LACTANTIUS AND CONSTANTINE*

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Flavius Valerius Constantius, the senior reigning emperor since Diocletian and Maximian had abdicated on 1 May 305, died at Eburacum on 25 July 306. At once his entourage and army proclaimed Augustus the son who stood beside his death-bed, and invested him with the purple. Constantine, however, with a subtlety beyond his years, contented himself with obtaining recognition as a Caesar from Galerius, who now, as the senior emperor, possessed the right of appointing new imperial colleagues. Constantine’s modesty or foresight was soon repaid. On 28 October 306 the praetorian guard and people of Rome raised to power Maxentius, the son of Maximian. Severus, Augustus in the west since Constantius’ death, marched on Rome to suppress the insurrection, but was forced to retreat by the desertion of his troops, besieged in Ravenna and inveigled into surrender by Maximian, who had emerged from retirement to aid his son.¹

Such was the opening campaign (late winter or spring 307) in a series of civil wars during which Constantine became, by the end of 324, the sole ruler of a re-united Roman Empire. Hence a familiar historiographical problem, aggravated by a paucity of evidence for the nearly two decades which intervene between Constantine’s first proclamation as emperor and his final victory. After this success, few who had witnessed what went before would wish or dare to publish an impartial narration. Stereotyped history better answered the needs and desires of contemporaries: the virtuous emperor triumphed over his wicked adversaries, he made war on his rivals in order to rescue their subjects from savage misrule.² Who could dispute or ask for further explanation? There was, moreover, an ideological issue which tended to dissuade later historians from rejecting this comfortable interpretation. Constantine viewed himself as God’s champion, victorious by God’s grace;³ therefore, his enemies were also the foes of God. At least one contemporary historian duly responded by rewriting his work to remove inconvenient facts. When Licinius was an ally of Constantine, he was a paragon of virtue and piety. But when he turned against Constantine and his divine protector, his good deeds were excised from the historical record and he became a monster of depravity and lust.⁴

When truth has been distorted or concealed in this fashion, especially close attention must be paid to the genuinely contemporary evidence for the rise of Constantine. Official documents of all kinds (most notably coins,⁵ inscriptions, calendars, and imperial laws and letters) have afforded invaluable aid in dispelling the cloud of uncertainty and falsehood. But to understand the moods and emotions of the

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¹ I am grateful to Glen Bowersock, Leonard Boyle, Christopher Jones and Fergus Millar for their advice and help in improving an earlier, even more imperfect version of the present argument.

² Thus the pagan Praxagoras of Athens, according to the summary of Photius, Bibl. Ixii = FGrH 219 T 1. He was writing before 330, cf. F. Jacoby, FGrH ii D (1930), 632.

³ As he is known to have stated himself as early as 314: ‘ex quibus forisran commoveri possit summa divinitat... etiam in me ipsum, cuius curae nutu suo caelesti terrena omnia moderanda commissit’ (Optatus, App. III. CSEL xxvi, 206, 16-18); ‘deus omnipotens in caeli specula residens tribuit, quod non merebar: certe iam neque dixi neque enumerari possunt ea quae caelesti sua in me fiamulum suum benivolenta concessit’ (Optatus, App. V. CSEL xxvi, 208, 28-31).

⁴ Eusebius, HE x, 8, 11 ff., cf. ix, 11, 8. For the main manuscript variants, see E. Schwartz, GCS ix, 3 (1909), xlcii ff.

⁵ Now collected in two scholarly and critical catalogues: C. H. V. Sutherland, RIC vi: From Diocletian’s Reform (A.D. 294) to the death of Maxentius (A.D. 313) (1967); P. Brun, RIC vii: Constantine and Licinius A.D. 313-337 (1966). Too much modern scholarship has relied on erroneous dates and attributions, or sometimes even unverified types, in J. Maurice, Numismatique constantinienne i (1908); ii (1911); iii (1912).
time, and even to establish a reliable factual narrative, the more articulate testimony of the contemporary literary productions still extant is needed: principally five panegyrics delivered before Constantine (in the years 307, 310, 311 or 312, 313, 321), and the subject of the present investigation. If Lactantius’ *De Mortibus Persecutorum* can be dated accurately and precisely, it will serve as irrefragable evidence of attitudes voiced in a particular historical context, and perhaps also of facts later suppressed or embellished.

1. THE WORK

The *De Mortibus Persecutorum* addresses itself to the confessor Donatus, who had been tried and tortured nine times by three magistrates (the praetorian prefect Flaccinus, and Sossianus Hierocles and Priscillianus, successive governors of Bithynia), and who had subsequently languished in prison in Nicomedia until the dying Galerius decreed an amnesty for all Christians (1, 1; 16, 3 ff.; 35, 2; 52, 5). The opening words appear to proclaim clearly the occasion of writing: God has heard Donatus’ incessant prayers, the enemies are destroyed, a tranquil peace has returned to the world, the church so lately almost ruined is rising again. For God has raised up emperors to annul the wicked and cruel ordinances of the tyrants, and he has dried the tears of those who sorrowed by destroying the plots of the impious. Those who attacked God lie dead, and Lactantius proposes to relate the manner of their deaths, that both those who were afar off and future generations may know how God displayed his virtue and majesty in utterly destroying his foes (1, 1 ff.).

After a brief survey of the fate of earlier persecutors of the Christians (Nero, Domitian, Decius, Valerian and Aurelian: 2, 4—6, 3), Lactantius launches into a savage and detailed description of the persons, families and actions of Diocletian, Maximian and Galerius, with an account of the beginning of the persecution, of the abdication of Diocletian (1 May 305) and the nomination of two new Caesars, Severus and Maximinus Daia (7, 1 ff.). There follows an equally severe and detailed account of Galerius’ actions as Augustus (20, 1 ff.), which leads into the proclamation of Constantine as his father’s successor—whose first action (so it is stated) was to restore to the Christians full freedom of worship (24, 9). From here Lactantius follows the tangled political events of the next four years: Galerius’ recognition of Constantine as Caesar, the proclamation of Maxentius, the death of Severus, Galerius’ failure to reassert his authority in Italy, Maximian’s attempt to dethrone Maxentius, the conference of Carnuntum at which Licinius was named Augustus, Maximian’s final flight to Constantine and his subsequent death (25, 1 ff.).

Maximian was the first of the persecutors to die (30, 6). At once God turned his eyes to the other Maximian (i.e. Galerius), the instigator of persecution, who was already thinking about his vicennalia and extorting funds for their celebration (31, 1 ff.) In the course of his eighteenth year (310/11), God struck him with an incurable disease (33, 1). Neither doctors nor Apollo and Asclepius could effect any improvement, and Galerius wasted away in great agony (33, 2 ff.). After a whole year, chastened by his misfortune, he was compelled to acknowledge God and proclaimed his intention of making restitution for his crimes (33, 11). Finally, as he was dying, he issued an edict (which Lactantius quotes) allowing his subjects once more to be Christians and build meeting-places, and requesting Christians to pray for himself and

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6 Respectively *Pan. Lat.* vii (vi); vi (vii); v (viii); xii (ix); iv (x). The best treatment of these speeches as a group remains that of R. Pichon, *Les derniers écrivains profanes* (1906), 36 ff.

7 Flaccinus and Priscillianus seem to be otherwise unknown. Hierocles produced an anti-Christian polemic (Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* v, 2, 12 ff.; Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem*) and later became prefect of Egypt (on his career, see *PLRE* i, 432).

8 On the details, see Moreau, o.c. 231 ff. Lactantius’ accuracy on specific facts has often had to await very recent discoveries for decisive confirmation: e.g., that Diocletian’s *dies imperii* was 20 November (17, 1, cf. *P. Beatty Pannon.* 2, 162, etc.).

9 For a significant omission, see p. 42.

10 Galerius proposed to celebrate his vicennalia from 1 March 312 (*Mort. Pers.* 35, 4); therefore, his official *dies imperii* was 1 March 293. For the hypothesis that his actual investiture as Caesar occurred on 21 May 293, see W. Sexton, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie* (1946), 91 ff.
the state (34). This edict was posted in Nicomedia on 30 April 311 (35, 1): the prisons were opened, but soon came news of Galerius' death (35, 4).

As soon as he heard, Maximinus occupied Asia Minor, made a treaty with Licinius on board ship in the straits between Europe and Asia, and proceeded to enforce in Asia Minor the policies he pursued in Syria and Egypt. Although Galerius had issued his edict of toleration in the name of all the emperors, Maximinus abolished it, ostensibly in response to petitions from his pagan subjects. He instituted chief priests in every city, to sacrifice daily, to prevent Christians from either building or even meeting and to help in compelling them to sacrifice. Further, he pretended to be merciful. Christians were not killed in the diocese of Oriens, only maimed: their eyes were put out, hands amputated, feet lopped off, and their ears or noses mutilated (36). Maximinus was preparing to institute the same régime in his new dominions, when he was deterred by a letter of Constantine (37, 1, cf. 36, 6). He therefore resorted to dissimulation, secretly drowning any Christian who fell into his hands (37, 1), and practising a wide variety of types of extortion and corruption on his subjects (37, 3 ff.).

