EVERYONE knows the story of Constantine the Great and how the Roman Empire became Christian after he won the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD, but not many know the story of Maxentius who lost the battle. He was the ruler of Rome from 306 to 312, and if he had won the battle the history of the world might have been very different.

Maxentius was probably born in Syria in about 283, which means that he was only a young man of 23 when he took control of Italy and North Africa. He was the son of Maximian (Figure 1) who ruled the western half of the Roman Empire, while Diocletian (Figure 2) ruled the eastern half. They were known as the Augusti (or emperors), and under them were the Caesars: Constantius in the west and Galerius in the east. This rule by four was called the Tetrarchy. When Diocletian and Maximian abdicated in 305, Galerius and Constantius became Augusti, while Maximinus, the nephew of Galerius, became Caesar in the east and Severus, a friend of Galerius, became Caesar in the west.

Problems soon arose when Constantius died in York in 306 and the troops there hailed his ambitious son, Constantine, as the Augustus. (Figures 3 and 4) Also Maxentius was disappointed that he had been passed over after his father abdicated. Galerius did not recognize Constantine as the Augustus, but he appointed him Caesar in the west, while Severus became Augustus in the west. Severus was based in Milan in the north of Italy and to raise money he imposed certain taxes on the people of Rome and announced that the Praetorian Guard in Rome would be disbanded. The citizens of Rome were outraged and they chose Maxentius, who lived in the outskirts of Rome, to lead a rebellion. On 28th October 306 he assumed the titles of Caesar and Princeps (Leader) and was

**Figure 1** – Aureus of Maximian minted at Nicomedia in 294. Hercules holds the apples of the Hesperides in his left hand. HERCVLI VICTORI means ‘to Hercules, the Victor.’ (Roma Numismatics Auction 2, Lot 765)

**Figure 2** – Aureus of Diocletian minted at Cyzicus in 293-4. Jupiter (Jove) holds a thunderbolt in his right hand. IOVI CONSERVATORI means ‘to Jove, the Preserver.’ (Heritage Auctions, Sept. 2011, Lot 23373)

**Figure 3** – Billion follis minted at Ticinum in northern Italy in 307-8. Obverse; head of Constantine with legend CONSTANTINVS PF AVG. Reverse: Hercules strangles the Nemean lion. Legend: VIRTVS PERPETUA AVG (the continual bravery of the Augustus). This rare coin was found by metal detector near Winchester in England in 2015. It was probably issued by Maxentius as a friendly gesture towards his brother-in-law, Constantine. (Author’s Collection)

**Figure 4** – On this black-figure lekythos made by the Painter of Athens in c. 500 BC Hercules fights a lion as on the coin in Figure 3. Praxagoras of Athens wrote a biography of Constantine in the 4th century AD and in it he said that Constantine fought a lion as a youth, but the story is not believable. (Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons)
joined by his father who had been living in southern Italy. In 307 Maxentius and Maximian declared themselves to be Augusti. Severus led his army from Milan to Rome to oppose them, but many of his soldiers defected to be with their old general, Maximian, and Severus had to retreat. Eventually he surrendered at Ravenna and was later executed in Rome by Maxentius.

Galerius now invaded Italy but he too had to retreat before his whole army defected. Maximian went to Gaul to form an alliance with Constantine, and the pact was sealed by Constantine marrying his daughter, Fausta. Constantine also assumed the title of Augustus, which meant there were now four Augusti and one Caesar. Maximian returned to Rome late in 307 but he quarrelled with his son over the sharing of power. When he failed to gain support he fled to Gaul where he sought asylum with his new son-in-law, Constantine.

In 308 Galerius called a conference at Carnuntum, a city on the Danube twenty-five miles from Vienna, to resolve the confusion. Maximian attended and agreed to abdicate once again as Augustus in the west. It was decided that his place should be taken by Licinius, a comrade-in-arms of Galerius, and that Constantine should be demoted to Caesar. Maxentius was declared a public enemy. After the conference Maximian retired to Gaul which was under Constantine’s control.

