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MAXENTIUS AS *PRINCEPS*

BY

MATS CULLHED

Abstract

Maxentius' use of the title *princeps* on the coins of his early reign instead of *augustus* or *caesar* has usually been interpreted as a sign of his respecting the authority of Galerius as the leader of the tetrarchy. The lack of any coins of Galerius from the Maxentian mints, however, does not support this. Instead, it is suggested that the *princeps* title mirrors the relations in Rome between Maxentius and his father. The latter's seniority as *augustus* was counterbalanced by Maxentius as *princeps*. The title guaranteed Maxentius his independence. It is also seen as one result of Maxentius' Rome-centred, anti-tetrarchic attitude.

On 28th October, 306, the praetorian guard carried out a coup which left Maxentius, son of Maximianus Herculeus, ruler of Rome. Discontent had been stirring in the city, as a result of Galerius' decree that the city was to lose its tax-privileges. Furthermore, the armed forces present in the old capital had already seen their numbers depleted, and were about to be removed, the units being distributed along the borders. Maxentius had been living in Rome for several years and now championed the cause of the Romans. He was aided by several officials and the only one known to have perished in the revolt was the official representative of the absent emperors. Thus began a reign which during its first tumultuous eighteen months saw Maxentius' father once more in the purple, two invasions of Italy by two different emperors, an alliance of sorts struck with Constantine and, finally, an attempt by Maximianus to depose his own son.¹

When Constantine had succeeded his father Constantius three months earlier, on 25th July, he had been acclaimed as *augustus* by the troops, but later accepted Galerius' elevation of Severus to that title and instead became the new Herculean *caesar* of the West.² Maxentius, during the first months of his reign, made use of another title on his coins: he appeared as *princeps invictus*.³

What did this title imply? *Princeps* was not a normal part of the emperor's official title,⁴ though it was used, e.g. in panegyrics, to address any ruler in general.⁵ On coinage, it occurred in combinations such as *princeps iuventutis* on the reverses; but as the formal title of an emperor, surrounding his portrait on the obverse, it was unprecedented.⁶

THE "ILLEGITIMATE" EMPEROR

Two interpretations have been put forward as solutions to this problem. The first might well be called the "standard"

one, as it is the one usually found in text-books. The second was suggested by C.H.V. Sutherland in 1963.⁷

The "standard" interpretation begins with the assumption that Maxentius wanted to enter the tetrarchy or, alternatively, a new "pentarchy". His first aim therefore must have been to win recognition, above all from the *maximus augustus*, Galerius. The *princeps* title then would have been a temporary one, held by Maxentius while waiting to be assigned his proper one as *augustus* or presumably *caesar* — cf. the deference of Constantine in front of Galerius' decisions earlier in 306.⁸

Sutherland, too, pictured Maxentius as acting within the framework of the existing tetrarchy, but regarded the *princeps* title as an innovative political notion of Maxentius. The position of Maxentius at Rome as *princeps* would have left him as neither *augustus* nor *caesar*, but instead as a fifth

This article is a preliminary study for a dissertation on the subject of Maxentius' reign and the politics and propaganda of the early fourth century A.D. The manuscript was finished 4 March, 1988.

Throughout, volumes of *The Roman imperial coinage* are cited as *RIC*: the most important one is of course vol. 6, by C.H.V. Sutherland, London 1967.

The two ancient sources most frequently cited have been Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, ed. J. Moreau (= Sources chrétiennes 39), Paris 1954 and *Panegyrici Latini*, ed. E. Galletier (Collection des universités de France), vols. 1—2, Paris 1949 & 1952; they are referred to as *Lact.* and *Paneg.* respectively.

¹ The most detailed accounts of the events of October 306 are given by *Lact.* 26 and by *Zosimos* 2.9.2—3.

² E.g. *Lact.* 24.8—9, 25.5; *Euseb. Hist. Eccl.* 8.13.14; *Paneg.* 6.5.3. *Origo Const.* 2, and *Zosimos* 2.9.1, state that Constantine became *caesar* only. It seems probable that these two sources confused Constantine's acceptance of Galerius' decision with his original status.