With the death of Diocletian (42, 3), Maximinus was the only one of the foes of God left alive (43, 1). He entered into alliance with Maxentius, who was already at war with Constantine (43, 1 ff.). Soon Constantine defeated Maxentius, entered Rome in triumph and gave his sister in marriage to Licinius at Milan (44, 1 ff.). Maximinus attempted to surprise Licinius by an unexpected invasion of Europe but was defeated near Adrianople (45, 2 ff.). Licinius, who had defeated him with God’s aid (46, 3 ff.), advanced to Nicomedia, where on 13 June, in gratitude to God, he published a letter which he had sent to the governor of Bithynia: it gave everyone, including Christians, the right to follow whatever religion he pleased and restored to the Christians any property which had been seized from them (48, 1 ff.). Licinius also, in a speech, encouraged churches to be restored, thus ending persecution after ten years and about four months (48, 13). He then pursued Maximinus, who killed himself at Tarsus when Licinius' army broke through the Cilician Gates (49, 1 ff.).

Three chapters of epilogue conclude the work. First, Licinius’ execution of the sons of Galerius and Severus and the son and daughter of Maximinus, together with the suicide of Maximus' widow (50). Then the capture of Galerius’ wife Valeria after fifteen months, and her execution with her mother (51). Finally, a claim to accuracy and a paean of gratitude to God for protecting his flock or people and extirpating the ‘evil beasts’, closing with a prayer that he guard his flourishing church in perpetual peace (52).

Lactantius was clearly writing in the immediate aftermath, or at least under the immediate impact, of persecution: 'nunc post atrae tempestatis violentos turbines placidus aer et optata lux refusit' (1, 4). The publication of the De Mortibus Persecutorum should therefore follow very close on the death of Maximinus, the last of the persecutors, who perished in the summer of 313. But a difficulty obtrudes. Lactantius includes later events. The chapters appended to the main narrative (50 f.) include not only the executions of Candidianus, the son of Galerius, in Nicomedia (perhaps as early as June 313), of the son of Severus, and of the family of Maximinus (in Antioch, therefore autumn 313), but also that of the widow and daughter of Diocletian, the latter after fifteen months of flight, i.e. no earlier than July or August

11 Also reproduced, in Greek translation, by Eusebius, HE viii, 17, 3 ff.
12 For these petitions, cf. OGIS 569; Eusebius, HE ix, 2, 1; 7, 12; 9 a, 4 ff.
13 For the epigraphic attestation of one such priest, H. Grégoire, Byzantion viii (1933), 49 ff.
14 On the site of the battle, see H. Grégoire, Byzantion xiii (1938), 585 f. Grégoire proposed to emend the 'campus Severus' to 'Campus Ergenus' (Mort. Pers. 46, 9). Perhaps unnecessary, cf. P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, Constantiniiana. Studi e Testi cxxi (1953), 78 f.

15 Eusebius preserves substantially the same document with a different preamble (HE x, 5, 1 ff.).
16 i.e. Prisca, the wife of Diocletian (Mort. Pers. 15, 1).
17 The precise date would be worth knowing (PLRE i, 579, offers no opinion). It is usually held to be late summer, probably September (C.H.V. Sutherland, RIC vi, 35; P. Bruun, RIC vii, 76). But news of Maximinus' death had reached Karanis before 13 September 313 (SB 7675 = P. Cairo. Isid. 103).
314 (51, 1, cf. 50, 3). 18 What is the explanation? Can Lactantius have added these episodes, or at least the last of them, some months after the work was otherwise complete? Although the argument cannot rise above the purely subjective, at least some readers of Lactantius think they perceive a slight incoherence in these chapters indicative of addition or rewriting by the author. 19 For most practical purposes, however, it will make little difference whether Lactantius added to an already finished draft, began the work in 313 and only completed it during or after the autumn of the following year, or wrote the whole tract together (before or during winter 314/5).

If the text of the De Mortibus Persecutorum makes an early date (at latest 314/5) seem appropriate, why has a significantly later one (c. 318) so often been preferred? It was a necessary consequence of two erroneous dates: 3 December 316 for the death of Diocletian (42, 3), and 8 October 314 for the opening battle of the first war between Constantine and Licinius.

II. THE DEATH OF Diocletian

The ancient sources (it is commonly asserted) offer two dates for the death of Diocletian: 313 and 316. 20 Modern scholars have naturally not been unanimous in choosing either of the two, but the weightier names appear to prefer the later date. 21 And there is a further complication not always clearly perceived: the earliest and best evidence may indicate, not 313 rather than 316, but an even earlier date.

At first sight, the evidence adduced in favour of 316 is abundant and impressive. Closer inspection, however, should counsel strong doubts. 22 Much of the evidence can be discounted. First, John of Antioch as quoted, or rather abbreviated, in the excerpts copied out by Salmisius in the seventeenth century. 23 The twelve years, which John is alleged to give as the length of Diocletian’s retirement, appear to result from a confusion with the length of the First Tetrarchy (293-305). 24 John is, therefore, irrelevant, and it is to be suspected that two later writers who state that Diocletian lived for twelve years as a private citizen are guilty of the same confusion. 25 Second, Zosimus, who specifies the date of Diocletian’s death after a lengthy digression appended to his abdication:

Διοκλητιανὸς μὲν τελευταία τρισίν ἐνιαυτοῖς οὐστείᾳ, ἢ ἄντι καταστάντες αὐτοκράτορες Κωνστάντιος καὶ Μαξιμιανὸς ὁ Γαλέριος αὐτεχθείς Κασσαρας Σεβήρων καὶ Μαξιμίλου... (ii, 8, 1).

Three years later than the last date mentioned in the digression (the third consulate of Constantine and Licinius in 313) brings one to 316. But there are two difficulties. Zosimus has been employing inclusive reckoning. 26 Moreover, he should surely calculate from the point from which the digression started and to which the following clause returns: that is, the abdication of Diocletian and the proclamation of Severus für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr. (1919), 165; W. Ensslin, P-W vii A, 2493; E. Stein, Histoire du Bas-Empire i (1958), 93. Also, recently, PLRE i, 254.


25 Cedrenus, p. 472 Bonn: [Leo the Grammarians], p. 82 Bonn.

and Maximinus as Caesars (1 May 305). Third, the Chronicle of Jerome and two of its derivatives, Prosper Tiro and a Gallic chronicle of A.D. 511, both the latter offering 315, not 316. Little reliance can be based on a chronicle which has so many erroneous dates in the near vicinity: for example, the deaths of Maximian, Galerius and Maximinus Daia in 308, 309 and 311 respectively (instead of 310, 311 and 313) and the war of Cibalae in 313 (316/7). Now Jerome presumably took all these dates from Eusebius' Chronicle, which he used in an edition which went as far as the vicennalia of Constantine. Accordingly, equally little reliance can probably be placed in the Paschal Chronicle, which also derives its date of 316 for the death of Diocletian from the same source. Perhaps the date has been misplaced in transmission, or Eusebius made a mistake. For one hypothesis or the other must be invoked to explain Eusebius' chronology for the reign of Diocletian, which seriously misdates events of his own lifetime.

By itself stands a chronicle, apparently composed in Rome shortly after 330, which was later incorporated in the document known as the Fasti of Hydatius or, misleadingly, as the Consularia Constantinopolitana. This proffers a very precise date for Diocletian's decease: 3 December 316. However, although the other contents of the document suggest that the original compiler possessed reliable information on day, month and year, any or all of these elements may have been distorted in transmission.

The evidence against 316, on the other hand, cannot all be impugned or explained away. One might waive the Epitome de Caesaribus, composed in or soon after 396, or Socrates, who was writing nearly another fifty years later. But Lactantius can only be discounted either on an accusation of grave and deliberate falsification or through sheer forgetfulness. He states unambiguously that Maximinus Daia, who died in the summer of 313, outlived Diocletian. Further, the evidence of successive editions of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, though not entirely easy to interpret, unmistakably implies that Diocletian died somewhat earlier than December 316.

The Epitome de Caesaribus reports that Diocletian declined an invitation to attend the marriage of Licinius to Constantia, which was celebrated in Milan early in 313. Angry vituperation greeted the refusal and the retired emperor (so it was said) poisoned himself. Socrates more vaguely dates his death after the marriage and Licinius' subsequent departure to the east. The Epitome adds that Diocletian lived sixty-eight years, of which almost nine fell after his abdication, thus implying, on
inclusive reckoning, that he died shortly before May 313. But before this date can be accepted a question arises. What were the immediate or ultimate sources of the *Epitome* and Socrates? The connection of Diocletian’s death with the marriage alliance between Constantine and Licinius may be an imaginative guess or rationalisation not due to an immediate contemporary.\textsuperscript{43} The primary witness still remains to be examined in detail.

