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Constantine's Tetradrachms

by

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Constantine's Tetradrachms

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Abstract: Constantine I struck two unusual types of silver coin at Constantinople which have traditionally been dated to the dedication of that city in May 330 and have recently been identified as imitations of Hellenistic tetradrachms struck in a brief renewal of a civic coinage there with important implications for the understanding of his religious policy. This note re-examines the evidence to suggest several possible alternative interpretations of these coins, that they may have been struck to commemorate the re-minting of large stocks of ancient coins recovered during the confiscation of temple treasures in the eastern empire, or to commemorate Hellenistic artistic achievement at a time when key works of art were being seized for display in Constantinople, or to mark the new ambitions of Constantine in the east as demonstrated by the appointment of his nephew Hannibalianus as *rex regum et Ponticarum gentium*.

Introduction

Ramskold and Lenski have recently argued that two highly unusual silver types traditionally dated at or about the time of the dedication of the city of Constantinople on 11 May 330, and both struck at this city alone, were deliberately created in imitation of a standard Hellenistic tetradrachm, that these types 'constitute something of a brief return to the tradition of civic coinage', and that one of them depicting the personification of Constantinople 'can be viewed as valuable iconographic evidence for the cult of Constantinople's Tyche established by Constantine and of his interest in maintaining Hellenic religious traditions'.[1] This paper argues against any attempt to interpret these coins as civic coinage, questions their relevance to the dedication of Constantinople in 330, and rejects the suggestion that they have any contribution to make to the understanding of Constantine's religious policy. It also offers several possible explanations of their imitation of a Hellenistic tetradrachm as potential alternatives to the civic and pagan religious interpretation favoured by Ramskold and Lenski.

[1] L. Ramskold and N. Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions and the maintenance of civic traditions', *NZ* 119 (2012), pp. 31-58, at 31. N. Lenski, 'Constantine and the Tyche of Constantinople', in J. Wienand (ed.), *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 330-52, repeats the same arguments with greater exploration of the literary evidence. On the other coins and medals struck at Constantinople about this period, see e.g. S. Bendall, 'Some comments on the anonymous silver coinage of the fourth to sixth centuries AD', *RN* 158 (2002), pp. 139-59; idem, 'A new anonymous Constantinian copper coin', *RN* 162 (2006), pp. 273-75; idem, 'Two new anonymous Constantinian coins', *NCirc* 116 (2008), pp. 185-87; L. Ramskold, 'Coins and medallions struck for the inauguration of Constantinopolis 11 May 330', in M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium, Ninth Symposium, Niš, 3–5 June 2010* (Niš, 2011), pp. 125–57.



Fig. 1. Imitative tetradrachm of Constantine I with reverse depicting Constantinopolis. *RIC* 7, Constantinople 53 var.
Ex Nomos AG, Auction 2 (18 May 2010), 219. © Nomos AG. (1.5x).



Fig. 2. Imitative tetradrachm of Constantine I with reverse depicting Roma. *RIC* 7, -.
Ex Triton XVI (9 January 2013), 1155. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. (1.5x).

The two types under discussion are quite rare. Ramskold and Lenski catalogued 18 specimens in total, 15 depicting the personification of Constantinopolis on the reverse (*Fig. 1*), and 3 depicting the personification Roma (*Fig. 2*).[2] Both types bear the same anepigraphic obverse depicting the diademed head of Constantine facing right. The reverse of the Constantinopolis type depicts Constantinopolis draped, veiled and with mural crown, sitting on an ornate, high-backed chair, facing towards the right, with a branch in her right hand and a cornucopia in her left. Two legends descend vertically on either side of her. That to the right reads D(ominus) N(oster) CONSTANTINVS, while that to the left reads MAX(imus) TRIVMF(ator)

[2] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', pp. 32-33. On the depiction of Constantinopolis and Roma during late antiquity, see e.g. J.M.C. Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis in Late Antique Art from 312 to 365', *JRS* 37 (1947), pp. 135-44; G. Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma. Stadtpersonifikationen der Spätantike* (Zürich, 1995). It is less certain than Ramskold and Lenski allow that the two types really do depict two different personifications, Constantinopolis and Roma, since neither is identified by name. One cannot entirely exclude the possibility that they represent two aspects of the same personification, Constantinopolis the plentiful in time of peace, Constantinopolis armed and ready in time of war. After all, a new type of *follis* introduced in 330 depicted a helmeted bust with reversed spear clearly identified as Constantinopolis on its obverse. See e.g. *RIC* 7, Constantinople 63, 79, 86, 144, 155. Fortunately, it does not affect the main arguments of this paper whether these types depict two different personifications, as I will assume throughout, or different aspects of the same personification.