³ For the chronological arrangement of Maxentius' coinage, cf. C.E. King, 'The Maxentian mints' *NC* 19, 1959, 47—78. The coins are of course best studied in *RIC* 6.

⁴ L. Wickert, 'Princeps (civitatis)', *RE* 22:2 (1954), 2062.

⁵ E.g. in *Paneg.* 4.3.2: *invictissimi principes*.

⁶ *RIC* 5:2, 153 no. 257, gives *Gallienum Princ P R*: note, however, the accusative case by which it differs from the Maxentian coins.

⁷ C.H.V. Sutherland, 'Some political notions in coin types between 294 and 313', *JRS* 53, 1963, 14—20.

⁸ Three examples may suffice: O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*², 1, Berlin 1897, 81; E. Groag, 'Maxentius', *RE* 14.2 (1930), 2424—2426; T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge, Mass. & London, England, 1981, 30.



dated by pottery only

man, able to manoeuvre on his own, with fewer formal obligations to his colleagues than would otherwise have been the case. As *princeps*, he could then have hoped to exert a controlling function in the formation of the future imperial college of rulers. Evidently, this gives quite another picture of Maxentius as an independently active ruler.⁹

I believe that both these interpretations fail to account for the problems posed by the early reign of Maxentius. In the following I will try to show an alternative interpretation of the sources as providing a more likely reason for Maxentius' unorthodox choice of title.

The principal objection that can be raised against both these explanations of the *princeps* title is based on a fact that—surprisingly—has earned very little in the way of comment: Maxentius never coined for Galerius.¹⁰

The collegiate rule which we call the tetrarchy was expressed in many ways—by monuments, by inscriptions, through joint manifestations of power like the *adventus*, and in the coinage. The rulers of the first, second and third tetrarchies coined for the entire imperial college. Maximinus struck for Constantius, Diocletian for Galerius, Severus for Constantine etc. In this way, and through the uniformity of coin legends and motives, the unity of the empire was visibly demonstrated. *Concordia* reigned supreme. The most often recurring legend on the bronze issues was *genio populi romani*: it was common to all the rulers and became a sign of one's share in power.¹¹

When Maxentius came to power in Rome he immediately issued coins from its mint, and soon from Carthage, too. Neither during these first months of his reign, nor during the following years up to the death of Galerius did he strike a single coin bearing the name of Galerius. Nor did he coin for Diocletian as *senior augustus*. The coins issued instead bear the names of—apart from Maxentius himself—Maximianus, Constantine and Maximinus. Galerius only appeared on Maxentius' splendid row of *consecratio* coins from 311, celebrating his deified predecessors.¹²

As for reverse legends, the *genio populi romani* never appeared on coins issued by Maxentius. His most typical legend was the *conservator urbis suae*, stressing less the abstract *romanitas* of the tetrarchs, which set all parts of the empire on equal footing, than the majesty of the old capital as the centre from which the empire was ruled.¹³

Certainly, divergences between the coinages of the different parts of the empire started to show already during the Second tetrarchy. For example, Severus apparently never struck coins with the *genio populi romani* legend, so its disappearance from Italy and Africa preceded Maxentius' reign.¹⁴ But there is no instance of total neglect of other rulers before the coming of Maxentius (who, it should be noted, certainly never appeared on coins from the eastern part of the empire).

Now, I maintain that this is inconsistent with any interpretation of Maxentius' political role as that of a ruler setting his hope on recognition from Galerius, the *maximus augustus*. If Maxentius' title was a sign of his respecting Galerius' authority, this respect should have resulted in Maxentius coining in his name, too. The total absence of Galerius from his coins, on the other hand, rather implies

that he chose to ignore him.

Let us compare Carausius, another rebellious emperor, who two decades earlier had also taken hold of a part of the empire. He issued coins bearing the names and portraits of both Diocletian and Maximianus as well as himself.¹⁵ The two former emperors, for their part, never included Carausius in their coinage, thereby refusing his claims. Maxentius didn't follow Carausius' example, but instead confidently stopped his mints working for Galerius. If the latter never permitted Maxentius to appear as a co-ruler, the reverse also seems to be true.

