

## Triumph Transformed: Constantine's Arch in the Sistine Chapel

The Arch of Constantine was a popular subject for Renaissance artists due to its visibility in the city, its variety of styles and subject matter, and the reputation of Constantine as a Christian emperor. Because Constantine built the first Basilica of St. Peter, his arch was a particularly appropriate motif for artists employed by the Vatican. The Arch of Constantine not only bridges the gap between Christian Rome and the pagan antiquity that was of interest to Renaissance artists and scholars, but also combines a variety of ancient sources itself. By reusing sculpture from great emperors such as Hadrian, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius and re-carving his own portrait in their place, Constantine hoped to capture some of the greatness of his predecessors while demonstrating ownership over Rome's past. Renaissance artists had a similar intent when they reused the Arch of Constantine in a Christian context. In the Vatican, the arch continued to serve as an allegory of triumph, but in this case an explicitly Christian one.

This paper examines the ways Renaissance painters modified the arch and its decoration to suit the theological messages of the Sistine Chapel's decorative program. Rather than copying the monument wholesale, the artists of the Sistine Chapel reinterpreted the Arch of Constantine to fit the meaning of specific scenes and of the chapel as a whole. In doing so, they gave new life to the ancient monument, transforming it from a tool of persuasion for Constantine into one for Sixtus IV, the Church, and the city of Rome.