



## [Constantine as “restorer of the human race” \(CIL VI, 1140\) \[1\]](#)

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Dedication.

**Original Location/Place:** Forum of Trajan, Rome, Italy.

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** now lost.

**Date:** 314 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Statue base? Reportedly seen in the garden of the medieval church of S. Nicola de Columna, near to Trajan’s column. It is not known at what date the inscription was lost.

**Material:** Marble.

**Measurements:** Unknown.

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Publications:** *CIL* VI, 1140

Last Statues of Antiquities: [837](#) [2]

**Commentary:** This inscription was dedicated to Constantine in Rome, in 314 CE, shortly after his defeats of Maxentius and Maximian, and his capture of the capital city. In the inscription Constantine is honoured with honorific titles and epithets, which demonstrate the continued importance of the theme of the emperor’s ‘preservation’ and ‘restoration’ of the Roman world.

The inscription was apparently set up on a statue base in the Forum of Trajan in 314 CE by the Urban Prefect of the city, Caius Caeionius Rufius Volusianus, one of the highest-ranking office-holders in the Roman empire; he served as consul and Prefect of the City of Rome on two occasions, as *praefectus urbi* in 310 CE under Maxentius, and also consul a year later in 311. He served as Prefect again under Constantine in 313-315 CE, and held his second consulship in 314 CE, when this statue base was dedicated, but this prestigious fact is not mentioned in the present inscription; although holding such offices twice was usually celebrated in inscriptions, in this case the first instances had fallen under the reign of an emperor denounced by Constantine as a tyrant, and are thus not referred to in the inscription’s text (Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la Préfecture*, p. 57; Jones, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, I, p. 976-978).

By 314 CE, when the inscription was set up, Constantine’s plan to rule as sole emperor was well underway. When Diocletian and Maximian had abdicated in 305 CE, Constantine had expected to be elevated to the rank of Caesar, following his father, Constantius I’s nomination as Augustus. However, rather than naming Constantine and Maxentius – the son of the abdicating emperor Maximian – as Caesars, the new Augustus Galerius insisted upon his friend, Valerius Severus and his nephew Maximinus Daia being nominated for and accepting the office, in a move that apparently “amazed” all those soldiers who were present (Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 19.4). That Constantine and Maxentius were expected to be named was reflective of the belief held by Roman soldiers that *imperium* – rule of the empire – was something that could, and indeed should, be inherited by sons from their fathers, when such sons were available (Harries, *Imperial Rome*, p. 42). The precedent set by Diocletian followed the way that the Antonine emperors had dealt with issues of succession, nominating individuals of excellent military record and popularity with the troops as heirs, but, unlike Maxentius and Constantius, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius had had no sons of their own, and so their appointments of unrelated men were deemed reasonable. At this early date in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Caesars named by Galerius were promoted without advance publicity, meaning that there was little opportunity for the new Augustus to dispel the impression that the Caesars had been nominated as such simply because of their personal connections to him (Harries, *Imperial Rome*, p. 42). In the immediate aftermath, Constantine swiftly made his way to join his father Constantius in Eboracum (York) in Britain, where he was proclaimed Augustus by the soldiers on 25<sup>th</sup> July 306 CE, shortly after his father’s death (Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 24.2-8; Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 1.19-22). The situation grew more complicated in October of the same year, when the senate and inhabitants of the city of Rome named Maxentius as Augustus too, following his revocation of Galerius’s tax reform, which had sought to make Rome and the neighbouring Italian regions subject to the same taxation as the rest of the empire (see Maxentius’s dedication to Mars and the founders of Rome). An alliance was drawn up between Constantine and the former emperor Maximian, who had also remerged, which was consolidated by marrying Constantine off to Fausta, Maximian’s daughter, in 307 CE. In an attempt at bringing matters under control, Galerius invited



Constantine to a meeting at Carnutum in 308 CE, at which the Tetrarchy was restored, with Constantine officially in the office of Caesar. By 311 CE, the former *Augusti* Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Severus were all dead, leaving Constantine free to turn his attention to the three rulers of the present tetrarchy, namely Licinius, Maxentius and Maximinus Daia, the first campaign of which resulted in the death of Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in Rome (see Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, p. 169-177 for a more detailed discussion of these events).

