



yorkshiremuseum&gardens

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

YORK'S ROMAN EMPEROR

A TEACHER'S GUIDE



YORKSHIRE MUSEUM:
31 MARCH - 29 OCTOBER

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Constantine the Great

Yorkshire Museum, York

31 March - 29 October 2006

The proclamation of Constantine as Emperor took place in York on 306AD. This exhibition celebrates this proclamation, and brings together a superb collection of objects which give an insight into Constantine's legacy.

The exhibition includes Roman textiles, coins, mosaics and sculpture. Many of these objects are on loan from other museums, and some have never been seen in Yorkshire before. The exhibition will appeal to all ages, and we hope very much that both pupils and teachers alike will be fascinated by the objects on display.

This pack has been designed to give background information for teachers. Each section corresponds to each of the gallery areas in the exhibition. Inside the pack references are made to key objects on display in the exhibition. Further information on all of the objects on display can be found in the comprehensive catalogue which supports the exhibition. This is for sale in the museum shop, though a copy is available for all education groups to take around the exhibition during their visit.

Also included in the pack are ideas for follow-up classroom activities and sheets which can be photocopied for use in the museum.

We hope this pack is of use, and we look forward to welcoming you and your pupils to this exciting exhibition!

www.constantinethegreat.org.uk



Constantine's life *(Gallery One)*

The Emperor Constantine the Great came to power on 25th July 306 - in York.

Constantine was born at Naissus (Serbia) in about 272 AD and spent much of his early life at Nicomedia (Turkey) in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire.

Helena, Constantine's mother was said to have been a barmaid whilst Constantius, Constantine's father had risen up the ranks of the army.

For most of the Empire period, the Roman Empire was ruled by a single Emperor. The Emperor Diocletian however, split the Empire into the east and west and created a system of four rulers and Constantine's father was one of the lesser rulers (Caesar) in the west.

When Diocletian retired in 305 (an unusual step for a Roman Emperor as a lot of them were assassinated), the system fell apart. Constantine had been in living in the East of the Empire and when Constantius became senior emperor in the West, Constantine hurried to Britain. Constantine and Constantius went north to defeat the Picts and then returned to Eboracum (York), the most important town of Roman Britain. Constantius' rule was short lived and when he died in York in 306 Constantine was proclaimed Emperor. He had no right to the title as it wasn't hereditary.

"Arrayed in his father's own purple robe Constantine emerged from his father's halls, showing to one and all that, as though revived, his father

reigned through him. Then he led the procession, and with his father's friends about him he formed the escort for his father. Enormous crowds of people and military guards... with unanimous consent praised the accession of the son as a new life for the dead; and immediately from the first word in their cries of acclamation they proclaimed the new Emperor Imperator and Venerable Augustus."

Eusebius: "Life of Constantine".

Constantine went on to rule for 31 years, the longest reign since the Augustus in the 1st century AD, defeating his enemies until he was sole leader of the Empire.

His key achievement was to establish religious tolerance in the Roman Empire and this led to the rise of the Christian Church. In 311 AD Constantine stopped persecution of Christians in the Western Empire.

The following year Constantine won an important victory defeating Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian bridge. Prior to the battle Constantine had a vision or a dream. In the sky he saw a cross (Chi-Rho) and the words "In hoc signo vince" or "in this sign conquer". Constantine then put the sign on the shields of all his troops and went on to win the battle.

Constantine defeated his rivals eventually becoming the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Constantine was a skilled military man and this helped him to maintain and increase his power.



Roman York *(Gallery One)*

The Romans had first come to York in AD71. Over the years the Roman presence grew in York and by the time of Constantine there was a large fortress and also a civilian settlement.

The Roman Fortress was north of the River Ouse with the main military headquarters being where York Minster now stands. The sixth legion was stationed in York. The exhibition includes objects typically found on military sites such as weapons and gaming boards. There is also a rare mail suit found at Arbeia Roman Fort which has been burnt in a fire.

There was a civilian settlement on the south side of the river, in the area now occupied by the railway station and Micklegate. In the civilian settlement, across the road from the railway station, a building with many beautiful mosaics was found. This may have been a residential palace in which Constantine stayed. A marble head of Constantine has been found in the fortress area of York (Stonegate).