Lactantius makes the death of Diocletian a direct consequence of the *damnatio memoriae* of Maximian. When Constantine ordered the statues and images of Maximian to be removed from their places of honour, those of Diocletian which accompanied them shared in the destruction. Diocletian then decided to die and self-starvation made his grief and anguish fatal (*Mort. Pers.* 42).\textsuperscript{44} Unfortunately, Lactantius assigns the episode no precise date: he merely makes it contemporaneous with the enormities which Maximinus Daia was perpetrating in the east after Galerius died in May 311 (42, 1). It has therefore been argued that the *damnatio memoriae* of Maximian was decreed by the Roman Senate after Constantine defeated Maxentius (i.e. in November or December 312), and hence that the date implied by Lactantius for the death of Diocletian accords with that stated by the *Epitome* and Socrates.\textsuperscript{45} Two main considerations are advanced: Constantine’s later rehabilitation of Maximian’s memory would be easier if he had no direct part in its abolition,\textsuperscript{46} and the Senate’s role was preserved in a confused form by Gelasius of Caesarea (writing c. 395), who reported that, when Diocletian and Maximian made a joint attempt to resume their thrones, the Senate condemned both to death.\textsuperscript{47} But the *a priori* argument will not convince those conversant with the techniques of propaganda in any age, and it is extremely unsound method to disbelieve Lactantius in order to accept much later evidence which must first be interpreted or rephrased in order to give the required sense. The legend that Diocletian and Maximian jointly attempted to resume imperial authority and were then killed together should simply be disbelieved. The true occasion of Constantine’s destruction of Maximian’s statues and images can easily be discovered.\textsuperscript{48} It was, as Lactantius indicates (*Mort. Pers.* 42, 3 ff.), before he defeated Maxentius.

The memory of Maximian was not abolished immediately after his death. A panegyrist speaking in 310, who revealed the hitherto unsuspected fact that Constantine was related to Claudius (emperor 268-270) by an ‘avita cognatio’,\textsuperscript{49} confessed himself uncertain how he should describe the dead conspirator and requested his godlike master’s advice.\textsuperscript{50} Hence he carefully eschewed any opprobrious epithets for Maximian, studiously referring to him by the bare demonstrative.\textsuperscript{51} Of Constantine’s subsequent attitude, there exists no precise testimony (except Lactantius) until after the death of Maxentius. In 313, however, another panegyrist of Constantine described the tyrant so justly killed. In accordance with the accepted canons of rhetoric, he gives a formal comparison of Constantine and Maxentius.\textsuperscript{52} He could, therefore, quite naturally have observed that Maxentius’ vices were largely inherited from the father who had ungratefully conspired against Constantine. But he chose instead to dissociate the two as far as possible: Maxentius was a supposititious son of Maximian, who tried to tear the purple from his ostensible son’s shoulders and


\textsuperscript{44} On the variant reports of how Diocletian died, see Moreau, o.c. 420. Eusebius believed that his death was caused by illness alone (*HE* viii, App. 3).


\textsuperscript{46} Moreau, o.c. 418: ‘il semble que Constantin n’ait pas pris l’initiative de cette condamnation.’

\textsuperscript{47} W. Emms, *P.-W.* xiv, 2515 f. For Gelasius, see Theophanes, a. 3796, p. 11 de Boor (with the name); Philippus of Side, frag. 3 (C. de Boor, *Texte u. Unters.* v, 2 (1888), 183) = G. C. Hansen, *Theodoros Anagnostes Kirchengeschichte* (GCS, 1971), 158 §2.

\textsuperscript{48} John of Nikiu alleged that the Senate exiled Diocletian after he was deposed (trans. Zotenberg, p. 418).

\textsuperscript{49} C. H. V. Sutherland, *RIC* vi (1967), 33.

\textsuperscript{50} *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 2, 1 ff.

\textsuperscript{51} *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 14, 1: ‘de quo ego quemad-modum dicam adhuc ferme dubito et de nutu numinis tui specto consilium.’ Such a performer was not long baffled: he adopted the principle ‘neminem hominum pecare nisi fato et ipsa sclera mortuum actus esse fortunae, contra autem deorum munera esse virtutes’ (14, 3).

\textsuperscript{52} *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 14, 5 ff.

realised that his own good fortune had passed to someone unworthy and disgraceful. The way was open for Maximian’s full rehabilitation: his statue appears on a relief on the arch which the Senate dedicated to Constantine in Rome in 315 and in 317/8 the coinage of Constantine was styling him Divus Maximianus. The damnatio memoriae must surely (even on this evidence alone) precede the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312).

Maxentius’ attitude to his father inevitably differed from that of Constantine. When the old man fled after attempting to depose him, silence was the best policy. But once dead he could safely be exploited for propaganda. Maxentius’ coinage began to commemorate Divus Maximianus, and he professed to be waging war on Constantine in order to avenge his murdered father (Mort. Pers. 43, 4). The damnatio memoriae was surely Constantine’s *riposte* to this claim. Can the date be more closely determined? Lactantius places it some time after the death of Galerius (May 311). The next step is mere conjecture. The consuls recognized in Rome on 3 December 311 were C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus and Aradius Rufinus. Perhaps a chronographer has confused this pair (Volusianus et Rufino) with the consuls of 316 (Sabino et Rufino), and thus entered the death of Diocletian under 316 when it really occurred on 3 December 311. If this conjecture (it is no more) be admitted, then Constantine abolished the memory of Maximian in autumn 311, and Lactantius was correct in claiming, before he described the war of Constantine and Maxentius, that only one of the emperors who had persecuted Christians still survived (Mort. Pers. 43, 1). Let it be proposed, therefore, that Diocletian died on 3 December 311. To be sure, more evidence could be marshalled in favour of 3 December 312, a date not incompatible with the *Epitome* and Socrates. However, on any view, some items of evidence must be discarded as untrustworthy, and both the earliest witness (Lactantius) and external considerations (the political situation) point to late 311 or early 312.

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53 Pan. Lat. xii (ix), 4, 3: ‘erat ille Maximiani suppositus, tu Constantii Pii filius’; 3, 4: ‘ipse denique qui pater illius credebatur discissam ab umeris purpuram detrahere conatus senserat in illud deduces sua fata transisse.’

54 Constantine addresses the people of Rome in front of five columns with statues, (of Jupiter and the four emperors) which were erected in the forum in 303 to commemorate the vicennalia of the Augusti and decennalia of the Caesars: A. Giuliano, Arco di Costantino (1955), plates 34; 40, cf. H. P. L’Orange, Rom. Mitt. lii (1938), 1 ff.

55 The reverse legend proclaims ‘requies optimorum meritorum’ and the issues commemorate Claudius, Constantius and Maxianian jointly: *RIC* vii, 180 (Trier); 252 (Arles); 310-312 (Rome: also with ‘memoriae aeternae’ as reverse legend: 394/5 (Aquitania); 429/30 (Scissia); 502/3 (Thessalonica). J. Maurice, Numismatique constantinienne i (1908), xciv; cxxvi, dated these coins to 314 and 324, regarding them as part of Constantine’s preparations for the two wars against Licinius. The results were unfortunate for the understanding of Lactantius. For if Maximian was commemorated so honourably by Constantine in 314 and on the arch of 315, then it seemed that Lactantius must have written De Mortibus Persecutorum at a later date (W. Setton, Diocletian et la Tétrarchie i (1946), 27; Moreau, o.c. 36 f.; A. Chastagnol, *Rev. num.*, iv (1962), 329).

56 *RIC* vi, 381 ff. (Rome); 403 f. (Ostia). Probably late in 310, cf. C. H. V. Sutherland, ib. 347.

57 *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 67 (reading ‘Rufino et Eusebio’ in apparent confusion with the consuls of 347, cf. T. Mommsen, ad loc.); 76: 231; *Liub. Pontificii*, pp. 74; 168 Duchesne (all with ‘Volusiano et Rufino’ or ‘Rufino et Volusiano’). For the identifications, see *PLRE* i, 775; 977. The consulates of Rufinus is not reported in A. Degrassi, *Fasti consolarii* (1952), 78.


59 Moreau, o.c. 419, argues that Lactantius’ order is logical rather than chronological. The mention of Diocletian’s death, but not that of Maximinus Daia, in Eusebius, *HE* viii, App. may also be significant.

60 A law which bears the date of 313 poses special problems: Iidem A. (i.e. Constantine) ad Eusebium v.p. praesidem Lyciae et Pamphyliarum. Plebs urbana, sicut in orientalibus quoque provinciis observatur, minime in censibus pro capitatione sua conveniatur, sed iuxta hanc iussionem nostram immunis habeatur, sicuti etiam sub domino et parente nostro Diocletiano seniore Aug. eadem plebs urbana immunit fuerat. Dat. Kal. Jun. Constantino A. III et Licinio III consess. (*CTh.* xiii, 10, 2). Though the law appears to show Diocletian alive on 1 June 313 (Seston, o.c. 44 f.), something is clearly amiss with its attribution and date. In June 313 Constantine controlled neither Lycia and Pamphylia nor the diocese of Oriens. Accordingly, the law might be attributed to Licinius (H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* xiii (1938), 551 ff.). But, on 1 June 313, Licinius did not yet control the ‘orientales provinciae’, the law’s reference to which surely designates Maximinus Daia as its promulgator (O. Seeck, *Zeitschr. für Social- und Wirtschaftsgesch.* iv (1890), 290 ff.; Regesten (1919), 52 f., cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* i (1964), 4). What then is the date of the law? Hardly as late as 1 June 313, after Maximinus’ invasion of Europe and defeat by Licinius. Possibly, therefore, 1 July 312 or 1 January 313, as proposed by A. Demantdt, *Gnomon* xiv (1972), 693; Better, 1 June 311, which enables the law to be brought into connection with a measure recorded by Lactantius: after Galerius’ death, Maximinus occupied Bithynia and ‘cum magna omnium laetitia sulluit censum’ (Mort. Pers. 35, 1). For a discussion, see H. Castritius, *Studien zu Maximinus Daia*. Frankfurter Althistorische Studien ii (1969), 9 ff.
Constantine fought two wars against Licinius. For the decisive battle in the latter, two chronological sources offer 324.61 But both 323 and 324 had notable adherents, until a papyrus published forty years ago showed that Licinius was still recognized as emperor in Egypt as late as 3 September 324, thus confirming the explicit ancient testimony.62 Matters stand otherwise, however, with the earlier war, the first battle of which (at Cibalae) the Consularia Constantinopolitana date to 8 October 314.63 The correctness of this date was scarcely ever doubted until twenty years ago, and some were even bold enough to argue that, since Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* apparently puts the beginning of Constantine's discord with Licinius after his decennalia (celebrated for one year from 25 July 315), Eusebius could not be its author.64 It was thus of the highest significance that a critical study of the coins minted by Constantine redated the war to 316.65 The redating naturally provoked attempts at disproof (all ineffectual).66 and some scholars, loath to give up old habits and sanctified dates, now posit wars in both 314 and 316.67 But subsequent work has buttressed the new date, which receives confirmation not only from literary and legal sources,68 but also from the coinage of Licinius.69 Therefore, Constantine fought Licinius in 316/7 and 323/4. Nevertheless, knowledge of this signal advance in understanding the period and contemporary writers seems not yet to have percolated everywhere,70 and ignorance of it has led a recent manual of reference to the remarkable deduction that Constantine (Augustus 337-340) was not the son of his father's lawful wife.71 More than mere relevance to Lactantius, therefore, will justify a brief recapitulation of the decisive evidence.