The next crisis confronting Maxentius occurred late in 308: the governor of the province of Africa, Lucius Domitius Alexander, rebelled against him. (Figure 5) Rome depended on Africa for its grain supply, so Maxentius sent his general, Rufius Volusianus, on an expedition to Carthage to quell the revolt. It was successful: Alexander hanged himself and Africa was restored to Maxentius. Coins issued in 310 celebrate this victory and the 5th anniversary of his reign. On the reverse the goddess Victory writes on a shield and the legend VICTORIA AETERNA AVG N means “the eternal victory of our Augustus.” (Figure 6)

Sadly in 309 Maxentius’ young son, Romulus, died. He had been born in about 294 and his mother was the daughter of Galerius, which meant that he was the
His grandson, grandson of two emperors. He had been named after Galerius' mother, Romula. When he died Maxentius was grief-stricken. He had the lad deified and built two temples in his honour. (Figures 7, 8 and 9). The name, ‘Romulus’, was also significant because the founder and first king of Rome was called ‘Romulus’. In fact the city was named after him. The name of his son summed up what Maxentius was about. He wanted to restore Rome to its former glory and he stood for the old traditions and religion of Rome. This is reflected in his coinage.

Because the city’s traditional role as the capital of the empire had been slowly eroding as power tended to concentrate in the east Maxentius embarked on a building program erecting a great basilica, parts of which still stand. (Figure 10) He rebuilt the temple of Roma and Venus, which had been partially destroyed by fire in 307. It was the largest temple in Rome. Coins showing Roma enthroned in her temple were issued in great numbers. (Figure 11) On some of them Maxentius is shown entering the temple and receiving a globe from the goddess. (Figures 12 and 13) Parts of the temple still stand (Figure 14) and amazingly a large globe made of chalcedony was unearthed by an archaeologist in Rome in 2005. It was attached to the top of a sceptre and was part of Maxentius’ imperial regalia which had been buried to keep it from Constantine. The sceptre was displayed in the Museo Nazionale Romano, and images of it are on the Internet. Type “Maxentius regalia” into the search engine.

In keeping with his conservative policy he issued coins showing the mythologi-
In 496 BC when the Romans defeated the Etruscans the twins were said to have appeared and taken part in the battle. In the Roman Forum they had a magnificent temple, three columns of which still stand. (Figure 16) The twins are usually shown with horses, and their temple was especially sacred to the Equestrian Order, of which Pontius Pilate had been a member.

Coins showing Romulus, the founder of Rome, and his twin brother Remus as infants being suckled by a she-wolf were also issued. (Figure 17) They were part of the foundation myth of Rome. Having been abandoned to die they were suckled by a wolf, and Romulus eventually went on to found Rome. The image of the wolf and twins was symbolic of the city and a bronze statue of them stood in Rome. (Figure 18) They had appeared on a coin as early as 270 BC, and in a variant of the myth Hercules was the father of the twins and he appears on the obverse of the coin. (Figure 19) The city’s foundation myth was important for the Romans, and the image of the wolf suckling the twins appears even on coins of Constantine I and his sons issued during the period 330-346. Recently, Dr Greg Jenks, Dean of St George’s College in Jerusalem, informed me that there might be a parallel between the story of Romulus and Remus and the story of Jesus and John the Baptist as recorded in Luke’s gospel. In the former Romulus displaces his brother and goes on to found Rome, while in the latter Jesus displaces his cousin and goes on to found Christianity.
Maxentius also issued coins featuring Hercules, who was a popular hero in Greco-Roman mythology. (Figure 20) He was renowned for achieving the impossible, and his appearance on these coins was particularly appropriate because Maxentius had achieved the impossible by repelling invasions by two emperors, Severus and Galerius. Moreover, Maxentius claimed Hercules as his ancestor; because when the Tetrarchy was set up, the Augusti adopted themselves into a divine family. Diocletian chose the supreme god, Jupiter (Figure 2), while Maximian chose his semi-divine son, Hercules (Figure 1). The Augusti considered themselves to be the representatives of these deities, and Maximian adopted the name ‘Maximianus Hercules’. On a gold medallion Maxentius is shown as Hercules. (Figure 21)