There following sites in York have visible Roman Remains:

- Multangular Tower in Museum Gardens - this is the west corner of the legionary fortress
- Minster Foundations
- Outside York Minster - recreated Roman Pillar
- Roman Baths pub - the Roman Baths are in the basement



Hoard (*Gallery One*)

The Beaurains (Arras) Treasure on display in the exhibition was found in 1922 at Beaurains in France.

It consisted of a pot containing a silver vessel, Roman jewellery and hundreds of coins. The hoard comes from the time of Constantine and includes coins from Constantius, Diocletian and Maxentius as well as Diocletian himself.

There have been many hoards found dating from Roman times. In an age when there were no banks or secure storage, burying valuables was commonplace. If the person forgot where they had buried something or something unfortunate happened to that person, the hoard may have lain forgotten until discovered many years later.

Sometimes hoards are connected with unstable political times. To find out more about coins visit www.finds.org.uk/romancoins/index.php



Constantine's Power *(Gallery Two)*

As the empire had been split, other cities had also risen to prominence, including Treviri (Trier) in the Rhineland of Germany, which was a focal point for the Western Empire. Constantine made this his main imperial residence until 315, building a palace hall, and many other buildings. The grand audience hall of the palace still stands today. He also built the oldest church in the city between 310 and 320.

In the Eastern Empire Constantine favoured the City of Byzantium. In 324 he re-founded the city as 'Constantinople' (now modern day Istanbul). It was the new Rome of the East and he embarked on an ambitious building plan, building churches and many civic buildings including a hippodrome (race course). The life size model of a goose on display in the exhibition is the sort of decoration that could have adorned the hippodrome. A pipe goes through the beak, so it may have emitted, smoke, steam or sound. When Constantine died he was buried in Constantinople.

In 315/6 the magnificent 'Arch of Constantine' was built, celebrating his victory over Maxentius and his ten year anniversary as an Emperor. Some of the sculpture on the arch was taken from other monuments and statues were altered to show Constantine, rather than previous Emperors. This may have been because it was only three years from his entry into Rome to his anniversary, which left little time to build a complete new arch.

For images of Constantine's Arch visit the following website http://sights.seindal.dk/sight/299_Arch_of_Constantine.html but please note that this website is suitable for teacher use only, and not suitable for children.

At this time Rome was still the capital of the Empire, but Emperors rarely visited it, spending the rest of the time in the Empire. They entered Rome for anniversaries and events - Constantine held both his 10th and 20th anniversaries there.

These cities were all at strategic positions and held garrisons of troops which helped to strengthen Constantine's power and gave focal points to each region.

York was also an important city for northern Britain. The finds from a burial in Sycamore Terrace in York include an inscription "Hail sister, may you live in God", which shows that there may have been Christians in Britain. There are also bracelets and earrings found at this site.

In a period where there is no printing and television, the only way to put an image across was through architecture and monuments, or more mobile means such as coinage. Images on coins were often stylized to show a perfect image of the Emperor. In the time of the Emperor Diocletian, the coins of his lesser rulers all had imagery which linked them to him, which was a good move politically. These images had a squared head, a 'Roman' nose and stubble. Constantine was the first emperor for many years not to have a beard and he developed a clean shaven image. Images would also be linked with the gods, or with great achievements of the emperors such as winning battles. Coinage formed an important part of imperial propaganda.



Constantine and Christianity *(Gallery Three)*

Following the life and death of Christ in the early years of the Roman Empire, Christianity gradually spread through the Roman world.

Roman society was polytheistic, allowing a Roman to worship a whole range of gods at any one time, without compromising any god. Part of worship often involved animal sacrifice. This belief system was fundamental to the Roman state and even the Emperor himself was considered to be a god.

As Christians only worshipped one God and would not worship others or the Emperor, they were seen as a threat to the state as not acknowledging the position and power of the Emperor. Several emperors lead persecutions on the faith, the most recent to the time of Constantine being under Diocletian in 303AD.

In 311 AD Constantine and his co-emperor in the Western Empire ended the persecution of Christians. The defining moment when Constantine is thought to have become a supporter of Christianity was in following year, when Constantine defeated Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian bridge. Prior to the battle Constantine had a vision or a dream. In the sky he saw a Chi-Rho (cross) and the words "In hoc signo vince" or "in this sign conquer". Constantine then put the sign on the shields of all his troops. Constantine attributed his victory to the support of the Christian god.

