In this thread I am discussing the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity. I have already given the political and military background to his conversion, and said something about his religious affiliations prior to converting. Now I can begin to address what we know about the conversion itself.

We have three principal sources of information for the vision(s) of Constantine that led to the conversion. The first comes to us in a flattering speech – known as a panegyric – delivered by an anonymous orator in 310 CE, before Constantine had initiated his final actions against Maxentius. The speech was occasioned by a military victory in a skirmish with Maxentius’s father, brought out of retirement, Maximian. As was always the case with panegyrics, the speaker had himself written his address and made it entirely sycophantic. Such speeches were designed to praise the recipient as one of the greatest human beings the universe has ever seen, as revealed by the subject’s activities and experiences. It is in the context of celebrating Constantine’s marvelous character that the panegyrist of 310 CE describes a vision that he had recently had of the god Apollo, who is often associated in ancient thought with the sun and considered, then, the Sun God.

In the speech we are told that...

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