In addition, it seems to be a reasonable presumption that Maxentius would not have been very wise in seeking contact with Galerius, whose decisions regarding Rome had made his own revolt possible. To have immediately negotiated with Galerius could easily have undermined Maxentius' popularity in the city.

Considering these indications of the quite independence of Maxentius in his relations with Galerius, one may be surprised that this luckless emperor is still usually described as an "illegitimate" ruler, who seeks "recognition" but who instead is constantly rebuffed as a "usurper". The reason is perhaps not difficult to find: the tetrarchy has been seen as a permanent system with almost the status of a modern constitution. With such a view of the political conditions, Maxentius' attempt at imperial power is naturally seen as a usurpation and therefore in need of confirmation by "authorized" rulers.

But the tetrarchy, as it developed from the 280s onwards, did not have that firmly set character. Nor were the principles that governed the formation of the imperial college so entirely different from the situation during the earlier centuries of the principate as has sometimes been thought. Its most remarkable traits were the joint abdication of Diocletian and Maximianus, and the following choice of new

⁹ Sutherland (supra n. 7), 18–20.

¹⁰ J.P.C. Kent, 'The pattern of bronze coinage under Constantine I', *NC* 17, 1957, 19f., attributed an *aureus* from Rome with Galerius on the obverse to Maxentius' first emissions. Sutherland, however (*RIC* 6, 337, 363 no. 113), placed it in the Second tetrarchy. The absence of any *folles* with Galerius' portrait at either Rome or Carthage seems to support this.

¹¹ H. Wrede, 'Der genius populi Romani und das Fünfsäulendenkmal der Tetrarchen', *BonnJbb* 181, 1981, 138f.

¹² The *consecratio* coins were struck in Rome and Ostia. *Rome RIC* 6, 382 nos. 246–248; Ostia: *ibid.* 404 nos. 30–31.

¹³ Wrede (supra n. 11), 125, argues "die Gleichung von Tetrarchie und Rom". In practice, however, the continued absence of the emperors from the city must have made their Roman ideal of the *genius* type appear as quite different from Maxentius' outright celebration of the *Urbs* on his coins, bearing the image of *Dea Roma*. The goddess, symptomatically, only rarely occurred outside the Italian mints.

¹⁴ J-P. Callu, *Genio populi romani (295–316). Contribution à une histoire numismatique de la tetrarchie* (= *Bibliothèque de l'école pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences historiques et philologiques*, 314), Paris 1960, 62f.

¹⁵ *RIC* 5, 442f, 550–556. Carausius, it may be added, never had any title but that of *augustus*.

¹⁶ Seeck (supra n. 8), 80f; Barnes (supra n. 8), 27.

caesares together with the creation of the two "families" of Iulii and Iulii Iulii.¹⁷

"Legitimacy is the foundation of such governmental power as is exercised both with a consciousness on the government's part that it has a right to govern and with some recognition by the governed of that right".¹⁸ Could Maxentius, in the political milieu of the early fourth century, make a claim to be recognized as legitimate without the consent of other rulers?

The hereditary principle of succession had been the rule for three centuries of the principate, and the tetrarchy took care to bind itself together through the means of adoptions and marriages (sometimes necessitating divorces). The Antonine emperors in the second century had also resorted to adoptions, but only when the emperor did not have a son of his own. The tetrarchy was able to combine personal competence with family ties, but disinheriting Maxentius must have caused general surprise.¹⁹ Earlier, Maxentius had been considered an evident heir to Maximianus.²⁰

Particular attention has been paid in recent research to the development of ruler cult and ceremonies surrounding the rulers. Far from being mere "decorations" or "empty gestures", they are seen as necessary attributes of any emperor wishing to appear as legitimate. They went together in showing that a ruler was favoured by the gods, ruled through his *numen* and enjoyed the *consensus universorum*.²¹ This way of ascertaining one's position is amply attested for the tetrarchy, above all in the preserved panegyrics. The *adventus* of Diocletian and Maximianus to Milan, for instance, is celebrated as a coming of two gods, shining as the sun itself.²²