AVG(ustus). The reverse of the Roma type depicts Roma draped, with crested helmet, sitting on an ornate, high-backed chair, facing towards the right also, with a globe in her right hand and spear in her left. Two legends descend vertically on either side of her. That to the right reads MAX(imus) TRIVMF(ator) AVG(ustus), while that to the left reads D(ominus) N(oster) CONSTANTINVS. Both types bear the same mintmark in the exergue, MCONS, either alone (1 specimen) or with an *officina* number (17); the Constantinopolis type was produced in 9 different *officinae* (B, Γ, Δ, Є, S, Z, Θ, I, IA) and the Roma type in 2 (S, I). As to their weight and value, there is some minor variation, but it has been suggested that they seem to have been intended as five-siliqua pieces (5 x 3.38 = 16.90g).[3]



Fig. 3. Tetradrachm of Demetrius I Soter (162-150 BC), Antioch mint.
Ex Hess-Divo AG, Auction 328 (22 May 2015), 69. © Hess-Divo AG. (1.5x).

Ramskold and Lenski argue that these coins share six main characteristics with Hellenistic tetradrachms: (1) weight (average 17.28g, where the tetradrachms of Alexander and his early successors were struck to the full Attic standard of c.17.2g) and diameter (c.30-32mm), (2) metal (silver), (3) thickness and high relief, (4) an anepigraphic obverse filled by a head cropped high on the neck, (5) a reverse depicting a god or goddess between two legends descending vertically, (6) the presence of a diadem on the obverse bust.[4] The cumulative effect of these characteristics is that these coins resemble no other coins or medallions of this period, whether produced at Constantinople itself or elsewhere. In fact, they resemble nothing so much as Hellenistic tetradrachms, and the result can hardly be accidental. In particular, Ramskold and Lenski emphasize the resemblance between the Constantinopolis type and the tetradrachms depicting the Tyche of Antioch struck under the Seleucid king Demetrius I Soter (162-150BC) at Antioch on the Orontes and most of his western mints (*Fig. 3*).[5] However, the chief similarities lie in the seated position of the personification in each case, and its possession of a cornucopia, but these are conventional characteristics shared by a large number of city-personifications

[3] Bruun, *RIC* 7, pp. 8, 578.

[4] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', pp. 31 (abstract summary), 35-43.

[5] Lenski, 'Constantine and the Tyche of Constantinople', pp. 333-36; Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', p. 40. On the coinage of Demetrius I Soter, see *SC II, Vol. I*, pp. 151-206.

by the fourth century AD, and should not be used to argue that the depiction of Constantinopolis here depended in particular on the depiction of the Tyche of Antioch on the coinage of Demetrius I Soter. Regardless of the precise model, however, there can be no doubt that the Constantinian coins were modelled upon a Hellenistic tetradrachm. The real puzzle, therefore, is why Constantine should have authorised the production of commemorative coins resembling Hellenistic tetradrachms.

Against the interpretation as civic coinage

Ramskold and Lenski conclude that these coins represent civic coinage recalling the period ending in the third century AD when many cities, particularly in the eastern Roman empire, had their own mints striking coins according to local standards for local needs. In reaching this conclusion, they emphasize two points, first, that these coins depict city personifications (Tychai) and, second, that they were only produced at one mint, Constantinople, although there were about a dozen mints operating at the time.[6] Neither of these points is telling. As regards the first, Ramskold and Lenski downplay the fact that these coins seem to depict two different personifications, of Rome as well as of Constantinople. Furthermore, they ignore the vast difference between the status of Rome and Constantinople on the one hand and that of the various provincial cities which had struck civic coinage on the other. The former were imperial cities, by which one means that Rome had always been recognised as the capital of the empire and the status of Constantinople, the former Byzantium, had now been raised to something approximating that of Rome, so that the personifications of these cities did not just represent the cities themselves, but the empire also.[7] In contrast, the personifications of the other provincial cities had never represented anything but those cities themselves. As regards the second point, despite its short history, the mint at Constantinople had already struck several unique types whose status as imperial coinage has never been questioned simply because they were struck only at Constantinople. It alone had struck the *follis* of SPES PVBLIC type depicting the labarum piercing a serpent.[8] It alone had struck coins of the CONSTANTINIANA DAFNE type, and had done so in gold, silver, and bronze.[9] More importantly, many types of precious metal multiples in particular seem to have been struck at one city only over the previous decades, that being the city where the emperor happened to be located when the relevant event was being celebrated.[10] It is clear, therefore, that the mere fact of being struck at a single city does not make a civic coinage.

