

The family of Constantine I



Constantius Chlorus



Helena

FATHER: Constantine Chlorus, a career soldier who rose in the Imperial Guard and was appointed Caesar (Junior Emperor) in the West, based at Trier in modern Germany. As Caesar, he was sent to Britain in 296 AD to crush the rebellion begun by Carausius (Commander of the Channel Fleet) who had been murdered and replaced by his first minister Allectus. Constantius easily defeated Allectus, who had little military experience, and returned to Trier. In 305 AD, he became Emperor (Augustus) in the West but in the same year he had to return to Britain to restore order in the north following an invasion by the Picts. On this occasion he was accompanied by his son Constantine who was proclaimed Emperor by the army in Britain after his father died at York in 306 AD.

MOTHER: Helena (second wife of Constantius). A devout Christian, Helena was responsible for bringing up Constantine while his father was serving at the Imperial Court. She greatly influenced him and was responsible for his tolerance of and later conversion to Christianity.

CONSTANTINE I, 307-337 (*Constantine the Great*) had been proclaimed Emperor by the army in Britain after the death of his father Constantius. This started a complex series of civil wars. At first Constantine kept out of these struggles, preferring to secure his power-base in Trier but eventually he was forced to intervene when the chaos escalated with five men each claiming the title Augustus.



Constantine I

The left coin features the title given to Constantine by the Senate after his defeat of Maxentius in 312 AD - "Constantine the Greatest Emperor".



Licinius I

Constantine made an alliance with Licinius (emperor in the East) and invaded Italy in 312 and confronted Maxentius (one of the claimants). At the battle of Milvian Bridge, despite being heavily outnumbered, Constantine's army was successful and Maxentius was killed. This victory was put down to the support of the Christian God. Meanwhile Maximinus (another claimant) invaded the territory of Licinius but was defeated and killed, leaving Licinius in control of the Eastern Empire, with Constantine in control of the West. For a time there was an uneasy truce which flared into warfare briefly in 314 and openly in 324. Eventually Licinius was defeated and forced to abdicate, though he was later put to death when he continued to plot. Constantine was now sole ruler of the whole Empire and, in 330 AD, he dedicated his new Eastern capital of Constantinople.



This coin commemorating the foundation of Constantinople shows a winged Victory standing on a galley prow which is thought to refer to Crispus' naval victory which led to the capture of the site for his new city.

CHRISTIANITY: After the Battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine adopted the Christian *chi-ro* as his standard (the first 2 letters of Christ in Greek - top coin). The Edict of Milan 313 AD ended all persecution (for all religions) and afterwards Constantine promoted Christians and Christian attitudes. In his new capital of Constantinople, he sponsored the building of Christian Churches, though he was not baptised until just before his death in 337 AD.



The lower coin at the left is a commemorative which shows Constantine on his way to Heaven (in a four-horse chariot) with the Hand of God (at the very top of the coin) beckoning him in.

THE DYNASTY OF CONSTANTINE



Crispus



Fausta with her 2 eldest sons



Constantine Jun



Constantius



Constans

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. In 317 AD, Crispus was made Caesar, together with his half-brother Constantine Junior. Crispus was executed for treason in 326 AD on the false evidence of his step-mother (who was herself put to death when her treachery became known). Meanwhile, in 324 AD, the two youngest sons, Constantius and Constans were also made Caesar. Constantine's intention was that his three surviving sons, together with two nephews should divide his Empire between them. After his death however, the two nephews Delmatius and Hanniballianus were murdered and the Empire was split three ways.

CONSTANTINE II (337-340) received Spain, Gaul and Britain on his father's death but quarrelled with his brother Constans and was killed in an ambush as he crossed the Alps to confront him.

CONSTANS (337-350) received Italy, Africa and the Balkans but took over his brother's provinces as well. He was the last ruling Emperor to visit Britain. Following a rebellion by Magnentius, Constans was killed fleeing to Spain.

CONSTANTIUS II (337-361) Initially Emperor in the East, he gained control of the whole Empire in 353 AD by defeating the usurper Magnentius who, not content with seizing power in the West, made the mistake of invading the Eastern Empire until forced to withdraw by Constantius. Pursued into Gaul, he was deserted by his soldiers and committed suicide, leaving Constantius in sole charge of his father's Empire.