The Imperial Cult in Late Roman Religion (ca. A.D. 244–395): Observations on the Epigraphy

FRANK R. TROMBLEY

The imperial cult was a conventional feature of urban political and religious life in the later Roman empire. It was observed continuously throughout the politically troubled era of the usurpers in the later third century, and afterward under the Tetrarchy and Constantinian, Valentinian and Theodosian dynasties. A considerable number of historical texts and inscriptions indicate the status of the imperial cult between two significant dates, A.D. 244, when Philip the Arab was raised to the imperium, and the death of Theodosius the Great A.D. 395. This period is less well documented than the preceding one as regards temples of the imperial cult, its priesthoods and the ritual practices entailed in it. One Christian writer, Eusebius of Caesarea, promoted the view that Philip the Arab had been the first Christian emperor, a proposition that has been exhaustively analysed in recent decades. Whether this was the case or not, there were few changes in the way the imperial cult was practised until after the death of Theodosius the Great, as evidenced in the epigraphy and the laws in the Theodosian and Justinian Codes.

The view is sometimes expressed that Theodosius the Great made Christianity the ‘official’ religion of the later Roman empire, particularly through the crucial law he issued on 8 November 392. This is a doubtful proposition. The decisive historical moment undoubtedly came later, with the comprehensive legislation of Justinian the Great ca. 529–534. The period between 244–395 saw direct continuity in the observance of the imperial cult. The scepticism expressed by scholars about the persistence of this political and theological reality is a consequence of their being influenced by polemics of Christian writers like Origen, who led a life largely divorced from active participation in civic life or in the administration of the Roman state, and could therefore afford to entertain dissi-
dent opinions that only obliquely acknowledged the importance of the imperial cult. There is a surprisingly large amount of evidence on this for the period in question. In what follows, some of the more significant texts will be identified and investigated, where the emphasis will be on the persistence of the Senate’s conferral of the title *divus*, the personnel of the priesthood, temples and the other accessories of cult, and the *Nachleben* of the imperial cult under the Christian empire (ca. A.D. 312–534).

I. Honouring Emperors: Imperial Cult ca. A.D. 244–305

The numerous assassinations of emperors during the crisis of the mid-third century did not affect the continuity of the imperial cult. Usurpers seem frequently to have urged the Senate to apply a process called *damnatio memoriae* to their predecessors as a tool to promote the legitimacy of their usurpation. It involved annulling the edicts and destroying the statuary and inscriptions of a ‘bad’ emperor after his deposition; it would presumably have also involved re-minting coins bearing the latter’s image. The process was of course fraught with all kinds of practical difficulties. The erasure of emperors’ names is common in the epigraphy of the third century, but most of the inscriptions even of condemned emperors seem to have been left untouched, as a perusal of the epigraphic collections reveals. Although it is strictly speaking impossible to date the political circumstances of particular erasures, they seem normally to have been done after a decree of *damnatio memoriae* was issued by the Senate; there are instances, however, where provincial governors seem to have acted on their own initiative, as in a case of the erasure of Aurelian’s name.

It is a natural corollary that the images of the condemned emperors would have been removed from the temples of the imperial cult in towns where their names were erased from the inscriptions. After this, the images might be either smashed into small fragments, or reworked into sculptures depicting their successors. Thus, in the politically difficult years between 244 and 284, the images of new emperors were constantly being installed in shrines while those of condemned emperors were being discarded. So, for example, the same official, a certain Aurelius Iulius who was equestrian governor of the province of Baetica, sponsored a dedication to emperor Florianus, who reigned for a about a year in

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5 On the period, see DRINKWATER 2005.
6 ELSNER 1998, 55–57. GIZEWSKI 2004. The provocative question of whether the erasures found in inscriptions of ca. 244–312 do in fact confirm acts of *damnatio memoriae* against the emperors of this period is not directly addressed in this article.
7 See below, n. 19.
A.D. 276, and then another to Probus, the latter’s immediate successor. Thus, political conditions were so unstable and turnovers in the imperial office so frequent that a governor’s term in office might extend across the reign of two or more emperors. The statues of some of the latter nevertheless survive, among them the famous image of Philip the Arab in the Vatican Museum, as well as those of Trebonianus Gallus, Gallienus, Carinus and possibly Numerianus. It is impossible to say if these portraits were originally installed in temples of the imperial cult or belonged to other honorific contexts.

The names and titles most frequently erased from inscriptions during this period ca. A.D. 244–284 seem to have been those of Philip the Arab and his son and co-emperor Caesar M. Iulius Philippus, but this phenomenon is apparent also in the inscriptions of Decius, Trebonianus Gallus, Gallienus and his son Caesar P. Licinius Saloninus, Gallienus’ brother Caesar Valerian, and Aurelian. At the end of this period many inscriptions had the names of Carus and his sons the Caesars Carinus and Numerianus erased; the circumstances surrounding the erasures of other emperors’ names except Philip, Trebonianus Gallus and Gallienus suggest that Carus and his sons were probably identified as ‘bad’ emperors and therefore appear not to have been deified. The possible damnatio memoriae of these men was unquestionably pursuant to an initiative of Diocletian who was anxious to consolidate his position with the Senate and army after the overthrow of a legitimate regime.

In some instances, names of deified emperors were erased, among them Caesar Valerianus, who had been co-emperor with his father Valerian and brother Gallienus (divo Valeriano Caes(ari) Cinguliani d. d. p.) and whose consecratio was also commemorated on coins. Separate inscriptions at the provincial town of Cingulum in Picenum indicate the erasure of the names of both Gallienus’ sons, Saloninus and divus Caesar Valerianus. This suggests that the latter had died already, before Gallienus was assassinated in 268, and that his brother’s persuasion (or coercion) was responsible for the younger Valerian’s deification. It is peculiar that the people of Cingulum were so punctual in erasing the two Caesars’ names when so many other inscriptions of theirs have survived without being defaced. Of the other emperors, Claudius Gothicus is known to have been deified from his consecration coins and from an inscription at Thamugadi in Numidia. In an inscription at Thuburuscum, also in Numidia, Emperor Aurelian

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9 ILS 579; CIL III 7586.
10 ILS 593 = CIL II 1115–1116.
12 E.g. ILS 505 (Rome), 508 (Henchir Naam, Africa), 509 (Galleria de Furlo, Umbria).
13 ILS 518, 526, 545, 547, 556, 558, 579, 597.
14 ILS 599, 601, 603, 605–608.
15 See H. Dessau’s remark at ILS 608.
16 ILS 556 = CIL IX 5682; ILS 557 = CIL VIII 8473.
17 ILS 558, 559.
18 ILS 572.
was referred to as a god while still alive (*deo Aureliano r(es) p(ublica) T(h)u(buriscitanae)*), a characteristic of his coins as well. It is not entirely clear why Aurelian’s name is erased from some inscriptions, one of them at Brixiα (present-day Brescia), the other in Moesia Inferior, except that local military commanders or civil governors acted on their own initiative before receiving clear instructions. The deification of Carus undoubtedly took place with the generous consent of the Senate, and effectively conferred legitimacy on his sons Carinus and Numerianus, who had first been promoted to the rank of Caesars and then Augusti. A temple of the imperial cult was constructed in their honour at Verecundia near the camp of the III Augusta legion at Lambaesis in Numidia, according to a badly damaged inscription: The deification of Carus undoubted-ly took place with the generous consent of the Senate, and effectively conferred legitimacy on his sons Carinus and Numerianus, who had first been promoted to the rank of Caesars and then Augusti. A temple of the imperial cult was constructed in their honour at Verecundia near the camp of the III Augusta legion at Lambaesis in Numidia, according to a badly damaged inscription:

For the preservation of the most fortunate emperors, our lords Carinus and Numerianus, the town (*res publica municipium*) of the Verecundians constructed a temple from the foundations up in honour of their father, the deified Carus (*... [divi Cari] genitoris eorum templum a fundamentis... constuit*).

The immediate *consecratio* of Carus is quite likely in view of his sons’ immediate succession and the fact that his grandson (*nepos*) Nigrianus is also called *divus* in an inscription in the Forum of Augustus in Rome. The Lambaesis inscription implicitly makes the point that the new temple and its cult would be conducive to the welfare of the two sons of a deified father. As things turned out, the city councilors were mistaken.

The accession of Diocletian in 284 and subsequently that of his colleagues put an end to the *consecratio* and installation of emperors for two decades. This was a consequence of the longevity of the emperors of the Tetrarchy, the first of them to die being Constantius I over two decades later, on 25 July 306. Dedica-
tions to the *numen* of Diocletian and his colleagues are numerous. A salute to the *genii* of the two branches of his regime, the Iovian and the Herculean, is found in an inscription found near the theatre of Pompeius in Rome:

To the *genius* of the Iovian Augustus, after the work on his Iovian portico was completed and ornamented from the foundations up. Aelius Dionysius *vir clarissimus* (presided over) the task of completing the work.

To the *genius* of the Herculean Augustus, after the work on the Herculean portico was completed and ornamented from the foundations up. Aelius Dionysius *vir clarissimus* (presided over) the task of completing the work.

Divine parenting was also attributed to Diocletian and Maximianus the Elder. Although these two emperors originated from the officer class of Illyricum, an

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19 ILS 585.
21 ILS 608. PARKER 1958, 219–220.
22 ILS 609 = CIL VIII 4221.
23 ILS 611.
24 E.g. ILS 614, etc.
25 ILS 621 and 622 = CIL VI 254 and 255.
inscription at Dyrrachium describes their children as descended from gods. The question remains open as to whether the co-emperors were seen as living gods, as Aurelian had claimed, or as men who were certain to be deified because of their great achievements in reconstructing the empire and the soundness of their character: 26

To our lords Diocletian and Maximianus, the unconquered Augusti, who were be-gotten by gods and are the begetters of gods (dis genitis et deorum creatoribus) [---].

The inscription dates between 285, when Maximianus was appointed Caesar, and 293, when Galerius and Constantius I joined the college of emperors to form the Tetrarchy. The ‘divine’ children in question included among others Valeria daughter of Diocletian and Maxentius son of Maximianus. The mentality expressed in the inscription is consistent with the allusion of an anonymous panegyrist writing in A.D. 291 to the divine parentage of Maximianus Herculeus (siqui-dem vos dis esse genitos . . .). 27 It would be valuable to know what innovations of cult, ritual and iconography, if any, accompanied the implementation of these conceptions.