[6] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', pp. 43-44.

[7] On the recognition of Constantinople as a second or new Rome from its very dedication, see e.g. J.R. Melville-Jones, 'Constantinople as "New Rome"', *Byzantina Symmetika* 24 (2014), pp. 247-62. More generally, see L. Grig and G. Kelly (eds), *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012).

[8] *RIC* 7, Constantinople 19, 26.

[9] *RIC* 7, Constantinople 36 (gold), 37 (silver), 19-35, 38 (bronze).

[10] Noteworthy examples include the gold multiple struck at Trier in 297 to commemorate the relief of London by Constantius I (*RIC* 6, Trier 34), or the silver multiple struck at Ticinum in 315 famously depicting the chi-rho on the crest of Constantine's helmet (*RIC* 7, Ticinum 36).

In addition to the weakness of the arguments offered by Ramskold and Lenski in support of the identification of these coins as a civic coinage, one may also adduce several more positive arguments against it. First, the emphasis in the imagery of these coins is resolutely imperial. Both types depict the imperial bust on the obverse, and, as already highlighted, the personifications on the reverse are as much symbols of the empire at this point as they are of these cities themselves. Ramskold and Lenski invoke the memory of the brief revival of civic coinage under Maximinus Daia in 312 in support of their argument, but it is interesting to note that none of the types struck then depict the imperial portrait on the obverse.[11] Furthermore, civic coinages had often displayed items of local architectural interest – temples, aqueducts, bridges, city-walls – so that it is particularly striking that these alleged civic coins from Constantinople do not depict any such items despite being produced in a city that had just experienced massive re-building and expansion.

Second, the emphasis in the legends of these coins is resolutely imperial also. They only refer to Constantine himself, but in the case of a truly civic coinage, one might have expected some mention of a local official, or the city council, or the people of the district. In this case, the only actual reference to Constantinople is the mintmark, and even this follows the conventional form much as one would expect on any imperial coin from any city in the empire. Furthermore, the legends are in Latin rather than Greek, despite the fact that Constantinople was situated well within the Greek-speaking portion of the empire, and one of the distinguishing features of civic coinages in this part of the empire had been their use of the local language, Greek, rather than the official language of the imperial administration, Latin. This failure to make any concession to local identity seriously undermines any attempt to identify these coins as a civic coinage.

Finally, the argument that these coins represent a civic coinage is inconsistent with the fact that they clearly imitate a standard Hellenistic tetradrachm, that is, a type that was mass-produced in numerous cities across the east, usually with little concession to local civic feeling. It was a royal coinage, not a civic coinage. In effect, and whatever the precise model, Constantine has transformed a royal Hellenistic coin type into a Roman imperial type by subjecting it to a minimal Romanisation. This required replacing the royal portrait with his portrait, the royal name and title with his name and title, and the favoured royal divinity or personification with the favoured imperial personification. Yet if he had truly sought to recreate a civic coinage, he (or his advisers) would not have turned to this particular model.

Dating the imitative tetradrachms

A major part of the difficulty faced by Ramskold and Lenski as they try to understand why Constantine authorised the production of commemorative coins resembling Hellenistic tetradrachms is that they start with the assumption that these coins were struck in connection with the dedication of Constantinople in 330, and this seriously

[11] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', pp. 43-44. J. Van Heesch, 'The last civic coinages and the religious policy of Maximinus Daia (AD 312)', *NC* 153 (1993), pp. 65-76, lists 9 types produced in Nicomedia, Antioch, and Alexandria.

restricts the interpretative possibilities. They do discuss a number of factors setting various *termini post quem* for the production of these coins. For example, the portrait of Constantine on the obverse depicts him with a jewelled diadem, and he is first depicted wearing this on coins produced in 326.[12] Again, the earliest firm evidence for Constantine's use of the title *triumfator* consists of a rescript which he issued to the city of Orcistus dated 30 June 331, and it has been plausibly argued that he only took this title in 330.[13] Hence coins bearing this title probably date to 330 or later. However, Ramskold and Lenski never discuss the reasons for dating these coins to 330 in particular. They point out that numerous authorities before them have associated the production of the Constantinopolis type with the foundation of that city, but frequent repetition of the same assumption does not represent proof.[14] Part of the problem is that the Roma type was not known before 1995, so that the earlier authorities tended to assume that the production of these coins was much more focussed on Constantinople than it actually was.

