

MAXENTIUS AS XERXES IN EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA'S ACCOUNTS OF THE BATTLE OF THE MILVIAN BRIDGE*

ABSTRACT

Of the many accounts of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in A.D. 312 written soon after the conflict, only those of Eusebius of Caesarea have Maxentius cross the Tiber on a bridge of boats to face the forces of Constantine. This detail, it is here argued, suggests that Maxentius may be seen as a latter-day Xerxes, the Persian emperor who, in preparation for his invasion of Greece in 480 B.C., famously spanned the Hellespont with a pair of boat-bridges. The article first reviews the seminal accounts of Xerxes' feat in Aeschylus' Persians and Herodotus' Histories, and next discusses the story's long afterlife in subsequent Greek (and Latin) authors, including those of Late Antiquity. Close analysis of Eusebius' battle narratives in his Ecclesiastical History (9.9.3–8) and in his Life of Constantine (1.38) reveals that their vocabulary echoes the distinctive language used by Aeschylus, Herodotus and later writers in reference to Xerxes' achievement. The article concludes by exploring the implications of this identification of Maxentius with Xerxes. It exemplifies two venerable tactics in Roman political propaganda: that of portraying a native rival as a foreign enemy and that of mapping the Persian Wars onto contemporary events. As Xerxes rediuiuus, Maxentius is cast as the quintessential barbarian tyrant, an Eastern despot resident in Rome.

Keywords: Battle of the Milvian Bridge; Constantine I; Eusebius of Caesarea; Hellespont; Maxentius; reception of the Persian Wars; Xerxes

Ancient accounts of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 are numerous and contradictory.¹ Wary of those who seek to reconstruct the course of the conflict, Raymond Van Dam cautions against trying to 'conflate the ancient accounts into a

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¹ Sources include Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.23; *Chron.* 354, pt. 16; *Epit. de Caes.* 40.7; Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.3–8 (and Rufinus' translation thereof), *Vit. Const.* 1.38, *Chron.* (R. Helm, *Eusebius Werke* 7, *Die Chronik des Hieronymus* [Berlin, 1956]), 229.25–6; Eutr. 10.4.3; Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 44.1–9; Landolfus 172 (MGH *AA* II 325); *Lib. Or.* 59.20; *Origo Constantini* 4.12; Oros. 7.28.16; *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).28–30, 12(9).16–18; Praxagoras *apud* Phot. *Bibl.* 62; Prudent. *C. Symm.* 1.481–8; *Socr. Hist. eccl.* 1.2; Zonar. 13.1.2–4; Zos. 2.15–17. The frieze of the Arch of Constantine also portrays the battle (H.P. L'Orange and A. von Gerkan, *Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens: Text* [Berlin, 1939], 65–71), though it has been recently argued that the frieze was spoliated from a lost monument erected by Diocletian and that the scene of riparian combat on the arch was originally a depiction of the Battle of the Margus River in 285: C.B. Rose, 'Reconsidering the frieze on the Arch of Constantine', *JRA* 34 (2021), 175–210. Latin sources variously refer to the bridge as the *pons Muluius* or *Miluius*. The former is likely to be the original spelling (G. Messineo, 'Mulvius Pons', in *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae: Suburbium* [Rome, 2006], 4.76 and C.M. Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* [London and New York, 2010²], 324 n. 16), but the latter is more familiar; hence the span will here be called the Milvian Bridge. All dates are A.D. unless indicated otherwise; all translations are mine.

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single master narrative'; rather, attention to 'differences in detail' may shed light on their 'authors' differing agendas'.² This article focusses on one such distinctive detail. Ancient authors agree that Maxentius drowned while trying to cross the Tiber, though the particular conditions of his demise vary from text to text. A panegyric in honour of Constantine delivered in 313, for example, claims that Maxentius, on horseback, perished as he was fording the river in retreat. Lactantius, writing a year or two later, says that Maxentius tried to flee across the Milvian Bridge, but so many of his terrified troops were crammed into the span that he was pushed into the Tiber.³ Among those writing soon after the battle, Eusebius alone says that Maxentius died whilst crossing the river on a bridge built of boats.⁴ This detail, I argue, suggests that Maxentius may be seen as a latter-day Xerxes, the Persian emperor who, in preparation for his invasion of Greece in 480 B.C., famously spanned the Hellespont with a pair of boat-bridges, enabling his army to march from Asia to Europe. I will first review the seminal accounts of Xerxes' feat in Aeschylus' *Persians* and Herodotus' *Histories*, and then discuss the story's continuing currency in Eusebius' time. Next I will suggest that the vocabulary in Eusebius' accounts of the battle echoes the distinctive language used by Aeschylus, Herodotus and later authors to describe Xerxes' achievement. In conclusion, I will consider how the parallel between Xerxes and Maxentius contributes to the latter's characterization as a tyrant.

In Aeschylus' *Persians* (472 B.C.), the failure of Xerxes' campaign is revealed to the Persian court. The bridging of the Hellespont is central to the play. It is first mentioned by the chorus, who liken it to 'casting a yoke about the neck of the sea'.⁵ The language of yoking—ζευγνύουσι, ζυγόν and cognates—has long been recognized as the play's 'dominant metaphor'.⁶ Later the Persian queen says that her son Xerxes 'by craft yoked the strait of Helle to make a pathway' over the sea.⁷ 'By craft' renders μηχαναίς, which indicates a cunning contrivance, an innovative use of technology; μηχανή appears twice in the play, both times in reference to Xerxes' bridge.⁸ Through a marvel of engineering, the Persian king turns sea into land, links distinct continents; this transgression of natural limits ordained by the gods invites their displeasure. In the *Persians*, yoke-imagery may also connote political and social domination, that of a tyrant over his subjects, a master over his slaves. According to the chorus, the purpose of Xerxes' expedition is 'to cast a yoke of slavery about

² R. Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (New York, 2011), 13.

³ *Pan. Lat.* 12(9).17, Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 44.9.