Finally, no emperor could feel secure on his throne if he did not prove his worth by being successful. If he was defeated, he would obviously have been seen as having lost the divine sanction of his rule that he had earlier possessed.²³

The conferment of *imperium* by a senior emperor, acclamation by the army and reception by the *SPQR* created the emperor; vested in purple robes, the emperor would surround himself with the ceremonial attributes of a rightful ruler, proclaiming his *pietas* and *felicitas*, not to mention the *aeterna victoria*, the *pax* and the ensuing *temporum felicitas* which showed the empire at its best under his divinely sanctioned rule. That, in short, would constitute a legitimate emperor of the tetrarchy as described by his own propaganda.²⁴

Maxentius was finally defeated; the people and the senate are described as rejoicing at his fall, after six years of tyranny; immediately after Constantine's victory it was "revealed" that Maxentius actually had been the son of a Syrian and not of Maximianus Herculeus.²⁵ Lack of success, lack of *consensus*, lack of imperial descent, and evidently lack of divine support. Thus he was a usurper; after his death. Before that, Maxentius was as legitimate as any other emperor. He forced two invading armies to retreat and won back Africa; he must have had the same imperial pomp surrounding him and the same honours accorded him as the other rulers, he embellished his city (*Roma*, too) and celebrated *quinquennalia*; he was un-

doubtedly the son of Herculeus. The view of Maxentius as a usurper of power not rightly his is still the Constantinian view, the result of Maxentius' defeat in 312 and Constantine's ultimate victory.²⁶ When Constantine (the Great) had made Christianity the favoured religion of the empire, Maxentius was given the part of an enemy of God, standing in the way of God's chosen. Constantine's propaganda survives into the 1980s; Maxentius is still described as wanting legitimacy.²⁷

Maxentius was the son of Maximianus and it is reported that he once had been a candidate for the throne and that he was embittered by his being bypassed in the succession.²⁸ If Maxentius wanted to strengthen his personal qualifications for being an emperor, I believe that he had a very good case to present to the *SPQR*. It is strange that Constantine's succession to his father is considered safely legitimate, while Maxentius being the son of an *augustus* is often not seen as being of any importance in that respect. Constantine received his *augustus* title from Maximianus; that Maxentius evidently must have gained from being coregent with his father is seldom mentioned.²⁹

¹⁷ Cf. W. Seston, *Diocletien et la tétrarchie* (= *BEFAR* 162), Paris 1946, esp. 194–257; recently described in S. Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman recovery*, London 1985, 41–70.

¹⁸ D. Sternberger, 'Legitimacy', *International encyclopedia of the social sciences*, ed. D.L. Sills, vol. 9, MacMillan & The Free Press, USA 1968, 244.

¹⁹ Wickert (supra n. 4), 2210, concludes that if there was a son of the emperor's own, not even the most gifted adopted sons would have stood a chance of being appointed heir to the throne.

²⁰ *Paneg.* 2.14.

²¹ Cf. S.G. MacCormack, *Art and ceremony in late antiquity*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, Calif. & London, England 1981, 162. The classical study of imperial ceremonial is A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreich*³, Darmstadt 1980.

²² *Paneg.* 3.10.

²³ MacCormack (supra n. 21), 182.

²⁴ MacCormack (supra n. 21), 168–173; W. Hartke, *Römische Kinderkaiser. Eine Strukturanalyse römischen Denkens und Daseins*, Berlin 1951, 170f.

²⁵ *Orig. Const.* 4; *Paneg.* 9.3–4; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 9.9.9.

²⁶ Lact. 26.6 states that Maxentius was aware of his misdeed (*Maxentius facinoris sibi tanti conscius* . . .). In the context, this might not so much refer to a general lack of legitimate claims, as to Maxentius being guilty of an act of *impietas* towards his father-in-law. Lactantius immediately (26.7) goes on to describe how Maxentius sent the purple to his father, and this might be a sign that the *pietas* towards his father could outweigh the disregard shown to Galerius.