One might have hoped that the mintmark on the coins could have provided a means of dating them more precisely. Unfortunately, only one other coin or medallion of this period bears the mintmark MCONS. This is a 30-solidi piece whose reverse depicts a large central figure, presumably Constantine I himself, standing between two smaller figures, normally identified as his sons, where all three are in military dress and lean on long sceptres.[15] A hand descends from a cloud in order to crown the central figure, while a Victory crowns the smaller figure to the right, and a soldier crowns the even smaller figure to the left. The surrounding legend reads GAVDIVM ROMANORVM, 'The joy of the Romans'. The obverse depicts a laureate bust of Constantius II holding a spear and shield, and the legend FL IVL CONSTANTIVS NOB CAES. The problem is that it is even more difficult to date this piece than it is the imitative tetradrachms with the same mintmark. Bruun dates it to 330 without properly explaining why, although one suspects that he was influenced in this by a perceived need to date it to some major event during the period when Constantine had only two Caesars, that is, before the promotion of his youngest son Constans as Caesar on 25 December 333. Alternatively, Toynbee prefers to date it to this later event, claiming that the reverse depicts Constantine I standing between Constantine II, crowned by Victory, and the newly promoted Constans, crowned by Virtus.[16]

[12] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', p. 41.

[13] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', p. 39. For text, translation, and discussion of this rescript, see R. Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 368-72. For the argument that the title *triumfator* was taken in 330, see T. Grünewald, *Constantinus Maximus Augustus: Herrschaftspropaganda in der zeitgenössischen Überlieferung* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 147-50.

[14] Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', p. 31, n. 1. The earlier authorities include Bruun, *RIC* 7, p. 578, who simply cites J.M.C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions* (New York, 1944), p. 168, whose argument in this matter consists of a brief reference to the Constantinopolis type as 'probably commemorating the solemn consecration of the new Capital in 330'.

[15] *RIC* 7, Constantinople 42.

[16] Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, p. 198.



Fig. 4. Four-siliqua piece from Trier, probably dated March 336. *RIC* 7, -.
Ex Numismatica Genevensis SA, Auction 5 (3 December 2008), 296.
© Numismatica Genevensis SA. (1.5x).

One should draw attention here also to a strong similarity between the imitative tetradrachms and two types of silver coins (four-siliqua pieces) that were struck in at least seven mints across the empire in apparent celebration of the 20th anniversary of the appointment of Constantine II as Caesar on 1 March 336.[17] One type pairs an obverse depicting the portrait of a Constantinian emperor in a rosette-diadem accompanied by the inscription AVGVSTVS with a reverse depicting a laurel wreath enclosing the inscription CAESAR (*Fig. 4*).[18] The other type pairs an obverse depicting the portrait of a Constantinian emperor in a rosette-diadem accompanied by the inscription CAESAR with a reverse depicting a laurel-wreath enclosing the inscription X X.[19] The interesting point here is the fact that the obverse legend descends vertically in the manner of the imperial name and titles on the reverse of the imitative tetradrachms rather than circling the circumference of the coin in the normal manner. It is arguable, therefore, that the epigraphy of one of these issues may have influenced that of the other, or that they both drew upon a common model. In either case, the possibility that they were struck in relatively close succession one after the other deserves serious consideration.

In conclusion, there is no good evidence to date the production of the imitative tetradrachms to 330 in particular, and while the use of the title *triumfato*r sets a *terminus post quem* of 330, the death of Constantine on 22 May 337 is probably the only firm *terminus ante quem*. This considerably broadens the context for the production of these coins and greatly increases the interpretative possibilities.

[17] See J. Lafaurie, 'Une série de médaillons d'argent de Constantin I et Constantin II', *RN* (1949), pp. 35-48. His dating of these coins is now regarded as standard. See e.g. A.R. Bellinger, 'Roman and Byzantine medallions in the Dumbarton Oaks collection', *DOP* 12 (1958), pp. 125-56, at 134-35; Bruun, *RIC* 7, *passim*.

[18] *RIC* 7, Lyons 283, Arles 410. Siscia 259, Thessalonica 221, Constantinople 132, Nicomedia 197.

[19] *RIC* 7, Lyons 284, Arles 411, Aquileia 138, Siscia 260, Nicomedia 198.

