



1623–25

Wool and silk with gold and silver threads

15 feet, 11 inches x 24 feet, 5 inches  
(485.1 x 744.2 cm)

**FIGURAL COMPOSITION  
DESIGNED IN 1622 BY  
PETER PAUL RUBENS**

Flemish (active Italy, Antwerp, and England), 1577–1640

Woven at the Comans–La Planche tapestry factory (Paris)

### LET'S LOOK

Describe the action in this scene.

What is happening?

Who is winning? Who is losing?

How can you tell?

What details tell you about the time period when this event took place?

### LET'S LOOK AGAIN

What do you think will happen next?

This **tapestry** is almost sixteen feet high and over twenty-four feet long. Measure this out in your classroom. Why might someone want a work of art this large?

## TAPESTRY SHOWING THE TRIUMPH OF CONSTANTINE OVER MAXENTIUS AT THE BATTLE OF THE MILVIAN BRIDGE

FROM THE SERIES KNOWN AS THE "HISTORY OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT"

This **tapestry** shows the dramatic conclusion of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge fought between two leaders of ancient Rome, Constantine and Maxentius, in 312 CE. As part of their strategy, Maxentius's army knocked down a stone bridge and replaced it with a temporary wooden one, which could be pulled down easily if they needed to retreat. When Maxentius and his troops were forced back by Constantine's army, the bridge unexpectedly collapsed beneath them, sending horses and soldiers tumbling into the Tiber River below. After this victory, Constantine became the sole ruler of the Western Roman Empire.

The defeated Maxentius is pictured upside down at the bottom center of the **composition**. Around him, horses and men fall in a tangled mass of arms, legs, bodies, and heads. At the edge of the bridge, a terrified soldier desperately attempts to prevent his horse from falling. Two soldiers cling to the bridge with their fingertips, anxiously trying to hang on. Constantine's army relentlessly charges forward in the upper right.

This **monumental** tapestry was designed by the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (ROO-bens) and woven by a team of weavers in France. It is almost sixteen feet high and over twenty-four feet long, and contains gold- and silver-wrapped threads. It is one of seven tapestries possibly **commissioned** by King Louis XIII of France and presented to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, a leader of the Catholic Church and nephew of Pope Urban VIII. Since Constantine was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, tapestries illustrating his life story were an appropriate choice for this important gift.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1959-78-3