



Follis depicting the head of Constantine and the globe set upon an altar (322 CE)

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[1]

Denomination:

Follis

Date: 322 CE

Material:

Brass (Æ)

Mint: Trier

Name of Ruler:

Constantine

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Laureate bust of Constantine facing right, wearing a cuirass, and holding an eagle-tipped scepter

Inscription: CONSTANTINVS AVG

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Globe set upon altar, with VO-TIS XX; three stars above

Inscription: BEATA TRANQUILLITAS - PTR

Diameter (mm): 19.00mm

Weight (g): 3.26g

Commentary:

(RIC VII, Treveri, no. 342)

This follis, minted in 320 CE at Trier, one of the main residences of Constantine after he became the undisputed ruler of the Latin West, celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of his reign. It depicts on the obverse the laureate head of Constantine wearing the cuirass (an piece of armour) and on the reverse a globe set upon an altar (the inscriptions and imagery on the present coin are almost identical to RIC VII, Treveri, nos. 305, 318, 369; RIC VII, Treveri, no. 343 shows on the obverse Constantine looking left, not right, wearing a laurel wreath and cuirass). The inscription on the obverse, "CONSTANTINVS AVG," refers to Constantine as Augustus, a title which served to emphasize the emperor's sacral standing. The legend which runs around the edge of the reverse, "BEATA TRANQUILLITAS," or "blessed/happy tranquillity" celebrates the peace and stability that Constantine brought to the empire, while the mark PTR denotes that the coin was minted at Trier. The text inscribed on the altar depicted on the reverse, "VOT/IS XX," celebrates the vows taken on the completion of the first fifteen years of Constantine's rule, and hopefully anticipates a second decade of power for the emperor. Constantine also minted in 322 and 323 CE similar bronze issues with the same reverse imagery, but with the obverse depicting him wearing a military helmet rather than a laurel wreath (see RIC VII, Treveri, nos. 303, 316, 341, 368, 389). These issues arguably emphasised more specifically the role of military power in his bringing about of tranquillity, whereas the present coin shows Constantine in the wreath, a more general symbol of honour and victory. Granted, in the present coin the emperor wears the cuirass, a piece of armour, and carries a sceptre topped with the eagle (the



symbol which appeared atop Roman military standards), so military connotations are certainly present. However, the wreath suggests his more generalised victory and honour.

The decennalia was a festival which celebrated the first ten years of rule of an emperor, and was likely created after 27 BCE, when the senate offered Augustus sovereign power for life. Augustus refused, and instead accepted to renew his supreme power every ten years. Thus, from then onwards, on the tenth anniversary of an emperor's accession to the throne, even if the imperium was bestowed on him for life, the decennalia was celebrated. At the beginning of the festival the vows previously taken for the safety of the emperor by the people of Rome (*vota soluta*) were absolved, and new vows, *vota suscepta*, which would be absolved only during the next celebration of the decennalia, were undertaken at the end of the festival. The decennalia were celebrated through donatives, or *congiaria*, through games, and of course through religious processions and sacrifices. The same ceremonies were held to celebrate the vicennalia (twenty years). Constantine had already celebrated the fifth anniversary of reign in 310 CE at Trier (or Augusta Treverorum) with various emissions bearing the inscription VOTIS V MVLTIS X (RIC VI, Constantine, no. 821; RIC VII, Antioch, no. 1), which celebrated the hope to reach a full decade of rule. Thus, in 315 CE, the victorious Constantine could celebrate the first decennalia, or ten years of rule. Yet, it was during the fifteenth anniversary of rule, celebrated at Sirmium in 320 CE, that many different issues were minted to commemorate the event. For example, some issues present on the reverse the inscription VOT XX MVLT XXX inside a wreath, which emphasizes the wishful hope for a third decade of rule (RIC VII, Thessalonica no. 27-32; Foss, *Roman Historical Coins*, p. 280-281).

Issues such as the present coin, which bear on the reverse the inscription *beata tranquillitas*, reflect the concept of peace as a cosmic eternal harmony. All these types depict an altar bearing a globe. This sphere, which bears a cross, and is topped by three stars, clearly symbolizes the universe. According to Bruno Bleckman, this depiction of the universe symbolizes the presence of a still unknown, "vaguely defined universal god," which assisted the emperor in bringing to the universe a general cosmic harmony, expressed by the inscription on the reverse (Bleckmann, "Constantine, Rome, and the Christians," p. 326). Thus, the obverse of the coin, which depicts the head of the emperor, and the reverse which depicts the altar and the globe are closely related. Imperial propaganda portrays the emperor as the main tool, chosen by a cosmic supreme divinity, to bring peace and salvation to mankind, which of course is identified with the population of the Roman empire. Thus, Constantine is represented as the *fundator quietis* (establisher of harmony) whom the supreme god had helped bring "general cosmic harmony" (Bleckmann, "Constantine, Rome, and the Christians," p. 326; see also the [Arch of Constantine](#) [2], which bears an inscription identifying Constantine as *fundator quietis*). The idea of *quies*, as opposed to that of *pax* (peace), emphasizes a broader sense of peacefulness that embodies a cosmic dimension. This image of Constantine as the God-appointed saviour of the Roman people from tyrannous rule is already forwarded by Eusebius in the fourth century (*Ecclesiastical History* IX.9; see also [Life of Constantine](#) 1.26. 28-28 [3]), when he describes the lead up to and outcome of the battle of the Milvian Bridge against Maxentius in 312 CE.