From this point he tolerated all religions and actively supported Christianity, granting privileges to Christian clergy in 313 as well as giving wealth such as jewels, plate and statuary. Persecution of Christians was stopped by Licinius in the Eastern Empire. Later

Lincinius revived Christian persecution and Constantine fought and defeated him in battle, seeing this as part of God's work.

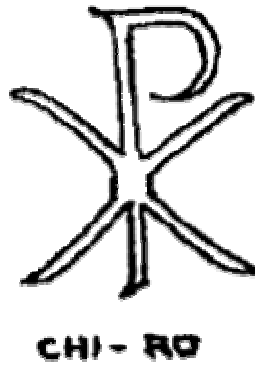
For Christians Constantine was God's deputy on earth. He attended the Council of Nicea in 325 and it was at this Council the Nicene Creed, an important statement of Christian belief was written. Animal sacrifice was also banned at this Council, and it was here that the calculation for date for Easter was decided.

Constantine and his mother, Helena, were responsible for the foundation of many churches across the Empire, including the Holy Land. At the end of his life, just before he died, Constantine was baptized. This was a normal time of life to do this at this period; you would be cleansed of your sins ready for heaven. Despite this, opinion is divided as to whether Constantine was a true Christian or whether he supported Christianity for political gain.

Although Constantine supported Christianity he did not ban or persecute other religions, so Christianity and traditional Roman beliefs co-existed side by side. Consequently it is not unusual to find Christianity absorbing religious symbolism from other religions. The halo, or nimbus, for example, had long been used for depicting Roman gods before its use for Christian saints, depictions of Christ and angels. The halo effect is also linked to the rays of the sun that were depicted in images of the Sun God. Christianity also developed its own range of symbols.

The Water Newton Treasure, found in Cambridgeshire and on display in the exhibition, consists of one gold and twenty seven silver objects; it includes bowls, plaques and a strainer. Christian symbols such as the Chi-Rho can be found on the objects, and they are thought to be evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain.

The Chi-rho is a cross which combines a P and X. These are the first two letters of the word Christ Christus as it is spelt in Greek. Prior to Constantine it was also used to mean time Chronus. From the time of Constantine it was associated purely with Christianity.



A and W stand for the Greek letters alpha and omega, the first and last words of the Greek alphabet. When viewed together, they are taken to have reference to the Christian God who is the beginning and end of everything.

The Greek word for fish is ichtûs. The letters of this word can stand for **I**esous **C**hristos **T**heou **U**sios **S**oter, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. Images of fish in Roman art are often linked to Christianity.



How the Romans Lived (*Galleries Four and Five*)

The Constantine period saw an increase in Roman Luxury. The rich lived in style and a wealthy roman villa would have colourful mosaics and wall plaster. The effect would have been stunning and a feast of colour.

Wall Painting

Wall painting was a popular way to decorate all kinds of building; the grander the building, the grander the wall painting. The subjects of paintings were appropriate to the function of the room. For instance a dining room may have people lying on couches eating, whilst baths may have water related subjects.

Paintings also enhanced the architecture of the building. This was done by painting columns, roofs and fake marble. You can see some examples of these in the exhibition. Paintings could be very brightly coloured and red was a very popular. Hunting, mythology and scenes from family life were all popular topics. Like mosaics, it is thought that artists worked from copy books.

Wall paintings are made up of stucco (plaster) and paint. The stucco had a base layer of coarse filler, followed by around 3 layers of coarse lime and sand, and finer layers of lime and marble.

The background colour was put on whilst the plaster was still damp. The basic design was planned out on the plaster.

Many of the pieces of wall plaster in the exhibition are thought to be of some kind of religious significance.

Pigments of the paint used in wall paintings were obtained from mineral, vegetable and animal sources:

<i>Red</i>	Vermillion or cinnabar (mercuric sulphide)
<i>Blue</i>	Copper, silica and calcium mix Indigo - vegetable dye Woad - vegetable dye
<i>Purple</i>	Sea mollusc
<i>Green</i>	Glaucanite and celadonite
<i>Yellow</i>	Yellow Ochre (clay and silica)
<i>Brown</i>	Red-brown ochre
<i>White</i>	Marble or oyster shells
<i>Black</i>	Carbon

The website www.accd.edu/sac/vat/arthistory/arts1303/Rome4.htm gives examples of various styles of wall painting.

www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/daily_life_gallery_01.shtml is a website showing many aspects of Roman life - click through the images to find examples of wall painting subjects.

