



Bronze depicting the head of Maxentius and the emperor together with Roma (307 CE)

Bronze depicting the head of Maxentius and the emperor together with Roma (307 CE)_obverse.jpg



[1]

[Bronze depicting the head of Maxentius and the emperor together with Roma \(307 CE\) reverse.jpg](#) [2]



[3]

Denomination: Bronze (AE 2)

Date: 307 CE

Material: Bronze

Mint: Aquileia

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): American numismatic Society

Id: 1961.27.2

Name of Ruler: Maxentius

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Laureate head of Maxentius looking right

Inscription: IMP C MAXENTIVS P F AVG

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Roma seated on shield looking to the left, within a tetrastyle temple, handing a globe to Maxentius and holding a sceptre. Seated captive between Roma and Maxentius. Victories in acroteria; she-wolf and twins in pediment.

Inscription: CONSERV URB SUAE - AQ?

Diameter (mm): 25.00mm

Weight (g): 6.19g

Commentary:

RIC VI, Aquileia, no. 113, p. 325.

The coin presented here was minted at Aquileia in 307 CE, that is, at the very beginning of the reign of Maxentius.



Before analysing the message conveyed through this coin, let us recall the historical context.

After the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian on the 1st of May 305 CE, the new tetrarchy was formed. The East was under the rule of Augustus Galerius and the Caesar Maximinus Daia, and the West under the Augustus Constantius I and the Caesar Severus. Instead of Maximinus Daia and Severus, people expected Maximian and Constantius I's sons, namely Maxentius and Constantine, to be chosen as Caesars. After the death of Constantius I on the 25th of July 306 CE, Galerius authorised Constantine to become Caesar, with Severus becoming Augustus. In 306 CE, Maxentius was at Rome, frustrated by having been rejected from the emperorship. However, due to two decisions taken by Galerius – one of which had consisted of suppressing Italy's tax exemption, which had lasted from the Republican period onwards, and the other of disbanding the Praetorian Guard – Maxentius gained support in Rome and in Italy (Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 23.1-9 and Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* 39.47). On the 28th of October 306 CE, at Rome, the praetorian troops acclaimed Maxentius and the Senate recognized his authority. Immediately after his acclamation by the troops, Maxentius took the title of *princeps*; a gesture that has been variably interpreted by scholars. For some, it would reflect his will to break up totally with the tetrarchical system, for others it would be part of a form of *recusatio* showing that Maxentius was waiting to be invested from the imperial power by his father Maximian whereas the latter returned to power after having abdicated from emperorship (in favour of the first thesis, see Hekster, "The City of Rome"; in favour of the second thesis, see Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 41-42). At the beginning of 307 CE, peninsular Italy and Africa rallied Maxentius whereas Severus still controlled the Po valley and Pannonia. Galerius refused to recognise Maxentius's authority and ordered Severus to march on Rome. During the spring of 307 CE, Severus attacked Rome but was defeated and fled. He was later arrested and executed by Maxentius in September. It is only at the latest in May 307 CE that Maxentius received or rather took the title of Augustus – that appears on the coin presented here – precisely because the other emperors did not recognise his principate. After the execution of Severus, Galerius also attempted to attack Italy, but due to the weakness of his troops, he preferred to withdraw in Pannonia (for Maxentius's reign, see Leppin and Ziemssen, *Maxentius*; about the context of the years 306-307, see Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 32-44; Chastagnol, *L'évolution politique*, p. 110-113).

During Maxentius's whole reign, numerous emissions of gold, silver and above all of bronze coins depicting on their reverse Roma in various situations are attested. The choice of this iconography fitted in with an ideology that makes a striking contrast with that of the Tetrarchs'. In fact, as the Tetrarchs paid less attention to the capital of the Empire and spent most of their time in imperial residences located near the borders of the Empire, the image of Roma appeared rarely on their coinage – practically never during the first Tetrarchy (see Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 62 and n. 292). This changed dramatically under Maxentius. The coin presented here fits in with numerous series of bronze emissions bearing on their reverse a depiction of Roma represented in a temple and the legend CONSERV(ATOR) URBIS SUAE, "preserver of his city" (or more rarely CONSERVATORES URBIS SUAE when coins are minted at the effigy of Maximian or of Constantine I until the breakdown of their relationships with Maxentius in 308 CE). These series were minted throughout Maxentius's reign and essentially in three mints: Ticinum, Aquileia and Rome. Four types (with variants) can be distinguished:

[Type 1](#) [4]: Roma is depicted draped, seated on shield in an hexastyle temple, holding a globe and a sceptre (bronze emissions minted at Rome in 307-312 CE, see RIC VI, Rome, no. 162-165, p. 371, no. 194-212, p. 376-378, no. 258-263, p. 382-383, no. 278-280, p. 384-385; at Aquileia in 307-310 CE, see RIC VI, Aquileia, no. 116-126, p. 325-326; at Ticinum in 307-310 CE, see RIC VI, Ticinum, no. 84-86, 91-95, 100-105, p. 293-295).

