

Consular diptychs in their social context: new eastern evidence

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Few scholars have entertained any serious doubts about Delbrueck's assignment of the Halberstadt diptych (Volbach 35) to the second consulate of the future emperor Constantius III in 417 (fig. 1).¹ His method was exemplary, but he missed one detail and failed to explain another satisfactorily. I propose to argue that the diptych was issued by an eastern rather than a western consul, in which case he should be identified as Fl. Constans, eastern consul in 414. If so, we would at last have a 5th-c. eastern diptych.² This would have major repercussions on our understanding of the earliest presentation diptychs, hitherto all presumed western.

1. Re-interpreting the Halberstadt diptych (Volbach 35)

The top register of both panels consists of a virtually identical imperial tableau comprising two seated Augusti, identified as western and eastern respectively by the personifications of Roma and Constantinopolis that sit beside them. Roma is clearly distinguished by her spear and helmet, while Constantinopolis wears what J. M. C. Toynbee characterized as "a crown of flowers surmounted by rays(?), or long, spiky leaves(?)," holding a laurel-branch in her left hand.³ The western Augustus is shown distinctly larger than his eastern colleague. This was a common practice whose meaning is unmistakable: at the time of the scene depicted, the latter was a minor.

In this context the term "minor" requires and yet defies definition. The actual age of an emperor was of no constitutional significance: there was no period of legal minority for an Augustus, however young (Theodosius II was crowned Augustus at the age of two). The principle of seniority among a plurality of emperors was always strictly observed: in official documents they are listed in sequence of promotion to the rank of Augustus irrespective of age. Nonetheless, if one of a plurality of emperors was less than about 15 years old, he was normally represented smaller than his colleague(s). It may be useful to set out the relevant surviving illustrations during the period with which we are concerned:⁴

1. Reverse of *solidus* issued at Milan to commemorate the joint consulship of Arcadius (19) and Honorius (12) in 396. The two emperors are shown seated on thrones, with the figure on the right (and so the senior emperor) slightly (but nonetheless distinctly) taller.⁵
2. The Stilicho diptych of 396 (V 63): the busts on Stilicho's shield are unequal, Arcadius at 19 and Honorius at 12.⁶
3. The LAMPADIORVM ivory of 396 (V 54): two unequal busts on the (suffect) consul's sceptre, Arcadius at 19 and Honorius at 12.

1 R. Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin 1929) no. 2, 87-93; W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike*³ (Mainz 1976) no. 35; H. Beck and P. C. Bol (edd.), *Spätantike und frühes Christentum: Ausstellung im Liebieghaus Museum alter Plastik Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt 1983) 647-49 (no. 229); most recent discussion (following Delbrueck), G. Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma: Stadtpersonifikationen der Spätantike* (Zurich 1995) 151-64.

2 This article owes much to A. Cutler's characteristically shrewd and trenchant criticisms.

3 "Roma and Constantinopolis in late-antique art from 365 to Justin II," *Studies presented to David Moore Robinson* 2 (St Louis 1953) 273.

4 This is a revised and expanded version of the list in my "Pagan ivories," in F. Paschoud (ed.), *Symmaque à l'occasion du mille six centième anniversaire du conflit de l'Autel de la Victoire* (Paris 1986) 58-59.

5 Illustrated in R. A. G. Carson, *Principal coins of the Romans* 3 (London 1981) no. 1503.

6 V 63. I am not persuaded by K. Shelton's argument against the identification with Stilicho (*JbAC* 25 [1982] 132-71); see now B. Küllerich and H. Torp, *JDAI* 104 (1989) 319-71.