the soldiers' shields, is a very plausible one. The exact form of this symbol—a wheel, a sort of stylised star, or simply a sign in the form of two or three crossed lines—is not known. But something must have prompted Constantine to introduce his symbol as he did. It was not a vision or a dream, and the fact that a large number of his soldiers were devotees of Sol Invictus Mithras cannot be ignored.

Another reason for suggesting that the chi-rho symbol was derived from a symbol of Sol Invictus is the way the letters in INVIC (unconquered) could so easily be seen as VINC (conquer) if they had been painted on a shield. So the historian's record of the words, 'in this conquer', can readily be explained, as can Constantine's later recollection of the words in the rather awkward sentence, 'in this sign you will be the victor', which looks like a deliberate attempt to get as far away from the original as possible. In fact, all the elements of the 'miracle'—the cross in the sky, the letters on the cross, the angels standing by—can be explained in human terms; and the simplest and least supernatural explanation is likely to be the true one. By studying the symbols and inscriptions on the coins of

this period numismatists are able to see beyond the historians' accounts and form their own opinions about what might have happened on the eve of the battle of the Milvian Bridge.

### End Notes

1. Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, book 1, ch. 2. For full text, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>>
2. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 1, ch. 28–30. For full text, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>>
3. Sozomen, *Church History*, book 1, ch. 3, 4. For full text, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>>
4. As quoted by John Howard Smith, *Constantine the Great*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1971, p. 102.
5. JM Jones, *A Dictionary of Ancient Roman Coins*, London, Seaby, 1990, p. 156.
6. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 1, ch. 31. For full text, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>>
7. Smith, op. cit., p. 102.
8. Lactantius, *Of the Manner in which the Persecutors Died*, vol. VII, ch. XLIV, sect. 36.
9. Michael Grant (*Constantine the Great*, New York, Scribner, 1993, p. 141), considers that Lactantius' version is 'unsatisfactory, because he confuses the dream with the emperor's alleged earlier vision, and only heard of it a long time later, probably from someone in Constantine's entourage; and he disposes of the dream rather briefly, in only thirty-one words.'
10. As quoted in Smith, op. cit., p. 103. This version is similar to that in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*,

vol. VII: 'Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died', ch. XLIV, sect. 36.

11. According to Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

12. *ibid.*

13. Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, New York, Dover, 1956 reprint of 1903 edn, p. 122.

14. The word COMES, a companion (COMITO is the dative case), indicates that Constantine saw himself as the companion of the sun-god. Grant (*op. cit.*, p. 135) says that the Iranian concept of kingly power as trust from God or the gods had replaced the idea of actual identification with him or them. As Sol's companion, Constantine represented him.

15. According to Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

16. Nigel Pennick, *The Celtic Cross*, London, Blandford, 1997, p. 25.

17. Pennick, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

18. Pennick, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

19. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

20. According to Grant (*op. cit.*, p. 135) 'This connection with the sun made Constantine's eventual transition to Christianity easier, because he may well have believed that Christ and the Unconquered Sun-god were both aspects of the Highest Divinity, and that no mutual exclusiveness existed between them or separated them.' Grant goes on to say, '...in the minds of the less well informed sections of the population, Christianity and Sun-worship were easily and thoroughly entangled and merged.'

21. Pax also occurs on a half-follis of Constantine, where she is standing holding a military standard! (Van Meter 69).

22. For example, the version used in *A New Eusebius*, edited by J Stevenson and revised by WHC Frend (London, SPCK, 1987) p. 283.

23. The simple cross occurs in the reverse fields of some coins of Constantine, where the reverse types are Sol crowning Constantine, or Mars. It also occurs on a rare solidus of Procopius (365-366 AD), where it appears on the standard that he is holding on the reverse (RIC IX 2b). Procopius was probably a pagan like his relative Julian II.

24. This analogy was pointed out by George Ferguson (*Signs & Symbols in Christian Art*, New York, OUP, 1954, p. 150). Ferguson also points out that the letters IHS, inscribed on a sun, was the sign that appeared to Saint Bernardino of Siena in the early fifteenth century. The saint used this symbol in his Christian preaching as a symbol of Christ and he is often depicted with it in his hand.

25. Mark Dunning, 'First Christian Symbols on Roman Imperial Coins', in *The Celator*, vol. 17, no. 12 (Dec. 2003) pp. 6-27.

## Figures

1. A double centenionalis of Magnentius (350-353 AD) showing the chi-rho monogram, formed by intersecting the first two letters, X (Ch) and P (R), of the Greek word for Christ.

2. Obverse and reverse of a follis of Constantine struck in 327 AD showing the labarum. RIC VII 19. The lower end of the pole is piercing a snake, which presumably represents his adversary, Licinius.

3. A centenionalis of Vetranio (350 AD) showing the chi-rho symbol on two military standards. Notice the star on the obverse and reverse. Vetranio was an elderly general who had served under Constantine.

4. Reverse of a follis of Fausta showing a star with eight rays in a wreath. RIC VII 51. Notice the small solar symbol at the top of the wreath. This symbol also appears on the front of Sol's chariot in Figure 8 and on the coin in Figure 12.

5. Reverse of a copper antoninianus of Victorinus showing Sol advancing with a star preceding him.

6. Reverse of a follis of Constantine showing a watch tower with a star above. RIC VII 24.

7. Reverse of a follis of Constantine showing Sol standing and the legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI. This type was issued from various mints until about 321 AD.

8. Reverse of a solidus of Constantine minted at Ticinum in 313 AD showing the sun chariot. RIC VI 113.

9. Reverse of a Æ 3/4 issued during the period 330 to 346 AD showing Victory with a shield standing on a prow with the chi-rho symbol above the point of the prow. Minted at Arles in Gaul.

10. Two sunwheels.

11. Possible markings on the shield of Constantine's soldiers on the morning of the battle of the Milvian Bridge.

12. A Celtic coin from about 40 BC showing a sunwheel between the horns of the god, Cernunnos. Note the other solar symbols on the coin. They also appear in Figures 4 and 8.

13. A follis of Vetranio (350 AD). The reverse shows a figure holding the labarum and being crowned by Victory. The legend is HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS.

14. Reverse of a centenionalis of Constantius II showing him holding a standard with a four-armed chi-rho symbol on it.

15. Reverse of a  $\text{Æ} 3$  of Procopius (365-366 AD) showing a standard without the chi-rho on it. Notice the propeller pattern on the shield.

16. Reverse of a  $\text{Æ} 3$  of Procopius (365-366 AD) showing a shield with the chi-rho minus the loop.

## Acknowledgements

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