But this Hercules was unable to repel Constantine’s invasion in 312. Maxentius was defeated at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and drowned in the Tiber River. Constantine took control of Rome and later claimed that he had won the battle in the name of Christ, but his coins show that he continued to worship the sun god, Sol, for many years after the battle. (Figure 22) Today some Christian scholars consider that Constantine’s victory was the worst thing that ever happened to Christianity because the religion founded by Jesus became established, i.e. it was incorporated into the structure of the state. Constantine had correctly judged that by embracing the popular new religion he would be able to unify and control the Roman Empire. Although this might seem a worthy aim it enabled him to promote his own ideology, which was not Christian at all. In his book, Constantine versus Christ, Alistair Kee argued that “his religion was not Christianity. Christianity was enlisted in his own personal crusade to gain control of the Empire and in the process Christianity was transformed.” Power and wealth became the idols for the people. According to Kee, “Constantine did not become a Christian, but he was able to tempt the church to forsake its faith in the Crucified One. He showed them that the time for that kind of faith was over.” They should ‘grow up’ and live in ‘the real world.’

The fascinating question in all this is, “What if Maxentius had won the Battle of the Milvian Bridge?” As his coins have shown, he was conservative in his views but he did not persecute Christians. According to Professor Frend in his book, The Early Church, Maxentius “had shown extreme tolerance toward the quarrelling factions of Roman Christians, and had restored liberty to the Church both in Rome and Africa.” Eusebius, the sycophantic bishop of Caesarea, who was a friend of Constantine and wrote a history.

Now You can buy the latest (26th) edition of **RENNIKS AUSTRALIAN COIN & BANKNOTE VALUES** directly from CAB. See order form on page XX.
of the church, conceded that Maxentius stopped the persecution of Christians which had been severe when Diocletian and Galerius were Augusti, but he went on to say that Maxentius only pretended to be good while underneath he was a cruel tyrant. In his history he wrote that Maxentius “commanded his subjects to desist from persecuting the Christians, pretending to piety with a view to appear much more mild and merciful than the former rulers. But he by no means proved to be in his actions as he was expected. He sunk into every kind of wickedness, leaving no impurity or licentiousness untouched, committing every species of adultery and fornication.” But did Maxentius really sink into every kind of wickedness? In judging Maxentius we must remember that Constantine needed an excuse for invading Italy and having the citizens of Rome oppressed by a murderous villain was a very suitable one.

Maxentius was tolerant of the new religion which might have been able to develop along the lines intended by its founder without the straight-jacket imposed on it by Constantine. The Church would have been free to speak with its prophetic voice. As Kee states, “With the establishment of Christianity the prophetic, critical dimension loses its central place which it had in the teaching of Jesus.” In his book, A New History of Early Christianity, published by Yale University Press in 2009, Charles Freeman wrote, “The carpenter’s son who had died as a rebel on the cross now risked being forgotten in the transformation of Christians from outsiders to insiders housed in rich buildings and tied in with the successes of the empire in war.” The coins of Maxentius remind us of a time when Christians were only a small minority but they could speak out for justice and peace in a way that they could not do in the subsequent centuries under the successors of Constantine.

Endangered
Golden Bell Frog
Fronts Tuvalu Silver Dollar

THE seventh coin in Tuvalu’s Endangered & Extinct Series has been released. The 40.60 mm, 1 oz .9999 fine silver proof dollar celebrates Australia’s Golden Bell Frog, (Litoria aurea).

The gold and green critter is a native to south-eastern Australia where its numbers have declined markedly in the past 10 years. Efforts to protect the species have included moving the location of the tennis courts for the 2000 Sydney Olympics when a population was found living at the proposed site.

The new coin was designed by Downies’ David Bowler and struck by The Perth Mint. Mintage is 5,000. It is available from Downies: www.downies.com.