²⁷ T.D. Barnes, *The new empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge, Mass. & London, England 1982, 12f., lists him as a usurper under the heading "other rulers". J. Ziegler, *Zur religiösen Haltung der Gegenkaiser im 4. Jh. n. Chr.* (= *Frankfurter Althistorische Studien* 4), Kallmünz 1970, 35–53, treats Maxentius' fate as a "typical" tyrant admirably, but still terms him usurper. The German "Gegenkaiser" would otherwise be a better description of Maxentius.

²⁸ *Paneg.* 2.14 has Maxentius as an evident heir to the throne. Zosimos 2.9.2 relates Maxentius' discontent with seeing Constantine succeed to his father, mentioning that Constantine's mother was only a concubine.

²⁹ Barnes (supra n. 8), 28f.

Maxentius could have enjoyed perfect legitimacy in his own territory. What were his relations with Galerius, then? The coinage ignores him altogether, but there are two facts that have been used as evidence to show Maxentius as accepting Galerius' authority: Constantine's behaviour in 306 and the lists of consuls.

One has often presupposed that Maxentius must have behaved in the same way as Constantine, sending his portrait to Galerius and accepting his decisions.³⁰ However, if—as has been suggested above—legitimacy is no longer seen as necessarily dependent on Galerius, such a parallel is not valid. Constantine's action was rather the offering to Galerius of a choice between either accepting *status quo* in the West or acquiring a fresh enemy. As it turned out, Galerius chose to keep the peace, but also demanded that Constantine should only be *caesar*, if he wished to ally himself to the other rulers. Constantine agreed to this, and avoided an immediate war, but there is no act of unconditional obeisance involved. As for Maxentius looking to Galerius for the same type of alliance as Constantine, he must have realized that his situation was vastly different. He had set himself up in territory already belonging to another emperor and cannot have expected anything but immediate conflict. It is significant that there is no indication in the literary sources that Maxentius turned to Galerius concerning his sudden promotion. In fact, I believe that one passage in the *Origo Constantini* can be adduced in favour of the view that Maxentius did not accord much respect to Galerius at all. It is the relation of Galerius' march against Rome in 307.³¹ Having halted at Interamna, he sent his emissaries to Rome: "... *per colloquium petens ut gener apud socerum, id est Maxentius apud Galerium, precibus magis quam armis optata mercaretur*". Galerius is the first to negotiate, and that does not sound as if Maxentius had looked earlier to him for recognition. Rather, it is Galerius who is making an attempt to reach a peaceful solution with an intransigent Maxentius.

As to the *fasti*, they are a complicated set of evidence. Constantine's, Maxentius' and Galerius'/Maximinus' nominations differ between each other and the modern editions do not agree on certain points.³²

The consuls of 306 had been Constantius and Galerius, both holding their offices for the sixth time. After Constantius' death, Galerius remained sole consul.

In 307, Maximinus and Severus were appointed consuls; Constantine, however, nominated himself and Galerius. In Rome, Galerius appeared as consul together with Maximinus. From the month of April, their consulate was replaced by the term *post sextum consulatum*, so that the three months that had passed of Galerius' seventh term of office as consul were not counted. This vacancy seemingly continued into 308, then described by the phrase *consules quos iusserint dd nn augg*. Thereafter, Maxentius and Romulus were elected, obviously after Maximianus' hasty departure from Rome, having failed to depose his son.

The exact meaning of Galerius' absence from the coinage and presence in the *fasti* is not clear, but I suggest that a possible explanation for Galerius' consulate might be that at this time Maximianus as *augustus*, rather than the *princeps*

Maxentius, would have been responsible for choosing consuls. It would thus reflect Maximianus' views, which certainly need not have been those of Maxentius.³³

In contrast to Galerius' and Severus' absence from Maxentius' coinage, both Constantine and Maximinus are shown on his early coins from Rome and Carthage.³⁴ Maxentius was in conflict with Severus, whose territory he had occupied, and Galerius, whose decisions regarding Rome and authority as *maximus augustus* he openly scorned. For the moment, he had no reason to antagonize the two *caesares*, and as their appointments had been the decision of Galerius (though "retroactive" in Constantine's case), Maxentius' emissions for them would have been an assurance that the ongoing conflict did not mean that he also questioned their authority. Maxentius would be content with their neutrality in the war that he must have foreseen. When Maximinus disappeared from both coins and the *fasti*, that was a sign that Maxentius had realized that the *caesar* remained faithful to Galerius' decisions.³⁵

Thus, neither coins, literary sources or the *fasti* seem to testify to Maxentius' treating Galerius as one whose authority was of crucial importance to him. The fact that Galerius was recognized as consul at Rome for three months remains, but has to be balanced against the collected numismatic evidence.