The names of the Tetrarchs were erased from their inscriptions in many towns sometime after Constantine became emperor. 28 The statues of Diocletian and Maximianus Herculeus were also removed from places of honour ca. 311. Lactantius describes the damnatio memoriae in these terms: 29

At the same time the statues of the elder Maximian were being thrown down on the orders of Constantine, and any pictures in which he had been portrayed were being removed. And because the two old men had been painted (picti) together, this meant that the pictures of both were being taken down. Diocletian thus saw happening to him in his own lifetime what had never happened to an emperor before.

Diocletian’s bewilderment is explained by the fact that the condemnation of an emperor normally took place after his death, but that he was being subjected to de facto damnatio memoriae through his association with the elder Maximianus. Paintings of this type have not survived, but their character may be surmised from the great porphyry image of the Tetrarchs holding each other in a fraternal embrace that is built into San Marco cathedral in Venice. 30 Eusebius makes it clear that it was Maximianus against whom the action was directed, and that it was taken after his death: 31

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26 ILS 629 = CIL III 710.
27 Paneg. XI (III) 2.4. See RODGERS 1986, 77–78.
28 See H. Dessau’s comment at ILS 630.
29 Lact. mort. pers. 42 (quotations are from the edition and translation by CREED 1984).
31 Eus. h. e. 8.13.
He was the first whose honorific inscriptions, statues and everything else that it has been customary to set up (ἀ’ ἐπὶ τιμὴ γραφαῖ, ἀνδριάντα τε καὶ ἃς τουμάτα ἐπ’ ἀνάθεσιν νενόμισται), were destroyed as reminders of an unholy and impious man.

This could have been done only in the regions that Constantine controlled, including Gaul, Britain and Spain, but excluding Italy and Africa. This being the case, the erasures from some inscriptions must have occurred later, as for example at Verona, Thamugadi in Numidia and Henchir Midid in Proconsular Africa.\(^{32}\) It should probably be assumed from this that Constantine also initiated a programme of removing statues of Maximianus from shrines of the imperial cult and smashing them. It is probable that Maximianus was nevertheless deified by the Senate in Rome at the behest of his son Maxentius, who was ruling Italy and Africa outside the recognised college of emperors. As will be seen below, at least one of the sons of Constantine effectively rescinded the damnatio memoriae of their grandfather and retroactively recognised Maximianus Herculeus as divus. The erasure of his name and that of Diocletian in the eastern provinces came much later, probably after Constantine became sole Augustus after the demise of Licinius in 324. There is an inscription of this type on the Arch of Galerius in Thessalonike;\(^{33}\) it is a little strange, however, that the images of Diocletian, Galerius and their entourage performing sacrifice, along with images of the gods and their temples on the same arch, were not defaced.\(^{34}\) It is quite probable that local officials, being mindful of the great achievements of the senior Tetrarchs and having benefited from their patronage, were not always eager to carry out Constantine’s directives.

II. Honouring Emperors: Continuity of Cult after A.D. 305

The question naturally arises as to what attitudes governed the policy of Constantine, his colleagues in the Second Tetrarchy and their successors (ca. 305–312).\(^{35}\) The surviving epigraphic evidence indicates that most of the fourth-century emperors from Diocletian to Theodosius the Great were deified at the time of their deaths, the crucial exceptions being the three sons of Constantine by Fausta who reigned between September 337 to November 361 and Valens, who ruled only the East.\(^{36}\) The evidence lies mainly in the Latin epigraphy and implies, on the basis of negative evidence from the eastern provinces, that the custom of deifying good emperors was more carefully observed in the Senate at Old Rome than in Con-

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32 ILS 631–633, 636, 637 = CIL VIII 2345–2346; V 8016 and VIII 608 respectively.
33 ILS 634.
34 EL SNER 1998, 87. The sacrifice is located on the south-eastern side of the south-west pillar. MACARONAS 1970, 47–48, pl. 25.
35 On this period, see CALDERONE 1973.
stantinople. The period after the death of Constantius II was marked by a broad
tolerance of the time-honoured Roman religious traditions. It is therefore not
surprising that Julian the Apostate and the Christian emperors Jovian, Valentinian
I, Gratian and Theodosius the Great should have been honoured with deification.
Furthermore, the custom of apotheosizing the fathers of emperors who had not
held imperial power became something approaching standard practice, along the
same lines as Philip the Arab had followed for his father Marinus. One father of a
Christian emperor certainly deified was Theodosius the Elder; it is likely that
Gratian the Elder, father of Valentinian I and Valens, also received this distinc-
tion, to judge from the phrasing of a badly damaged inscription found at Cirta in
Numidia:

To a man of most fortunate remembrance and one who will be celebrated through
all the ages, Gratian, the father of our lords and princeps Valentinian and Valens,
noble and always triumphant Augusti. Antonius Dracontius vir clarissimus, act-
ing in place of the Praetorian Prefect of the African provinces, dedicated (his)
statue adjacent to the Capitol, under the supervision of Valerius [. . .] equestrian
(vir egregius) priest of the imperial cult (sacerdotalis).

This inscription provides important clarification as to how and where the images
of deified emperors were emplaced. In this instance it was set up adjacent to the
Capitol (iuxta C[apitolium]), the temple of every Roman colonia that housed the
triad of Juppiter, Juno and Minerva. The provincial priest of the cult carried out
the installation. The co-emperors’ deified father may well have been the object of
honourific rituals at the hands of people involved in sacrifice in the Capitol.
Gratian’s consecratio took place not long after the accession of Valentinian I and
Valens to imperial power, for Antonius Dracontius is known to have been active
c. 365. It was a natural act of gratitude to a father whose services had paved the
way for the brothers’ imperial investiture. The “divine character” of the elder
Gratian is explained in Ammianus Marcellinus’ brief laudatory biography. The
deification of Valentinian I proceeded without any objection and is recorded in an
inscription found at Gigithe in Byzancena (ca. 378):

For Valentinian (II), the most vigourous princeps Augustus, begotten from a di-
vine lineage. F[l(avius)] Vivius Benedictus, [equestrian] governor of the province
of Tripolitania, dedicated (this) to his numen and majesty always.

Where deification was not possible, the panegyrists took over the task, following
the example of the anonymous panegyrist who alluded, while writing in A.D. 291,
the divine parentage of Maximianus Herculeus (siquidem vos dis esse genitos . . .).  

The starting point for this discussion must inevitably be the death of Fl. Valerius Constantius, Herculean Caesar in 293–305 and Augustus in the West 305–6, and the father of Constantine. Constantius I was the first of the college of Tetrarchs to die and become divus. As has been seen, there is no correlation between the religious opinions of particular emperors and their deification. We might take Constantius I as an example. There is little evidence to verify or circumscribe his religious beliefs, apart from cultic inscriptions erected in his name. They bear little reference to any sense of personal religion. It was left to Eusebius to pass on the story that on his deathbed in Eburacum Constantius “offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God” for the arrival of his eldest son Constantine, set his affairs in order and then expired (25 July 306). The terminology of divine names during this period is unusual. There was a strong tendency to designate the god of one’s own devotion using terms such as ‘the divine’, ‘the divinity’ and the ‘highest divinity’. It was a type of theological correctness that was largely confined to the late Tetrarchic period. Eusebius’ description is consistent with this transitory phase of Mediterranean religious history. Constantius is elsewhere described as being “on friendly terms with the God over all” and “attached to what pleases God”; it is also said that he recognised “only the God over all” and condemned “the polytheism of the godless”. All this was fairly easy to come by, and could have meant practically anything in the monotheistic jargon of the late Tetrarchic period, assuming that Eusebius is expressing the actual terminology that Constantine the Great reported to him about his father’s beliefs – something that may be open to question.

Eusebius’ claim that Constantius was the first of the Tetrarchs to be deified is corroborated by the epigraphic evidence – not least because his predecessors the Augusti Diocletian and Maximian had retired and were going to be alive for many years: “He was the first of the four to be proclaimed one of the gods by the Romans, being deemed worthy of every honour that could be bestowed on an emperor after his death” (πρώτος τε ἐν θεοῖς ἀνηγρόφειτο παρ’ αὐτοῖς, ἄπάσις μετὰ θάνατον, ὅσῃ βασιλεί τις ἄν ὀδηγεῖτο, τιμὴ ἥξιωμένος). The date of Constantius’ deification was quite early. An inscription found near Chester in Anglia seems to put this well before Caesar Constantine’s march on Rome in 312. It is unknown when, or if, the Senate in Rome ratified this:

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43 Paneg. XI (III) 2.4. See Rodgers 1986, 77–78.
44 Eus. v. Const. 1.21 (Cameron – Hall 1999, 76).
46 It is probably better to disregard Eusebius’ claim that Constantius surrounded himself with Christian holy men at this juncture; however, it cannot be excluded that he consulted with the bishops of the larger cities lying inside his jurisdiction.
47 Eus. h. e. 8.13.
48 ILS 682. Dessau was convinced that the inscription belonged to a time near the army’s proclamation of Constantine as Augustus. The deification would have had to be formally voted by the
To emperor Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus, pious, fortunate nobilissimus Caesar, son of the deified (divus) Constantius, pious Augustus.

Constantius’ deification was not the last; there is good evidence to show that the emperors of the First and Second Tetrarchies were all formally deified except Maximinus Daia, who had to be condemned for reversing Galerius’ edict of toleration for the Christians. Maxentius’ son Romulus became divus after his death sometime after his second consulship 309, as an inscription from the Circus of Maxentius indicates: 49

To the deified Romulus, a man of most noble remembrance, consul ordinarius for the second time, son of our lord Maxentius unconquered and perpetual Augustus, grandson of the deified elder Maximian and of the deified younger Maximian and [. . .].

Furthermore, an inscription at Caesarea in Mauretania reports: 50

To the son of the deified Maximianus, son-in-law of the deified Maximianus (Galerius), most fortunate emperors, our lord M. Aurelius Valerius Maxentius, perpetual emperor of the whole world, pious, fortunate, unconquered and most glorious perpetual Augustus. Valerius Faustus vir perfectissimus, governor of the province of Mauretania Caesariensis, dedicated (this) to his guardian spirit (numen) and majesty.