Most explicit is Aurelius Victor:72 Maximinus was defeated by Licinius and died at Tarsus after two years of rule as Augustus (i.e. two years from the death of Galerius):73 the two remaining emperors, different in character though related by marriage, maintained an anxious peace for three years; the ensuing war ended with the proclamation of Crispus, the younger Constantine and Licinius as Caesars (formally invested at Serdica on 1 March 317);74 then, an eclipse of the sun portending a short peace,75 hostilities were resumed after six years, and Licinius was finally overwhelmed. Victor's chronology can easily be inferred; three years of anxious peace from 313 to 316, the first war in 316/7, six years' respite from 317 to 323, the second war, 323/4, with the investiture of Constantius as Caesar (8 November 324) correctly stated to be contemporaneous with Licinius' final defeat (18 September 324).76
The other literary evidence exhibits confusion of various types, due not least to a tendency to conflate and confuse the two wars. Further, even authors who can distinguish the two wars are unaware of a fact clearly implied by the coinage: before the formal joint proclamation of Caesars on 1 March 317, Constantine had already begun to style Crispus and the younger Constantine by that title. Yet certain significant facts, very relevant to the date of the war, are preserved by various authors. Licinius' son was about twenty months old when proclaimed Caesar (1 March 317). But he and his mother were at Sirmium at the time of the battle of Cibalae; therefore, the battle occurred no earlier than summer 315. Eusebius speaks allusively of plots which Licinius directed against Constantine after his decennalia while a normally well-informed writer supplies what seem to be the pertinent names and details: Licinius induced Senecio to persuade his brother, Bassianus, the husband of Constantine's sister Anastasia, to attempt to assassinate Constantine; Bassianus was caught in the attempt, convicted and executed; Licinius' refusal to surrender Senecio then led to war. Such evidence is clearly incompatible with a date of autumn 314 for the war.

The movements of Constantine can partly be deduced from the Codex Theodosianus, which normally states the author, date and place of promulgation of each law. Unfortunately, on any view, some of the subscriptions contradict one another, and the standard register of dates for the period bases itself on the assumption that in the autumn of 314 Constantine was campaigning in the Balkans. However, it may be assumed that consular dates by private citizens are more reliable than dates given by imperial consulates—the normal working principle when seeking to harmonise dates in the law codes. Then a clear picture emerges. In the autumn of 314 (consulate of C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus for the second time, and Petronius Annianus) Constantine remained in Trier. During 315, the fourth consulate of both Constantine and Licinius, three laws appear to show the former in residence at Sirmium, Naisusus and Thessalonica. But there are some clear errors in this year, which offers one law purporting to be issued at Constantinople, and another issued by Constantine from Antioch. On the other hand, one law dated to March 315 has the emperor at Cavallium (Châlons-sur-Marne). In 316 and 317, the consuls are again private citizens: in 316 Antonius Caecina Sabinus and Vettius Rufinus, in 317 Ovinus Gallicanus and Caesonianus Bassus, who were recognised at Rome from 17 February—an indication that Constantine and Licinius negotiated an agreement in January. During these two years, if two obvious errors can be ignored, the Codex Theodosianus shows Constantine residing in Gaul until August 316 (with a visit to Rome in 315), but at Serdica by 6 December. Less ambiguous perhaps is a
communication of Petronius Annianus and Julianus (i.e. the pretorian prefects) to Domitius Celsus, *vicarius* of Africa. 9, 6 The prefects inform Celsus that, after certain clerics came to Gaul to see Constantine on his orders, he instructed them to return home. Consequently, the prefects have provided free transport and lodging as far as the port of Arelate, where the clerics are to embark for Africa, and they apprise Celsus of the fact. The letter concludes with the note that the beneficiaries received the diploma on 28 April at Trier. 9, 7 The year is not stated, but it can only be 315. 9, 8 Therefore, Constantine was in Trier in April 315, not in northern Greece or the Balkan lands.

Finally, and clearest of all, the coinage of Constantine and Licinius. 9, 9 In rapid succession (therefore in 316/7), most western mints dropped Licinius to coin in the name of Constantine alone, added Crispus and the younger Constantine, and then reinstated Licinius, now with Annianus as Caesar. 10, 6 A similar picture obtains for the mint of Siscia, which Constantine seized during the war. 10, 1 Among the Licinian mints, the clearest evidence comes from Alexandria: the same issue includes obverses both of Valens, whom Licinius put up as emperor during the war, and of the two new Caesars, Crispus and Constantine. 10, 2

The historical outline which results from the new chronology should be clear. After their meeting in Milan (early 313), Licinius left to confront Maximinus, while Constantine proceeded to Gaul. 10, 3 Licinius defeated Maximinus in Europe (30 April 313) and pursued him through Asia Minor, travelling at least as far as Antioch. 10, 4 Licinius' further movements appear to be unknown. 10, 5 Constantine resided in Gaul, dealing with Christians and barbarians, and visited Rome in 315 to celebrate his *decennalia*, entering the city on 18 or 21 July and departing on 27 September. 10, 6 He travelled first to Mediolanum, but soon proceeded to Trier and remained in Gaul until the next summer. 10, 7 The plot (real or alleged) which Licinius instigated against his life belongs to 316: in a letter apparently written in winter 315/6, Constantine states his intention of visiting Africa to put a decisive end to bickering between Christians. 10, 8 Also to 316 belongs the birth of Fausta's first son, Constantine, whom she bore at Arelate; 10, 9 probably during August, when Constantine is attested there. 10, 10 Relations between Constantine and Licinius gradually soured, until there was open war (autumn 316). If the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* fails to mention the conflict, an easy explanation avails. Lactantius wrote before it occurred.

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10 CSEL xxvi, 212, 24 ff.: 'Hilarius princeps obtulit iii Kal. Maias Tribenis.' Presumably Hilarius was *princeps officii* of the pretorian prefect at Trier (so *PLRE* 1, 434).

11 *PLRE* i, 195, Celsus 8. Seeck felt compelled to emend the date to 27 February, i.e. of 316, precisely because he believed that Constantine was not at Trier in April 315 (o.c. 142 ff.; 164).

12 Bruun, o.c. (1953), 17 ff.; o.c. (1961), 10 ff.

13 O.P. vii, 172 ff. (Trier); 240 ff. (Arles); 298 ff. (Rome); 366 ff. (Ticinum).

14 *PLRE* vii, 425 ff. (coinage of the name of Licinius alone, then of Constantine alone, before the Caesars appear); 498 ff.

15 *PLRE* vii, 706. There seem to exist only two undoubtedly genuine types of Valens (*RIC* vii, 644 no. 7 (Cyzicus); 706 no. 19), but very many forgeries, cf. R. A. G. Carson, *NC* xviii (1958), 55 ff. It is therefore unfortunate that *PLRE* 1, 931, Valens 13, cites only Cohen, whose 'inaccuracy or even negligence in even important details renders him useless for the purpose of modern numismatic research' (Bruun, o.c. (1953), 56).


17 Eusebius, *HE* ix, 11, 6.

18 That is, once deductions from his alleged presence at Cibalae in October 314 are discarded (cf. O. Seeck, P-W xiii, 224 ff.).

19 The Chronographer of 354 records 'advent(us) divi' on 18 and 21 July, and 29 October (*CIL* 5, pp. 268; 274). Since the last entry refers to Constantine's entry into Rome in 312 (after the 'evictio tyranni', ib. 274), the others must refer to 315 and 326. It records 'profectio divi' on 27 September (ib. 272): almost certainly 315 rather than 326, cf. Seeck, *Regesten* (1919), 164, 177.

20 Augustine, *Epigr*. xiii, 7, 20; *Fragmenta Vetus*. 273 (19 October 315, Mediolanum); *CTh*. i, 22, 1 (11 January 316, Trier).