I have questioned Maxentius' supposed need of recognition from Galerius. He could already claim legitimacy for his rule, and there is no evidence that he tried to come to terms with Galerius in the way that Constantine did, i.e., in order to enter the imperial college on terms of an alliance. The conclusion of all this is that Maxentius' *princeps* title should have nothing to do with his relations to the most prominent member of the tetrarchy, Galerius, and that an explanation for it has to be sought elsewhere.

THE IMPERIAL TITLES IN THE WEST

The titles of the rulers are of course of primary importance in the study of political relationships and ambitions.³⁶ During the first six months of Maxentius' reign, the three west-

³⁰ Cf. *supra*, n.2.

³¹ *Origo. Const.* 3.

³² The *fasti* were edited in *MGH*, Chron.Min.3, ed. Th. Mommsen, Berlin 1898, 517f. I give the arrangement of Barnes (*supra* n. 27), 93f.

³³ Cf. *below*, p. 16. It should also be noted that Maximianus Herculeus is given as consul instead of Galerius in some versions; A. Degraffi, *I fasti consolari dell'Impero Romano* (= *Sussidi eruditi*, 3), Roma 1952, 77, accepted that alternative.

³⁴ *RIC* 6, 369, e.g. nos. 149–150; 431 no. 51b–c.

³⁵ There are coins which bear the formula *augg et caess nn* on their reverses from Maxentius' mints (e.g. *RIC* 6, 369, nos. 147–148). The plural would demonstrate his loyalty to Galerius. Kent (*supra* n. 10), 19, found a "definitely tetrarchic air" about Maxentius' early issues. However, I maintain that the non-existent obverses for Galerius emphasize Maxentius' slight respect for him.

³⁶ Barnes (*supra* n.27), 17–29, has a good survey of the different titles and related problems.

ern rulers followed different patterns in their titulature. I chart them briefly in the following.

Maximianus Herculeus had been *augustus* for almost twenty years and obviously a highly unwilling *senior augustus*.³⁷ His return to political life meant that he was able to resume his former title. On one early Maxentian issue from Aquileia, his name was given in the dative, preceded by the *domino nostro* which had been typical for the issues celebrating Diocletian and Maximianus after their abdication.³⁸ Otherwise he was, by force of the nominative used, described as an active ruler. Perhaps I should add that I do not agree with those interpretations which make the word *senior* necessarily a sign of retirement,³⁹ to me it appears that the case used in the obverse legend is more important. An active emperor had his own mints working for him, while the "retired" seniors only received issues as an expression of *pietas* from their successors. That Maximianus was *senior* placed him over Galerius.⁴⁰

Maxentius was termed *caesar* on some coins from Carthage, but otherwise was *princeps invictus* until some time in 307 when he exchanged the *princeps* for *augustus*.⁴¹

Constantine was called *caesar*, but was made *augustus* by Maximianus when the marriage with Fausta took place.⁴²

How should this changing picture be interpreted? What political realities were behind the titulature? To make any answer possible, the chronology needs careful consideration, in order to establish at what time the rulers assumed their respective titles.

Though the relative chronology for Maxentius' early reign is reasonably clear, there is not a single absolute date available for the period between his accession and his first consulate in April 308. The time for Severus' and Galerius' respective campaigns, the death of Severus and the days of Maxentius' and Constantine's respective elevations to the rank of *augusti* have all been disputed.⁴³

In the panegyric delivered to Maximianus and Constantine on the occasion of the marriage to Fausta in 307, Constantine is also addressed as having been made *augustus* by Maximianus.⁴⁴ Scholars have differed over the date, ranging from March to December.⁴⁵ As Maximianus only went to Gaul after Severus' defeat, March seems very early for the following reasons:

Within the period between Maxentius' accession on 28th October 306 and the marriage in Gaul must be accommodated Severus' campaign, his retreat and the siege of Ravenna, and Maximianus' journey to Gaul, before which he is reported to have fortified Rome in the face of Galerius' probable attack.⁴⁶ In Gaul, Maximianus was included in Constantine's coinage as active *augustus* together with Constantine himself as *caesar*, issues which probably wouldn't have been meaningful for Constantine before Maximianus' actual arrival and suggestions for the future. A reasonably wide period of time should be allowed for these.⁴⁷ If one assumes that Severus did not launch his attack until winter was over, this should take us well beyond March for the date of the wedding.

The wedding of Constantine and Fausta was celebrated by an emission in Trier including Fausta's, Maximianus' but also Galerius' names.⁴⁸ Constantine was as the panegyric

clearly shows raised to the rank of *augustus*. Maxentius was absent in this silver emission, nor was he mentioned in the wedding panegyric.⁴⁹ When he appeared, on *folles* of reduced weight from Trier and Lyons, it was as *augustus*.⁵⁰

In Italy and Africa, Maxentius appeared as *augustus* on unreduced bronze from Aquileia and Carthage, with Constantine as *caesar* and Maximianus as *senior augustus*.⁵¹ The Aquileia issue was the first Maxentian one there; in Carthage, Maxentius had previously had issues as *caesar*, later as *princeps*, including an active Maximianus and Constantine and Maximinus as *caesares*.⁵² His title was changed from *princeps* to *augustus* within one and the same emission.⁵³ Both at Ticinum and Rome, Maxentius only appeared as *augustus* on the reduced bronze issues.⁵⁴ At all the Italian mints, reduced issues of *folles* with Maxentius *augustus*, Maximianus as active *augustus* and Constantine as *caesar* precede the latter's final promotion to the higher rank.⁵⁵ Carthage's mint was closed before Constantine was

³⁷ Lact. 26.7; Aur. Vict. *Caes.*, 39.48.

³⁸ *RIC* 6, 324 no. 105.

³⁹ E.g. *RIC* 6, 339; "half-retirement".

⁴⁰ *RIC* 6, 260 no. 247 names Galerius *junior augustus* in evident contrast to Maximianus.

⁴¹ *RIC* 6, 430 nos. 47—48a; 431 no. 51a.

⁴² *RIC* 6, 216 nos. 756—765. No. 763 is for Fausta.

⁴³ A choice of the literature concerning chronology: E.A. Sydenham, 'The vicissitudes of Maximian after his abdication', *NC* 14, 1934, 141—167; W. Seston, 'Recherches sur la chronologie du Constantin le grand', *REA* 39, 1937, esp. 197—208; C.E. King (supra n. 3), A. Jelocnik, 'Constantine as Caesar and as Augustus and the Rome mint', in *Congresso internazionale di numismatica, Roma 11—16 settembre 1961*, vol. 2, *Atti*, Rome 1965, 377—385; J. Lafaurie, 'Remarques sur les dates de quelques inscriptions du début du 4e siècle', *CRAI* 1965, 192—210; C.H.V. Sutherland, *RIC* 6, London 1967, 12—14. It should be mentioned that the subject of *dies imperii* and its use to calculate chronological points, as well as the extent to which *imperium* was confined to the *augusti*, presents a bewildering picture of conflicting evidence. Obviously there cannot have existed strict, no-exceptions-permitted rules. The convenience of the rulers and the partial unreliability of the material should warn us not to expect any necessary clarity. For example, Barnes (supra n. 27), 253, illustrates this well by a table showing the no less than four different ways in which Constantine's holding of *tribunicia potestas* and his imperial acclamations have been computed in ancient sources.

⁴⁴ *Paneg.* 6.8.1: *Constantine Auguste*. Sutherland (*RIC* 6, 13) seems to have overlooked this passage.

⁴⁵ 31 March: Seston (supra n. 43), 200—202; September: Barnes (supra n. 27), 69, n. 103; 25 December: Lafaurie (supra n. 43), 201—203.

⁴⁶ Lact. 27.1.