Mosaics

The first floor mosaics were made of natural pebbles. By the third century BC it was common to have mosaics made entirely of cut tesserae. The tesserae (the hand cut stones that make up the mosaic) were made of rocks indigenous to where the mosaic was made, although in Italy large quantities of stone were often imported.

In Britain it was often difficult to find red stone, so instead they were made from terracotta (often roofing or building tiles) and sometimes they were purpose-made. The tesserae are cubes ranging from 0.5 to 1.5cm. The finer the mosaic, the more expensive it was.

The floor onto which the mosaic was to be laid would have to have been a firm foundation of compressed rubble and mortar. Guidelines were painted or scored into the top layer of the foundation. As the person laying the mosaic was skilled, little detail would be needed as they often used repetitive patterns.

There are three ways to lay a mosaic:

- Direct - set the tesserae directly on to the setting mortar.
- Indirect - the upper surface of the tesserae are glued on to cloth or paper and the design set into the mortar. The glue and cloth/paper is dissolved off with hot water
- Reverse - similar to the indirect, but the lower face of the tesserae is glued onto the paper. This reverses the image.

Master craftsmen had copy-books of mosaic designs, a procedure similar to choosing wall paper today. It is therefore possible to tell the workshop which produced a certain mosaic. In Britain many patterns were retained as traditional patterns and repeated over the centuries.

The Hinton St. Mary mosaic on display in the exhibition came from the Durnovarian (Dorchester) school of mosaicists. The mosaic itself is thought to allude to Psalm 22 which starts with the suffering of Christ and goes on to salvation. In the centre is the image of a young man, thought to be Christ, with a Chi-Rho sign behind him. Either side of his head are pomegranates (pomegranates have hundreds of seeds so are often used as a symbol of life). In each of the corners is a figure. This design is not uncommon, and normally each of these figures would represent a season - spring summer, autumn and winter - and this style is known as a *four seasons mosaic*. In this case however, the people are thought to represent the apostles. The trees depicted elsewhere on the mosaics are symbols of the Tree of Life.

Other symbolism is present on the rest of the mosaic. This mosaic is one of only three mosaics with Christian symbolism which has been found in Britain.



Clothing *(Gallery Five)*

The making of clothes was a normal household chore. To buy ready made clothes was considered very extravagant. People would own relatively few clothes in comparison to today, and they were worn until they fell apart after being mended and patched.

A slave would be given a new tunic once a year and a cloak every other year. In relative values, clothes were much more expensive than they are today, and would often be the target for theft (one of the reasons being the time it took to make them).

Wool would be spun by hand using a drop spindle, and then the yarn would have to be weaved into cloth. Sometimes this would be done by creating a length of cloth which could then be cut into shape, but often it was by actually weaving the shape of the garment, saving cutting and also waste. The fabrics used were wool, linen and, for the extremely wealthy, silk, which was worth literally its weight in gold.

Like today, the colour of clothing could be symbolic. White was worn for all kinds of celebrations (including weddings) and dark colours for mourning. Purple was only used by the wealthy, partly due to the cost of its production.

There was a divide in male and female dress. At formal occasions men wore a toga, similar to the wearing of a suit today. It was made up of two garments. The under garment was a tunic, basically a rectangular piece of material folded over and sewn, with arm and head holes. Over this was worn the toga, a very long piece of material, of which the length was twice the height of the wearer and the width three times that of the wearer.

Women wore a basic tunic, but this was longer than the male tunic. Respectable married women wore a *stola* over this, which was similar to the tunic but arranged differently. Tunics and stolas were belted, high

under the breastline, similar to the style worn in the early 19th century. As the fashions changed in the later Empire period, long sleeved tunics or *dalmaticus* became fashionable. The *dalmaticus* in the exhibition shows evidence of repair and is patched.

Other textiles could be very fine and the textiles on display from Egypt show superb skill and vibrant colours. The two textile faces on display in the exhibition come from Christian burials.

