

## CONSTANTINE AND THE ENCAENIA

Michael A. Fraser

In September 335 the Martyrium basilica of the Cross was inaugurated. This event occurred in the same year that Constantine celebrated his tricennialia. The anniversary of the inauguration, known as the Encaenia, occurs on September 13. This paper will discuss the appropriateness of this date for the celebration of the Encaenia in 335.

The 13th September marks the day on which the liturgical Encaenia, the anniversary of the inauguration in 335, occurred. The *Chronicon Paschale* records September 17 as the day of the inauguration. This date has been accepted by H. A. Drake and W. H. C. Frend, for example, but not by Timothy Barnes. Liturgists have tended to trust the accuracy of the liturgical memory and accepted 13 September as the beginning of the inauguration feast in 335. The date given by the *Chronicon Paschale* would appear to be a date given in error for the Egyptian date of 17 Thout, the day on which the Coptic church celebrates the finding of the Cross.

In 333 the pilgrim from Bordeaux recounted having seen, a stone's throw away from the tomb of Christ, a basilica of wonderful beauty complete with water cisterns wherein infants were baptised. This basilica, the Martyrium, was not, it seems, a building site but rather had not only been completed but was already in use for baptism two years before its official inauguration.

If there was a delay between the basilica's completion and its inauguration then the theological turmoil in those years may well have partly accounted for the delay. Indeed, it has been suggested that one of the reasons for Constantine being absent from the inauguration ceremonies was for the same reason he turned back from his journey in the Eastern empire in 324; that there was no place for the emperor amidst disunity.<sup>1</sup>

The urgency, however, with which Constantine commanded the bishops to assemble in Jerusalem for the Encaenia is something to consider when discussing possible reasons behind the timing of the Encaenia. The council of Tyre certainly seems to have been convened as a prelude to the Encaenia assembly in Jerusalem. The historian Socrates states that the synod had been convened as a "secondary matter" to the inauguration of the Martyrium basilica, so that "all causes of contention being removed there, they might the more peacefully perform the inaugural ceremonies in the dedication of the church of God."<sup>2</sup> When the order came from Constantine that the bishops were to move from Tyre to Jerusalem the proceedings were unfinished; the bishops re-assembled in Jerusalem to re-admit Arius to communion.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of September 13th as the *natalis* of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline hill in Rome was noted by Baumstark.<sup>4</sup> Such a suggestion brings together the victory of Constantine over Licinius (who had placed himself under the patronage of Jupiter<sup>5</sup>) and the Saving Sign, in honour of which the basilica had been erected (possibly over a shrine to Jupiter).<sup>6</sup>

The Calendar of 354 preserves Roman non-Christian anniversaries, celebrations and games.<sup>7</sup> Included are the celebrations associated with various imperial victories. The 18th to the 22nd September are marked as the *Ludi Triumphales*, celebrating Constantine's victory over Licinius at Chalcedon.<sup>8</sup> One would have expected the final day of the games to mark the actual anniversary of the victory; in which case the games should have commenced on 13 September. However, since the *Ludi Romani* were already celebrated from 13 to 18 September, the first day of the *Ludi Triumphales* is pushed back to the last day of the *Ludi Romani*.<sup>9</sup> We also know that on September 18 335 Constantine raised his nephew to Caesar.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Encaenia in 335 occurred on the first day of the *Ludi Romani* and what should have been the first day of the *Ludi Triumphales*. If, as is widely assumed, the Encaenia lasted for a number of days then it would have included (or perhaps have ended on) the 18th September, the anniversary of Constantine's victory over Licinius. The Encaenia was further associated with the emperor and his tricennialia by the presence of the notary Marianus who arranged the episcopal banquets, money and clothes for the impoverished, and rich offerings for the basilica itself.<sup>11</sup>

September 13 was a particularly appropriate day for the Encaenia. Not simply because it coincided with the anniversary of Constantine's victory over Licinius and his honouring of the heavenly sign but because that day was also one of a wider theological significance. The Martyrium basilica is described by Eusebius as the New Jerusalem, predicted by the prophets of old, namely Ezekiel.<sup>12</sup> The implication, in accrediting Constantine with the building of a New Jerusalem, is that a new Solomon has also arisen. Less than fifty years later the pilgrim Egeria will write that the date of the Encaenia was also the day on which Solomon dedicated the temple.<sup>13</sup> The feast of Solomon's dedication commenced on the 10th day of Tishri, the day of atonement, and ended with the feast of Tabernacles. The feast of the Encaenia occurs in this very same season. According to a software application which calculates the Jewish feasts for any given year, in 335 the 10th day of Tishri fell on Saturday 13th September. Whilst we have some difficulty calculating the dates of the Jewish year before the calendar of Hillel II, the dates given by the software agree within a day or so with examples taken from Jack Finegan's *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, 1964).<sup>14</sup> There could scarcely have been a better day on which the Encaenia could occur. Not only because the Solomonic imagery is reinforced but also because the theology of Atonement and the Cross of Christ are inextricably bound together. In the context of the day of Atonement the Martyrium basilica, built as a symbol of the Cross, reflects the new Jerusalem, not only the city spoken of by the prophets but also that heavenly city which underlies the letter to the Hebrews.<sup>15</sup> Eusebius himself, in the oration he delivered at the Encaenia, also draws attention to the atoning death of Christ as one of the reasons for Christ's death.<sup>16</sup>