⁴ *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.3–8, *Vit. Const.* 1.38. The brief notice of the battle in the *Epitome de Caesaribus* also has Maxentius employ a boat-bridge (40.7); it is not clear whence the epitomator derived this detail: J. Schlumberger, *Die Epitome de Caesaribus: Untersuchungen zur heidnischen Geschichtsschreibung des 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Munich, 1974), 191. Conventionally dated to between 395 and 408, this text may well have been compiled much later, in the second half of the sixth or even the seventh century: J.A. Stover and G. Woudhuysen, 'Jordanes and the date of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*', *Histos* 15 (2021), 150–88.

⁵ ζυγόν ἀμφιβόλων ἀχένη πόντου (72). Like 'neck' in English, ἀχένη may refer to a narrow passage, such as a strait: LSJ s.v. II.2.

⁶ A.F. Garvie, *Aeschylus Persae* (Oxford, 2009), xxxix, 66–7, 72–4, 90–1, 294–6; quotation from page 66, where can be found further bibliography on yoke-metaphors in the *Persians* and Greek literature generally. See also E. Bridges, *Imagining Xerxes: Ancient Perspectives on a Persian King* (London and New York, 2015), 15–16.

⁷ μηχαναίς ἔξευξεν Ἕλλησ πορθμὸν ὡστ' ἔχειν πόρον (72).

⁸ 114, 722. On the connotations of μηχανή, see M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, transl. J. Lloyd (Hassocks and Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1978), Index, s.v.

Greece'.⁹ Military conquest and the conquest of nature are conjoined: for Xerxes to subjugate Greece, he must first subjugate the Hellespont.¹⁰

Herodotus makes the crossing of the Hellespont central to Xerxes' campaign and characterization. It caps a series of water-crossings by Xerxes and his imperial predecessors; these crossings, often made on custom-built bridges, constitute 'a significant motif in Herodotus', used 'to prove the *hybris* of the aggressor'.¹¹ In reference to them, Herodotus, like Aeschylus, draws on the vocabulary of yoking. Of thirty instances of ζευγνύουσι in the *Histories*, twenty-six are associated with Persian conquest.¹² When Xerxes informs Persian nobles of his plan to invade Greece, he says: 'I intend, after yoking the Hellespont (ζεύξας τὸν Ἑλλησποντον), to lead an army through Europe against Greece, that I may punish the Athenians' (7.8.β). As we will see, the participle ζεύξας becomes especially emblematic of Xerxes' accomplishment. Xerxes goes on to vaunt that not just Greece but all Europe will come to bear 'the yoke of slavery' (δούλιον ζυγόν).¹³ Also associated in Herodotus with Xerxes and the other Persian monarchs is the verb διαβαίνειν, which indicates a boundary-crossing undertaken for the purpose of conquest; when a river is crossed without hostile intent, Herodotus prefers περᾶν.¹⁴ Like ζευγνύουσι, διαβαίνειν links geographical transgression and imperialistic aggression. διαβαίνειν appears more often in Book 7, in which Herodotus dilates on the Persians' bridging of and march across the Hellespont, than in any of the other eight books of the *Histories*.¹⁵ The cognate noun διάβασις appears seven times in Herodotus, six of which refer to an ultimately disastrous Persian campaign facilitated by a boat-bridge; half of the six refer to Xerxes' spanning of the strait: 'After the crossing of the Hellespont (ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς διαβάσιος τοῦ Ἑλλησπόντου), where the barbarians began their march, having passed a month there whilst they were crossing (διέβαινον) into Europe ... they captured the city [of Athens], deserted' (8.51). For Herodotus as for Aeschylus, Xerxes' constructions at the Hellespont, described in distinctive language, reified his overweening ambition and thirst for domination.

Throughout antiquity, Xerxes remained a familiar figure, found in a host of Greek and Latin texts. As early as the fourth century B.C., the psychologically complex and not wholly unsympathetic Xerxes of Aeschylus and Herodotus was in most texts replaced by Xerxes the quintessential barbarian tyrant, remembered for a few notorious acts, among them his bridging of the Hellespont, which is mentioned by dozens of

⁹ ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλεῖν δούλιον Ἑλλάδι (50). The first two words parallel those of 72 (ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλὼν, n. 6 above), equating the enslavement of Greece and the bridging of the Hellespont.

¹⁰ Garvie (n. 6), 73. Darius' ghost says that Xerxes was so brash and imperceptive that he 'hoped to check the flowing hallowed Hellespont with fetters, like a slave' (Ἑλλησποντον ἱρὸν δούλον ὡς δεσιμώμασιν | ἤλπισε σχῆσειν ῥέοντα, 745–6). Cf. Hdt. 7.35: after a storm had destroyed Xerxes' first bridges across the narrows, he famously ordered the Hellespont to be scourged three hundred times and fetters—literally, a 'yoke for the feet' (πεδέων ζεύγος)—to be tossed into its waters.

¹¹ H.R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland, 1966), 293. On Persian boundary-crossing in Herodotus, see D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto, 1989), 127–35; P. Payen, *Les îles nomades: conquérir et résister de l'Enquête d'Hérodote* (Paris, 1997), 138–45; J. Romm, 'Herodotus and the natural world', in C. Dewald and J. Marincola (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (Cambridge and New York, 2006), 178–92, at 186–90.

¹² Payen (n. 11), 138 n. 20.

¹³ 7.8.γ. The chorus in the *Persians* uses the same two words in reference to Xerxes' campaign (n. 9 above).

¹⁴ Lateiner (n. 11), 131–2; Payen (n. 11), 140–2.