The religious significance of the imitative tetradrachms

Any discussion of the religious significance of these coins should begin by acknowledging two clear facts, first, that the coins preserve no indication that Constantinopolis and Roma were regarded as the objects of continuing worship and, second, that indisputably Christian emperors who would not have tolerated any pagan cult continued to depict Constantinopolis on their coinage until the second half of the sixth century. On the first point, it is important to emphasize that no altar, sacrificial implements, animal victims or offerings of any other type are depicted in association with either Constantinopolis or Roma. Consequently, it is difficult to understand why one should assume that Constantine's intention in depicting these personifications of the leading cities of his empire upon his coinage was any different to that of, for example, Justin II (565-78), the last Byzantine emperor to depict Constantinopolis upon his coinage.[20] In the context of the evidence for his removal of all other unambiguous depictions of the gods from his coinage, it is obvious that he was the first emperor to treat Constantinopolis, Roma, and Victory as purely political symbols, personifications of key imperial concepts, rather than as gods also. Certainly, he maintained Hellenistic iconographical traditions while so doing, but this should not be confused with 'maintaining Hellenistic religious traditions'.

Ramskold and Lenski connect the striking of the imitative tetradrachms to the alleged construction of two 'temples' for Constantinopolis and Roma as described by the early sixth-century pagan author Zosimus, depending in turn upon the late fourth-century pagan author Eunapius of Sardis, in order to argue that this demonstrates Constantine's interest in 'maintaining Hellenistic religious traditions':

> There was in Byzantium a huge forum consisting of four porticoes, and at the end of one of them which has numerous steps leading up to it, he had two temples built, setting up statues in them. In one he put a statue of Rhea, mother of the gods. This was the statue which the Argonauts happened to set up on Mount Dindymus overlooking the city of Cyzicus, but they say he defaced it through his disregard for religion, by taking away the lions on each side and changing the arrangement of the hands; for whereas previously she looked like she was restraining lions, now she was changed into the form of someone praying and looking over the city and honouring it. And in the other, he put the statue of Fortuna Romae.[21]

While Zosimus does describe the two buildings which Constantine apparently had erected in order to house the statues of Constantinopolis and Roma as 'temples', it is important to bear in mind that this was not necessarily how Constantine himself would have characterised them. As a pagan, Zosimus seems to have been incapable of rising above his traditional cultural assumptions that a building housing a large statue of a personification was necessarily a temple, that is, a building intended to facilitate the religious worship of this statue, but it may simply have been intended to protect a valuable work of art and symbol of the city, or to provide shelter from sun or rain for any curious visitors to this great work of art and symbol of the city. More

[20] *MIBE*, Justin II nos 1-9, 12-15, 16-17, 18-23.

[21] Zosimus, *HN* 2.31.2-3. Trans. Ramskold and Lenski, 'Constantinople's dedication medallions', p. 44.

importantly here, there is very little reason to identify the statue of Constantinopolis as described by Zosimus with the Constantinopolis depicted on the coins. Zosimus does not mention either the cornucopia or the branch, the two items depicted in the hands of Constantinopolis on the coinage, and it is not clear what he means by describing the statue as in the form of someone praying and honouring the city.

One could digress into a long discussion of this and similar passages of even more dubious value from the sixth-century chronicle of John Malalas and the eighth century *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, but the main points here are that the imitative tetradrachms do not in themselves support the idea of continued worship of Constantinopolis and Roma as gods and really have nothing new to contribute the longstanding debate concerning the value of such passages.[22]

Some alternative interpretations

It is important to note that Constantine was not the first emperor to strike new issues in imitation of earlier coins. For example, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan had all restored earlier types, where the first three had restored earlier imperial types, but Trajan had restored republican types also, including some from as early as the late third century BC.[23] This practice continued in a rather more sporadic fashion into the third century also.[24] However, three features distinguish Constantine's striking of the imitative tetradrachms from these earlier schemes of restoration. First, his imperial predecessors had normally identified the restored coins as such by the use of the verb RESTITVIT or some abbreviation thereof. However, Constantine's coins bear no acknowledgement that they were intended in imitation or restoration of earlier types. Second, his imperial predecessors had only restored Roman types, but his coins clearly imitated a Hellenistic type. Admittedly, some local officials seem to have produced medallions based on Hellenistic models during the third century AD, but they were not mint officials acting on behalf of the central Roman government, so the situation was very different.[25] Finally, Constantine's coins did not imitate a single, precise type in the manner of these earlier schemes of restoration, but imitated rather the general appearance of a broad class or denomination of coin. For these reasons, it does not seem likely that these earlier schemes of restoration can shed much light of Constantine's reasons for briefly restoring the Hellenistic tetradrachm. Indeed, it is not always clear why these earlier emperors had acted as they did either. It seems, therefore, that Constantine's restoration of the Hellenistic tetradrachm is best considered in the context of his other actions in the Greek-speaking east, the

[22] For discussion of the relevant passages in Malalas and the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, see Lenski, 'Constantine and the Tyche of Constantinople', pp. 340-45. For a negative assessment of later traditions concerning the foundation and dedication of Constantinople, see e.g. T.D. Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire* (Chichester, 2011), pp. 126-31.