Both women and men wore sandals and boots at various times in the Empire period. The army wore hobnailed boots, the hobnails making boots last longer. Slipper style shoes similar to those in the exhibition may have been common in the Eastern Empire.

Men wore little jewellery, although they often wore insignia rings. A gold ring would be set with a gemstone into which was cut with a specific design. The ring could be pushed into hot wax and used as a seal. It wasn't unusual for the stones to fall out and a large number of these have been found at the baths at Carleon Roman Fort. Images and information on rings can be found at www.gtj.org.uk/en/item1/25423

Women wore more jewellery, preferably gold. Pierced earrings would be worn along with bangles, gold necklaces and glass or gem beads. This exhibition shows some very beautiful pieces that only the very wealthy could afford. Gold necklaces are mixed with emeralds whilst gemstones are set in gold as pendants and brooches. Delicately carved Cameos were also worn as jewellery. The bangles show the fashion at this time of piercing gold into lacy openwork. Women would also wear insignia rings.

Mirrors were a luxury that only the rich could afford, so many people rarely saw their own reflection. Mirrors were basically a highly polished piece of metal. This method is used in some public toilets today. The backs of mirrors were ornately decorated.



Constantine's Legacy *(Gallery Five)*

The rule of Constantine brought a time of peace and prosperity, with the economy based on agriculture. Crops such as spelt, barley and oats were widely grown.

Britain also had its own wealth, being rich in minerals such as copper, lead, tin, silver and some gold. Pewter was made in Britain and used to make tableware for everyday use.

Silver was also imported from other parts of the Empire for more elaborate vessels. The Traprain Law Treasure on display in the exhibition was found in a hill fort near Edinburgh. It includes beautiful pieces of silver with images of the New Testament, and also many vessels cut into pieces. The reason for this is unknown, but it could be a pirates hoard cut up for distribution, a way of exchanging wealth or cut up ready to be melted down. In Roman times, metals were valued by weight, and little value was attached to workmanship.

Building trades flourished, which included the production of tiles for roofs. Tiles would be individually hand made and then laid out on the ground to dry. It isn't unusual to find paw prints from cats and dogs (or children!) who ran across the drying tiles, as can be seen in two tiles in the exhibition.

Constantine was a prolific Church builder, and his initial designs are still in use today, becoming the models for medieval churches and cathedrals of Europe. They are based on Roman aisled basilicas. The interiors of these churches shimmered with gold and silver

With thanks to Alison Bodley for the production of this pack.



Nicean Creed

*We believe in one God,
The Father,
Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
The Son of God,
Begotten from the Father,
Only-begotten,
That is, from the substance of the Father,
God from God,
Light from light,
True God from true God,
Begotten not made,
Of one substance with the father,
Through whom all things came into being,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation
Came down and became incarnate,
Becoming man,
Suffered and rose again on the third day,
Ascended to heavens,
Will come again to judge the living and the dead;
And in the Holy Spirit."*



Constantine Time Line

- 272-3 Constantine born at Naissus
- 285 Diocletian proclaimed Emperor and creates the Tetrachy, splitting the management of the Empire between east and west
- 305 Diocletian abdicates, a new Tetrarchy is formed with Constantius, Constantine's father, as senior emperor. Constantine flees to his father in the Western Empire.
- 306 Constantius dies in York and Constantine is proclaimed emperor
- 311 The Galerian edict ends persecution of Christians
- 312 Constantine defeats Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge
- 315/6 Arch of Constantine built
- 324 Constantine defeats Licinius in the East and becomes the sole Emperor
Foundation of Constantinople
- 325 Council of Nicea - date for Easter fixed and the Nicene Creed written
- 328 Helena, Constantine's mother dies
- 337 Constantine dies. He is baptized before he dies.

Visiting the Exhibition

Yorkshire Museum
Museum Gardens
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Group admission rates:

Under 5s	FREE
5-16	£2.00
Students	£2.50
Adult	£3.00

Open daily, 10am-5pm.

Schools within York LEA are admitted FREE of charge to the museum.

To make a booking:

Telephone: 01904 650333

E-mail: groupbookings@ymt.org.uk

An exciting education programme supports this exhibition. Full details can be found in the leaflet accompanying this pack, or by visiting the 'Education' page at www.constantinethegreat.org.uk

We look forward to welcoming you and your pupils!