¹⁵ J.E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938), s.v.

ancient authors.¹⁶ This particular act became a trope; a cautionary tale of despotic, self-destructive excess; a ‘shorthand for the arrogance and transgressive behaviour of the king’.¹⁷ Numerous later writers used the distinctive language of Aeschylus and Herodotus, especially *ξευγνύναι*, *διαβαίνειν* and their cognates, in reference to it.¹⁸

Although Eusebius mentions Xerxes’ crossing of the Hellespont only once and briefly,¹⁹ he will have been familiar with the monarch’s memorable deeds at the narrows. For Eusebius seems to have read at least some of Herodotus’ *Histories*, and certainly had a thoroughgoing knowledge of other writers who treated Xerxes’ feat, including Diodorus Siculus, Philo, Josephus and Clement of Alexandria.²⁰ Eusebius encountered ethnographical descriptions of the Persians as a people: his own view of them is far from positive, for he charges them—at least those who have not converted to Christianity—with engaging in incestuous marriages and incubating the insidious prophet Mani.²¹ He knows Persian history, including Xerxes’ invasion of Greece.²² Moreover, the Persian Wars generally and the bridging of the Hellespont specifically were, for centuries, common themes in both Greek and Latin declamations, so much so that Lucian, in the second century, satirized rhetors of his day for turning too

¹⁶ On Xerxes’ afterlife in classical antiquity, see Bridges (n. 6), 99–189. V.J. Rosivach notes that ‘the *topos* of Xerxes’ bridge ... was extraordinarily popular in Latin literature’ and collects the references to prove it: ‘The Romans’ view of the Persians’, *CW* 78 (1984), 1–8, at 2. For another compendium of sources, both Greek and Latin, on Xerxes, see J.E.B. Mayor, *Thirteen Satires of Juvenal with a Commentary* (London and Cambridge, 1881³), 2.127–31.

¹⁷ Bridges (n. 6), 15.

¹⁸ For Xerxes associated with *ξευγνύναι* and cognates, see Aeschin. 3.132; *Anth. Pal.* 16.5; Aristid. *Or.* 2.152; Arr. *Anab.* 5.7; Ctesias, *Persica* (*FGrHist* 3c.688) F 13.119; Diod. Sic. 11.2.4, 11.3.6, 11.19.5; Himer. *Or.* 6.27; Isoc. 4.89 (quoted at Arist. *Rhet.* 1410a); Lucian, *Dial. mort.* 6(20).2; Lys. 2.29; Philo, *De somniis* 2.118; Plut. *Arist.* 9.3, *Them.* 16.4; [Plut.] *Cons. ad Apoll.* 110D = *TrGF* 2.372; Strabo 7a.56, 13.1.22; Timoth. *Pers.* 791.74 Hordern; Zos. 1.2.2. For Xerxes associated with *διαβαίνειν* and cognates, see Aristid. *Or.* 2.152; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.21.138; Ctesias, *Persica* (*FGrHist* 3c.688) F 1b.156; Diod. Sic. 10.33.1, 11.1.1, 11.56.5; Diog. Laert. 1.2, 2.7, 8.57; Julian, *Or.* 2.79a; Paus. 8.42.8; Polyb. 3.22.2, 6.11.1, 38.2.1; Zos. 1.2.2.

¹⁹ It is mentioned as a temporal marker in Eusebius’ *Chronicle*. According to Jerome’s Latin translation of this work, the Aeginetes controlled the sea until the ‘crossing of Xerxes’ (*transitum Xerxis*, Helm [n. 1], 107.2–3), called the ‘crossing of Alexander’ in the work’s Armenian translation through a copyist’s error: J. Karst (ed.), *Eusebius Werke 5, Die Chronik aus dem armenischen Übersetzt mit textkritischen Kommentar* (Leipzig, 1911), 107.14.

²⁰ e.g. Diod. Sic. 2.5.5, 10.33.1, 11.1–3; Philo, *De somniis* 2.117–18; Joseph. *BJ* 2.358; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.21.138. Although Eusebius knew much about Herodotus, whether he read the *Histories* first-hand or encountered the historian solely through intermediary sources (*Mittelquellen*) is debated. A passage in the Syriac translation of Eusebius’ *Theophany* (2.69) discusses details from the story of Croesus as narrated in Herodotus Book 1, suggesting direct knowledge. For Eusebius’ familiarity with Herodotus, Diodorus and other Greek historians, see C. Mondello, *Eusebio e la storiografia antica: strategie e tecniche di alterazione nella Praeparatio Evangelica* (Messina, 2017), 51–105; D.J. DeVore, ‘“The only event mightier than everyone’s hope”: classical historiography and Eusebius’ plague narrative’, *Histos* 14 (2020), 1–34, at 3–4. DeVore has shown that Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* is deeply indebted to the Greek historiographical tradition: ‘Genre and Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*: toward a focused debate’, in A. Johnson and J. Schott (edd.), *Eusebius of Caesarea: Tradition and Innovations* (Washington, DC, 2013), 19–49. On Eusebius’ familiarity with Philo, Josephus and Clement, see A. Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 157–61, 164–77, 196–8, 302–4.

²¹ *Hist. eccl.* 7.31; *Dem. evang.* 3.6.32; *Praep. evang.* 1.4.6, 6.10.16, with A.P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius’ Praeparatio Evangelica* (Oxford and New York, 2006), 22–4, 205–10.

²² *Hist. eccl.* 10.3; *Praep. evang.* 9.9.1, 10.7.14; *Chron.* (Helm [n. 1]), 107.2–3, 108.23, 108.25, 109.5–6; *Chron.* (Karst [n. 19]), 15.14, 33.18, 60.1–2, 69.15–16. In his *Commentary on Isaiah* (1.68), Eusebius portrays Xerxes positively, for he believed that the monarch had aided Ezra and Nehemiah in the resettlement of Jerusalem. For Josephus’ view of Xerxes, see Bridges (n. 6), 173–6.

often to these hoary, hackneyed subjects.²³ References to Xerxes at the Hellespont were still frequent in Greek (and Latin) orations and rhetorical treatises dating to the fourth century. Given Eusebius' knowledge of the Greek historiographical and rhetorical traditions, he must have repeatedly encountered Xerxes' famed act.

One final point should be made about that act before we turn to Eusebius' accounts of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Although Xerxes' boat-bridges came to be viewed symbolically, as representations of his character, they were also logistically practical and technologically ingenious. Boat-bridges were later employed by generals with sophisticated engineers at their disposal, including Roman emperors on campaign. Not every bridge of boats erected in antiquity, then, should necessarily be considered an avatar of its builder's hubris. But the building of such a bridge does invite comparison with Xerxes', as the first and most famed example thereof. When a boat-bridge is built by a figure such as Maxentius, who, as we will see, is by Eusebius repeatedly branded a tyrant and, moreover, compared to the Pharaoh of Exodus, the Eastern barbarian despot who enslaved a foreign people resident in his land, an ancient reader is primed to view that span in the light of the Hellespontine boat-bridges of Xerxes, another Eastern barbarian despot who enslaved his subjects.