The two inscriptions were cut between early May 311 to 28 October 312, after Galerius’ death but before Constantine’s victory at the Milvian Bridge. 51 The younger Maximianus mentioned here was in fact Galerius (viz. Maximianus Galerius), the Augustus in Oriens, who died in 311, and who was evidently young Romulus’ father-in-law. Maxentius’ presence in Rome may have secured the support of the Senate for the three deifications. 52 Maximian and Galerius also became divi, once again before Constantine took possession of Rome in late 312. It would have been difficult for Constantine or any succeeding Christian emperor to abrogate these arrangements, and it is doubtful that there were any pragmatic reasons for doing so, notwithstanding the biased denunciations of the Tetrarchs found in the works of Christian writers like Eusebius and Lactantius. There were sound reasons for emphasising the dynastic connection, namely to legitimize the succession of Fausta’s sons after the execution of Constantine’s half-brothers in September 337, for Constantine’s three sons by Fausta had the elder Maximian as

49 ILS 673 = CIL VI 1138.
50 ILS 671.
51 BARNES 1981, 47, 206, puts the consecratio of the elder Maximianus ca. 317/18 at the instigation of Constantine. But see his p. 304 n. 126.
52 Maxentius held the consulship four times during his brief reign, in 308 with his son Romulus, in 309 with his son Romulus both for the second time, in 310 alone, and in 312. See ILS 668.
their grandfather.\textsuperscript{53} The accuracy of this interpretation is proven by a milestone inscription of Constantius II on a stretch of military highway near Sirmium (present-day Mitrovica) running between the Save and Drave rivers (ca. A.D. 354).\textsuperscript{54}

Five miles. Emperor Caesar Flavius Iulius Constantius, pious, fortunate Augustus, greatest victor, eternally triumphant, [son] of the deified Constantine, best and greatest princeps, grandson of the deified Maximianus and Constantius, descendant of the deified Claudius . . . with proconsular imperium for the roads that have been strengthened, bridges rebuilt (and) the Republic restored, laid quinari-us stones across Illyricum for the distance of 346 miles from Atrantis to the Save river.

That this was the broad consensus during the reign of Constantius II is corroborated in literary documents like Julian’s First Encomium dedicated to him and in the epigraphy of the fourth-century.

There is a consistent progression in the claims being made for the Constantinian dynasty, as diachronic analysis reveals. The divine status of Constantius I as the father of Constantine began to be attested in the epigraphy of Italy not later than 314, during C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus’ service as \textit{consul ordinarius} for the second time and \textit{praefectus urbi} in Rome, who erected a dedicatory inscription to Constantine in the forum of Trajan.\textsuperscript{55}

To our lord, restorer of the human race, enlarger of the Roman empire and its rule, founder of eternal security, Flavius Valerius Constantinus fortunate, Maximus, pious perpetual Augustus, son of the divine Constantius, perpetually and everywhere revered (\textit{filio divi Constanti semper et ubique venerabilis}). C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus, \textit{vir clarissimus, consul ordinarius, praefectus urbi}, acting as judge in sacred affairs, who consecrated it to his guardian spirit (\textit{numen}) and majesty.

Constantine was not averse to his \textit{genius} or guardian spirit being saluted at a time when the memory of Christian martyrs who had died refusing to pour libations in imperial cult was still vividly alive. The phenomenon is apparent in Italy even earlier, on a milestone in the territory of Harpinium dated to 313, but in the latter case the grandiloquent phrases are lacking and Constantine is designated merely as \textit{imperator} Caesar with the patronymic.\textsuperscript{56} He is saluted in an inscription at Vicetia in 328 as “best of princes in human affairs, son of the deified Constantius, born for the good of the Republic” (\textit{humanarum rerum optimus princeps, divi Constanti filius, bono reipublicae natus}), a clear intensification of the familial rhetoric that qualifies the obscure origin of Constantine’s mother Helena in a positive way.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{53} Fausta herself suffered \textit{damnatio memoriae}, with the erasure of her name and that of Caesar Crispus (\textit{inter 8 November 323 – fin. 326}). \textit{ILS} 710.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{ILS} 732 = \textit{CIL} III 3705. See also \textit{ILS} 730 = \textit{CIL} II 4844 (\textit{prope Bracam in Callaecia}).
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{ILS} 692 = \textit{CIL} VI 1140.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{ILS} 693. The inscription is dated by Constantine’s third consulship.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{ILS} 697 = \textit{CIL} V 8011.
The commemoration of Constantine with his deified father is more typical of the provinces on the northern coast of the Mediterranean than the rest of the empire. It is commemorated, for example, on a milestone at Cabassa in Narbonensis, on which the elder Maximian is mentioned as his nepos, an apparent reference to his status as father-in-law of Constantine after the latter’s marriage to Fausta.\(^58\) Such acknowledgements are lacking in any number of other inscriptions dedicated to his numen, including at Ain-Roua in Mauretania, Cirta, Luxor in Egypt, Ostia, Sitifis in Mauretania and Uci Maioris in Africa.\(^59\) There is an undated inscription at Troesmis in Scythia Minor, where he is designated as a “son of the Augusti” (filius Augustorum). As Hermann Dessau explains, this inscription was erected in the Praefecture of Thrace, which lay under Galerius’ jurisdiction; it may well reflect eastern practice, inasmuch as Lactantius uses the same phrase. Maxentius and possibly Maximinus Daia were also known by this title.\(^60\) The question remains as to whether Constantine’s particular status, as the first emperor of the Tetrarchy to have a deified father, was being suppressed in Oriens in the interest of collegial politics and of putting Constantine’s ambitious nature into the shadows.

Eusebius of Caesarea was the first Christian literary figure to propagate the story of Constantine’s descent from his purported ancestor, the emperor Claudius II Gothicus. It was not original to him. Dessau regards this as having begun not long after the death of the elder Maximian in 310.\(^61\) This particular facet is attested in an undated inscription dedicated by the superintendent of an imperial weapons factory (praepositus fabricae [armorum]).\(^62\)

To the enlarger of the Roman empire, founder of public peace, our lord Flavius Constantinus Maximus, victor, perpetual Augustus, grandson of the deified Claudius, son of the deified Constantius. Sertorius Silanus vir perfectissimus, superintendent of the factory, dedicated it to his guardian spirit and majesty.

The off-hand way in which the equestrian officer delivered the message of Constantine’s descent from Claudius (divi Claudi nepos) suggests that it had been in wide circulation for some time. It also appears in an undated inscription at Rome commemorating the reconstruction of the aqueduct of Virgo in Rome, along with the standard dedicatory formula of the imperial cult (devotus numini maiestatique eius).\(^63\)

The well-known inscription at Hispellum, in which the college of emperors – Constantine and his three sons by Fausta – permitted the foundation of a temple (aedes) and local priesthood of the cult of the gens Flavia at the request of the

\(^{58}\) ILS 684 = CIL XII 5470.
\(^{59}\) ILS 687–688, 691, 696.
\(^{60}\) Lact. mort. pers. 32.
\(^{61}\) BARNES 1981, 34–36, 40–41 etc.
\(^{63}\) ILS 702.
*curiales*, has been frequently commented upon. As a token of the progress of the imperial cult, the inscription is significant in two respects: it points to the continued existence of priests of the imperial cult (here designated as *sacerdotes*), and the proscription of sacrifice in the name of the dynasty. The latter was the culmination of a long process. The decree is far from being earth-shaking. It permits the full range of spectacles associated with non-Christian religious festivals, a principle that remained in force throughout the fourth century. Sacrifice is proscribed merely in the cult of the *gens Flavia* at this *temenos*: “lest the building dedicated to our name be polluted by the errors of contagious religious excess” (*ne aedis nostro nomini dedicata cuiusquam contagiose superstitionis fraudibus polluantur*). The word *contagiosus* is confined in the secular literature to a certain Vegetius’ *De arte veterinaria sive de mulomedicina*, and tends to appear in the terminological contexts of medical science, in phrases such as *passio contagiosa* and *scabies contagiosa* (ca. 420). The Hispellum inscription clearly uses the term in the sense of spiritual disease, with possible physical repercussions, as expressed for example in Book 2 of Porphyrius of Tyre’s work on abstinence from animal meat, where sacrifice is denounced because, in Pythagorean theology, it was thought to attract the daemons of disease. The cult of the *gens Flavia* continues to be attested in the epigraphy thereafter through the *pontifex Flavialis* in Rome. It is possible that the ritual aspect of the cult of deified emperors was being exaggerated in some quarters. A useful corrective to this comes from the pen of Vegetius in his *De re militari* where he emphasises service to the monarch as the proper attitude:

When an emperor has accepted the name of Augustus, loyal devotion must be offered and ceaseless service must be applied to him, as though to a present and incarnate God. For either in peace or in war one serves God when one loyally loves him who rules under God’s authority.

III. Temples

Shrines of the deified emperors existed in most urban settlements and permanent military camps between A.D. 244–395. There are many instances of this phenomenon, as for example the temple at Durostorum in Moesia Inferior mentioned in the martyrdom narrative of St. Dasius, where there were ‘images’ of the living

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64 *ILS* 705. *GASCOU* 1967; *CURRAN* 1996.
65 On sacrifice in the imperial cult before 305, see *PRICE* 1984, 207–233.
66 For example, *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.8.
68 *CIL VI* 1690, 1691, 1694.
69 [*Veget. mil.* 2.5], quoted from *COLEMAN–NORTON* 1966, 302.
70 For a list of the temples of the imperial cult in Asia Minor, see *PRICE* 1984, 249–274. For central and southern Greece: *TRUMMER* 1980.
emperors of the First Tetrarchy. At times the imperial images were housed in the temples of other gods.

The era of the Christian empire saw the destruction of many pagan temples, and the conversion of many others into Christian buildings. Friedrich Deichmann, writing in 1939, came up with a provisional list of temples converted into Christian churches. Subsequent research in epigraphic and hagiographic texts indicates the execution of many more temple conversions than Deichmann was able to trace. As R.P.C. Hanson has suggested, the main sequence of converting temples into churches took place from the late fourth century onward. It is significant that among the recorded examples there is not a single instance of a temple specifically dedicated to the imperial cult being converted for other uses, whether secular or ecclesiastical. It has been argued that one of the excavated temples in Eretria on the island of Euboea housed many images dedicated to the imperial cult. Its date of destruction must be near that of the Parthenon and Asklepieion in Athens, which was probably ca. 484. An examination of the epigraphic and historical evidence suggests that, although some emperors like Maximianus Galerius, Diocletian’s original junior colleague in the Iovian branch of the Tetrarchy, were subjected to damnatio memoriae in some local contexts, there does not always seem to have been a systematic attempt to remove their statuary, altars and other trappings of cult when it was a case of harming buildings and shrines dedicated to the imperial cult proper. Actions of this kind seem not to have been tolerated, particularly if the actors were not agents of the imperial administration, such as bishops, provincial curiae and city councils. It must be recognised that shrines for deified emperors did at times exist in temples dedicated to other great gods. This may partly explain why some temples were left intact in the interest of civic functions. In instances where a building was being converted or destroyed, it would have been necessary to remove the imperial images and install them at another appropriately consecrated installation before the contemplated action could take place. Certain of these features will become obvious through a survey of the epigraphy.