It was against such a backdrop that the present inscription was dedicated, which may explain the honorific titles that it employs in celebration of Constantine’s reign. In the inscription, he is described as the “restorer of the human race” (*restitutori humani generis*), the “extender of Roman imperium and dominion” (*propagatori imperii dicionisque Romanae*) and the “founder of eternal security” (*fundatori...securitatis aeternae*), in a clear reproduction of imperial ideals. As Carlos Noreña has rightly noted, one of the principal themes to emerge in such honorific titles is “that of preservation and restoration...[reflecting] the idea of the *cura rei publicae*, ‘stewardship of the commonwealth,’ which the emperor automatically assumed upon accession to the imperial purple” (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 246). *Restitutor* had appeared on imperial coinage from the Flavian period on, and had enjoyed a particular prominence under the Antonine emperors, with Hadrian in particular heralded as the “restorer” of several provinces (see [Hadrian, Roman soldiers and Asia](#) [3]). It had several associations: emperors might be acclaimed *restitutor* on account of the peace and prosperity that they had brought to a particular province, or it could refer more specifically to the capital itself, where it symbolised the restitution of order after civic strife (see e.g. RIC IV/1, Septimius Severus, no. 140 and 140a, p. 108; the same message is included in the dedicatory inscription of the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome). *Restitutor* could also refer to the restoration of particular virtues, such as *pietas* (“piety”), *libertas* (“liberty”) or *securitas publica* (“public safety”), whereby the emperor’s own personal connection with these qualities extended them beyond his person and into the populace of the empire as a whole (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 246-247). In this inscription, the notion of “restoration” is taken even further, claiming it on behalf of the whole human race under Constantine; this was an unusual statement, and one that is attested only once more in the surviving epigraphic record, in Sabratha, although the text of that inscription is badly fragmented and it is not possible to say for certain that *restitutor* there is paired with the *humani generis* that follows in the next line (see [IRT 85](#) [4]). *Restitutor humani generis* had, however, been minted as a coin legend – albeit infrequently – in the third century CE, initially for Valerian and then later under Gallienus, in which the emperors were depicted holding a globe, symbolising the entirety of “humankind” that had found restoration under their rule (see e.g. [Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\)](#) [5]).

As an honorific title “extender of Roman *imperium* and dominion” was somewhat more frequent, having been employed first under Trajan (*CIL VI, 40500: propagator orbis terrarum*), and with greater regularity in the inscriptions of the Severan emperors, particularly in North Africa (see Septimius Severus and the expansion of empire). The title appears to have been derived by the Senate in Rome, however, from an epithet more properly associated with Jupiter, and which must have been conceived in 195 CE, when the decision was taken to honour the new Severan emperor with a triumphal arch in the capital following his success in the first Parthian War (Birley, “Septimius Severus, *Propagator Imperii*”, p. 298). Indeed, in the dedicatory inscription of that arch, Septimius Severus is honoured *ob rem publicam restitutam imperiumque populi Romani propagatum* (“on account of the restitution of the state and the extension of the empire of the Roman people”: *CIL VI, 1003*). The title celebrated the message of permanent victory, which is attributed in terms that if not exactly the same, are nonetheless deeply reminiscent of the language used by Augustus in his claims to have restored the Roman state and to have expanded the boundaries of Roman power (e.g. *Res Gestae*, 34; 26). Of course, in the case of Constantine here no new territory had been won, but there was perhaps a symbolic re-conquest of the city of Rome, the surrounding Italian regions, and the provinces of North Africa that had come under the power of Maxentius’s short reign; the capital city of the empire and these provincial regions had been ‘won back’ to Roman rule from the control of a ‘tyrant’, in what may have been interpreted as an expansion of *imperium* in a figurative, if not physical sense (see also [Nummus depicting the head of Constantine and the labarum spearing a snake \(337 CE\)](#) [6]). Taking territory back from the control of enemy hands also returned Rome to a state of security, which was represented in association with the honorific title “founder” (*fundator*); here Constantine was celebrated for the removal of a tangible threat, but also for restoring continuity to the office of emperor – which had been disturbed by the “usurpation” of Maxentius – and “more broadly with the institution of the principate” (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 175). *Aeternitas* proclaimed the golden age of the Roman people, as promised by Jupiter in the Aeneid of an “empire without end” (*imperium sine fine*; see [Virgil, Aeneid I.257-296](#) [7]), but only under the guidance and leadership of Constantine.