With Xerxes' boat-bridges in mind, and the distinctive vocabulary used to describe them, we now turn to Eusebius' two accounts of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312. His first account appears in the ninth book of the *Ecclesiastical History*, a work that most scholars believe to have been revised by Eusebius more than once, the last major update taking place after the death of Emperor Licinius on 19 September 324, probably in 325 or 326. His narrative of the battle, drawing on a lost source, was composed soon after it, probably within a year and no later than 315.²⁴ The second account appears in Book 1 of his *Life of Constantine*, a work that reached its final form after the death of Constantine on 22 May 337 and before Eusebius' own death on 30 May 339. On the whole, this later text portrays Maxentius as an even more villainous and tyrannical figure, but its account of the battle itself mostly follows the earlier one, at points reproducing it verbatim.²⁵

To ready the reader for Constantine's march on Rome, Eusebius describes a lurid litany of acts—murder, plunder, rape, necromancy—committed by Maxentius, which testify to his 'fearsome tyranny' (δεινῆ ... τυραννίδι) and the 'bitter slavery' (πικρὸν ... δουλείαν) he imposed on the residents of the former capital.²⁶ These acts,

²³ Lucian, *Rhetorum Praeceptor* 18. See also Bridges (n. 6), 151–2, 164–7; Mayor (n. 16), 127; Rosivach (n. 16), 6–7; G. Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (London and New York, 1993), 55–63.

²⁴ On the composition of Book 9 and of Constantine's Italian campaign, see R. Van Dam, 'A lost panegyric: the source for Eusebius of Caesarea's description of Constantine's victory and arrival at Rome in 312', *J ECS* 27 (2019), 211–40. On the fraught questions regarding the composition of the *Ecclesiastical History*, see O. Andrei, 'Canons chronologiques et Histoire ecclésiastique' and V. Neri, 'Les éditions de l'*Histoire ecclésiastique* (livres VIII–IX): bilan critique et perspectives de la recherche', in S. Morlet and L. Perrone (edd.), *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique, Commentaire, Tome I, Études d'introduction* (Paris, 2012), 33–82, 151–83.

²⁵ On the differences, see Van Dam (n. 2), 97–100; S.G. Hall, 'Eusebian and other sources in *Vita Constantini* I', in H.C. Brennecke, E.L. Grasmück and C. Marksches (edd.), *Logos: Festschrift für Luise Abramowski zum 8. Juli 1993* (Berlin and New York, 1993), 239–63; J.W. Drijvers, 'Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the construction of the image of Maxentius', in H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny (edd.), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (Leuven and Dudley, MA, 2007), 11–27, at 16–18.

²⁶ *Hist. eccl.* 8.14 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.33–6; quotations from *Hist. eccl.* 8.14.3 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.35.1. (The symbol ~ indicates that Eusebius' language is similar but not identical in the two works.) On

characteristic of the stereotypical ancient tyrant,²⁷ manifest Maxentius' cruelty, greed, impiety and unrestrained appetite for sex and violence, and thus serve to justify the invasion of Italy by Constantine, its liberator. As the story of the battle begins, Constantine is 'very near' (ἄγχιστα) Rome, whereas Maxentius remains within the city's walls, relying less on his people's loyalty than on the devices of sorcery (ταῖς κατὰ γοητεῖαν μηχαναῖς) for his defence (*Hist. eccl.* 9.9.3 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.37.2–1.38.1). Like Aeschylus' Xerxes, he employs artificial contrivances (μηχαναί), in this case of a supernatural sort. Although ensconced in Rome, Maxentius is forced to fight, for 'God himself, as if by chains, drags the tyrant far beyond the gates' and across the Tiber (*Hist. eccl.* 9.9.4 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.38.1). Like a fettered captive, Maxentius is extracted from the city: the despot who has enslaved his subjects is himself enslaved by God. Then follows an elaborate typological comparison between the battle and the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea. Oscillating between scriptural quotation and battle narrative, Eusebius melds the two events (*Hist. eccl.* 9.9.5 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.38.2):

ὡσπερ γοῦν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ Μωυσεῶς καὶ τοῦ πάλαι θεοσεβοῦς Ἑβραίων γένους "ἄρματα Φαραῶ καὶ τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἔρριπεν εἰς θάλασσαν, ἐπιλέκτους ἀναβάτας τριστάτας" ... κατὰ αὐτὰ δὴ καὶ Μαξέντιος οἱ τε ἄμφ' αὐτὸν ὀπλίται καὶ δορυφόροι "ἔδυσαν εἰς βυθὸν ὡς εἰ λίθος"

Just as in the time of Moses himself and the ancient God-fearing people of the Hebrews [God] 'cast Pharaoh's chariots and his army, his select cavalrymen, his high-ranking officers, into the sea' [Exod. 15:4] ... in the same way also Maxentius, his soldiers roundabout him, and his bodyguards 'sank into the deep like a stone' [Exod. 15:5].

Immediately after this passage Eusebius rewinds to explain how Maxentius and his men found themselves submerged. Through a string of aorist participles, Eusebius takes us back to the construction of Maxentius' boat-bridge (*Hist. eccl.* 9.9.5 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.38.2):

ὀπνίκα νῶτα δοὺς τῇ ἐκ θεοῦ μετὰ Κωνσταντίνου δυνάμει, τὸν πρὸ τῆς πορείας διήκει ποταμόν, ὃν αὐτὸς σκάφεσιν ζεύξας καὶ εὖ μάλα γεφυρώσας μηχανὴν ὀλέθρου καθ' ἑαυτοῦ συνεστήσατο.

when, having turned his back on the army from God with Constantine, he began to cross the river before his path; having yoked with boats and spanned the river quite well, he himself devised the mechanism of his own destruction.