[Type 2](#) [5]: A winged Victory is depicted in a tetrastyle temple crowning Roma with one hand and holding palm in the other. Roma is depicted seated on a shield, holding a globe and a sceptre. Between Victory and Roma stands a captive (bronze emissions minted at Aquileia in 307 CE, RIC VI, Aquileia, no. 115, p. 325; at Ticinum in 308-310 CE, RIC VI, Ticinum, no. 106-108, p. 295-296).

[Type 3](#) [6]: Roma is depicted seated front in a tetrastyle temple with on either side Victories crowning her (bronze emission at Ticinum in 308-310 CE, RIC VI, Ticinum, no. 109, p. 296).

Type 4: Corresponds to the type of the coin presented here. Roma is depicted seated on a shield in a tetrastyle temple, giving globe to Maxentius and holding sceptre. Maxentius is depicted near her, draped, cuirassed, holding sceptre and placing a foot on a captive. This type appears on bronze coins minted at Aquileia in 307 CE (RIC VI, Aquileia, no. 113-114, p. 325); at Rome in 308-310 CE (RIC VI, Rome, no. 213, p. 378); and at Ticinum in 308-310 (RIC VI, Ticinum, no. 110, p. 296).

The fact that Roma is represented on so many coins minted during Maxentius's entire reign attests that the new emperor wanted to appear as "the champion of the city of Rome and the guardian of its tradition" (quotation from Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 45). Indeed, as Rome had been the first city that had been in his area of influence, and also in order to distinguish himself from the tetrarchs who had not spent much of their time in the *Urbs*, thus relegating the capital of the Empire to a city of secondary rank, Maxentius decided to put Rome at the very centre of his policy (Hekster, "The City of Rome," p. 724-731; on the evolution of the length of the imperial



stays in the most important cities of the Empire see Reboul, “Les capitales impériales”; more generally on that theme see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).14](#) [7]). It is in the framework of that policy that one should understand all these coins minted during his reign with the legend CONSERVATOR URBIS SUAE and representing Roma on their reverse, but also the coins representing the she-wolf or the Dioscuri with legends referring to the felicity of the time or to the eternity of the emperor (these coins are analysed in Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 47-49). Maxentius wanted to show his devotion to the city of Rome, to *Dea Roma*, and to its ancestral virtues and mythical origins. Moreover, as stated by Mats Cullhed, all these coins bearing symbols of *Romanitas* were also minted to convey the message that Maxentius worked not only for the protection of these values, but also for the *renovatio*, namely the rebirth of Rome’s glory and power (in Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 45). Aside from this ideological programme, Maxentius also undertook important re-building operations in Rome’s centre that had been greatly destroyed after a fire that occurred under Carinus in 283 CE. We will return later to some aspects of this building programme, but the legend CONSERVATOR URBIS SUAE also echoes this will to rebuild many monuments that embodied Rome’s greatness – at least for some of them.

