‘Remembering’ has become one of the most frequently applied concepts of approaches in modern historical research, even to a point that it risks losing its meaning. The notion has gained importance from the time that ‘lieux de mémoire’ and ‘Erinnerungsplätze’ won the field. Although initially, ‘memory’ and the connoted concept of ‘remembering’ or ‘remembrance’ pertained to particular places, objects or texts, the concept later has met with a more general application in historical theory. Van Dam’s contribution to this field of research, while still retaining the original idea of ‘remembrance’ associated with a place, the Milvian Bridge in case, is highly innovative and utterly convincing: in his book, he understands ‘remembering’ as the active process of thinking backwards to an iconic as well as hypothetical event in history: Constantine’s conversion to Christianity on 28 October 312 AD just before the battle at the Milvian Bridge. By a retrospective approach, viz. the study of the reception from modern times back to Medieval and late Antique reports and interpretations of that pivotal day (chapters 1-3), Van Dam shows how ‘remembering’ was able to transform an event, about which very little is known in an historical sense, and about which primarily myths make their rounds, to which the memory of the emperor Constantine the Great himself, as the protagonist in the turbulent years to follow, have contributed a lot (chapter 4).

Not, however, without the help of his loyal supporter Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, who in two works, the Historia Ecclesiastica and Life of Constantine, helped to shape the myth that set the standard for later generations (chapter 5). In a careful analysis, Van Dam demonstrates how the successive four editions of the former work gradually change the interpretation of the battle at the Milvian Bridge, as a result of the author’s increased knowledge and personal experience with the emperor. The question of the sources for the described events belongs, by the nature of the case, to the most speculative parts of the book. Personal conversation with Constantine, who must have spoken from memory about past events in several circumstances, contributed to a kind of propagandistic historiography, while, the other way round, Eusebius’ discourses must have influenced Constantine’s memory—this way, ‘remembering’ must be understood in its most literal sense. This way of personal ‘remembering’ is, maybe contrary to expectations, strongly linked with the historical concept of ‘remembering’: it is Eusebius’ reports in a dynamic intercourse with Constantine’s memories that established the Christian discourse about Constantine’s conversion and the foundation of a Christian Europe.

Highlighting the gradual process of Constantine’s conversion, Van Dam is hesitant in accepting early tokens of Christian sympathy on Constantine’s side.
(chapter 6). For example, the much referred to Medallion of Constantine from the year 315 (RIC 7 Ticinum 36), on which the chi-rho-sign is depicted on the emperor’s helmet, is not accepted as a sign of Christendom (p. 117). The famous inscription on Constantine’s arch in Rome from the same year (instinctu divinitatis—‘stimulated by the divinity’) is said to be a pagan address to the emperor (p. 131-2). Constantine’s presence at the convent in Arles (314) had a strictly secular goal, namely to maintain peace in the Christian community, although after this conference, Constantine’s awareness of Christianity increased (p. 178-9, chapter 7). On the other hand, events later in Constantine’s life, such as his burial in the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople, are interpreted in a Christian sense, with Constantine as the 13th apostle or even as an equivalent of Jesus Christ (p. 245-6). Van Dam doesn’t seem to consider a syncretist interpretation of these examples, which often provides an escape, or, more positively, an explanation, in the many ambiguous cases which Constantine’s reign and religion have produced, as, e.g., Wallraff has shown.1

The reader of the book may be surprised not to encounter one single picture (apart from three maps of Rome, Northern Italy and Central Europe on pp. 204, 182 and xiv respectively). In fact, although the reasons for this choice can only be guessed at, it is a very effective way to focus entirely on the written word. How easy—but also how deceptive—it would have been to insert a picture of the Arch of Constantine, the Milvian Bridge or Constantine’s colossus. Instead, the author of the book only resorts to the description of expressions of art, so that the interpretation of the ecphraseis is not influenced by any visual record. This practice touches upon the problem that also panegyrists must have encountered: while attempting to present a picture as lively as possible of Constantine’s deeds, the orator did not have any pictorial matter at his disposal. Or did he? On p. 141-6, Van Dam describes how an orator like Nazarius (321 AD) may have reflected on the panels of the Arch, thereby providing an oral explanation to the architectural praise. At the same time, these panels must have provided material for the speech, as a visual source for spoken words.

Van Dam’s book has a clear and even dramatic structure: after methodically going back into history and deconstructing different narratives from diverging eras about Constantine at the Milvian Bridge—comparable to the archaeologist excavating the strata of a complex site—Van Dam prepares the reader for an epilogue in which new insights are prompted (chapter 8). Not Constantine, but Maxentius is the focus of the narration (chapter 9), which leads to an original perspective of the position of the conquered in relation to the conqueror. Constantine’s invasion of Italy, supported by many tribes of barbarian stock, must have reminded Max-

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