Eusebius' language here recalls Xerxes at the Hellespont. Maxentius bridged the 'river' (ποταμός) with boats; Xerxes bridged the strait—which the king calls a 'river' (ποταμός) in Herodotus (7.35)—by the same. To describe Maxentius' construction, Eusebius, fond of pleonastic doubling, employs not only γεφυροῦν, 'to span', which may be used of a broad range of structures, including dams, viaducts and all manner of bridges, but also ζευγνύναι, 'to yoke', which refers specifically to boat-bridges and, as we have seen, has long been associated with Xerxes' spanning of the

these passages, see V. Neri, 'Massenzio e Massimino coppia di tiranni (Eus., *HE* VIII, 14)', *Adamantius* 14 (2008), 207–17 and the footnotes in L. Pietri and M.-J. Rondeau (edd.), *Eusèbe de Césarée, Vie de Constantin* (Paris, 2013), 225–30.

²⁷ See J.R. Dunkle, 'The Greek tyrant and Roman political invective of the Late Republic', *TAPhA* 98 (1967), 151–71; J.R. Dunkle, 'The rhetorical tyrant in Roman historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus', *CW* 65 (1971), 12–20; A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: A Scholar and his Caesars* (London and New Haven, 1983), 142–74.

Hellespont.²⁸ Even more tellingly, the verb appears in the participial form ζευύζας, the form used to describe Xerxes' bridging of the Hellespont by nine authors spanning seven centuries; indeed, of all the form's appearances in Greek literature that predate Eusebius, nearly one-quarter have Xerxes as their subject.²⁹ Moreover, Maxentius' construction is called a μηχανή, a mechanism, a contrivance. As noted, the word appears twice in Aeschylus' *Persians*, both times in reference to Xerxes' bridge.

Following this passage Eusebius' two accounts of the battle briefly diverge. The later version in the *Life of Constantine* (1.38.3), expanding on the μηχανή just mentioned, explains that Maxentius hid 'secret mechanisms' (κρυφίους μηχανάς) within the boat-bridge so that it would plunge Constantine into the river as he was crossing it in pursuit; such details are absent from the earlier version. The dissolution of the bridge under Maxentius is then narrated. The earlier version in the *Ecclesiastical History* says 'when the boat-bridge over the river was destroyed', whereas the later version in the *Life of Constantine*, the text of which requires supplementation, reads 'when the boat-bridge's mechanisms and the trap within them <was destroyed> at an unanticipated time'.³⁰ In both versions, the bridge is called a ζευύγμα, a word cognate with ζευυγόναι and frequently used in reference to Xerxes' spans across the Hellespont.³¹ In the earlier version, the word is modified by διαλυθέντος, from διαλύειν, 'to destroy', a verb used to describe the destruction of Xerxes' Hellespontine bridges three times by Herodotus and by subsequent authors as well.³² The same word may also have been used in the later version—indeed, some editors of the *Life of Constantine* have inserted it as a supplement—but this suggestion must be considered tentative because of the textual trouble just mentioned. In any case, Eusebius' two accounts thereafter run parallel once again: 'the crossing sinks, and in a moment the boats drop into the deep, men and all.'³³ As already noted, διάβασις used here is strongly associated in Herodotus and later authors with ill-starred Persian campaigns that relied on boat-bridges, especially Xerxes' transit of the Hellespont. In Eusebius, the same noun flags another failed military venture, that of Maxentius, here presented as Xerxes' avatar.

Before we turn to the significance of this Xerxes–Maxentius connection, an important if insoluble question ought to be addressed: should this linking of the leaders be credited to Eusebius or to his source(s) for the battle? Scholars have posited for decades that Eusebius drew on a source or sources, now lost, for his accounts of Constantine's campaign in Italy. In 2019, Van Dam convincingly argued that Eusebius employed a

²⁸ On the verbs, see V. Galliazzo, *I ponti romani*, 2 vols. (Treviso, 1995), 1.24–6. In Herodotus, γεφυροῦν is twice used in reference to Xerxes' bridging of the Hellespont (7.34, 7.36), ζευυγόναι nine times: Powell (n. 15), s.vv.

²⁹ Aeschin. 3.132; Aristid. *Or.* 2.152; Dion. Hal. *Dem.* 41 (adapting Hdt. 7.8); Hdt. 7.8, 7.10, 7.157; Isoc. 4.89 (quoted at Arist. *Rhet.* 1410a); Lys. 2.29; [Plut.] *Cons. ad Apoll.* 110D = *TrGF* 2.372.

³⁰ *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.7 τοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ζευύγματος διαλυθέντος. *Vit. Const.* 1.38.4 τῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ ζευύγματος μηχανῶν τοῦ τ' ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐγκρύμματος <διαλυθέντος> οὐ κατὰ καιρὸν τὸν ἐπισηθέντα. Thus I.A. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke 1, Über das Leben Constantins* (Leipzig, 1902); F. Winkelmann (*Eusebius Werke 1.1, Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin* [Berlin, 1991²]) prefers ἐπισηθέντα <διαρρησιῶν>, '<slipped> at an unanticipated time'.

³¹ e.g. Aristodemus (*FGrHist* = *BNJ*² 2a.104) F 1.2, 7; Diod. Sic. 11.3.6, 11.19.5; Plut. *Arist.* 9.6, *Them.* 16.5; Strabo 7a.56, 13.1.22.

³² e.g. Hdt. 7.34, 8.117, 9.114; Plut. *De tranq. anim.* 464E; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 1.30.4; Strabo 7a.56, 13.1.22.

