



The Wife of Maximinus

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THE WIFE OF MAXIMINUS

On 1 May 305, in Nicomedia and Milan respectively, the emperors Diocletian and Maximian abdicated and appointed two new Caesars to the imperial college, with the two existing Caesars automatically replacing them as Augusti.¹ The new Caesars were not the two princes who seemed destined for the imperial purple by traditional dynastic considerations. The western Caesar, Constantius, had three sons: Constantine, who was probably over thirty years of age, and two who were much younger, perhaps still mere infants, Dalmatius and Constantius, who became consuls in 333 and 335, when presumably not much beyond their thirtieth years; the western Augustus, Maximian, had an adult son, Maxentius, and a daughter, Fausta, who seems to have been much younger than her brother and was not yet of marriageable age; the eastern Augustus, Diocletian, had one child, a daughter, Valeria, who was married to the eastern Caesar, Galerius; Galerius had only one legitimate child, a daughter, Valeria Maximilla, who was married to Maxentius. Before the abdication, therefore, it seemed obvious that the next Caesars to be appointed to the imperial college must be Constantine and Maxentius, since they were the only two sons of the ruling emperors who were old enough to discharge the imperial duties.² In the event, however, the new Caesars were Maximinus, who was Galerius' nephew, and Severus, whose antecedents are totally unknown.

1. For documentation of undisputed facts, dates, and relationships, see T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, 1982), esp. 4–5, 30–39.

2. See T. D. Barnes, "Christentum und dynastische Politik (300–325)," in *Usurpationen in der Spätantike*, ed. F. Paschoud and J. Szidat, *Historia Einzelschriften* 111 (Stuttgart, 1997), 99–109.

In an important article in this journal, Christopher Mackay has shown that Lactantius, who describes the choice of the new Caesars in detail, has deliberately suppressed the fact, reported by two writers dependent on Eunapius, that Maximinus was the son of Galerius' sister (*Epit.* 40.1, 40.18; *Zos.* 2.8.1).³ The *De Mortibus Persecutorum* makes Galerius describe Maximinus, when recommending him to Diocletian, as *adfinis meus* (18.13–14). The word *adfinis*, as Mackay correctly emphasizes against the consensus of scholarship since the seventeenth century, means “relative by marriage” and cannot designate a blood relative;⁴ hence Lactantius has omitted the significant and very relevant fact that Maximinus was Galerius' closest male relative by blood and by doing so he has deliberately attenuated Maximinus' dynastic claims to the imperial purple.

So far so good. At this point, however, the question arises whether Maximinus was related to Galerius by marriage as well as by blood. Mackay appears to assume that he was not, when he states that “in order to heighten Maximinus' obscurity, Lactantius must misrepresent his relationship to Galerius, calling him a marriage relation rather than his nephew.”⁵ But Maximinus had a wife who between 305 and 307 bore him a son, Maximus, and a daughter who was betrothed to Galerius' illegitimate son Candidianus, who was a decade older than his intended bride (*Lactant. Mort. Pers.* 50.6; *Zonar.* 13.1). Since neither the name nor the identity of Maximinus' wife is anywhere attested, the possibility that she was related to Galerius ought to be considered before Lactantius is accused of lying. There is (so far as I can see) nothing in the surviving evidence to discountenance the hypothesis that the wife of Maximinus was the daughter (or possibly granddaughter) of a sibling of Galerius. On the contrary, while Lactantius may frequently caricature by distortion and omission, he avoids outright lies and deliberate error wherever he can, so that his record for factual accuracy is high, even when his presentation and interpretation are grossly tendentious. If Maximinus had married a cousin, then he was indeed an *adfinis* as well as a *cognatus* of his uncle Galerius.

The argument presented so far inevitably leads on to speculation about the Caesar Severus. It is perhaps unfair to characterize the hapless Caesar as “somewhat of a cipher, not having left a vivid picture of himself in the historical record.”⁶ Our ignorance is due not only to his political and military failure in Italy in 305–7, but also to the fact that Lactantius has chosen to suppress whatever he knew about his family and what must have been a long (and perhaps distinguished) military career. Lactantius makes Diocletian characterize Severus as a drunken reprobate (*Mort. Pers.* 18.12), and he vouchsafes no further personal details about him whatever, except that he had a son who was an adult in 313 when he fought in Maximinus' army and was executed (*Mort. Pers.* 50.4). Given Lactantius' silence about Maximinus' tie of consanguinity to Galerius, it does not seem rash to conjecture that Severus too may have been related to him. For all that is known, Severus too may be a nephew of Galerius.

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3. C. S. Mackay, “Lactantius and the Succession to Diocletian,” *CP* 94, 2 (1999): 198–209.

4. Mackay, “Lactantius,” 202–5.

5. Mackay, “Lactantius,” 205.

6. Mackay, “Lactantius,” 201.