

The 1st ACE Contest – Academic Year 2001 / 02
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The Coin of Thessalonica

As the dust of many emperors settles upon my faded imprint of Emperor Flavius Julius Constans, I struggle to recall the many journeys which have taken me across the great Roman Empire. For it is not without first telling my story that I will resign myself to be covered by the sedimentary layers of time. Alas, however, after my story is told I will rest; for I am old and dull, my inscriptions worn, and the dirt is beginning to stick to what was once the glimmering shine of polished bronze. Yet as I recall my travels from the Diocese of Iberia to Gaul to Italia to Aegyptus and further, I leave with no regrets.

I was minted in Thessalonica, in the Diocese of Macedonia, or more specifically in the province of Graecia, whereupon I was immediately shipped out to be distributed in Rome. It was around 347 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Constans whose imprint decorates my obverse side. At the time, Emperor Constans reigned over much of the central part of the Roman Empire including Italia, Africa, Illyricum and Macedonia. As well, he ruled over the territory of his brother Constantine II, who died in battle after attempting to seize some of Constans' realm of the empire. The empire lay divided among the three sons of Constantine I until Constans took hold of his brothers' territory in 340 A.D. Yet as I lay packed in the carriers' bags I knew nothing until I arrived at the Roman argentarius.

Soon after my arrival in Rome I was handed to a wealthy merchant who wished to exchange a siliqua for a heavy half siliqua and a number of small bronze coins like myself. As I was clutched in the man's hand, he passed through the streets of Rome—passing by markets and shows, and poets reciting on the street corner. I was astonished and bewildered by the bustling streets of Rome as I proudly and naively displayed my crisp imprint of Emperor Constans and the shine of my new bronze. Without much delay, however, I was thrown harshly into the merchant's purse as the darkness closed in around me and the noise and clamor of the street became faint.

The following morning I felt a lurch as a herald picked up the heavy silk of the purse and grabbed from it a handful of the small coins. As the herald approached the door I heard the respectful praises of clients at the

doorstep, many giving thanks for the help of their patron. When the herald stopped at the door he proceeded to hurl me into the air where I found myself falling quickly to the ground. As the clients scrambled to retrieve the money thrown at them, dirt and dust covered the bronze face of Emperor Constans as I was forgotten in the dirt.

I cannot recall how much time passed until the sound of boys running in the street and the sudden flash of light flung the dust from my shining bronze as I reflected the sunlight in the street. It was not the young pueri, however, who discovered me but a small mischievous little hand that seemed to scoop me up with delight. As I was held tightly, fastened in the small hand, I could see nothing, although before long I could hear the bustle of the forum. As the grip loosened I could see glimpses of enormous buildings, large temples and exotic fruits being sold at various stands and markets. There was a vast array of items including honey, peaches, pheasant, ham and fish, all, of course, costing far more than the comparatively insignificant value of a coin such as myself, which stood far below the denarius, quintarius or even the dupondius.

Suddenly a great clamor arose in the forum as citizens cheered and parted the way. With a scream of excitement the hand unclasped its grip and I tumbled to the ground yet now with a clear view of the procession coming through the forum. It was a grand procession filled with iuvenes, feminae, sacerdotes and puellae saltantes. From amidst the crowd I could hear voices saying it was the annual procession honoring Constans' successful campaign against the Franci only a few years before in 341 and 342 A.D. Just as I was beginning to feel overwhelmed, the wheel of a vendor's cart rolled right over my hard bronze structure as I was left to sit beneath the wheel until long after the procession had passed.

My experience goes on like this for some time as I found myself thrown from the hands of one to another, in pouches or in bags, from the rich to the poor. I even witnessed the murder of my dear Emperor, Flavius Constans, whose life ended at the blade of a usurper named Magnentius in 350 A.D. I was constantly moving by chance to unexpected places-in the courts of the basilica, the seats of the Colosseum and even among the Emperors change or across the sea, to Britain and back.

As can be expected I witnessed far beyond the years of Emperor Constans and almost to the fall of the empire. My story continues yet I have realized it is far too complex to tell you in one sitting. So alas, I must hold

out just a little longer to see my story pass on and my knowledge of Rome, its scandals and triumphs, revealed to one more curious mind.