21 Opatius, App. vii (CSEL xxvi, 211, 19 ff.).

22 *Epigr. de Caes*. 41, 4; *Zosimus* ii, 20, 2.

23 *CTh*. xi, 30, 5 f. (13 August 316). Polemius Silvius enters 'natalis Constantini minoris' under 7 August (*CIL* 5, p. 271). Since Constantius was certainly born on 7 August (*CIL* 5, p. 270; *CTh*. vi, 4, 10), this is normally taken as an error. Yet the coincidence does not surpass belief, and August is approximately the correct month, as was seen long ago by E. Stein, *Zeitschr. für d. neueste Wiss.* xxx (1931), 183 f.; J.-R. Palanque, *Revue ér. anec.* xi (1938), 249 f. Polemius Silvius, the only direct testimony to the exact day of his birth, is nowhere adduced in the articles on the younger Constantine by J. Moreau, *JAC* ii (1959), 160 f.; *PLRE* i, 223.
The *De Mortibus Persecutorum* combines three features which long seemed to contradict one another. Lactantius writes as if persecution has very recently ceased, he records the death of Diocletian, and he betrays no hint of conflict between Constantine and Licinius. The date of composition consequently presented a vexing problem, with no universally agreed solution. If the work was written close to the events which it describes, then one of three implausible hypotheses seemed to be imposed.\(^{111}\) Either its completion fell within the brief (or non-existent) interval between Lactantius’ learning of the capture and execution of Valeria (hardly earlier than September 314) and the outbreak of war (before the end of the same month),\(^{112}\) or Lactantius wrote ‘restituta per orbem tranquillitate’ and ‘pax incunda et serena’ (*Mort. Pers.* 1, 2 f.) during the war,\(^{113}\) or else the passages which refer to events of 314 (either chapter 51 alone, or both 50 and 51) had to be deleted as interpolations.\(^{114}\) Then came wide acceptance of the notion that Diocletian died on 3 December 316.\(^{115}\) That entailed a date for the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* which solved or alleviated the existing difficulty: Lactantius was writing between 317 and 321. Such was the opinion which prevailed in recent times,\(^{116}\) with the corollary (not always clearly enunciated) that Lactantius indulged in a deliberate artifice: whether or not he has displaced the death of Diocletian, he omitted the war and he purported to be writing from four to seven years earlier than the genuine time of composition.\(^{117}\) Correct chronology redeems Lactantius’ candour and accuracy.\(^{118}\) No longer does either the death of Diocletian (certainly no later than 312/3 and possibly as early as 3 December 311)\(^{119}\) or the war (316/7) present any problem. The implications of the text may now be accepted: the author completed the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* in autumn 314 or (at the very latest) during the following winter.

Jerome records that Lactantius composed one book ‘de persecutione’.\(^{120}\) This has not been preserved with his other extant works, but appears to correspond to a work preserved in a manuscript of the ninth century: ‘Lucii C(a)ecilii liber ad Donatum confessorem de mortibus persecutorum’.\(^{121}\) The ascription to ‘L. Caecilius’ is no argument against identification. On the contrary: the manuscripts of the *Divinae Institutiones*, the *Epitome, De Opificio Dei* and *De Ira Dei* present the author’s name in a wide variety of forms, most fully as ‘L. Caelius Firmianus Lactantius’ or ‘L. C(a)ecilius Firmianus Lactantius’, and the latter form of the *nomen* has perhaps the better claim to be regarded as correct.\(^{122}\) However, the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* was not discovered until 1677,\(^{123}\) after a picture of Constantine based on Eusebius had established itself.\(^{124}\) In consequence, many were inclined to dispute Lactantius’ authorship of the newly discovered evidence, and controversy ensued for more than

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112 F. Günter, *Philologia* xxxvi\(^{\text{\textsuperscript{1}}}\) (1877), 596 ff.
113 S. Brandt, *Zh. Wien cxxv*, 6 (1892), 107 f.
115 O. Seeck gave the lead, mainly through the first volume of his *Geschichte* (first edition, 1895).
117 M. Moreau claimed that the opening sentences are little more than a rhetorical commonplace, and that Lactantius was simply copying Cyprian, *Laps.* 1 and possibly also Curiius Rufus x, 9, 1 ff. (c.c. 190 f.).
119 Jerome, *De vir. ill.* 80, also reporting other works now lost (for the fragments, *CSEL* xxvii, 155 ff.).
120 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 2627, ff. 101-104. The ms. is ascribed to the eleventh century by S. Brandt, *CSEL* xxvii, ix; Quasten, o.c. 401; Moreau, o.c. 73; to the ninth by Schanz-Hosius, o.c. 431; P. de Labroille, *Histoire de la littérature latine chrétienne* i (1947), 275. Professor L. E. Boyle advises me that the earlier date is palaeographically probable.
121 For attestations of ‘Caecilius’, see S. Brandt’s critical notes (*CSEL* xix, 94; 380; xxvii, 64; 132). It is held to be the correct form of Lactantius’ *nom* in Schanz-Hosius, o.c. 414, adducing *CIL* viii, 7241 (Cirta): D. M. L. Caecilius Firmianus v.a. xxv h.s.e. ‘Perhaps an ancestor’, according to *PLRE* i, 338.
123 Observe the recent verdict that Baronius’ *Annales*, published in Rome between 1588 and 1605, ‘remained till the nineteenth century the standard text of Catholic ecclesiastical history’ (H. Jedin, *Handbook of Church History* i (1965); 25).
two hundred years. The decisive arguments in favour were formulated at the beginning of the present century: the historical accuracy and detail of De Mortibus Persecutorum prove a date within Lactantius' lifetime; the differences of style from Lactantius' undisputed works derive from differences of genre, of audience and in the author's state of mind, while pervasive similarities of thought indicate the same author. Few have subsequently doubted Lactantius' authorship.

Lactantius' movements help to identify the audience which his work envisages. He was in Nicomedia when the 'Great Persecution' began (early 303) and implies that he remained there for at least two years. Hence a strong temptation to infer that his vivid narrative of later events in Nicomedia represents the report of an eyewitness. Lactantius (it is commonly and perhaps correctly supposed) was there, not only when Diocletian abdicated on 1 May 305 (Mort. Pers. 35), but also when Galerius' edict of toleration was posted there on 30 April 311 (35, 1) and when Licinius ordered the publication of a letter on 13 June 313 (48, 1). However, the validity of the inference may awake doubt or scepticism when it is applied to events outside Nicomedia. From the De Mortibus Persecutorum alone, it has been deduced that Lactantius may have been also in Gaul in 310 (29, 3 ff.) and in Serdica in 311 and perhaps early 313 (33; 45 ff.). With equal plausibility, he might be supposed to have accompanied Constantine in Italy in 312 (43 f.). Not all of these deductions are likely to be valid, and the vividness of the narrative may come from Lactantius' rhetorical skill rather than autopsy. Since he could discover and question eye-witnesses of most of the events which he describes, the narrative need not reveal anything about his movements.

Lactantius left Bithynia not long after 305, and wrote at least part of his Divinae Institutiones elsewhere. Neither the date nor the place can be specified exactly, but a reference to persecution should indicate that he was writing before April 311, perhaps in the territory of Constantine. In 311 Lactantius may have returned to Bithynia, since he reproduces the texts of the edict of Galerius and letter of Licinius which were published in Nicomedia (Mort. Pers. 35; 48). Yet he could have acquired copies from friends there, or even from the recipient of the work: the only evidence outside the De Mortibus Persecutorum shows him still (or again) in the west a little later, as the tutor to Crispus Caesar.

The De Mortibus Persecutorum addresses itself to the confessor Donatus, who had been imprisoned in Nicomedia from 305 to 311 (1, 1, etc., esp. 35, 2). It must therefore be supposed either that Lactantius was writing in Nicomedia or that he sent there at least one copy of his tract. But what was the wider audience which he

