



Constantius I



Constantine the Great (307-337) and his family

Constantine was the son of Constantius I (Emperor 305-306 AD) and Helena. In 296 his father (who was then Caesar for the Western Empire) came to Britain to confront and defeat the usurper Allectus and to restore order. In 305 Constantine became Emperor (Augustus) but died at York the following year.

The young Constantine was proclaimed Emperor by the army at York but was not recognised as Emperor until 307 AD after much wrangling and some fighting. Indeed he spent much of his long reign fighting, peace not being fully restored until 324 AD when he finally defeated his rival Licinius. By this time he had become Christian and made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. He spent the next five years building a new capital for the east – Constantinople, while confirming Rome as the western capital.

Constantine married twice, first to Minervina who bore him a son Crispus and then to Fausta, with whom he had three more sons, Constantine Junior, Constantius and Constans. Crispus was executed for treason in 326 following a false accusation by his step-mother – when Constantine realised this, he had Fausta thrown into a bath of boiling water!

By the end of his reign, he had arranged to divide his Empire between his three surviving sons and two nephews, Delmatius and Hanniballianus. These two were murdered following his death and his three sons split the Empire between them, before continuing to quarrel for control over it.



commemorative of Constantinople



Crispus



Delmatius



Constantius Gallus
Caesar 351-4
Cousin of Constantine I



Constantine II
337-340

Spain, Gaul & Britain



Constantius II
337-361

Eastern Empire



Constans
337-350

Italy, Africa & Balkans



Left: Commemorative of Constantine the Great, showing him in a 4 horse chariot on his way to Heaven with the hand of God beckoning!



Right: Julian II, nephew of Constantine and Emperor 361 – 363 tried unsuccessfully to return the Empire to paganism.



Helena



commemorative of Rome



Fausta



Hanniballianus



Nepotian
Nephew of Constantine I who led a revolt of gladiators after the death of Constans

Reverse Designs

Constantine's coins used a wide variety of reverse designs. These were meant to send a visual message to a largely illiterate population, stressing the Emperor's deeds, qualities and (especially) his victories in the two civil wars he fought with his rival Licinius I.



Above, from left: The war god Mars in full armour; two captives sitting at the base of a trophy; figure of Victory standing on a galley (thought to refer to Crispus' naval victory resulting in the capture of Byzantium); winged Victory holding an olive wreath.



A whole series of coins celebrated Constantine's annual public vows to his people. Above, from left: Vot XX (20th year) in a laurel wreath; the same message on an altar; two Victories placing a shield inscribed Vot XX on an altar; finally, Genius of the People



Before Constantine embraced Christianity, pagan gods featured on his coins. Above, from left: Mars; Jupiter with eagle and Nike (Spirit of Victory); Sol the sun god with his radiate crown and holding a globe; finally the Temple of Roma



It was also important to honour the army. Above, from left: a military camp gateway; two soldiers holding standards (here two standards, sometimes only one); Constantine as Commander in Chief with the message Glory to the Army; finally 'The Emperor is Coming'.