[23] See H. Komnick, *Die Restitutionsmünzen der frühen Kaiserzeit: Aspekte der Kaiserlegitimation* (Berlin, 2001); A.B. Gallia, *Remembering the Roman Republic: Culture, Politics, and History under the Principate* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 217-70.

[24] See e.g. R. Abdy, 'A new coin type of Gallienus found in Hertfordshire', *NC* 162 (2002), 346-50.

[25] See e.g. K. Dahmen, 'Alexander in gold and silver: reassessing third century AD medallions from Aboukir and Tarsos', *AJN* 20 (2008), pp. 493-546.

territories of the former Hellenistic kingdoms, during the period c.330-37, and as one examines these actions, three alternative explanations of his restoration of the Hellenistic tetradrachm suggest themselves.

First, it is important to bear in mind when considering this problem that imperial finances were greatly enriched during this period by the confiscation of the wealth of the pagan temples in the east.[26] Writing about 337, bishop Eusebius of Caesarea preserves the earliest and most detailed account of this process, although he does focus rather narrowly on the treatment of pagan statues in particular:

> When he [Constantine] perceived that the masses in the manner of silly children were pointlessly terrified by the bogeys fashioned from gold and silver, he decided to get rid of these as one would stumbling-blocks dropped before the feet of people walking in the dark, and to open wide for all hereafter, clear and level, the royal way. With this in mind he reckoned that he did not need armed men and a military force to confute these: one or two only of his familiar circle sufficed for the operation, and he sent these to every province at a single command. Confident in the Emperor's piety and their own reverence for the Divinity, they visited populous communities and nations, and city by city, country by country, they exposed the long-standing error, ordering the consecrated officials themselves to bring out their gods with much mockery and contempt from their dark recesses into daylight, and then depriving them of their fine appearance and revealing to every eye the ugliness that lay within the superficially applied beauty. They then scraped off the material which seemed to be usable, purifying it by smelting with fire; as much useful material as was deemed to belong to them they collected and stored in a safe place, while conversely what was superfluous and useless they allowed the superstitious to keep as a souvenir of their shame.[27]

In reality, most of the gold and silver stored within the temples would have consisted of offerings towards the gods rather than have decorated their statues.[28] Writing in the 380s, Libanius refers vaguely several times to the confiscation of temple treasures, and later again the anonymous western author of the *De Rebus Bellicis* refers vaguely to the confiscation of gold, silver and large stocks of precious jewels, but no source preserves a detailed list of the various categories of treasure confiscated, the types of offerings.[29] However, there is no reason to doubt that precious metal coinage would have featured among the offerings and that, given both the location of the regions affected and the antiquity of many of the temples therein, Hellenistic coinage, including tetradrachms, may have featured prominently among this coinage. Certainly, many temples in this region had suffered various

[26] See G. Bonamente, 'Sulla confisca dei beni mobile dei temple in epoca costantiniana', in G. Bonamente and F. Fusco (eds.), *Costantino il Grande: Dall'antichità all'umanesimo, Colloquio sul cristianesimo nel mondo antico* (Macerata, 1992), pp. 171-201; N. Lenski, *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics* (Philadelphia, 2016), pp. 168-72.

[27] Eusebius, *VC* 3.54.4-6. Trans. A. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 143-44.

[28] For a brief summary of the role of temples as sources of treasure, see R. Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 8-10. On the range of treasures one might find in Greek temples in particular, see e.g. J. Shaya, 'Greek temple treasures and the invention of collecting', in M. Wellington Gahtan and D. Pegazzano (eds.), *Museum Archetypes and Collecting in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2015), pp. 24-32.

[29] Libanius, *Or*. 30.6, 37 and 62.8; *DRB* 2.2.

losses during and since the incorporation of the relevant territories into the Roman empire, but the difference this time was that Constantine's despoliation of the temples was much more systematic and destructive than any previous looting of the temples, so that little or nothing was allowed to survive on this occasion. As to the date of this confiscation, Jerome refers to it in his chronicle in an entry for the year 331, and even though this entry probably reflects a specific event in or about Antioch in Syria that year, the wider process should probably be dated similarly.[30] It is possible, therefore, that Constantine struck the imitative tetradrachms in order to imitate the very coins that had been melted down in order to provide the metal for re-minting as imperial coinage, and that he did so as a potent reminder to all handling these coins of where the metal for them had originally come from, ancient offerings from the Hellenistic past to now defunct gods. In effect, these tetradrachms may have served to commemorate the despoliation of the temples.