³³ ὑφιζάνει μὲν ἢ διάβασις, χωρεῖ δ' ἄθρόως αὐτανδρα κατὰ τοῦ βυθοῦ τὰ σκάφη, *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.7 = *Vit. Const.* 1.38.4.

single source, a pagan panegyric composed in Latin, to which he added his own Christianizing gloss, including the comparison of the battle and the crossing of the Red Sea.³⁴ He demonstrated that Eusebius' accounts include just the sort of content commonly found in panegyrics and recommended for inclusion in them by rhetorical theoreticians.³⁵ In his guidelines for speeches on rulers (βασιλικοί λόγοι), for example, Menander Rhetor recommends that those discussed in such orations be frequently compared with prominent persons of the past (2.1.13, 15, 18, 36). The oratorical exercises (προγομνάσματα) attributed to Hermogenes put it succinctly: 'in encomiums, the best source of argument is comparison' (7). Comparisons are indeed rife in extant panegyrics, and Xerxes is a not uncommon comparand.³⁶ So it seems possible, if not provable, that Eusebius encountered a comparison between Xerxes and Maxentius in his source. Since that source was written in Latin, however, Eusebius must have been responsible for using in his battle narratives the marked Greek vocabulary linked to Xerxes' actions at the Hellespont.

This identification of Maxentius with Xerxes adds another dimension to Maxentius' representation as a tyrant, in Eusebius and other contemporary sources. The semantic range of the term 'tyrant' (Latin *tyrannus*/Greek τύραννος) broadened in the fourth century: it continued to denote an oppressive, morally depraved autocrat, but also accumulated new associations.³⁷ First, it could connote a usurper, someone whose claim to imperial power was rejected by his rivals. Second, it could connote a persecutor of God's people. In Greek, the word is attested in the latter sense as early as 4 Maccabees and the works of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, in which monarchs who oppressed Jews were branded τύραννοι. In Latin, 'tyrant' with this connotation, used as early as Tertullian, was popularized by Lactantius: in his *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (c.315), many emperors who persecute Christians are called *tyranni*.³⁸ In the fourth century, then, 'tyrant' could mean not just despot but also pretender and persecutor.

Maxentius was the 'prototype of the late antique tyrant'.³⁹ His defeat at the Milvian Bridge was essential to the victor's early image: Lenski has argued that, from soon after the battle through 321, Constantine's predominant mode of self-presentation was as a tyrannicide.⁴⁰ Just months after his rival's defeat, Constantine refers to Maxentius as a tyrant in two laws dating to January 313; he does so again in a letter from spring 313 and in a law dating to 19 March 314.⁴¹ Panegyrics declaimed in 313 and on 1

³⁴ Van Dam (n. 24), citing earlier scholarship.

³⁵ Van Dam (n. 24), 223–7.

³⁶ e.g. Julian, *Or.* 1.28b–d, 1.42c–d, 2.63a–b, 2.79a–c; *Lib. Or.* 59.51, 59.65; *Them. Or.* 6.74c–d, 7.96d, 10.132d, 19.226a–b; *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).13, 8(5).7; *Sid. Apoll. Carm.* 2.451–5, 5.40–9.

³⁷ On the evolution of the term, see e.g. T. Grünewald, *Constantinus Maximus Augustus: Herrschaftspropaganda in der zeitgenössischen Überlieferung* (Stuttgart, 1990), 64–71; T.D. Barnes, 'Oppressor, persecutor, usurper: the meaning of "tyrannus" in the fourth century', in G. Bonamente and M. Mayer (edd.), *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Barcinonense* (Bari, 1996), 55–65; V. Neri, 'L'usurpatore come tiranno nel lessico politico della tarda antichità', in F. Paschoud and J. Szidat (edd.), *Usurpationen in der Spätantike: Akten des Kolloquiums 'Staatsstreich und Staatlichkeit', 6.–10. März 1996, Solothurn/Bern* (Stuttgart, 1997), 71–86; Neri (n. 26), 207–17; N. Lenski, *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics* (Philadelphia, 2016), 32–7.

³⁸ For early examples of tyrant as persecutor, see Neri (n. 26), 207–8; Barnes (n. 37), 57–8.

³⁹ Grünewald (n. 37), 66.

⁴⁰ Lenski (n. 37), 28, 32–7.

⁴¹ Laws: *CTh* 5.8.1, 15.14.3–4, with the dating of O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr.: Vorarbeit zu einer Prosopographie der christlichen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 1919), 64–5, 160, 162. Letter: Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.12.

March 321 present Maxentius in tyrannical terms; the later speech refers to him as *tyrannus* ‘more than any other single noun or adjective’.⁴² The most conspicuous characterization of Maxentius as tyrant is found on the famed arch in Rome dedicated to Constantine when he was visiting the city between July and September 315. There, on a prominently placed monument that portrays the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, twin inscriptions proclaim, in language reminiscent of Augustus’ *Res Gestae*, that Constantine ‘avenged the Republic with just arms’ by freeing it ‘from both the tyrant and his entire faction’.⁴³ Although the inscriptions make clear that the Senate and the People of Rome dedicated the arch, whether the Senate or the emperor was primarily responsible for its design is disputed.⁴⁴ Yet both parties surely would have approved of the inscriptions’ anti-tyrannical message. As we have seen, in Eusebius, too, Maxentius is repeatedly represented as a tyrant. In narrating Constantine’s campaign against him in the *Life of Constantine*, for example, the author uses *τύραννος* or its cognates of Maxentius sixteen times in just fifteen sections (1.26–41). But Eusebius is distinctive in that he assimilates Maxentius to that ‘impious tyrant of old’, Pharaoh, who had oppressed the Israelites in Egypt.⁴⁵

What has perhaps not been fully appreciated about Eusebius’ comparison of Maxentius and Pharaoh, which has received far less attention than his corollary comparison of Constantine and Moses,⁴⁶ is that it exemplifies a familiar stratagem in Roman political propaganda, one in which a native rival is recast as an Eastern enemy, turning internecine infighting into foreign conquest.⁴⁷ The most familiar example of this is Octavian’s portrayal of Mark Antony. Barnes thus rightly draws an illustrative parallel between Maxentius’ defeat at the Milvian Bridge and Antony’s at Actium.⁴⁸ The comparison with Pharaoh reconfigures Maxentius—who had promoted himself as a pro-senatorial *princeps*, a booster and benefactor of the ancient capital, a reactionary alternative to the distant authoritarian tetrarchs⁴⁹—as a foreign ‘enemy

⁴² *Pan. Lat.* 12(9), 4(10), with Grünewald (n. 37), 64–7 and A. Omissi, *Emperors and Usurpers in the Later Roman Empire: Civil War, Panegyric, and the Construction of Legitimacy* (Oxford and New York, 2018), 116–42 (quotation from 132).