To analyse more precisely the coin presented here minted at the end of the summer 307 CE at Aquileia, Maxentius is depicted holding a sceptre, receiving the globe from Roma, and stepping on a captured barbarian. During the summer of 307 CE, Maxentius had just taken the title of Augustus without being recognised by the Augusti Galerius and Severus, and even by his own father, the former Augustus Maximian. The sceptre and the globe were thus depicted on this coin to present Maxentius as a legitimate Augustus who had been entrusted with the preservation of Rome’s universal domination by Rome herself. The second important point of the scene represented on the reverse of this coin is the character of Roma. One could actually question whether the Roma here depicted is the city personified or the goddess? As one central point of Maxentius’s policy had been to reassert the pre-eminence of the city of Rome in the Empire, the first option could be possible, however it is preferable to consider that the Roma represented here was the goddess Rome. Some scholars consider that the temple depicted on the coin could be the temple of Venus and Rome, built under Hadrian in Rome (in favour of this identification see Gag , “Le ‘Templum Urbis’,” p. 160, n. 2; for a more cautious approach towards this identification, see Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 47, n. 194 and p. 52; see [Temple of Venus and Roma \(135 CE\)](#) [8]). This identification is primarily based on the fact that, during his six-year reign, Maxentius committed to important building activity in Rome, in order to rebuild the centre that had been destroyed by fire more than twenty years ago. Among the main architectural programmes he undertook, there had been the basilica of Maxentius (that may have served as the main *aula* of the Urban prefect), the so-called “temple of Romulus” (about the various identifications of this building see Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 52-55) and the temple of Venus and Rome (on this rebuilding programme, see Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 49-60). The temple of Venus and Rome was actually damaged by a fire in 307 CE and was then rebuilt by Maxentius from its very foundation (this is mentioned in Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* 40.26 and in the *Chronograph* of 354). If Andrea Barattolo has initially concluded that Maxentius would have rebuilt the temple without adding or improving the original Hadrianic building structure, it has been proven more recently that Maxentius may have rebuilt some parts of the monument, especially the *exedrae*, according to his own plans (see Barattolo, “Nuove ricerche,” p. 245; on the modifications introduced by Maxentius see Cassatella, “Venus et Roma,” p. 123). By taking some liberties with the Hadrianic structure, Maxentius thus appropriated this traditional temple and he used its reconstruction in order to fit in with the policy of celebration of Rome and of its sacral standing. However, as the minting of bronze coins which depicted on their reverse the *Dea Roma* with the legend CONSERVATOR URBIS SUAE started in 306 CE, it would be hazardous to connect the minting of these bronze coins only with the rebuilding operations of the temple of Venus and Rome ordered by Maxentius. The choice of this iconography has to be understood as having been motivated by Maxentius’s will to present himself as a superior legitimate emperor who was going to ensure the defence and the renovation of Rome’s values and strength. Moreover, the fact that the goddess Roma is here depicted while granting Maxentius the globe embodying Rome’s universal domination also shows that the relationship between the goddess and the emperor is not unequivocal. Maxentius not only ensured Rome’s protection and greatness, but he is also depicted as receiving his power and his ability to rule the universal empire from the *Dea Roma* herself (this idea appears explicitly on a gold multiple minted in Rome bearing on its reverse the legend ROMAE AETERNAE AUCTRICI AUG N, “To Eternal Rome, the creator of our Augustus,” with a representation of Maxentius receiving the globe from Roma, see RIC VI, Rome, no. 173, p. 373; example quoted in Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae*, p. 47).

In conclusion, this coin minted at the end of the summer 307 CE at Aquileia, conveyed various messages. First, the fact that Maxentius is here represented receiving the globe from the goddess Roma and holding the sceptre, shows that the new ruler of Rome wanted to appear as a legitimate ruler even if he had recently taken the title of Augustus without being recognised by the other reigning *Augusti*, Galerius and Severus. Second, all these bronze coins representing Roma in various situations also convey the message that, at the difference of the Tetrarchs who spent most of their time far from the *Urbs*, Maxentius wanted to put the city of Rome at the very centre of the Empire



again and to be its champion and defender. Thus, through all these coins representing on their reverse the *Dea Roma* granting symbols of power to Maxentius with the legend CONSERVATOR URBIS SVAE, the new Augustus may have wanted to claim that his reign was different from the tetrarchical system. As he was in possession of Rome and as the empire had been traditionally ruled from Rome, Maxentius thus implicitly asserted that he was the supreme emperor (Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Svae*, p. 66). In this specific context, the official propaganda conveyed by many coins produced during Maxentius's reign was focused on the idea that the new emperor acted as the guardian of Rome's values and mythical origins (see also the frequent appearance of the she-wolf, Romulus and Remus, and of the Dioscuri). Many of the coin emissions and the architectural programme led by Maxentius throughout his reign have to be understood not only as showing his devotion towards the city of Rome, the goddess Roma and Rome's mythical origins, but also as conveying the idea that the new Augustus was working for the rebirth (*renovatio*) of the city of Rome and more generally of the whole Empire.

Keywords in the original language:

- [imperator](#) [9]
- [Caesar](#) [10]
- [Maxentius](#) [11]
- [Augustus](#) [12]
- [conservator](#) [13]
- [urbs](#) [14]

Thematic keywords:

- [Maxentius](#) [15]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [16]
- [Roma \(goddess\)](#) [17]
- [eternity of Rome](#) [18]
- [captive](#) [19]
- [sceptre](#) [20]
- [globe](#) [21]
- [temple](#) [22]
- [building policy](#) [23]
- [imperial capital](#) [24]

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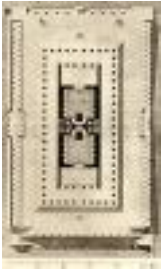
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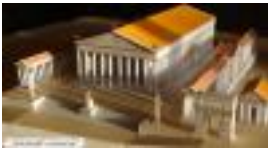
[Temple of Venus and Roma \(135 CE\) \[8\]](#)



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[Photo of the southern cella \[34\]](#)



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Text

[Latin Panegyric II \(10\).14 \[7\]](#)

Trier, the imperial residence competing with Rome

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