Turning to the inscriptions, the imperial cult is indicated in many different ways, sometimes indirectly. The most common form of expression is a prayer, sacrifice or construction of a small shrine on behalf of the ruling prince or co-emperors. The offering was often made to a tutelary spirit on behalf of the emperor, as for example his Victoria or Nikē, Fortuna or Tychē, or else on behalf of

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71 M. Das. 7 (Musurillo 1972, 276–277).
72 IGR I 1181.
75 Hanson 1978.
76 The excavator (Schmid 2001, 140–141) does not commit himself to a particular date.
77 Trombley 1993–94, 1:310–311. MacMullen (1997, 187–188 n. 59) provides no evidence (or arguments) for his supposition that these events took place some decades earlier.
78 On the city councils and priesthoods in the fourth century, see Horstkotte 1989.
his Salus or Hygeia. These sacred acts were sometimes performed under the immediate impact of events, particularly in wars and in case of regime change. One such inscription commemorates a military victory by the dux of Noricum and Pannonia Superior. The date was 27 June 310:79

A sacred offering (sacrum) to the Victoria Augusta on behalf of the safety of our lords Maximinus and Constantine and Licinius perpetual Augusti. Aur(elius) Senecio vir perfectissimus (and) dux ordered that a temple (templum) be made anew for her (or ‘their’) numen because of a vow, through the instance of Val(erius) Sambarra, praepositus of the Equites Dalmatae Aquesianes Comitatenses, because of the victory that took place on the fifth day before the Kalends of July when Andronicus and Probus were consuls.

This engagement is otherwise unattested. Shrines of this type existed in many places and were being constantly set up in localities where Roman military forces achieved local successes against the barbarians. Armies passing on campaign would pause to perform the necessary rituals at these sites, even in the later fourth century. A good example of this was seen during Julian Augustus’ campaign in Mesopotamia in 363. Ammianus Marcellinus reports:80

Setting out from [Circesium] we came to a place called Zaitha, which means ‘olive tree’. Here we saw, conspicuous from afar, the tomb (tumulum) of the emperor Gordianus. . . . When Julian had there, in accordance with his native piety (ingenita pietas), made offerings to the deified emperor (consecratus princeps), and was on his way to Dura (a deserted town), he saw a troop of soldiers in the distance and halted.

The monument does not seem to have survived to the present day, so its configuration cannot be deduced. One might suppose from this that the customary rules of ritual purity did not apply in connection with sacrifices performed at the tombs or cenotaphs of deified emperors, even though their corpses might have been interred within.

Other open-air shrines may have existed, although the sources do not always provide the requisite detail. For example, Lactantius mentions an open-air site outside Nicomedia in Asia Minor, one of the eastern imperial residences before the foundation of Constantinople. The place was used on 1 May 305 for the ceremonial abdication of Diocletian:81

The gaze of all was upon Constantine . . . the soldiers who were present, the military officers who had been chosen and summoned from the legions . . . were making their prayers for him (vota faciebant). There was some high ground just under three miles out of the city, on whose summit Maximian had himself assumed the purple, and on which a statue had been put up with a statue of Jupiter (et iber columna fuerat erecta cum Iovis signo).

79  ILS 664.
80  Amm. 23.5.7–8.
81  Lact. mort. pers. 19.2.
The image of Jupiter certainly commemorated the Iovian branch of the Tetrarchy. The question remains whether an altar existed for votive offerings and whether there was a *synoikism* with the cult of the father of the gods with that of the *numina* of the emperors. The latter seems quite possible. This practice was known particularly in Egypt. A rare dedication from the brief reign of the usurper Quietus of A.D. 260 found at Koptos in Egypt seems to indicate such a *synoikism*. The inscription is broken in many places:

82 On behalf of the security (*diamonë*) of Quietus, one of the Augusti, to the gods [housed in the same temple], the temple (*temenos*) and statue in it [---] Areios whose family name is [---] city councillor [---] of the Red Sea with [---].

The statue in question was evidently that of the emperor Quietus, since there appears to be no space for names of the other divinities on the stone. There is a possible *synoikism* of a shrine of the emperors with a god at Gerasa. The inscription concerns a *stoa* dedicated to Artemis, whose effigy appears on locally minted coins:

83 For a blessing. In the year 142 (of the province of Arabia). On behalf of the preservation of the Augusti. Using their own funds the men who reverence the gods (or ‘the emperors’) made the *stoa* for Artemis and the cistern in the year 142 (= A.D. 247/8).

The dedicants may have been the local college of priests of the imperial cult. They are styled as ‘the reverers’ (*sebomenoi*), a term that is normally devoid of any technical meaning, but here it could be a play on the Sebastoi or Augusti named at the start of the inscription. It is not unlikely that the *stoa* contained altars dedicated to both Artemis and the deified emperors, but positive proof is lacking. The reigning emperors were once again Philip the Arab and his son.

It is also likely that statues of reigning emperors were housed in the ancillary shrines of temples that were dedicated to local and ethnic divinities. This must have been particularly the case in the Provincia Arabia during the *imperium* of Philip the Arab, who established in his native town Philippopolis the cult of his father, the deified Marinus, who goes by the name of “Marcus Iulius Marinus deified father of the Augustus” (*M. ˁIu̇ḷi̇u̇s Māṛi̇us, θ̣ε̣ό̣ς, πατήρ [ṭọδ̣ Σε̣β̣α̣σ̣τ̣ο̣ῦ]) in one inscription, in the instance a statue erected by the *ducenarius* Aurelius Antoninus.84 The legate of the province of Syria (* المختلفُ) was also responsible for a dedication to the deified Marinos (*θέος Μαρείνος [. . . .] τος (ˁİp̣[ατικός]) at Philippopolis.85 The *terminus ante quem* of these inscriptions was the overthrow and apparent *damnatio memoriae* of Philip in 249. The deification of the fathers of emperors who had not themselves held the imperial office became a tendency from this time onwards, among them Gratian the Elder, father of

82 *IGR* I 1181.
83 *IGR* III 1363.
84 *IGR* III 1199 = [*Waddington 2075*]. On Marinus, see KÖRNER 2002, 49–54.
85 *IGR* III 1200a.
Valentinian I (364–375) and the elder Theodosius, father of Theodosius the Great (379–395), as noted above.

Prayers for the safety (σωτηρία) of the Arab emperor abound elsewhere in Arabia. An apposite example is seen in an inscription of 15 October 245 at Admedera:

For the preservation of our lords the emperors, the Caesars Marcus Iulius Philippus (senior and junior) the Augusti, the temple of Aeichala was finished and dedicated in the time of the sacred treasurers M. Aurelius Aneus son of Gaôrus and Gaôrus son of Oasaithos the city councilor (βουλευτῆς), from the funds of the god.

Aeichala, a seldom-attested Arabian divinity with an established local cult, was invoked as though he were Philip’s tutelary god. The emperor’s name and title were erased in consequence of his ostensible damnatio memoriae after Decius assumed the imperium. Another inscription at Admedera, whose date needs to be emended either to A.D. 294/5 or 394/5, reflects continuity in the imperial cult among military officers down to the time either of the Tetrarchy or the Theodosian dynasty:

For the preservation of (our) lords [the Augusti?], Annianus, groom (stratōr) of the commander of the Ala Vocontiorum, built the architrave (to epistyllion) from his own funds in accordance with his own vow and that of his children. The architrave was emplaced in a temple of the deified emperors to judge from the prayer at the beginning. There are other less specific inscriptions of this character. The size and impressiveness of these installations varied considerably, and they were as likely to appear in the countryside as much as in the cities. So for example at Meron in Phrygia Salutaris, a badly damaged inscription with some doubtful readings, probably of the reign of Gallienus (A.D. 260), reports that the revenue collector (μισθωτής) of the nearby imperial estates set up an installation:

[On behalf of the perpetual safety emperor Gallienus – Ger]manicu[s Caesar and] of the dēmos of Prymmessos and] the dēmos of Nac[ol]ia. Appa the revenue collector [of the villages] of Caesar with his [wife Rho]dō offered the building of [the temple?] from his own funds. [---] son of Alexander (the) village headman (κομάρχος) took charge of the god (?).

Prayers for the preservation of the emperor were an important pro forma in inscriptions mentioning the construction of installations designed for the protection of the empire. Inscriptions use the language of sanctification as though such sites were altars or other cultic appurtenances, as with a tower erected at Adraae in

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86 IGR III 1093 = [Waddington 2562g].
87 IGR III 1094.
88 IGR IV 1487 (Sedikeui, Asia, A.D. 251–253); IGR IV 568 (Aezani, Asia, reign of Diocletian).
89 IGR IV 592, 593. ILS 540.
Arabia: “For the preservation of our lord the emperor Gallienus Augustus, the
tower was dedicated (ὀ πύργος ἀφετερώθη) . . . (etc.).”

A reigning emperor might sometimes be characterised as a divinity in the
conventionalised language of a local cult. This was the case at Baitokaikai in
Phoenice, where the co-emperors Valerian and Gallienus renewed the privileges
of the priesthood who served the local Zeus-Baal that had originally been con-
ferred by one of the Seleucid kings sometime between 280 and 264 B.C. (regum
antiqua be[nt]eficia). The resolution of thanks voted to the co-emperors by the
city was addressed “to the divine Augustus” (θεὸς Αὐγοῦστω), evidently with
the senior emperor Valerian in mind.

At other times the emperors are merely mentioned in the dating formula,
where the imperial cult stands in niggardly contrast to the recognised powers of
great gods and the spirit of devotion found in their adherents. One thinks for ex-
ample of an inscription from the time of the Tetrarchy at Akoris in Egypt in
which the priest Dydymos (sic) commemorates the life-giving strength of the
Egyptian gods (August 290), and a prayer of thanksgiving after return from exile
dedicated to the “highest divinity who hearkens” by a certain Aurelius Valerius
Sogous son of Olympus at Panticapaeum in the Crimea (A.D. 306). There is also
much terminology that expresses an empty formalism, as for example the “most
holy” (ὄσιωτατοι) emperors of the First Tetrarchy in a boundary inscription from
Doliche in Euphratensis.