However, this issue was minted before the outbreak of the second war with Licinius, whom having initially been an ally of Constantine's against Maxentius and Maximinus Daia, became his bitter rival. An alliance between Maxentius and Maximinus Daia, who would both be defeated by Constantine and Licinius (Maxentius in 312 CE and Maximinus in 313 CE), forced the latter two emperors into an agreement as well. In 313 CE the Edict of Milan was issued, which promised freedom to practice any religion (including Christianity). Civil war broke out between the two Augusti in 314 CE. There was a temporary reprieve before war broke out again in 321 CE after campaigns waged against the Sarmatians and Goths in Licinius's territory was perceived by the latter as a breaking of the terms of their agreement. This context is interesting in relation to the fact that Constantine would later, after his ultimate defeat of Licinius, rendering him the sole ruler of the empire, present Licinius as a "tyrant" from which he had saved the Roman people, again with divine help (e.g., see [Nummus depicting the head of Constantine and the labarum spearing a snake \(337 CE\)](#) [4]). One feature of Constantine's imperial propaganda was to present himself specifically as the deliverer of the senate, and the restorer of their freedom from this "tyrant" (see the commentary on [Eusebius of Caesarea, Life of Constantine](#) 1.39 [5]). Perhaps in this follis, then, we see an early indication of the benefit to the Roman people which Constantine wanted to present himself as providing – specifically tranquillity, stability, and peace. Reinhart Staats interprets the *beata tranquillitas* type as an indication by Constantine of the new Christian religion to whose God he attributed his success ("Kaiser Konstantin der Große und der Apostel Paulus," p. 345; Staats considers this coin type in light of Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 2:2 that Christians should pray for kings and authorities "that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life"). However, Constantine's visual propaganda is notoriously ambiguous in this regard, with allusions to the role of Christianity often appearing alongside those to traditional Roman deities (for further discussion of this, see the commentary on the [Colossus of Constantine](#) [6]).



Keywords in the original language:

- [Augustus](#) [7]
- [beata tranquillitas](#) [8]

Thematic keywords:

- [imperial cult](#) [9]
- [festival](#) [10]
- [games](#) [11]
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- [decennalia](#) [13]
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- [eagle](#) [23]

Bibliographical references:

[“Constantine, Rome, and the Christians”](#) [24]

Bleckmann, Bruno article-in-a-book *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD* Wien and Johannes 309-329 “Constantine, Rome, and the Christians” *Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity* Oxford Oxford University Press 2014

[Roman Historical Coins](#) [25]

Foss, Clive book *Roman Historical Coins* London Seaby 1990

[“Kaiser Konstantin der Große und der Apostel Paulus”](#) [26]

Staats, Reinhart article-in-a-journal 334-370 62.4 “Kaiser Konstantin der Große und der Apostel Paulus” *Vigiliae Christianae* 2008

Other sources connected with this document: Text

[Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* I.26, 28-29](#) [27]

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](#) [27]

Text



[Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* I.39 \[28\]](#)

Constantine's triumphal entry into Rome

- [Read more about Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* I.39 \[28\]](#)

Architecture

[The Arch of Constantine \[29\]](#)

[South Attic with inscription \[30\]](#)



[South side, from the Via Triumphalis \[31\]](#)



[North side, from the Colosseum \[32\]](#)



[Relief panels, round reliefs and frieze over left \(west\) arch, from south \[33\]](#)



[Round reliefs and frieze over right \(east\) arch, from south \[34\]](#)



[Detail of relief panel, south side, right panel of left arch](#) [35]



[Detail of north plinth on second column from east, viewed from east, with Victoria \(left\) and prisoners \(right\)](#) [36]



[Round relief, south side, far left, showing the departure for the hunt](#) [37]



[West: Profectio \(departure for the battle from Milan\)](#) [38]



[South West, Obsidio \(the Siege of Verona\)](#) [39]



[South east: Proelium \(Constantine's troops defeating Maxentius's army in battle\)](#) [40]



[East: Ingressus \(Constantine and his troops march into Rome\) \[41\]](#)



[North East: Oratio \(Constantine's speech to the citizens of Rome\) \[42\]](#)



[North West: Liberalitas \(Constantine distributes money to the Roman people\) \[43\]](#)



[Detail of the Liberalitas \[44\]](#)



- [Read more about The Arch of Constantine \[29\]](#)

Relief / Sculpture

[The Colossus of Constantine \[45\]](#)

- [Read more about The Colossus of Constantine \[45\]](#)

Numismatic item

[Nummus depicting the head of Constantine and the labarum spearing a snake \(337 CE\) \[46\]](#)

- [Read more about Nummus depicting the head of Constantine and the labarum spearing a snake \(337 CE\) \[46\]](#)

Numismatic item

[Solidus depicting the head of Constantine and the emperor receiving the globe from the personification of Roma \(315 CE\) \[47\]](#)

- [Read more about Solidus depicting the head of Constantine and the emperor receiving the globe from the](#)



[personification of Roma \(315 CE\)](#) [47]

Realized by:

[Samuele Rocca](#) [48]



[Kimberley Fowler](#) [49]



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- [2] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/arch-constantine>
- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/eusebius-caesarea-life-constantine-i26-28-29>
- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/nummus-depicting-head-constantine-and-labarum-spearing-snake-337-ce>
- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/eusebius-caesarea-life-constantine-i39>
- [6] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/colossus-constantine>
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- [24] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Cconstantine-rome-and-christians%E2%80%9D>
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- [46] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/nummus-depicting-head-constantine-and-labarum-spearing-snake-337-ce>
- [47] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/solidus-depicting-head-constantine-and-emperor-receiving-globe-personification-roma-315-ce>
- [48] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/samuele-rocca>
- [49] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/kimberley-fowler>