This inscription is, then, an important source for the continued resonance that such honorific titles held in the presentation of imperial power; Constantine was honoured in terms that were associated with traditional Roman hegemony, but which acknowledged its evolution through his own particular demonstration of it. The inscription set up in the Forum of Trajan in 314 CE can have left its audience with little doubt that Constantine’s reign was one of



legitimacy, with respect to his deified father Constantius I, who was also named in the text, but also one that aimed at restating Rome’s power across the empire in terms of unequivocal and universal meaning.

Keywords in the original language:

- [dominus](#) [8]
- [restitutor](#) [9]
- [genus humanum](#) [10]
- [propagator](#) [11]
- [imperium Romanum](#) [12]
- [fundator](#) [13]
- [securitas](#) [14]
- [aeternus](#) [15]
- [Constantinus](#) [16]
- [Augustus](#) [17]
- [divus](#) [18]
- [Constantius](#) [19]
- [venerabilis](#) [20]
- [vir clarissimus](#) [21]
- [praefectus urbis](#) [22]
- [sacrum](#) [23]
- [numen](#) [24]
- [maiestas](#) [25]

Thematic keywords:

- [Constantine](#) [26]
- [Maxentius](#) [27]
- [tetrarchy](#) [28]
- [legitimacy](#) [29]
- [restorer of humankind](#) [30]
- [Roman people](#) [31]
- [Roman power](#) [32]
- [eternity of the Roman empire](#) [33]

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Birley, Anthony, [Septimius Severus, Propagator Imperii](#) [35], in Actes du IX-e Congrès international d’études sur les frontières romaines, Mamaia, 6-13 septembre 1972 (ed. D.M. Pippidi ; Bucaresti; Köln; Wien: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România; Böhlau Verlag, 1974), 297-299

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**Other sources connected with this document:** Inscription

## [Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia \[42\]](#)

Hadrian issues an edict to prevent the abuse by soldiers crossing Asia during one of his imperial visits



- [Read more about Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia](#) [42]

Numismatic item

### [Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\) \[43\]](#)

- [Read more about Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\)](#) [43]

Numismatic item

### [Nummus depicting the head of Constantine and the labarum spearing a snake \(337 CE\) \[44\]](#)

- [Read more about Nummus depicting the head of Constantine and the labarum spearing a snake \(337 CE\)](#) [44]

Text

### [Virgil, \*Aeneid\* I.257-296 \[45\]](#)

Jupiter outlines the future descendants of Aeneas – Rome’s great leaders

- [Read more about Virgil, \*Aeneid\* I.257-296](#) [45]

Inscription

### [Septimius Severus and the expansion of the empire \(CIL VIII, 18256\) \[46\]](#)

- [Read more about Septimius Severus and the expansion of the empire \(CIL VIII, 18256\)](#) [46]

Text

### [Eusebius of Caesarea, \*Life of Constantine\* I.26, 28-29 \[47\]](#)

Constantine’s vision of Christ prior to the battle at the Milvian Bridge

- [Read more about Eusebius of Caesarea, \*Life of Constantine\* I.26, 28-29](#) [47]

**Realized by:**

[Caroline Barron](#) [48]



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- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/antoninianus-depicting-valerian-restitutor-generis-humani-walking-and-holding-globe-254-255-ce>
- [6] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/nummus-depicting-head-constantine-and-labarum-spearing-snake-337-ce>
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