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125 For the details, F. Corsaro, Lactantiana (1970), 6 ff.
126 R. Pichon, Lactance. Étude sur le mouvement philosophique et religieux sous le règne de Constantin (1901), 337 ff. In a review, S. Brandt conceded the case (Berl. phil. Wochenschr. xxiii (1903), 1257).
128 Div. Inst. v, 2, 11, 15.
129 Harnack, o.c. 417; Schanz-Hosius, o.c. 428. B. Altaner-A. Stuber, Patrologe (1966), 185 state that he remained there continuously until c. 317.
130 Pichon, o.c. 359.
131 H. J. Lawlor, Eusebiania (1912), 242.
132 Pichon playedly suggested (o.c. 358 f.) that Lawlor advanced the same hypothesis seriously (o.c. 241), and a written source was invoked by K. Kolos, Die Kaisergeschichte in Laktanz 'de mortibus persecutorum' (Diss. Giessen, 1927), 12 ff.
133 Even the apparently explicit claim 'vidimus' need not always prove autopsy, cf. Tertullian (1971), 245 f.
134 Div. Inst. v, 2, 2: 'ego cum in Bithynia oratorias litteras accepi doceorem ... duo exiturunt ibidem ...'
135 Div. Inst. vi, 17, 6: 'spectatua sunt enim semper spectanturque adhuc per orbem poenae cultorum del. A serious problem is posed by passages not included in all ms., particularly two long invocations of Constantine (i, 1, 13 ff.; vii, 26, 11 ff.). Three, and only three, solutions can be devised. Either the passages are interpolations (S. Brandt, St. W en cxxvi, 8 (1899); cxix, 1 (1899) - retracted in Berl. Phil. Wochenschr. xxiii (1903), 1225), or they belong to a second edition of the work by Lactantius himself (A. Piganoli, Rev. d'hist. et de phil. rel. xxi (1932), 368 f., dated 1, 1, 13 ff. to 322 or 323, vii, 26, 11 ff. to the period between Licinius' defeat and his execution), or they originally stood in the sole edition which Lactantius published and were expunged by another hand (Pichon, o.c. 4 ff.).
136 Jerome, Chronicle, under A.D. 317 (GCS xii, 230), De Vir. Ill. 80. Since Jerome merely adds the notice to Crispus' investiture as Caesar in 317, his date has no authority. Pichon argued that Lactantius left Nicomedia for Gaul, never to return, between 306 and 308 (o.c. 356 ff.).
envisaged? He states that he writes so that all who were afar off and all who shall come after may know how God showed his excellence and majesty in destroying the enemies of his name (1, 7). Moreover, he was writing primarily, if not exclusively, for Christians: contrary to the practice of his apologetical writings, he uses specifically Christian terminology. A double purpose may thus be detected. Lactantius had contacts enough to be able to inform himself about contemporary happenings in both East and West. Since few were in such a position, his work probably contained something new for Christians everywhere. It is thus misleading to view Lactantius either as intent on informing Christians in the Western Empire of Licinius’ virtues or as circulating Constantine’s version of events among the subjects of Licinius. Lactantius was writing at a time when he could attempt to portray Constantine and Licinius with relative accuracy for an audience which embraced the subjects of both. On the correct chronology, it becomes possible to consider him more as an impartial witness to the policies of the later rivals than as a propagandist for either.

V. CONSTANTINIAN PROPAGANDA

Lactantius’ relationship to Constantine has often been misunderstood. If the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* were written c. 318-320, then Lactantius was surely disseminating an official version of events acceptable in Constantian circles at that time, he omitted the war between Constantine and Licinius at the emperor’s express command, and some of his information came from Constantine in person. An earlier date for the work will clearly require such hypotheses to be either reformulated or discarded. Lactantius’ treatment of Maximi and Maxentius discountenances the idea that he was closely following changes in official attitudes.

Constantine had (in 307) allied himself with Maxentius and Maximi: he married Fausta, the daughter of the latter (*Mort. Pers.* 27, 1), and was invested by him as Augustus. Later, after the Conference of Carnuntum had finally forced him to retire (November 308), Maximian attempted to seize power from Constantine by occupying Massilia, failed and was allowed (or compelled) to commit suicide (early 310). The explanation which found immediate official favour represented the episode as a family tragedy: the ungrateful Maximian sinned by fate or fortune, then perceived that he did not deserve to live and met an entirely voluntary death. Soon, however, Maxentius was waging war on Constantine as if to avenge his father (*Mort. Pers.* 43, 4). Constantine therefore ordered the condemnation of Maximian’s memory (311 or 312) and a second plot was revealed. After failure at Massilia and pardon, Maximian had tried to murder his son-in-law with his own hand: forewarned of the impending attempt by Fausta, whom her father urged to betrayal, Constantine placed a eunuch in his bed and apprehended Maximian after he killed the substitute. The old man was allowed to choose how to die and hanged himself (*Mort. Pers.* 30, 1 ff.).

137 e.g. ‘oratio’, in the sense of ‘prayer’, in the very first sentence (1, 1), which Lactantius avoids in his other works (Borleffs, o.c. 262). Hence the ‘candidati ministri’ seen by the blinded Maximinus (49, 5) are probably not angels, but elders or ‘those to whom judgement was committed’ (Rev. 4, 4; 20, 4).


140 H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* xiii (1938), 566.


143 The precise date diverges widely in modern treatments: *PLRE* dates the marriage to March (i, 325) and seems to express no opinion on Constantine’s becoming Augustus (i, 223 f.); C. H. V. Sutherland dates the marriage to April and the investiture to the autumn (*RIC* vi, 12 ff.); J. Lafaurie both to precisely 25 December (CRAI 1965, 201 ff.; *Mél. Piganoli* ii (1966), 799 ff.). December is probably too late, but the late summer or autumn of the year appears certain. The marriage and the investiture were contemporaneous (*Pan. Lat. vii*) (vi), esp. 1, 1; 5, 3; 8, 1), and Constantine was still only Caesar on 25 July 307 (R. Strauss, *Rev. Num.* xvi (1954), 26 ff.; *RIC* vi, 213, nos. 744-747).

144 Moreau, o.c. (1954), 367; Sutherland, o.c. 14 f.

145 *Pan. Lat. vi* (vii), 14, 3 ff.; 20, 3 ff. The speech was delivered in 310, on the ‘natalis dies’ of Trier (22, 4).
story shows clear signs of being invented during Constantine’s war against Maxentius."\textsuperscript{146} Subsequently, it was officially ignored: Maximian soon became Divus Maximianus and the grandfather of Constantine’s sons.\textsuperscript{147}

Lactantius could not avoid being affected by some of this propaganda and was deceived by the story of Maximian’s two plots. But the falsehoods were the invention of others.\textsuperscript{148} Lactantius, to be sure, omits Maximian’s investiture of Constantine as Augustus and Constantine’s refusal to acknowledge the decisions taken at Carnuntum, by which he was demoted again to Caesar and thus regarded as junior in rank to Maximinus.\textsuperscript{149} Instead, he ascribes Galerius’ eventual recognition of both as Augusti to the contumacy of Maximinus alone (\textit{Mort. Pers.} 32, 1 ff.), for he considers Constantine an Augustus from the day of his father’s death (24, 9; 25, 5).\textsuperscript{150} But his picture of Maximian hardly corresponds to Constantinian propaganda at the time of writing (313-315). Lactantius’ Maximian possesses many of the traits of the typical tyrant: as ruler of Italy, Africa and Spain, for example, he continually executed the wealthiest senators on false charges of treason,\textsuperscript{151} practised sodomy, and raped the virgin daughters of leading citizens wherever he journeyed (8, 4 ff.). It thus comes as no surprise to learn that he was expelled from Rome (in April 308) like a second Tarquinius Superbus (28, 4). Further, Lactantius’ views on the Diocletianic Tetrarchy diverged from those of Constantine and the Roman Senate:

ubi sunt modo magnifica illa et clara per gentes Iovi et Herculis cognomina, quae primum a Dioclete et Maximiano insolenter adsumpta et postmodum ad successores eorum translatæ viguerunt (52, 3)?

The coinage of Constantine continued for some years more to present Licinius, and occasionally himself, as being under the protection of Jupiter,\textsuperscript{152} and the Senate (in 315) portrayed Constantine in stone as the legitimate successor of the Tetrarchy.\textsuperscript{153} One whom Constantine had taken into his confidence or who habitually moved in court circles would surely have written with greater tact or avoided the topic.\textsuperscript{154} Hence, if Lactantius reflects official attitudes towards Maximian, they are not the attitudes of the time of writing but of Constantine’s war against Maximian’s son (i.e. 311/2).\textsuperscript{155}

Maxentius fares better than his father at the hands of Lactantius. Admittedly, he was of an evil disposition and so arrogant and resentful that he did not prostrate himself in adoration before his father or father-in-law (Galerius), who both therefore hated him (18, 9). But that is hardly a severe condemnation. Moreover, Lactantius entirely avoids vituperation. According to other contemporaries Maxentius committed crimes still more abominable than Lactantius attributes to his father (8, 4) or to Maximinus (37, 3 ff.): he indulged in every form of sexual debauchery, he robbed temples and butchered the Senate, he distributed other men’s wives and the lives and property of the innocent to his followers to secure their loyalty, and he even slaughtered pregnant women and new-born babies for magical purposes.\textsuperscript{156} Constantine naturally welcomed (if he did not inspire) such allegations, since they

\textsuperscript{146} No ancient writer other than Lactantius has both plots (Moreau, o.c. 373 ff.).

\textsuperscript{147} p. 35. For a slightly different hypothesis of two successive stories, cf. A. Maddalena, \textit{Atti Ist. Veneto} xvii, 2 (1934/5), 575.

\textsuperscript{148} An important distinction, cf. Moreau, o.c. 44 ff.

\textsuperscript{149} For Galerius’ view of the settlement of Carnuntum, note esp. \textit{ILS} 658 f.; \textit{RIC} vi, 514 (Thessalonica). Constantine (an important fact not made clear by \textit{PLRE} i, 1043) refused, both in 309 and later, to recognise the consulate which Galerius gave him for that year: \textit{P. Cairo Isid.} 47; 90; 91, cf. \textit{Mon. Germ. Hist.}, Auc. Ant. ix, 60; 76; 231 (post cons. x et septimum). Further, in the territory of Galerius and Maximinus, the \textit{dies imperii} of Constantine was not 25 July 306, but the day (subsequent to 29 August) on which Galerius formally appointed him (\textit{P. Cairo Isid.} 41, etc., confirming \textit{Mort. Pers.} 25, 2 ff.).

\textsuperscript{150} Which was, presumably, the legal basis of Constantine’s claim, ratified by the Senate in November 312, to be the senior emperor (\textit{Mort. Pers.} 44, 11).