Temples of the deified emperors might remain standing for centuries, as for
example the sacred Kaisareion in Smyrna. A striking example is seen in the
temple of the deified Vespasian at Baiae near Naples, which was still in use for
public functions in A.D. 289. Another example of this is the temple of Hadrian at
Ephesus. It was repaired after an earthquake, possibly the one of A.D. 358, and a
new frieze, making use of pre-existing material, was incorporated into its interior.
Probably dating from the time of Julian, Section D of the frieze may represent
himself (a man of average height in military garb), his father (a somewhat taller
man wearing a mantle that resembles a toga) and his grandfather the deified Con-
stantius I. It is one of the chronologically latest examples of pre-Christian reli-
gious art of any kind to have survived.

90 IGR III 1286 (A.D. 261/2).
91 It is unknown which Antiochus was the author of the grant.
92 IGR III 1020 = CIL III 184.
93 IGR [*I-II] 1134; IGR III 873.
94 IGR III 1002.
95 IGR IV 1480.
96 ILS 4175.
97 FLEISCHER 1967. The author of this study does not commit himself absolutely to the identifica-
tions I have made. The figures in question are D8, D9 and D12, pp. 31–34 and pl. 17. It is sug-
gestive that the deified figure I take to be divus Constantius stands next to a figure that seems to
be Hercules, the tutelary divinity of Constantius’ branch of the Tetrarchy. It is also thought-
provoking that the figure I take to be Julian (D12) – who distinguished himself as a military
IV. Images, Priesthoods, Sacrifice and the Accessories of Cult

There is a vast number of inscriptions between ca. 244 and 395 recording the erection of images of the emperors. In most cases it is impossible directly to establish these images’ character as accessories to the imperial cult. The stones on which the dedications are made have frequently been moved from their original locations for secondary use as building materials. It is difficult to determine whether the images were originally sited in temples of the imperial cult or simply positioned in urban public spaces as tokens of honour for reigning emperors; it is not always clear in what kind of building or shrine they were housed. When cultic personnel and the activities they sponsored are mentioned, however, it is possible to draw such connections. This is borne out in an inscription possibly from the reign of Probus at Nikopolis in Moesia Inferior. The priesthood expresses its views in Greek, but there must have been a strong Latin ethnic element in the local population:

The council and most sacred dēmos of the city of the Nicopolitans on the Danube erected the (image of) M. Aurelius Probus, master of land and sea, fortunate Augustus, [G]e[t]jicus (?) Parthicus Maximus with blessings, in the consulship of Cl. Annius Natalianus, legatus propraetore (antistratēgos), under the supervision of Asklepiodoros son of Asklepiades, sacerdotalis of the province (archieratikos).

Asklepiades was the priest of the imperial cult in Moesia Interior and may well have supervised the emplacement of this image of a living emperor in the local sebasteion. The examples that follow belong mostly to cultic contexts or make reference to cultic behaviour. It must be borne in mind that the images of deified emperors appear to have held the same status as those of recognised great gods.

Reports about imperial images in historical sources are often vague as to the context. A good example of this is found in Ammianus Marcellinus’ report about the return of Jovian to Antioch after the retreat from Mesopotamia in 363. I must quote our eyewitness at length because of its theological implications:

[W]e came by long marches to Antioch; where for successive days, as though the divinity were angered, many fearful portents were seen. . . . For the statue of Caesar Maximinus, which stood in the vestibule of the imperial palace, suddenly dropped the brazen ball, in the form of the globe of heaven, which it was holding.

commander in Gaul – is surrounded by the female divinities Athena, Aphrodite and Hekate. Julian may have held Athena in special reverence as the philosopher goddess, and Hekate not least because of the influence on him of the theurgist Maximus of Ephesus. These opinions are provisional, pending further study of the cultural, political and religious background.

98 For the period under consideration here, see PRICE 1984, 175–177, 203–206.
99 These observations are a product of reviewing the inscriptions collected in Cagnat’s IGR.
100 IGR [*I–II] 582.
101 Other inscriptions use a similar formula, but fail to mention cultic personnel, e.g. IGR IV 626 (Trajanopolis, Asia, A.D. 251/2).
102 Amm. 25.10.1–2.
It is at first sight surprising that the image of Maximianus Herculeus, Diocletian’s co-Augustus in the Tetrarchy, was still found in the imperial residence at Antioch in view of the possible damnatio memoriae of his former senior colleague in 311, as reported by Lactantius. Perhaps the measure was confined to the West, with Licinius unwilling to act on it in the East and the matter becoming otiose after the latter’s demise in 323. It is again possible that the image in question stood in a shrine, in view of its presence in the palace.

The temples of the imperial cult were still quite active in the fourth century. There is the example of a temple at Capua in the Campania, where a certain Romanus Iunior, a priest of the imperial cult of the province (sacerdos ferialis dominorum), was ordered to carry out an annual calendar of festivals, including the vows (vota) for the preservation of the emperors, at the command of the co-emperors (viz. Theodosius I, Valentinian II and Arcadius). These he performed on 22 November A.D. 387, apparently the birthday of Valentinian II. It seems that there was no objection to these activities or the other local festivals in the calendar, as long as the proscribed sacrifices were avoided.

Sacrifices normally accompanied the celebration of the cult of the deified emperors. Clear examples of the ritual are nevertheless difficult to find in the sources, apart from the Christian martyrodic narratives. Maximinus Herculeus is known to have performed sacrifices. It is reported that, after his installation ceremony for the consulship was interrupted by a barbarian raid, he celebrated the victory in Trier with sacrifices. The panegyrist characterizes the event as a sacrifice to the emperor’s own numen (sacrific[i]s . . . numini tuo implesti). Sacrificial liturgies are exceptionally difficult to trace under the fourth-century Christian emperors, who surely followed the example of Constantine as expressed in the Hispellum inscription in abhorring those proceedings. Yet the use of incense in front of imperial statues and portraits continued even among Christians, to judge from the remarks of Philostorgius the ecclesiastical historian. Whether sacrifices continued thereafter in the imperial cult is a worthwhile question. There would have been little interference with this during the period of toleration between A.D. 361 and 381. Similarly, there may have been a liberalisation in some localities during the administration of the Praetorian Prefect Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus in Oriens. The latter may have lived up to his name Εὐτολμιος, as an inscription from Antinoopolis in Egypt suggests. It was carved on an altar dedicated to the co-emperors:

103 Lact. mort. pers. 42.1: Eodemque tempore senis Maximiani statuae Constantini Constantini iussu revellebantur et imagines ubicumque pictus esset, detrhebantur. Cf. DOWNEY 1953, esp. 114 n. 1.
104 ILS 4918 = CIL X 3792.
105 PRICE 1980.
106 Paneg. X (II) 10.6.5. RODGERS 1986, 75–76.
107 See next section.
108 OGIS 723. Cf. WACHSMUTH 1873.
Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus, the most distinguished Praetorian Prefect, consecrated (this altar) with the customary dedication, in the time of the distinguished governor Flavius Septimius Eutropius, on behalf of the emperors of (all) the earth under the sun, our triumphant masters, Valentinian (II), Theodosius (I) (and) Arcadius, the eternal Augusti, and the most distinguished Flavius Honorius.

This altar is a final reminder of the sacrificial tradition of the imperial cult. Local devotees may have placed incense on the altar fires, just as some Christians did beneath the porphyry statue of Constantine in Constantinople. The survival of this unique document is suggestive that the altar in Antinoopolis remained in long use, perhaps for the duration of the Theodosian house in Oriens. The cultic personnel of the temples have been thoroughly documented. There is therefore little more to do than note some particularly striking cases. The offices of provincial high priest of the imperial cult (sacerdotalis provinciae) and municipal priest (flamen perpetuus) are attested in many places from the beginning of the period under consideration here until A.D. 525/6. The preponderance of epigraphic evidence comes from the African provinces. It is clear that, in addition to the priestly functions, the sacerdotalis and flamines had important civic duties to perform, like a certain Ecidicius at Cirta-Constantina who took charge of repairing the principal water conduit bringing water into the city.

This fact in no way vitiated their role as curators of the imperial images and shrines. Some municipalities had large numbers of flamines. For example, an inscription at Thamugadi in Numidia dating from the later years of Constantius II or Julian provides a register of men (album ordinis co(loniae) Tham(ugadorum)) who had recently held key municipal offices. Among them are two sacerdotalis, with a flamen in the prescript. There is a second inscription from the reign of Julian where the sacerdotalis are designated as coronati provinciae. The imperial cult flourished at this time. The flamen Flavius Aquilinus supervised the erection of an altar dedicated to this emperor. It is likely that the priesthoods retained certain cultic functions until the early sixth century. It is therefore difficult to understand why, with the province of Byzacena under the administration of the Vandal kings, a man would identify himself as a “Christian flamen” (fl(amen) p(er)p(etuus) Christianus (sic)) in a funerary inscription. It is found in one of the five early Christian basilicas in Ammaedara (A.D. 525/6):

\[\text{109 See next section.}\]
\[\text{110 On Egypt, see FRANKFURTER 1998, 265–284.}\]
\[\text{111 KORNEMANN 1902, esp. 136–142.}\]
\[\text{112 For the epigraphic record on imperial cult in the towns of Africa, see LEPHELLEY 1979, 362–369.}\]
\[\text{113 CIL VIII 7034.}\]
\[\text{114 CIL VIII 2403. MOMMSEN 1877, 77–84.}\]
\[\text{115 CIL VIII 17896.}\]
\[\text{116 CIL VIII 2387.}\]
\[\text{117 CIL VIII 10516. Another flamen, identified as a Christian by the usual symbols, is found at CIL VIII 450.}\]
The Imperial Cult in Late Roman Religion (ca. A.D. 244–395)

Astius Mustelus, a Christian flamen perpetuus, lived seventy-two years. He died (quievit) on the eighth day before the Ides of December in the fourth year of the reign of our lord, king Ildirix.

Christians had never been forbidden to hold office in the imperial cult, but only from taking part in the production of games and theatrical events, as well as participating in sacrifice, as we learn from the Canons 2 and 3 of the Council of Elvira (ca. 305). It is likely that the priests of the imperial cult mentioned in many public, as opposed to funerary inscriptions, were in fact Christians, but positive proof of cult is invariably lacking.

There is limited evidence for the sponsorship and celebration of games by priests of the imperial cult. For example, we learn of the Augustan games being celebrated in Smyrna ca. 253–259. More significantly, a fourth-century inscription at Athens mentions the activities of a flamen:

Flavius Septimius Marcellinus, flamen and ex-agonothete, repaired the gates for the city using his own funds (leaf) [---]. (Fl. Σεπτίμιος Μαρκέλλείνος φλαμ(ήν) καὶ ἀπὸ ἀγωνοθετῶν ἐκ τῶν ἱδίων τοῦς πυλῶνας τῇ πόλει [---].)