The second possible interpretation is closely related to the first in that it involves Constantine's treatment of the temples once more. The key point this time is that he seems to have ordered the preservation and transport to Constantinople of many of the bronze offerings in the temples where these were regarded as important not because of their metallic content, but because of their artistic merit or historical significance.[31] Eusebius of Caesarea is the main literary source also for this aspect to his confiscation of the wealth of the temples, although he characteristically misrepresents Constantine's behaviour in putting these works of art on display at Constantinople:

> In all these undertakings the Emperor worked for the glory of the Saviour's power. While he continued in this way to honour his Saviour God, he confuted the superstitious error of the heathen in all sorts of ways. To this end he stripped the entrances to their temples in every city so that their doors were removed at the Emperor's command. In other cases the roofs were ruined by the removal of the cladding. In yet other cases the sacred bronze figures, of which the error of the ancients had for a long time been proud, he displayed to all the public in all the squares of the Emperor's city, so that in one place the Pythian was displayed as a contemptible spectacle to the viewers, in another the Sminthian, in the Hippodrome itself the tripods from Delphi, and the Muses of Helicon at the palace. The city named after the Emperor was filled throughout with objects of skilled artwork in bronze dedicated in various provinces. To these under the name of gods those sick with error had for long ages vainly offered innumerable hecatombs and whole burnt sacrifices, but now they at last learnt sense, as the Emperor used these very toys for the laughter and amusement of the spectators.[32]

[30] See R.W. Burgess, *Studies in Eusebian and Post-Eusebian Chronography* (Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 155, 209.

[31] On Constantine's beautification of the city, see S. Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 50-78. Bronze statues and offerings of little or no artistic merit or historical significance were probably melted down to recover the metal. A poem by Palladas, whose *floruit* has recently been re-dated to the Constantinian period, seems to attest the melting of bronze statues to produce *folles* instead. See K. Wilkinson, 'Palladas and the age of Constantine', *JRS* 99 (2009), pp. 36-60, at 54-56.

[32] Eusebius, *VC* 3.54.1-3. Trans. Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, p. 143.

Eusebius' description of the works put on display in Constantinople as 'objects of skilled artwork' undermines his own explanation of Constantine's action, and no serious commentator accepts that Constantine displayed these works in order for them to be mocked. On the contrary, it is clear that he wished to beautify the city which he had named after himself. Furthermore, not every work of art placed on display necessarily came from a temple originally, and Eusebius' association of this artistic beautification of the city with the despoliation of the temples confuses two separate processes. It is possible, therefore, that Constantine's striking of the imitative tetradrachms was intended to display his respect for the high craftsmanship traditionally displayed by the Greeks in this artistic field as well as in others, and in that sense symbolises his wider appreciation of the beauty of Greek art as demonstrated by his gathering of so many of these works of art into his new capital. In effect, these tetradrachms may have served to celebrate the beautification of Constantinople by means of ancient Greek art.

The third alternative explanation of the restoration of the tetradrachm involves Constantine's foreign policy in the east. By their very nature, these tetradrachms revived memories of Alexander the Great's conquests as far as India and the glories of the subsequent Hellenistic kingdoms also. In this context, one recalls Constantine's decision to appoint his half-nephew Hannibalianus to some form of kingship in the east, whether as *rex regum et Ponticarum gentium* 'King of Kings and of the Pontic Peoples' as recorded by the *Origo Constantini* or as *rex regum gentium Ponticarum* 'King of the Kings of the Pontic Peoples' as described by Polemius Silvius.[33] Some insight into what may have been meant by this position is provided by the anonymous author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* who, in describing Constantine's division of the empire before his death, describes how Hannibalianus received Armenia and the surrounding allied peoples to rule. Some slight further information is also provided by the author of the *Chronicon Paschale* (*s.a*. 335) who reports that after Hannibalianus was appointed king, he was clad in a scarlet cloak and sent to Caesarea in Cappadocia. The numismatic evidence confirms that Hannibalianus was appointed king. The mint at Constantinople struck one silver type in his name, with the obverse legend FL ANNIBALIANO REGI, and a bronze type which bore either this legend or a slight variant with his name spelled differently, FL HANNIBALLIANO REGI.[34] As for the date of Hannibalianus' promotion as king, it is normally assumed to have occurred at or about the same time that his brother Dalmatius was appointed as Caesar on 18 September 335, since the *Chronicon Paschale* reports one event after the other in close succession under the year 335, but this need not necessarily have been the case. For present purposes, however, all that matters was that he was certainly appointed king of some eastern territories or peoples and that this was done sometime during the last two years of the reign of Constantine.