\textsuperscript{151} Maximian’s relations with the Roman Senate are not discussed in M. T. W. Arbein, \textit{The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire} (1972).

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{RIC} vii, 246 ff.; 305 ff.; 371 ff.; 393 (all Licinius or his son); 498 ff. (Constantine: Thessalonica, after it passed into Constantine’s control in 316/7).

\textsuperscript{153} Above, n. 54.

\textsuperscript{154} Impossible, therefore, to suppose that ‘un des objectifs de Lactance... Stait de justifier l’attitude de Constantin à l’égard de Maximien’ (Moreau, o.c. 366).

\textsuperscript{155} p. 34 f.

supported his claim to be liberating Rome and Italy from tyranny.\textsuperscript{157} But his wife was the daughter of Maximian and thus a sister of Maxentius.\textsuperscript{158} The unpleasant fact was removed (or at least palliated) by the expedient of denying the tyrant’s paternity: an orator addressing Constantine in 313 boldly asserted that he was not really Maximian’s son at all, and a story was circulated that Eutropia had conceived him in adultery with a Syrian.\textsuperscript{159}

The argument can be reduced to a schematic form. Constantinian propaganda treated the memory of Maximian favourably except for a brief period (in 311 and 312), but consistently vilified the dead Maxentius. Lactantius treats Maxentius dispassionately but vilifies Maximian.\textsuperscript{160} The contrast both confirms an early date for \textit{De Mortibus Persecutorum} and proves that the author was not simply purveying the contemporary official version of events accepted at the court of Constantine.

VI CONSTANTINE AND THE CHRISTIANS

suscepto imperio Constantinus Augustus nihil egit prius quam Christianos cultui ac deo suo reddere. haec fuit prima eius sanctio sanctae religionis restitutae (\textit{Mort. Pers.}, 24, 9);

opus nunc nominis tui auspicio inchoamus, Constantine imperator maxime, qui primus Romanorum principum repudiatus erroribus maiestatem dei singularis ac veri et cognovisti et honorasti. nam cum dies ille felicissimus orbi terrarum inluxisset, quo te deus summis ad beatum imperii columnam evertit, salutarem universis et optabilem principatum praeclaro initio auspicatus es, cum eversam sublatamque iustitiam reducens taeterrimum aliorum facinus expiasti. (\textit{Div. Inst.}, i, 1, 13).

Lactantius presents a clear and almost unambiguous account of how the persecuting edicts of Diocletian were enforced by different emperors, and how the Christians gained freedom from molestation in one part of the empire after another. Galerius was the moving force and cowed the senile Diocletian into executing his wishes (\textit{Mort. Pers.}, 10, 6 ff.).\textsuperscript{161} Letters were sent to Maximian and Constantius bidding them take similar action: in Italy Maximian gladly obeyed, but in Gaul Constantius frustrated the intentions of his colleagues by allowing churches to be destroyed but preserving unharmed God’s true temple in men’s hearts (15, 6 f.). When Diocletian abdicated, Galerius was then able to practise on all the savage tortures he had learnt to apply to Christians (22, 1). But God’s judgement was drawing near, and Galerius’ position began to be threatened when Constantius died (24, 1). On his death, Constantine was proclaimed Augustus, and immediately allowed the Christians to worship God—a step which Lactantius clearly regards as something more than a mere continuation or reaffirmation of his father’s policy (24, 8 f.).\textsuperscript{162}

In the subsequent narrative, Lactantius marks several more steps in the deliverance of the Christians. The dying Galerius issued an edict of toleration in the name of all the emperors (i.e. himself, Maximinus, Constantine and Licinius), which was published in Nicomedia on 30 April 311 (33, 11 ff.; 36, 3) and in the other cities of the east.\textsuperscript{163} But Maximinus, who had been harrying Christians in Syria and

\textsuperscript{157} ILS 687 ff.; \textit{RIC}, vi, 387 nos. 303/4: Liberatori urbis Suae.

\textsuperscript{158} In fact, a full sister (\textit{Epit. de Caes.}, 40, 12).

\textsuperscript{159} Pan. Lat. xii (ix), 3; 4; 4; 3; Exc. Vales. i, 12. Eutropia was a Syrian herself (\textit{Epit. de Caes.}, 40, 12).

\textsuperscript{160} Note the allegations that Maximian intended to kill Galerius at Carnuntum (\textit{Mort. Pers.}, 29, 1) and to exterminate all the emperors except Diocletian, who was to be his sole colleague (43, 6).


\textsuperscript{162} On the enforcement of the various edicts (four in number) in different areas, see de Ste. Croix, \textit{o.c.} 75 ff. This fundamental study appears to be unknown to a recent writer on the subject (J. Molthagen, \textit{Der römische Staat und die Christen im zweiten und dritten Jahrhundert}, Hypomnemata xxvii (1970), 101 ff.)

\textsuperscript{163} H. Kraft, \textit{Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung} (1955), 7.

\textsuperscript{164} For a Greek translation, with the names and titles of the emperors (except Maximinus), see Eusebius, \textit{HE} viii, 17, 3 ff. It is not a necessary deduction from Eusebius’ \textit{ηπισκοπούσι τοις καθα τοὺς βασιλεῖς ἐρρήσας} (ib. 2) that the edict was published in the territory of either Maxentius or Constantine.
Egypt, at once occupied Asia Minor and introduced the same policies there, though later compelled by a letter of Constantine to resort to subterfuge (36, 1 ff.). Two years later, however, when Licinius defeated Maximinus, he guaranteed religious liberty to all his subjects and restored the Church in Asia and later (a fact only implied by Lactantius) in Syria and Egypt (48, 1 ff.).

On Lactantius' showing, the Christians gained freedom in several distinct stages: first, in Gaul and Britain (306), then in the Balkan lands (311), and finally throughout the East (313). The only uncertainty left by Lactantius concerns Italy and Africa, which were ruled by Maxentius until 312, and Spain, about whose allegiance in these years there seems to exist no explicit evidence. The explanation for this apparent uncertainty can easily be discerned. Lactantius, who makes no statement whatever about Maxentius' attitude toward the Christians, has deliberately omitted his actions in their favour. Maxentius (it is known) put an end to persecution in Africa (perhaps as early as 307), and ordered the Prefect of the City of Rome to aid the Christians in recovering what had been taken from them during the persecution.

Lactantius' picture is reproduced in very few modern accounts of the period, and some lengthy books on Constantine disdain to mention what Lactantius asserts to be his first act as emperor. Instead, the edict of Galerius is presented as the first occasion on which the illegality of being a Christian was 'explicitly revoked' by 'direct imperial enactment'. Alternatively, 'the very famous "Edict of Milan"... marks the decisive turning point in the history of the relations between the Church and the State.' And even those who perceive that Lactantius' account not only fails to mention an 'Edict of Milan', but also renders it impossible to suppose that Constantine and Licinius needed to promulgate any edict ordaining toleration in their own territories as late as 313, incline to keep the term for its symbolic value. But on what basis has Lactantius' express testimony been discarded? It will be wise to review the arguments advanced with some care.

Two statements of Lactantius are at issue: that Constantine restored religious liberty in 306 (Mort. Pers. 24, 9), and that he wrote to Maximinus in 311 discouraging him from persecution (37, 1). Lactantius (it is argued or assumed) has antedated the letter: he refers in fact to a letter which Constantine wrote to Maximinus after the battle of the Milvian Bridge (cf. 44, 11), or to the 'most perfect law' which Constantine and Licinius communicated to Maximinus at the same time, and which should accordingly be identical with the letter. Apparent disproof of Constantine's earlier action comes from Africa: the Donatist bishops (it is contended) were totally

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165 Eusebius presents substantially the same document with a different preamble (HE x, 5, 1 ff.), presumably reproducing the version which Licinius dispatched to Palestine and which was published there. For modern discussion of the two versions, cf. J. Moreau, *Scripta Minora* (1964), 99 ff.

166 For Africa, *Pan. Lat.* xii (ix), 16, 1: 25, 2 f.

167 R. Grosse, *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* viii: Las fuentes desde César hasta el siglo v d. de J. C. (1959), 55 f., cites only alleged coins of Tarracon, which were in fact minted at Ticinum (C. H. V. Sutherland, *RJC* vi, 6 f.; 266 ff.). It thus becomes possible to draw the obvious deduction from the absence of any mention of Spain in *Pan. Lat.* xii (ix): Constantine ruled the peninsula from 306 in succession to his father (cf. E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (1958), 435 f.).


169 Augustine, *Brev. coll.* iii, 18, 34; *Contra partem Donati post gesta* 13, 17 (CSEL liii, 84; 113 f.).


173 The term is conventionally applied to *Mort. Pers.* 48, 2 ff.—which, as O. Seeck pertinently remarked, is not an edict, was not published in Milan and was not issued by Constantine (Zeitschr. für Kirchengesch. xii (1891), 381 ff.).

174 The Edict of Milan may be a fiction, but the fact for which the term stood remains untouched' (N. H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great* (1931), 11). For bibliography on the 'Edict' see M. V. Anastos, *Rev. ét. byz. xxv* (1967), 13 ff. That writer essay 'a defence of its traditional authorship and designation' and professes respect for contemporary evidence as his 'cardinal principle' (ib. 15), yet seems nowhere to mention *Mort. Pers.* 24, 9.