Michel van Esbroeck has also drawn attention to a sermon on the Church attributed to John of Jerusalem, delivered on September 15, 394 during the octave of the Encaenia. The sermon amounts to a discourse on the day of Atonement, a subject chosen, believes van Esbroeck, because in that year Atonement may have coincided with the Encaenia.<sup>17</sup>

If the day of Atonement fell on September 13 then the feast of Tabernacles in 335 commenced on September 18, the first day of the *Ludi Triumphales*. We have no explicit details concerning the length of the Jerusalem Encaenia in 335. The anniversary feast of the Encaenia, described by Egeria in her Journal and preserved in the Jerusalem lectionaries, lasted a full octave. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the Encaenia in 335 also lasted for a number of days. Eusebius mentions that numerous orations were delivered at the feast. The *Ludi Triumphales* itself lasted for five days. Thus, the Encaenia in 335 may also have coincided with the first day of the feast of Tabernacles. If the above reconstruction is accurate then the Jewish, Christian, and Roman calendars coincided with particular force on Saturday, September 13th 335.

Not only was it the first imperial Encaenia but the feast brought together connections between the cult of Jupiter, the days of Atonement and Tabernacles, the Cross of victory, the death and resurrection of Christ, the victory of Constantine over Licinius, and an offering of thanksgiving for a thirty year reign. A feast indeed rich in signification.

<sup>1</sup> Constantine's absence is not noticed by everyone; W.H.C. Frend, for example, places Constantine firmly in Jerusalem for the Encaenia in The Rise of Christianity. Philadelphia, 1984) 527. That Constantine could not bring himself to see "ces querelles indécentes" is the opinion of André Piganiol. L'Empire Chrétien (325-395). (Paris, 1972) 66.

<sup>2</sup> Socrates, H.E. 1.28.

<sup>3</sup> Athanasius, Apologia c. Arianos, 84; Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, 238.

<sup>4</sup> A. Baumstark, and B. Botte. Comparative Liturgy. (London, 1958) 183.

<sup>5</sup> The coinage of Licinius frequently depicts Jupiter with the legend, IOVI CONSERVATORI (The Roman Imperial Coinage Ed. C. H. V. Sutherland and R. A. G. Carson. Vol. VII. 590 (Nicomedia), 741; see also J. R. Fears. "The cult of Jupiter and Roman imperial ideology." ANRW II.17.1 (1981): 119).

<sup>6</sup> Jerome mentions a statue to Jupiter over the site of the Sepulchre (Ep. 58.3). It is generally accepted that the principal shrine was a temple dedicated to Aphrodite. The city of Jerusalem, bearing the name Aelia Capitolina, was dedicated to the gods of the Capitoline, the only such city in the empire outside Rome (see, for example, David Golan. "Hadrian's decision to supplant 'Jerusalem' by 'Aelia Capitolina'." Historia 35.2 (1986): 226-239).

<sup>7</sup> See Michele Renee Salzman. On Roman Time: The codex-calendar of 354 and the rhythms of urban life in late antiquity (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1990). A good commentary is still H. Stern. Le calendrier du 354: Etude sur son texte et sur les illustrations. Bibliothèque archéologique et historique. (Paris, 1953).

<sup>8</sup> H. Stern. Le calendrier du 354, 82.

<sup>9</sup> H. Stern. Le calendrier du 354, 81. Discussed by A. Degraasi. Inscriptiones Italiae. Vol. 13 (Rome, 1963) 509-511. September 18 was also the Triumphales Traiani.

<sup>10</sup> Chronicon Paschale 335. See the discussion in Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, 251. There is an allusion to the Caesars, including Dalmatius, in Eusebius, L.C. 3.2.

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, V.C. 4.44.

<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Wilken. The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian history and thought (New Haven, 1992) 93-100.

<sup>13</sup> Egeria, Itinerarium 48.1.

<sup>14</sup> The program is called, "Hebrew Calendar" (Polyglot Solutions) and may be downloaded from the Internet with the URL: <ftp://oi.uchicago.edu/pub/stuff/calendar/>.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Heb. 10:20.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebius, L.C. 15.11-12. This passage was not written especially for the day since it is almost word for word from the Theophania, 3.59. The coincidence of Atonement with the Encaenia may have influenced Eusebius' decision to speak with particular emphasis on the effects of Christ's death. The same themes occur in Cyril of Jerusalem's Catechetical Lecture 13.

<sup>17</sup> For the text of the sermon see, "Une homélie sur l'église attribuée à Jean de Jérusalem." Le Muséon 86 (1973): 283-304. His comments can be found in, "Jean II de Jérusalem et les cultes de S. Étienne, de la Sainte-Sion et de la Croix." Analecta Bollandiana 102 (1984): 99-134. The "Hebrew Calendar" software places 15 September, 394 on 4 Tishri. This would mean that 10 Tishri occurred the day after the end of the Encaenia octave (Sept 21).