⁴³ *tam de tyranno quam de omni eius factione ... iustis rem publicam ultus est armis, ILS 694*; cf. *rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicauit, RGDA 1.1*. On the Augustan aspects of the arch, see e.g. R. Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge and New York, 2007), 48–9; M.L. Popkin, ‘Symbiosis and civil war: the audacity of the Arch of Constantine’, *JLA* 9 (2016), 42–88, at 64–6.

⁴⁴ Popkin (n. 43); N. Lenski, ‘The sun and the Senate: the inspiration for the Arch of Constantine’, in E. Dal Covolo and G. Sfameni Gasparro (edd.), *Costantino il Grande: alle radici dell’Europa. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio in occasione del 1700° anniversario della Battaglia di Ponte Milvio e della conversione di Costantino* (Vatican City, 2014), 155–96.

⁴⁵ τοῦ πάλαϊ δυνασσεβοῦς τυράννου: *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.8 = *Vit. Const.* 1.38.5.

⁴⁶ An exception is Drijvers (n. 25), though this essay is less concerned with the Pharaoh–Maxentius comparison than its title might suggest. On the identification of Constantine with Moses, see now A.P. Johnson, *Eusebius* (London and New York, 2014), 160–2; M. Hollerich, ‘Eusebius’s Moses: Hebrew, Jew, and Christian’, in P. Rousseau and J.A. Timbie (edd.), *The Christian Moses: From Philo to the Qur’ān* (Washington, DC, 2019), 116–35, at 130–3.

⁴⁷ P. Hardie, ‘Images of the Persian Wars in Rome’, in E. Bridges, E. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (edd.), *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium* (Oxford and New York, 2007), 127–43, at 135–6.

⁴⁸ T. Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire* (Chichester and Malden, MA, 2011), 82; cf. Van Dam (n. 2), 218.

⁴⁹ On Maxentius’ self-presentation M. Cullhed, *Conservator urbis suae: Studies in the Politics and Propaganda of the Emperor Maxentius* (Stockholm, 1994) remains seminal; see also S. Betjes and S. Heijnen, ‘“The usurping princeps”: Maxentius’ image and its Constantinian legacy’, *Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology* 5 (2018), 5–23, citing more recent work.

within', an Eastern despot resident in Rome.⁵⁰ Presenting Maxentius as a new Xerxes reinforces this characterization, but also reflects another long-standing practice, one attested in Rome as early as the first century B.C., in which the Persian Wars are mapped onto contemporary events.⁵¹ Campaigns undertaken on the eastern frontier, especially those against the Parthian kings of Persia (who claimed descent from Xerxes' family), by Augustus, Lucius Verus, Caracalla and Gordian III are variously presented, in literary sources and artistic representations, as revivals of the Persian Wars.⁵²

Xerxes was a familiar figure in these Roman re-imaginings. According to Plutarch and other authors, the Late Republican general L. Licinius Lucullus, a lover of luxury, was branded *Xerxes togatus*, 'Xerxes in a toga', because of, among other things, the enormous opulent structures he erected over the sea, which, in their scale, grandiosity and blurring of natural boundaries, recalled the bridging of the Hellespont.⁵³ The poet Lucan likens his anti-hero Julius Caesar to Xerxes when the Roman general builds a massive mole by chaining tree-trunks together to blockade the harbour of Brundisium.⁵⁴ In 39, Caligula had a boat-bridge erected across the waters between Baiae and Puteoli in the Bay of Naples that he traversed on two consecutive days in a sort of quasi-triumph. Suetonius reports that many thought the emperor built the bridge to rival Xerxes', and Cassius Dio has Caligula, using the Xerxean form ζεύξας, boast that his bridge was longer than the Persian king's.⁵⁵ Evocations of Xerxes continue to appear in literary works of the later empire. In 310, a panegyrist praises Constantine's construction of a permanent span across the Rhine at Cologne, contrasting it with both Xerxes' and Caligula's temporary boat-bridges.⁵⁶ The historian Zosimus' account of Constantine's victory over Licinius at the Hellespont in 324, drawing on a lost source, evokes the Greeks' triumph over the Persians at Salamis in 480 B.C. and thereby presents another defeated rival of Constantine as Xerxes *rediuivus*.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ In a similar vein, Nero is represented by Tacitus as an Egyptian/Persian tyrant living in Rome: T. Woodman, 'Nero's alien capital: Tacitus as paradoxographer (*Annals* 15.36–7)', in T. Woodman and J. Powell (edd.), *Author and Audience in Latin Literature* (Cambridge and New York, 1992), 173–88.

⁵¹ On the Persian Wars tradition in Rome, see Bridges (n. 6), 157–89; Hardie (n. 47), 127–43; Rosivach (n. 16), 1–8; R.M. Schneider, 'Die Faszination des Feindes: Bilder der Parther und des Orients in Rom', in J. Wiesehöfer (ed.), *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse/The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation. Beiträge des internationalen Colloquiums, Eutin (27.–30. Juni 1996)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 95–127; A. Spawforth, 'Symbol of unity? The Persian Wars tradition in the Roman empire', in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford and New York, 1994), 233–47.

⁵² Bridges (n. 6), 161–2; Hardie (n. 47), 129–31; Spawforth (n. 51), 237–40.

⁵³ Vell. Pat. 2.33.4, Plin. *HN* 9.170, Plut. *Luc.* 39.3; Plutarch furthers his Persianizing characterization of Lucullus by claiming that his table was opulent and 'satrapal' (σατραπικὴν), that is, like that of a Persian governor (*Comparison of Luc. and Cim.* 1.5). On Lucullus as *Xerxes togatus*, see Hardie (n. 47), 133; V. Jolivet, '*Xerxes togatus*: Lucullus en Campanie', *MÉFRA* 99 (1987), 875–904, at 875–8.

⁵⁴ 2.660–79, with Bridges (n. 6), 173 and Hardie (n. 47), 134, from which is borrowed the term 'anti-hero'.