The man embodied many of the functions thus far seen: public works, the ritual aspects of the imperial cult and the sponsorship of games.

V. Christian Responses

Christian theological writers had always expressed skepticism about the imperial cult. Their arguments were at times delivered with a degree of deliberate obtuseness and cynicism that is surprising in light of what they surely knew about the realities of the ritual of consecratio, the deification of good emperors after their deaths, and the subsequent honours and rites accorded to them.

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118 For text and analysis, see HEFELE 1907, 221–264.
119 IGR IV 1419.
120 IGR [*II.2] 5206 (ed. Kirchner).
121 In the period before A.D. 244, there is considerable evidence in the martyr acta for Christians refusing to honour the cult of the emperors by pouring libations and other forms of sacrifice. The relevant examples can be briefly summarized. The first instance of Christian contact with the imperial cult is seen in a martyrdom narrative about Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna ca. 156/7. Upon first being interrogated by the chief of police (ἱρηνάρχης), the prelate was invited to make a simple declaration: “What is wrong with saying ‘Caesar is lord’ (ἀβαίνει Καῖσαρ), performing the sacrifices and attendant rituals and thereby saving yourself?” (M. Polyc. 8, ed. MUSURILLO 1972, 8–9). The next phase of the trial took place in the stadium (στάδιον) of the city. The proconsul or governor of the province of Asia took charge of the proceedings, asking Polycarp in simple terms: “Have respect for your age. . . . Swear by the τυχή of the emperor (δρόμον τὴν Καίσαρος τύχην). Repent. Say: ‘Away with the atheists.’” When Polycarp refused, the proconsul posed the question a second time with one addition: “Swear and I will release you. Curse Christ.” Polycarp’s reply was even less compromising, for it made use of the honorific terminology of the emperors and applied it to Christ: “How can I blaspheme my emperor
the imperial cult in the martyrdom narratives appear increasingly in the second half of the third century, and particularly in the time of the Tetrarchy. Refusal to swear by the emperor’s genius was seldom an issue, and it is likely that Christians felt little repulsion at the rituals connected with the cult. Christians had certainly begun to hold the office of flamen or priest of the imperial cult by the time of the Council of Elvira in Spain in the early fourth century, but probably much earlier, in the last quarter of the third century. ¹²² This is consistent with the greater integration of Christians into the wealth and administrative fabric of the late Roman empire.

The references to imperial cult in the martyr passiones require attention, because of the special way in which these documents handle it. The martyr acta are vividly biased against pagan religion, and yet are usually formally respectful toward imperial institutions.¹²³ The more historically grounded martyr acta, which make references to imperial cult for the period under consideration here, even if only obliquely, are found in Musurillo’s select collection of passiones.¹²⁴

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¹²² JONES 1964, 71.
¹²⁴ MUSURILLO 1972.
<table>
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<th>Place of Martyrdom</th>
<th>Date of Martyrdom</th>
<th>Redaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pionius</td>
<td>Smyrna</td>
<td>ca. 250/1 ?</td>
<td>ca. 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fructuosus et al.</td>
<td>Tarragona, Spain</td>
<td>21 January 259</td>
<td>early 4th cent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marinus</td>
<td>Caesarea in Palaestina</td>
<td>ca. 260/1</td>
<td>early 4th cent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>or Marcellus</td>
<td>Leon in Gallaecia</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcellus</td>
<td>Tingis in Mauretania</td>
<td>31 October 298?</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius veteranus</td>
<td>Durostorum, Moesia Inf.</td>
<td>Spring 304</td>
<td>post 306–308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasius</td>
<td>Durostorum, Moesia Inf.</td>
<td>Spring 304</td>
<td>late 4th cent.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agape, Irene, Chione</td>
<td>Thessalonicke</td>
<td>Spring 304</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euplus</td>
<td>Catania, Sicily</td>
<td>29 April</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>or 12 August 304</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crispina</td>
<td>Tebessa</td>
<td>5 December 304</td>
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It is striking that so many of these texts belong to the period of the First Tetrarchy (284–305), and particularly to the aftermath of the Fourth Edict of January–February 304, which required sacrifice to the gods. Apart from the *acta* of Dasius, these documents seem to have mostly been written not long after the events, and therefore have a greater chance of reflecting the types of statements made at these tribunals.

References to imperial cult in the pre-Tetrarchic documents are at times no more than passing observations. So, for example, in the *martyrion* of Pionius, after the latter refuses to sacrifice to the gods, his interrogator responds: “So then perform sacrifice to the emperor instead” (ἐπίθοσον οἴν κἂν τῷ αὐτοκράτορι) as though this was more persuasive and likely to get a positive response from a Christian.\(^{125}\) Similarly, in the *passio* of Bishop Fructuosus, and his deacons Augurius and Eulogus, the proconsul Aemilianus of Hispania Citerior is reputed to have told them: “These [gods] are obeyed, they are feared, they are worshipped. If the gods are not worshiped, then neither are the images of the emperors” (. . . nec imperatorum vultus adorantur).\(^{126}\) The basis for this prosecution was the failure of Fructuosus and his clergy to comply with the edict of Emperor Valerian (July 258) requiring an empire-wide sacrifice, rather than a specific refusal to honour the emperors.\(^{127}\) Once again, it seemed obvious to the magistrate that it was a simple and obvious thing for Christians to worship the emperors, even if they ignored the other cults. The martyrdom of Marinus is rather more explicit. It comes from the pen of Eusebius of Caesarea:\(^{128}\)

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125 *M. Pionii* 8, ed. Musurillo 1972, 146–147. It should be noted that this work shows clear signs of literary re-editing.
127 The decree called for the immediate punishment of Christian clergy. Cypr. ep. 80.1 (*CSEL III* 2,839–840 (*non vidi latine*).)
An army post fell vacant, and according to the order of promotion it was Marinus who was entitled to fill it. But when he was on the point of receiving the office, another man came before the magistrate and attacked Marinus, saying that as a Christian Marinus would not sacrifice to the emperors (Χριστιανὸς γε ὄντι καὶ τοῖς βασιλεῖσι μὴ θύοντι) and should therefore not be allowed to participate in the honours that belonged to the Romans in accordance with their ancient laws, but that the post should fall to himself instead.

It is of some interest that the *acta* of the trial of Cyprian of Carthage are silent about the imperial cult, except for the archbishop’s indirect observation: “We Christians serve this God, we pray to him day and night, for ourselves, for all mankind, for the health of the emperors themselves” (*... et pro incolumitate ipsorum imperatorum*). These prayers were of course delivered without the customary pagan sacrifices.

By the time of the First Tetrarchy, Christians were serving in the imperial guards, regular army formations and imperial administration. A Christian soldier named Aurelius Mannos is mentioned in a funerary inscription at Eumenia in Phrygia: he was a cavalryman and horse-archer holding the special office a *draconarius*, “bearer of the dragon standard” in the office of Castrius Constans, who was civil governor of Phrygia and Caria shortly after 293. Eusebius of Caesarea mentions Adauctus, a senior manager of the imperial estates in the time of Diocletian (*magister rei privatae* and *rationalis summarum*), and Dorotheus, a presbyter of the church of Antioch, who was put in charge of the imperial purple dye workshops in Tyre, a politically sensitive position. It is therefore not surprising to find significant numbers of Christian soldiers mentioned in the martyr *acta*. One of the martyrologies dating from before the Great Persecution, that of Marcellus (ca. 298?), which exists in two recensions, M and N, mentions a practice that was implicitly connected with the imperial cult, that of celebrating the birthdays of the reigning emperors. The situation is set forth in quasi-documentary style in recension M, which places the event in Tingis in Mauretania:

In the city of Tingis when Fortunatus was governor, the birthday celebration of the emperor arrived. Thereupon, while everyone was dining at the banquet tables, a certain Marcellus, one of the centurions, refused these profane festivities (*profana... convivia*). After throwing down his military belt (*cingulum militare*) in front of the legionary stands (*signa legions*), which were then present, he said: “I am a soldier of Jesus Christ the eternal king” (*Iesu Christo regi aeterno militio*).

The birthday of the emperors (*natalis imperatoris*) was presumably celebrated with ad hoc sacrifices. It is not entirely clear from the narrative that Marcellus was compelled to perform the traditional salutes or eat any sacrificial meats. Marcellus is said to have repeated his statement in front of the prefect Anastasius, and

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130 *ILS* 8881.
131 Eus. *h. e.* 8.11 and 7.32.
to have been tried in front of a certain Aurelius Agricolianus, a deputy of the
Prefect of the Praetorian Guard. The report is clarified by a letter found in some
manuscripts of recension N of the acta, which places the event not in Mauretania
but elsewhere, at Leon in the province of Gallaecia, Spain, in the camp of the
Legio VII Gemina: 133

Manlius Fortunatus: a greeting to his Agricolianus. On the most fortunate and
blessed day in the whole world of the double birthday of our lords and of the
same Augusti (and) Caesares, while we were solemnly celebrating it, O lord
Aurelius Agricolianus, Marcellus a regular centurion of the first cohort (centurio
ordinarius), seized by what madness I don’t know, voluntarily ungirded his mili-
tary belt, the sword and staff (balteus et spata et vitis) that he was wearing,
thought to throw them down in the central space of the camp (principia) of our
lords. I thought it necessary to refer this act to your jurisdiction and to have the
man himself sent to you.

