



Constantine the Great: The Man and His Times

Michael Grant

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Constantine the Great delves into the reasons why the reign of this Roman emperor (306-37) marked an historical epoch, albeit one charged with irony. Founding his capital at Constantinople, Constantine revitalized the Eastern half of the empire, enabling it to survive and to flourish (as the Byzantine Empire) for another thousand years. Yet, as Grant shows, this shift of power to the east would prove fatal to the Western empire and have profound consequences for Europe as a whole.

Constantine's most far-reaching decision, however, was the legalization of Christianity and his conversion to the faith. Without this dramatic change, Christianity might have remained a suppressed, minority religion—or worse. Grant points out the irony behind this watershed too: For Constantine, the Christian God represented not peace but power, not humanity but success in warfare.

Whatever the emperor's motives, Christian writers of that period—and after—greatly admired Constantine. Grant draws on their writings judiciously, while noting, for example, that Eusebius fails to mention Constantine's murder of his own son and his empress. Grant deftly explores the many questions surrounding these killings—Had the son plotted revolution? Had his stepmother, the empress, fallen in love with him? Had the emperor allowed a charge of rape (possibly false) brought by the empress against her stepson, to stand?—and goes further than any historian before him in finding answers.

In examining Constantine as soldier, administrator, Christian, father, andhusband, Michael Grant produces a rich composite picture of a gifted but profoundly flawed man.

“Michael Grant is justly recognized as an expert & civilized guide to the ancient world.”—The Economist
“Michael Grant was one of the few classical historians to win respect from academics & a lay readership.”—The Times, London

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Constantine the Great: The Man and His Times Details

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From Reader Review Constantine the Great: The Man and His Times for online ebook

Ginger Heskett says

I registered a book at BookCrossing.com!
<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/14340385>

Michael Vincent says

I read this over a period of many years, but overall it gave some interesting history and background to an important person in history. I mostly appreciated the chapters on Constantine and the Christian God and Church, the story of his conversion, and found interesting how many churches he (and his mother Helena) built.

D.K. Brantley says

As the two stars indicate, "it was okay."

Reynold Levocz says

As a student of History, I enjoyed this book's detail of an age that changed the world forever

Redsteve says

A solid general biography. 3rd/4th Centuries are not my favorite period and this book makes me no more excited about it.

Ian Racey says

Grant has a tough task trying to paint an accurate picture of Constantine, because, as he says himself (repeatedly), all of our sources about him are either hopelessly hagiographic, because he was the first Christian emperor and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, or irredeemably hostile ... because he was the first Christian emperor and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. But he does a good job, describing the actions of an excellent field general, a cautious and moderate policy maker who nevertheless acted from a place of conviction, while also condemning Constantine's actions when they're harmful and ill judged (provoking a war with Persia), ultimately pointless (his victories over the Goths and Sarmatians) or downright evil (his executions of his oldest son and empress). On the

question of whether Constantine's conversion was genuine or a shrewd political calculation, Grant's answer boils down to "Both," but it's a conclusion that he reaches by exploring the subtleties of the situation and the historical context that led Constantine to the decisions he made, and it's a thorough and well-rounded argument. Grant can be repetitive at times, and I'd have liked more time spent on the foundation of Constantinople.

Douglas Wilson says

Okay.

Jack says

Constantine the Great. What can I say that already isn't in the title. I have a passionate love for learning about the Roman Empire. Nothing make me sadder than reading about the barbarian incursions on the Empire's northern frontier while the threat in the East continues to grow against Constantinople. A tragedy every time I read about the civil wars after the retirement of Diocletian leading to the sole rule of Constantine. In his greatest hours he sowed the seeds of the destruction of the Western Empire. The first Christian monarch, while all powerful, could not bring the Arian Christians into line with the rest of Christianity...leading to punitive measure against those deemed heretic, providing a precedent for wars and inquisitions against those who would be labeled heretic in the future. He created consolidated an empire but weakened it. He ensured the western empire would long outlive him until 1453 at the expense of the west. He recruited heavily in the Germanic tribes making Germans comfortable commanding the Roman armies, too comfortable. Rome remained Roman only for about 100 years after his death, yet Byzantium grew powerful due to his efforts. All Roman Empire lovers should read this one.

J says

Very dry from the very beginning with an opening chapter on sources. Who starts a biography of a roman emperor who most readers will know very little about already with a chapter on that? The writing style is dry and turgid.

David Elkin says

Just started Aug 30. Grant's style is very readable and this is basically a book that covers not only the man but deals well with Church History in the 300's. Grant states in the beginning that original sources are either all positive (some even overt flattery) by Christian authors or down right condemning (Pagan authors). I have enjoyed Grant's books over the years. Good for the casual fan.

The book is more "general" and an overview that I thought it would be. It certainly is an introduction to the man and not as in depth as I had hoped for.

Donna says

I really tried to get into this book, but finally gave up halfway through.

Rebecca says

There is no reason for it to take me so long to read a book that only had 225 pages of actual text, but it was just...so....*bad*.

I don't know why that was. Grant is known as a good writer and an excellent historian, and he certainly had an interesting subject, but I guess everyone's going to be off their game at some time or another. I struggled to even finish it. For the first hundred pages, every ten pages I kept thinking I was going to give up and put it down, because the writing was choppy and difficult, but I told myself I wasn't going to be defeated by a measly 200 page book. As I went along I got more used to the writing style and more interested in the information, so I made it through, but it was not a pleasant experience. Definitely not going to repeat.

Sharon says

This took a long time since I read it only when charging my nook. A bit dry in parts, but that's history. Grant focused more on the battles and victories, and not so much on the expansion of Christianity.

Patrick says

Kindling-dry history of the emperor that transformed Rome and ensured its survival by transferring the capital east.

Erik Graff says

This is one of Michael Grant's better books. One of his poorer books is another biography, that of Herod the Great. The reason for the difference may be that while there are relatively few sources for Herod, there are relatively many for Constantine, allowing Grant a broader canvas and more materials to reconstruct the character of the man and his times.

There is also some humor--a major virtue in an historian--in this book, more than I've been accustomed to from Grant's popular histories. Of course, most of it is dark and ironical.

The greatest impediment to my enjoyment of this biography is the great amount of space Grant devotes to Constantine's supposed architectural accomplishments. One who has visited the sites mentioned would get more out of it, but for readers like myself less travelled the lack of any photographs or diagrams is sorely

felt.

As re Constantine and Christianity, Grant comes down firmly on the side of those who believe the emperor's conversion sincere and date it to long before his death. Constantine's god, however, is only barely recognizable as Christian in today's terms.