⁵⁵ Suet. *Calig.* 19, Cass. Dio 59.17; see also Sen. *De brevitate uitae* 18.5. On Caligula's remarkable bridge and his possible intentions in erecting it, see Bridges (n. 6), 171–3 and Hardie (n. 47), 132–3. Eusebius may have known of Caligula's construction, as it is discussed in Joseph. *AJ* 19.5–6; the nineteenth book of this work was in his library, and he quotes (and alters) a long passage from it in the *Ecclesiastical History* (2.10.3–9 ~ *AJ* 19.343–51): H. Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden, 1972), 79–88, at 81–2.

⁵⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).13. On the bridge, see Galliazzo (n. 28), 1.78, 2.271–3.

⁵⁷ D. Krallis, 'Greek glory, Constantinian legend: Praxagoras' Athenian agenda in Zosimos *New History*', *JLA* 7 (2014), 110–30.

Eusebius' portrayal of Maxentius as Xerxes, then, is another example of how prominent Romans might be unfavourably likened to the Persian emperor, remembered for centuries as the 'archetypal barbarian oppressor'.⁵⁸ This portrayal may also take part in the venerable practice, described above, of linking Roman campaigns on the eastern frontier to the Persian Wars. For in the latter part of his reign Constantine intended to invade Persia, then ruled by the Sassanid dynasty; indeed, some sources say that he died during the early stages of his expedition, en route to the east from Constantinople.⁵⁹ Eusebius was aware of his intention: he describes Constantine's preparations for the invasion.⁶⁰ When Constantine, who in 297/8 had fought under Emperor Galerius in the last major conflict between Persia and Rome, began to consider this campaign is unclear, but textual and numismatic evidence suggests a date as early as 324 or 325,⁶¹ around the same time that Eusebius' account of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in the *Ecclesiastical History* appeared in its final form. The later account in the *Life of Constantine* was composed in the aftermath of Constantine's death, when war had broken out between Rome and Persia: the Sassanian king Shapur II led an expedition into Roman Mesopotamia and besieged the frontier city of Nisibis for sixty-three days, whilst the late emperor's son, Constantius, assumed control of the Roman forces mustered for his father's campaign and fought the Persians intermittently for much of his reign.⁶² Panegyrics composed by Libanius and Julian in honour of Constantius compare Shapur with Xerxes.⁶³ For an ancient reader of Eusebius familiar with the recent hostility between Rome and Persia, the portrayal of Maxentius as the nonpareil Persian despot Xerxes must have had particular resonance. One might see in the portrayal an argument by analogy: just as Constantine had defeated Maxentius, the Persian king inside the empire, so he, or his descendants, would defeat Shapur, the Persian king outside it.

This article has suggested that Eusebius' accounts of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge evoke Xerxes' bridging of the Hellespont, an astonishing act recounted repeatedly by ancient authors. Later tellings of the tale were indebted to the authoritative accounts of Aeschylus and Herodotus, who, in describing Xerxes' feat, employed a particular metaphor, that of the yoke. The yoke connoted dominance over two distinct but related realms, the physical and the political. In narrating the conflict between Constantine and Maxentius, Eusebius has been seen so far to employ yoke-language only in the former sense, to describe Maxentius' boat-bridge over the Tiber. But towards the end of Eusebius' accounts there appears one last yoke, and this time the word is used in its latter sense.⁶⁴ To commemorate his victory, Constantine had a statue of himself,

⁵⁸ Bridges (n. 6), 107.

⁵⁹ On Constantine's death and his Persian campaign, see G. Fowden, 'The last days of Constantine: oppositional views and their influence', *JRS* 84 (1994), 146–70; E.K. Fowden, 'Constantine and the peoples of the eastern frontier', in N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge and New York, 2012²), 377–407; K. Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oakland, 2016), 17–64.

⁶⁰ *Vit. Const.* 4.56–7, with G. Fowden (n. 59), 146–53.

⁶¹ E.K. Fowden (n. 59), 389–91.

⁶² T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 258–63.

⁶³ *Lib. Or.* 59.65; *Julian, Or.* 1.28b–d, 1.42c–d, 2.63a–b, where Shapur is said to be imitating (μιμούμενος) Xerxes.

⁶⁴ Eusebius also would have encountered the yoke as a metaphor for political submission and personal slavery in the Bible, where it is especially common in the Old Testament: see e.g. Gen. 27:40; Lev. 26:13; Deut. 8:48; 1 Kgs 12:4–14; Isa. 9:4, 10:27; Gal. 5:1; 1 Tim. 6:1. The yoke is used similarly in Old Babylonian and Assyrian texts: M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford and New York, 1997), 520.

gripping a cross, displayed in Rome; the statue bore a Latin inscription presented in Greek by Eusebius: ‘By this saving sign, the true proof of bravery, I have liberated your city, saved from the yoke of the tyrant; even more, freeing the Senate and People of the Romans, I restored them to their ancient fame and brilliance.’⁶⁵ This inscription aptly caps Eusebius’ accounts of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, since the collapse of Maxentius’ boat-bridge, his yoking of the Tiber, marked the collapse of his tyranny, his yoking of Rome.

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⁶⁵ τούτω τῷ σωτηριώδει σημείῳ, τῷ ἀληθεῖ ἐλέγχῳ τῆς ἀνδρείας τὴν πόλιν ὑμῶν ἀπὸ ζυγοῦ τοῦ τυράννου διασωθεῖσαν ἠλευθέρωσα, ἔτι μὴν καὶ τὴν σύγκλητον καὶ τὸν δῆμον Ῥωμαίων τῇ ἀρχαίᾳ ἐπιφανείᾳ καὶ λαμπρότητι ἐλευθερώσας ἀποκατέστησα, *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.11 ~ *Vit. Const.* 1.40.2, where ζυγοῦ τυραννικοῦ replaces ἀπὸ ζυγοῦ τοῦ τυράννου. In his translation of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Rufinus provides a Latin text of the inscription that he apparently acquired through autopsy; it, too, includes yoke-language (*iugo tyrannicae dominationis*): Van Dam (n. 2), 192–6.