The charges centred on Marcellus’ throwing down the symbols of his military
oath (sacramenta). 134 There is no hint that he was put on trial for directly failing
to honour the guardian spirit or majesty of the emperors. The prefect Anastasius’
name, if accurately emended in recension M, is a plausibly Christian one. 135 It
seems quite likely that Christian soldiers would normally have participated in the
emperor’s birthday celebrations, as long as they did not have to perform sacrifice.
It should be borne in mind that many of these ‘Christians’ would as yet have been
only catechumens and not yet ‘sealed’ by baptism. They would therefore have en-
joyed marginally greater freedom to participate in these festivals. It is worth
noting that Marcellus’ alleged statement in recension M about serving Christ as
‘eternal king’ (rex aeternus) was contumacious, inasmuch as the Tarquinus Su-
perbus had supposedly been placed under damnatio memoriae at the time of the
expulsion of the kings from Rome ca. 510 B.C. 136 It is difficult to say whether
these approximated his original words, or are a consequence of later redaction.
Either way, they are inconsistent with the conservation of Roman political and

133 M. Marcell., recensio N 3, ed. MUSURILLO 1972, 256–257 n. 17. The brevity of the text in
recension N is perhaps an argument in favour of its relative antiquity, but its dating formula is
corrupt, referring to Diocletian and Maximian who resigned in 305 as Augusti, but naming Con-
stantine and Licinius as their Caesars, who together held this rank only between 306–308. A
Christian redactor must have inserted the names of the latter two, displacing the names of the
actual Caesars ca. 298, Galerius and Constantius I, under whom Christians were persecuted. But
this transposition cannot have been made after about 317, when Constantine and Licinius began
to have political differences. Recension N was therefore composed in the first quarter of the
fourth century, sometime between 306 and 317. It therefore reflects an early tradition, but one
that has been consciously modified. Cf. MUSURILLO 1972, 257 n. 16.
135 The manuscripts have Astasius > Anastasius.
religious traditions that typifies the policies of the fourth-century Christian emperors, when the Latin text would have been edited.\textsuperscript{137}

The main sequence of martyrrologies that are under consideration here reflects the situation after the Fourth Edict of Diocletian in January/February 304. It was, according to Eusebius, a “general law” requiring “that in the cities all the people should sacrifice as a whole and offer libations to the images.”\textsuperscript{138} If the martyrrologies are an accurate reflection of the Christian experience of religious coercion, temples of the imperial cult were seldom involved in these proceedings. For example, in the historically authentic \textit{Passio Iuli veterani}, there is a single oblique reference to it. The prosecutor Maximus is reputed to have said: “See how stupid you are as one who more fears a dead man [Christ] than kings \textit{(sic)} who are living.” It would have been obvious in the minds of readers that emperors who had been deified after their deaths did receive worship on the principle of \textit{do ut des}, and that honours to emperors living and dead were a part of the annual religious calendar.\textsuperscript{139}

The martyrdom of Dasius appears to have taken place at Durostorum in Moesia Inferior after Diocletian’s Fourth Edict of early 304.\textsuperscript{140} The martyrdom narrative reflects a late tradition and there are serious difficulties with the historical details found in it. The ostensible event was the festival of Saturn on the first of January, which in this instance involved even Christians participating in revels and mummeries, and their implication in a sacrifice – supposedly involving self-immolation.\textsuperscript{141} The crucial passage in the text from the standpoint of imperial cult is the advice given by a certain Bassus, legate of the Legio XI Claudia, in which Dasius was serving:\textsuperscript{142}

\begin{quote}

The legate Bassus said: “Pray to the images of our masters the emperors who have provided us with peace, give us our rations and every day show concern for our advantage. . . . Dasius, supplicate the sacred images which even the barbarian nations revere.”
\end{quote}

The imperial cult may have proved a convenient vehicle for carrying out Diocletian’s Fourth Edict; its shrines lay in most cities, and a sincere reverence for the Tetrarchs may have been widespread because of their successes in pacifying the frontiers and providing rations to the much enlarged army that now manned the state factories and \textit{officia} of the provincial governors. These sentiments appear

\begin{footnotes}

\item[139] Cf. MACMULLEN 1984. On the imperial cult in the religious calendar, see \textit{P.Dura} 54, quoted in LEE 2000, 16–19.
\item[140] If the narrative has any historical basis, this would put the Fourth Edict at or near the beginning of January. Dasius is reported to have been executed on 20 November, presumably of the same year.
\item[141] The epigraphic evidence suggests that human sacrifice was normally carried out using an animal as a proxy for the designated human ‘victim’. FREND 1952, 79f.
\item[142] \textit{M. Das.} 7–8, ed. MUSURILLO 1972, 276–277.
\end{footnotes}
frequently in the titulature of inscriptions erected in the Tetrarchs’ honour, as for example recorded in an inscription of A.D. 290 at Augusta Vindelicorum in Raetia Secunda (present-day Augsburg) where Diocletian had strengthened the frontier defences through the construction of fortresses and deployment of troops against the Alamanni, Burgundians and Franks. He is characterized as providentissimus princeps, rector orbis ac dominus, fundator pacis aeternae. This is an authentic feature of the Dasius narrative, even if the existing redaction has a terminus post quem in the late fourth century. The customs of ‘praying’ and ‘supplication’ at imperial shrines may well have been characteristic aspects of the cult throughout the first century of the Christian empire.

An early Christian response to the imperial cult is found in the Contra Celsum of Origen, which appears to have been written, following a statement of Eusebius of Caesarea, during the imperium of Philip the Arab. It will be recalled in this connection that Emperor Alexander Severus’ mother granted an audience to Origen in Antioch ca. 232, an event that has been seen as a feature of trends in syncretism and a supposed ‘drift to monotheism’. Whatever Origen’s experience of the imperial household, he has nothing good to say about the imperial cult. On the contrary, he sums up the views found in such diverse predecessors of his as Epicetetus, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and the anonymous authors of the martyrdoms of Polycarp and the Scillitani. He observes:

The doctrine concerning the institution of emperors and rulers is profound. Many questions are raised on this subject by the existence of those who have ruled savagely and tyrannically, or of those who have drifted from exercising rule into debauchery and wantonness. On this account we here omit any discussion of the problem. However, we certainly do not swear by the fortune (genius [tychê]) of the emperor, in the same way as we do not swear by any other supposed god. For if, as some have said, fortune is only a mode of expression like an opinion or a disagreement, we do not swear by something which does not exist as though it were a god, or as if it were a certain reality and had the power to do something, lest we apply the force of an oath to the wrong things. Or if, as some think who say that people who swear by the genius of the Roman emperor are swearing by his daemon . . ., in this case also we ought rather to die than to swear by a wicked and faithless daemon which often commits sin with the man to whom it has been assigned, or sins even more than he does.

143 ILS 618 = CIL III 5810. KELLNER 1971, 156f.
144 The use of a precise Trinitarian formula seems characteristic of the time after the Second Oecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381. M. Das. 8, ed. MUSURILLO 1972, 277.
145 CHADWICK 1965, xiv–xv.
146 Orig. Cels. 8.65 (CHADWICK 1965, 502 with n. 2). At Epict. diss. 4.1.14, we read: “But who can compel me, if not Caesar the lord of all things? Do you not yourself admit that he is one of your masters? Because, as you say, he is the koinos of all things, . . . but know that you are the slave of a great household. Just as the people of Nicopolis were accustomed to shout: ‘By the tychê of Caesar, we are free men!’” (SCHENK 1965, 356 lines 17–23).
147 Orig. Cels. 8.65 (quotations are from the translation by CHADWICK 1965).
Origen shows a deliberate disingenuousness about the imperial cult on one point, for surely he knew that ‘bad’ emperors suffered *damnatio memoriae* at the hands of the Senate, a process that led to the removal of their images from public places and from the temples, the erasure of their names from honorific inscriptions and the annulment of their decrees. He had experienced this any number of times in his early years. When one comes to the time of Constantine, however, one sees the gradual displacement of the idea of the emperor’s *tychē* or *genius* in favour of the Apollonian *divus comes* as seen on a gold *solidus* of 313, culminating eventually in Christ, as embodied in the Chi-Rho borne aloft on the *labarum*.\(^{148}\) Origen puts the solar divinities of the era, including the divine companion of the future emperor Aurelian (270–275), *Sol Invictus*, into a particular context, that of a created being devoid of divine power:\(^{149}\)

> We praise Helios (the sun) as a noble creation of God, which keeps God’s laws and hears the saying, “Praise the Lord, sun and moon”, and with all its power praises the Father and Creator of the universe.

Origen is at pains to deny the accusation of Celsus that “all earthly things have been given to [the emperor], and whatever you receive in this life you receive from him”. He is happy to accept the Homeric dictum “let there be one ruler, one king”, while denying the need for the imperial cult.\(^{150}\) Specifically, a refusal to honour the *tychē* or *genius* of the emperor does not involve a breach of the *pax deorum*, but is conducive to a more permanent terrestrial peace. Origen envisions that the Romans might “neglect the customary honours to both gods and men” with impunity. In making this point Origen implicitly predicts the coming of a Christian empire, whose fulfillment is reported in a triumphalist section of Augustine’s *City of God*, as will be seen later:\(^{151}\)

> Let [everyone] deny the Homeric doctrine, while keeping the doctrine of the divine right of the king and observing the command “Honour the emperor.” Yet on such a basis as this neither would the emperor be left alone [of divine assistance], nor would he be deserted [by the gods], nor would earthly things be in the power of the most lawless and savage barbarians. For if, as Celsus has it, every one were to do the same as I, obviously the barbarians would also be converted to the word of God and would be most law-abiding and mild. And all other worship would be done away and only that of the Christians would prevail. One day it will be the only one to prevail.

Origen concludes his argument with a plea for a *pax Romana* buttressed by Christian prayers – but not sacrifices – for the welfare of the emperor, and may perhaps allude to the reigning emperor, Philip the Arab:\(^{152}\)

\(^{148}\) Krautheimer 1983, 33.
\(^{150}\) Hom. *Il.* 2.205.
\(^{151}\) Orig. *Cels.* 8.68 (CHADWICK 1965, 505).
\(^{152}\) Orig. *Cels.* 8.73 (CHADWICK 1965, 509).
How much more reasonable it is that, while others fight, Christians also should be fighting as priest and worshippers of God, keeping their right hands pure and by their prayers to God striving for those who fight in a righteous cause and for the emperor who reigns righteously...? Moreover, we who by our prayers destroy all daemons which stir up wars, violate oaths, and disturb the peace, are of more help to the emperors than those who seem to be doing the fighting.

Origen’s daemonology is generally consistent with that seen in later writers, both Hellenes and Christians, including Porphyry, Iamblichus and, to take one example, Nilus of Ancyra. Whatever the cogency of Origen’s arguments, the public cult of the emperor suffered little diminution from the reign of Philip the Arab down to that of Theodosius the Great. The continuous series of inscriptions strongly suggests this, even if a somewhat different style of interpreting the imperial cult became a feature of the cult under the Christian empire.

The Christian emperors of the fourth century drew back from the more extreme claims of the Tetrarchy about the divine nature of emperors and their offspring who were presented as “begotten by gods and the begetters of gods” (diis genitis et deorum creatoribus). A good example of this is the reduced claim made by Constantine the Great in the military prayer to the highest divinity composed ca. 321:

We know you as the only God, we recognize you as emperor, we invoke you as an ally, we have gained victories through you, through you we are superior to our enemies, we declare thanks to you for past benefits and we hope for future favours. We are all your suppliants, imploring you to preserve us for the longest time of life, safe and victorious, our emperor Constantine and his God-beloved sons.