It is possible, therefore, that Constantine struck the imitative tetradrachms in connection with his promotion of Hannibalianus as king, and that they were intended to appeal to the Greek-speaking elite of the eastern empire in that they represented this promotion as the restoration of Greek dominance in an area that had once belonged

[33] *Origo* 35; Polemius Silvius, *Laterculus* 1.63 (MGH, AA 9: *Chron. min*. I.522). In general, see K. Mosig-Walburg, 'Hannibalianus Rex', *Millenium* 2 (2005), pp. 229-54.

[34] *RIC* 7, Constantinople 100 (silver), 145-48 (bronze).

to Alexander the Great and the successor kingdoms, but had since succumbed to other influences. It is an attempt to present his eastern policy, a key part in which was undoubtedly played by the promotion of Hannibalianus as king, in the best possible light to the Greek elite. His head remained on the obverse of these coins rather than that of Hannibalianus, because Hannibalianus would still be subject to him, and there was to be no uncertainty in this matter. Similarly, the personifications of Constantinopolis and Roma were a reminder that this new kingdom, however exactly defined, would still remain subject to the Roman state as symbolised by these personifications. Nevertheless, the coins made the point that his new eastern policy revived in some way the glory of the Hellenistic age.

Conclusion

There is no easy answer to the problem posed by Constantine's decision to strike two types of imitative tetradrachms at Constantinople sometime during the 330s. Ramskold and Lenski argue that these coins represent a brief renewal of civic coinage at Constantinople in association with the dedication of that city in May 330, but this argument fails to persuade. An alternative explanation is necessary. This paper has offered three other potential explanations in the hope of provoking further discussion of this topic. None is necessarily the correct one. Furthermore, as with so many other historical problems of the Constantinian era, one's final decision will depend very much on one's interpretation of the associated literary evidence and one's prior assumptions concerning Constantine's religious policy in general. Those who prefer to see in Constantine a relatively tolerant Christian who was careful to placate pagan feeling where he could, may prefer to interpret these coins as a celebration of his appreciation of Hellenistic artistic achievement. Alternatively, those who prefer to see in Constantine a militant Christian heedless of pagan opinion, may prefer to interpret them as a celebration of his despoliation of pagan temples. Others, those who believe that the religious question tends to cast too long a shadow over the reign of Constantine, may prefer to interpret these coins in reference to his eastern policy instead.

A final note of warning is necessary. One should perhaps beware of assuming that there was ever just one correct interpretation of these coins. The chief characteristic of the reverse types chosen by Constantine, or his advisors, during his later reign was their studied ambiguity from the religious point of view. For example, the reverse on the main series of *folles* struck throughout the empire during the period 330-35 depicted two soldiers standing either side of a pair of military standards surrounded by the legend GLORIA EXERCITVS, where pagans could identify these as the Dioscuri if they so wished and Christians could interpret them as ordinary Roman soldiers.[35] In this case, it is arguable that the imitative tetradrachms were also designed

[35] *RIC* 7, Lyons 236-40, 243-45, 248-50, 253-55, 258, 261-65, 268-69; Trier 518-21, 525-28, 537-41, 544-46, 549-52, 555-60; Arles 341-42, 345-50, 353-55, 358-61, 364-67, 370-72, 375-78, 381-84, 387-91; Rome 327-30, 335-37, 350-53, 363-69, 372; Aquileia 118-21, 124-27, 131-35; Siscia 219-21, 235-39; Thessalonica 183-86, 198-202; Heraclea 111-13, 116-18, 121-23, 126-28, 131-33, 136-42; Constantinople 59-61, 73-77, 80-84; Nicomedia 188-94; Cyzicus 65-70, 76-89, 94-104, 109-17; Antioch 85-90; Alexandria 58-61. For earlier ambiguous imagery, see e.g. J. Vanderspoel and M.L. Mann, 'The empress Fausta as Romano-Celtic Dea Nutrix', *NC* 162 (2002), pp. 350-55.

so that the different pagan or Christian factions could read into them whatever they liked to believe concerning the emperor's religious position, since the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea reveals that he did indeed scrutinise the coinage in this manner, and he was hardly alone in so doing.[36] On the one hand, pagans could interpret them as a celebration of Hellenistic artistic achievement, and so assume a greater sympathy for associated Hellenistic religious beliefs than was otherwise evident. On the other hand, Christians could interpret them as a celebration of the despoliation of the temples, with the implicit promise of more action against the temples in the future also. And it is because of Constantine's preference for ambiguity in this way that it is unlikely that one will ever be able to discover a single, simple explanation as to why he struck these imitative tetradrachms.

[36] Eusebius, *VC* 4.15, 73.