175 N. H. Baynes, *CAH* xii (1939), 685 f.


unaware of it when they appealed to Constantine, and in 314 the legal basis of the Christians' position in Africa was the edict of Galerius, not the alleged enactment of Constantine. However, the first argument rests on the false premise that Lactantius consistently echoes Constantinian propaganda. If he wrote c. 314, then the alleged anachronism could only be a deliberate and implausible distortion. For, on Lactantius's showing, Maximinus was preparing to introduce open persecution of Christians into his newly conquered domains in Asia Minor, when he was deterred by the letter of Constantine and therefore resorted to subterfuge (36, 6; 37, 1). Further, the letter precedes the account of Maximinus' crimes (37, 1 ff.). The narrative thus unambiguously implies a date in summer or autumn 311. The second argument (it may be maintained) relies upon evidence which should be otherwise interpreted.

First, the Donatist petition to Constantine, from which Optatus quotes:

\[\text{rogamus te, Constantine optime imperator-quotem de genere iusto es, cuius pater inter ceteros imperatores persecutionem non exercuit, et ab hoc facinore immunis est Gallia, nam in Africa inter nos et ceteros episcopos contentiones sunt—petimus, ut de Gallia nobis iudices dari praecipiat pietas tua. datea a Luciano, Digno, Nasutio, Capitone, Fidentio et ceteris episcopis partis Donati (i, 22).}\]

Since the Donatist bishops mention only Constantine's favourable behaviour to the Christians, then it might seem that Constantine himself has so far done nothing comparable. Such an argument, however, assumes that Optatus quotes the petition in full, and that 'hoc facinore' refers to persecution. Neither assumption is correct. For the crucial clause means 'and Gaul is immune from this crime', and thus refers to a present (not a past) occurrence. Hence the crime should be dissension among Christians, and the demonstrative refers back to an earlier clause which Optatus does not quote. In order to interpret the crime as being persecution, the wording of the petition has not always been properly respected: one English translation blandly transposes the order of the clauses, another takes 'nam' as lacking any reference whatever to what precedes (‘whereas there are disputes . . . we pray . . .’), while a third omits the embarrassing 'nam' and renders the present tense 'immunis est' by the past 'remained free'. If Optatus is not quoting the full text of the petition, then the Donatists' words can be allowed their natural meaning, and cease to prove that Constantine had so far done nothing to benefit the Christians. The conclusion ought not to surprise. For in his reply Constantine angrily objected to the appeal: 'You seek judgement from me on earth, when I myself expect the judgement of Christ.' He had already, therefore, begun openly to declare himself a Christian.

The second argument arises from a passage in the Acta purgationis Felicis:

Aelianus proconsul dixit: <Constantinus> Maximus semper Augustus et Licinius Caesar<es> iia pietatem Christianis exhibere dignatur, ut disciplinam corrumpi nolint, sed potius observari religionem istam et coli velint. noli itaque tibi blandiri, quod cum mihi dicas dei cultorem te esse [ac] propere non possis torqueri. torqueris, ne mentiaris, quod alienum Christianis esse videtur. et ideo dic simpliciter, ne torquerias. Ingenui dixit: iam confessus sum sine tormento (Optatus, App. iii).

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178 J. Moreau, Scripta minora (1964), 121 f.
179 CSEL xxvi, 25 f. The words 'et ceteris episcopis partis Donati' are Optatus' summary of an originally longer list, cf. L. Duchesne, Mél. d'arch. et d'hist. x (1890), 608 f.
180 H. Grégoire, Byzantion vii (1932), 650.
181 As Duchesne unequivocally asserted (o.c. 598; 608).
182 So it is apparently taken by A. Piganol, L'entrepreneur Constantin (1932), 101.
183 O. R. Vassall-Phillips, The Work of St. Optatus (1917), 43: 'we beseech . . . that we be granted judges from Gaul; for between us and other Bishops in Africa disputes have arisen'.
184 A. H. M. Jones, Constantine and the Conversion of Europe (1948), 104. 'Nam' is a coordinating, not a subordinating conjunction, cf.

Leumann - Hofmann - Szantyr, Lateinische Grammatik ii (1965), 504 ff.
185 W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church (1952), 147. Similarly, Grégoire has 'la Gaule est reste indemne', with 'done' for 'nam' (o.c. 650).
186 Optatus ii, 23 (CSEL xxvi, 26): 'quibus (i.e. the petition) lection Constantinus pleno livore respondit in qua responsione et eorum preces prodidit dum sit: petitis a me in sacculo iudicium, cum ego ipse Christi iudicium expectem.'
187 The document quoted by Optatus can be identified as one of the two libelli which the proconsul of Africa forwarded to Constantine on 15 April 313 (Augustine, Epp. lxxviii, 2).
188 M. J. Routh, Reliquiae Sacrae iv (1846), 293; CSEL xxvi, 203-5 ff.
The apparent allusion to a phrase in Galerius' edict (Mort. Pers. 34, 4: ‘denuo sint Christiani . . . ita ut ne quid contra disciplinam agant’) has been judged to show that in 314 in Africa this edict was the only legal basis of the Christians’ position.\(^{189}\) The deduction does not follow from the evidence. Respect for ‘disciplina’ is a principle so rooted in Roman law and Roman attitudes that no specific reference to Galerius’ edict need be supposed.\(^{190}\) Moreover, the proconsul is not telling Ingentius the law as it concerns Christians, but stating imperial policy on the use of torture. Although Constantine and Licinius (he explains) show respect for Christians, they do not intend Christians to be absolved from observing either normal proprieties or the moral standards expected of Christians. Thus it is reasonable for Ingentius to be tortured, since he is suspected of perjury. No cause or justification, therefore, for inferring from Aelianus’ words either that Galerius’ edict was in force,\(^{191}\) or that it had been superseded,\(^{192}\) or that it had ever been promulgated in Africa. For, in Africa, persecution had been formally ended by Maxentius, who also ordered restitution of church property.\(^{193}\) Constantine needed to reiterate the latter ordinance, since its terms had not been completely fulfilled.\(^{194}\) But he did not need to re-enact freedom of worship for the Christians of Africa. Only those acts of Maxentius were rescinded which offended the canons of justice: the rest simply continued in force, or were perhaps confirmed if challenged.\(^{195}\)

The case against Lactantius thus lapses. He was writing between 313 and 315 about the deaths of those who persecuted Christians during the preceding decade. It hardly seems possible that he has misstated, either deliberately or by mistake, a fact of such central relevance to his theme as the identity of the first emperor to restore full freedom of worship to the Christians. Although Lactantius fails to state explicitly the precise nature of Constantine’s action at his accession, he nevertheless represents Constantine as adopting a policy more favourable to the Christians than his father Constantius. He thus implies, even if he does not state, that Constantine allowed the rebuilding of the churches which Constantius destroyed (Mort. Pers. 15, 6). Constantine’s subsequent conduct amply reveals his ability to draw political support from men of almost every religious persuasion. His protection of Christianity was originally a purely political act, which proclaimed that the new ruler would emphasise those policies of his father which most set him apart from the other emperors. It thus preceded by several years his personal adhesion to the religion, which Constantine first publicly declared (Mort. Pers. 44, 5 f.) when about to do battle with a rival who was not an enemy, but another friend of the Christians. It is not the least of Lactantius’ merits that his De Mortibus Persecutorum contains such a favourable account of Maxentius.

The preceding study appropriately appears with articles by other pupils of Sir Ronald Syme which aptly ‘attest the variety of his inclinations’ in the field of Roman History. Its object, its method, and the choice of subject were inspired by his writings and by the advice which he has so freely given to a young scholar. Ever since I began to study under his guidance (in 1964), he has steadily encouraged me to investigate areas and authors not normally the central concern of an ancient historian or student of Latin literature—in other words, to become, like himself, ‘unus ex curiosis’.

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\(^{189}\) E. Caspar, Geschichte des Papsttums i (1930), 581: H. Grégoire, Byzantion vii (1932), 648 f. Against this view, see also J.-R. Palanque, Byzantion x (1935), 607 ff.; M. V. Anastas, Rev. ét. byz. xxv (1967), 36 f.

\(^{190}\) See O. Mauch, Der lateinische Begriff DISCIPLINA. Eine Wortuntersuchung (Diss. Freiburg in der Schweiz, 1941), 52 ff.; 66 ff.

\(^{191}\) J. Moreau, Lactance (1954), 405, assumes that Galerius’ edict automatically replaced Maxentius’ legislation relating to Christians.

\(^{192}\) I.e. by the ‘Edict of Milan’, as argued by P. Batiffol, La paix constantinienne et le catholicisme (1914), 240 ff.

\(^{193}\) P. 44.

\(^{194}\) Note the emphasis on speed in the letter to Anullinus: Eusebius, HE x, 5, 15 ff.

\(^{195}\) Constantine enunciated the principle clearly: ‘tyranni et iudicius eius gestis infrormatis nemo per calumniam velit quod sponte ipse fecit etereiere nec quod legitime gestum est’ (CTh xv, 14, 2); ‘quae tyrannis contra ius resipisit non valere praeclimpimus, legitimus eius resipitis minime impugnamus’ (CTh xv, 14, 3). These two laws bear the dates 12 February 325 and 8 July 326, but the latter should be dated to 6 January 313, and thus refers to Maxentius (O. Seeck, Regesten (1919), 64 f.; 160).