Constantine is also said to have given instructions for his full-length portrait with eyes upraised and hands in the orant position to be erected over the gates of palaces in some cities, and for a similar image of his face to be struck on coins. Eusebius leaves open the question of whether images of this type were installed in shrines of the imperial cult as well. The representation of the Christian emperor with the upward gaze, as though contemplating the highest divinity, was not an innovation, but goes back to the second quarter of the second century, as seen for example in busts of the emperors Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius veiled and wreathed as a priest, in the British Museum and the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. The motif is also quite common in non-imperial statuary from the second quarter of the second century onward, in the portraiture of

154 ILS 629 = CIL III 710.
156 Eus. v. Const. 4.14–15. For a coin of the mint of Nicomedia with the upward gaze, see Brown 1971, 27.
priests, philosophers and intellectuals, and aristocratic youths and women, as seen in statuary discovered at Athens and other parts of southern Greece including the islands. The colossal head of Constantine in the Basilica of Rome has this tendency, as do coins of his mother Helena and a bronze head of his son Constantius II. The orant posture makes its appearance in fourth-century Egyptian funerary art and undated graffiti in the catacombs, but has resonances in Celtic religion as the posture of the druid in the act of prophesying or casting a curse. Whatever the impact of Constantine’s images in this form, imperial portraiture reverted thereafter to the direct, piercing gaze previously seen in the images the emperors of the Tetrarchy and some of their predecessors, as for example in the bronze statue of an unidentified Christian emperor at Barletta.

Responses to the cult of worshipping emperors varied with the outlook of particular Christian writers. The ecclesiastical historian Philostorgius condemned the Christians in Constantinople who offered prayers and sacrifices of incense – as he understood it – to an image of Constantine:

This enemy of God accused the Christians of worshipping the image of Constantine standing on a porphyry column with sacrifices, of honouring it by burning incense and lighting lamps, and of offering prayers to it as though it were a god (ὁ θεὸς), and of making supplications to it to fend off misfortunes.

It is likely that Philostorgius is describing what were fairly conventional rituals practiced at imperial shrines, about which few Christians felt compunctions. It is suggestive of continuity in ritual, which could be safely performed in front of the image of a Christian emperor, but not in response to the demands of the Tetrarchs during the Great Persecution. Jerome of Stridon makes a similar observation in an exegesis of Daniel 3:18 in commenting on the three young men who refused to adore the image of Nebuchadnezzar:

Whether it is a statue, as Symmachus says, or a golden image, as others convey, we wish to say that worshippers of God should not adore it. Therefore, the civil governors and prominent men of the world who adore statues and paintings (imagines) of the emperors understand they are doing something which the three boys did not wish to do and thereby pleased God.

Like Philostorgius, Jerome is referring to Christians who should know better than to worship an image. His language is somewhat ambiguous, however, and may

159 VOGT 1965, pl. 31, 61, 70.
162 The following examples are noted by BEURLIER 1891, 285–286 and notes.
163 Philost. h. e. 2.17, ed. BIDEZ – WINCKELMANN 1972, 28.
164 PL 25:507.
not mean the performance of sacrifice. It may refer instead to performing the act of proskynesis, which was de rigueur in the presence of the emperor, when the viewer was confronted with the imperial image in shrines of the imperial cult or public places. Jerome clearly has in mind upwardly mobile public officials and wealthy men who were prepared to engage in every imaginable form of obeisance to promote their advancement.  

Finally, Ambrose of Milan in his Hexaemeron speaks of the importance of the head to the human personality and observes:

The heads of emperors, although molded merely of bronze, and their faces, which are shaped from bronze or marble, are worshipped by mankind.

He goes on to say that the limbs of the human body gravitate around the head as though it were a god (numen). These denunciations, whether direct or implicit, are far from being an absolute condemnation of imperial cult which must have enjoyed the implicit approval of the Christian emperors. Philostorgius’ difficulty with res Constantiana was of course his own partisanship of the anti-Nicene cause.

VI. Conclusions

It seems doubtful that the imperial cult became a source of religious conflict between ca. A.D. 244 and 392. The institution of emperor worship was sufficiently flexible to be adapted to Christian monotheism, where the emperor could no longer be considered divine vis-à-vis the godhead; the emperor acted as its instrument, and enjoyed the assistance of the divinity as his divine companion. The emperor may himself have been the son of a deified father, but he and any children of his were considered God-protected rather than gods in their own right. The parameters of the Constantinian revolution were well suited to the continued maintenance of the emperors’ statues in the shrines of the imperial cult. This was dictated by dynastic politics and religious conservatism even in the minds of Christian emperors. There is no unambiguously official evidence of petitions to deified emperors being validated by the performance of sacrifice. Yet certain pre-Christian appurtenances of cult, including sacrifice, continued in spite of periodic laws coming from the emperors.

It is important to bear in mind that the repression of traditional Mediterranean religion lapsed from the reign of Julian until the early years of Theodosius the Great, ca. 361–381, and that the imperial cult would have undergone little diminution during such a period. The later years of Theodosius marked a decisive turning point; sacrifices and other appurtenances of ritual were banned in the law of 8 November 392 – although the imperial cult is not specifically mentioned – and the Euhemerist critique of pagan theogonies intensified in the hands of

166 Ambr. hex. 6.9.57 (PL 14:266).
Augustine and Rufinus of Aquileia.\textsuperscript{167} Most priesthoods were abolished, but the list of titles in the law omits the priests of the imperial cult at the provincial and urban levels, the \textit{sacerdotalis provinciae} and the flamen respectively.\textsuperscript{168} It appears that the cult was allowed to continue for reasons of political necessity. In the fifth century the cult became increasingly otiose in the Latin West as the military power and political influence of the emperors crumbled. The weakening of imperial power eroded the primary evidentiary base for understanding the imperial cult, that is, statuary and dedications to the emperors in the Latin epigraphy. Yet cultic personnel like the flamines are still reported in the early sixth century, and the use of \textit{divus} and θεῖος as terms commemorative of deceased emperors recurs as late as 531–534 in imperial laws referring to Anastasius (\textit{Anastasius divae memoriae princeps}, Αναστάσιος θείας λήξεως, and \textit{Anastasius divinae recor- dationis}).\textsuperscript{169}

These cultic traditions were replaced (rather than displaced) by new ideological constructions, such as those which identified the emperor and his office with Old Testament traditions of sacred kingship.\textsuperscript{170} Practically none of it was promulgated in the epigraphy. It was around this time at the latest, as it appears, that the imperial images of the Principate began to be defaced with crosses. The problem of dating crosses is a particularly important one as regards the continuity of the imperial cult, but it cannot be dealt with here.\textsuperscript{171} One thinks of the cross incised

\textsuperscript{167} On the religious policies of Theodosius I and the historiographic issues, see ERRINGTON 1997a, and especially ERRINGTON 1997b; LIZZI TESTA 1996.

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Cod. Theod.} 16.10.14 (7 December 396).

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Cod. Iust.} 4.35.23–24 and 5.27.7, etc. For various fifth-century examples, see BEURLIER 1891, 330–331.

\textsuperscript{170} EVANS 2000, 59–60, 258.

\textsuperscript{171} I am unaware of any literature on the question of dating crosses, nor are large-scale photographic editions available. For typologies and examples, see SULZBERGER 1926. Trefoil crosses and those with their arms split at the end seem to have come into general use in the Greek epigraphy of Syria I and II and Phoenice Libanensis in the third quarter of the fifth century. A very early example of a trefoil cross is seen at \textit{IGLS} 1739 (A.D. 412/13), 1726 (?), 1752 (A.D. 453/4), 2068, 2093, 2176, 2204, 2245, 2553, 2632 etc. Crosses with their arms split at the end may begin as early as ca. 460 A.D.; see \textit{IGLS} 2617, 2618. See also \textit{IGLS} 258, 270, 271, 276, 298, 309, 317, 589, 2622, 2630, 2648. This is consistent with the Syriac epigraphy. LITTMANN 1934, nos. 2, 28, 50, 54. Conventional Greek crosses persist after ca. 450. \textit{IGLS} 1632, and \textit{PAES} IV D 8, 17, 24, 26, 27, 52. In Asia Minor, crosses with serifs seem to be most common in the third–fourth century. Trefoil crosses, triangular-tipped crosses, and those with turned-out arms, appear in increasing numbers in the fifth–sixth century. Most of the latter are broadly dated on stylistic grounds and thematic content. One exception is TABBERNEE 1997, no. 84 (A.D. 515). Some Coptic trefoil crosses have third–fourth-century dates assigned to them on the basis of style, e.g. Coptic Museum, Cairo, nos. 4302, 8016, 8556, 8578. In my view, it is doubtful that trefoil crosses developed in Egypt as early as the third century. There is a wide selection of crosses in Syria, many of them datable from inscriptions, that have yet to be studied systematically. \textsc{Peña – Castellana – Fernandez} 1983, 237–270. \textsc{Peña – Castellana – Fernandez} 1980, 404–429. There is a weird exception to all this in an inscription from \textsc{Ma`arrat al-Nu`man} in Syria II. \textit{IGLS} 1547. I suspect that the inscription is much later than the late-fourth-century date suggested by its editors.
on the emperor’s *gorgoneion* on the roundel bust of Marcus Aurelius at Eleusis. The arms of the cross are turned out at their ends, a feature characteristic of the mid-fifth century or later.\(^{172}\) The crosses cut on the foreheads of the statues of Augustus and Livia at Ephesus are simple Greek crosses with equidistant arms and can date from any time in the fifth century. The two images also had their noses chiseled off and were broken into small pieces. This most likely took place sometime after the image of Artemis was removed from her temple at the beginning of the fifth century.\(^{173}\) The demolition of the temple of the imperial cult excavated at Eretria on Euboea belongs somewhere in this chronological framework, probably at the late fifth century, as indicated above.\(^{174}\)

The construction of the emperor as the New David and the destruction of previously sacrosanct imperial images symbolically mark the end of the imperial cult *qua cultus*.\(^{175}\)

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**Bibliography**


172 Eleusis: personal observation, January 1980. DEUBNER 1937, 75 and pl. 39. TRUMMER 1980, 124–125 and fig. 28. The closest parallels that I have been able to identify belong to the second half of the fifth century. E.g. TABBERNEE 1997, nos. 87 and 88 (both dated by content and style to the fifth–sixth century).


175 DANIÉLOU 1957.


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