⁴⁷ *RIC* 6, 211—214. It should be noted that Maximianus was at first only recognized at Trier, where he stayed; a somewhat reserved gesture from Constantine's side.

⁴⁸ Cf. supra n. 42.

⁴⁹ *Paneg.* 6.12 alludes to the myth of Phaëton and compares him to Maximianus' successor. This should refer to Severus and not to Maxentius. As Galerius was included in the wedding emission, he would hardly have been criticized in this way.

⁵⁰ *RIC* 6, 217 no. 772c; 261 no. 256.

⁵¹ *RIC* 6, 324 nos. 101—112; 432 nos. 52—58.

⁵² Cf. supra n. 41.

⁵³ *RIC* 6, 432 nos. 53—54.

⁵⁴ *RIC* 6, 293 nos. 84a—85; 371 nos. 162—163.

⁵⁵ *RIC* 6, 293; 324—325; 371, 376.

THE WEST

primary importance and ambitions.³⁶ During the reign, the three west-

chron. Min. 3, ed. The arrangement of Barnes

oted that Maximianus was in some versions of *Romano* (= *Sussidi*) alternative. o. 51b—c.

la *augg et caess* nn on *RIC* 6, 369, nos. 147—149. The title of Galerius. Ken- "the air" about Maxen- that the non-existent slight respect for him- and survey of the differ-

appointed *augustus*, and the Maxentian reduced bronze was represented by one single emission, with Constantine still as *caesar*.⁵⁶

The break in relations between East and West was also mirrored in Galerius' and Maximinus' emissions. At Siscia, Maximinus shared an unreduced *folles* issue with Constantine, but also appeared alone as *caesar* on presumably later, still unreduced bronze.⁵⁷ At Serdica, Constantine never appeared on the reduced bronze, nor at Thessalonica until a time clearly following on the Carnuntum decisions in late 308.⁵⁸ At Heraclea, Constantine's last appearance was on unreduced *aes*; on slightly reduced coins, Maximinus and Galerius were alone.⁵⁹ The situation was the same at Nicomedia (though Constantine was present in a slightly reduced emission of 9 grs.; at the 8—7 grs. level, only Maximinus and Galerius occurred),⁶⁰ and at Cyzicus and Alexandria too, Constantine's disappearance coincided with the reduction.⁶¹

The marriage with Fausta and the acceptance of *imperium* from Maximianus would have demonstrated to Galerius that Constantine was an unreliable ally (in spite of his including the eastern rulers on his wedding coinage), and accordingly he was removed from the eastern mints. During the "gliding" phases of reduction, both in Constantine's and Galerius' territories, Constantine was still *caesar*, with the former also acknowledging Maximianus; this stage, should coincide with Maximianus' stay in Gaul before the marriage took place.

The coin weights afford the possibility of relating titles and chronology, if the reduction itself can be dated.⁶² As mentioned above, Constantine first recognized Maximianus as active *augustus* on *aes* from Trier. This was slightly reduced, but the issue had been preceded by others of the same weight with a still retired Herculeus. It would thus seem that the reduction in Constantine's territory started before Maximianus' arrival in Gaul. Galerius' campaign probably took place during late spring or summer 307 and we know that Maximianus left for Gaul before that.⁶³ Constantine's reduction should be placed in the spring of that year.

Maxentius *augustus* belongs firmly to the pre-reduction phase through the evidence from Aquileia and Carthage. The Aquileia issue cannot very well date before Severus' defeat, i.e., at the earliest from March 307. The number of Maxentius' *princeps* issues should also reach some time into 307.

At Carthage, Maximinus is first absent in the issue during which Maxentius changed his title, while on silver from Rome, Maxentius was still *princeps* together with his active father and *caesar* Constantine, with Maximinus being left out. This might indicate that Maxentius took his new title soon after having broken with both the eastern rulers. I suggest that this should be roughly contemporary with the disappearance of Galerius and Maximinus as consuls in Rome, which occurred in April 307. This should place Maxentius' first *augustus* legends in April or perhaps May, with the reduction carried out during the late spring or summer of 307, i.e., slightly later than that of Constantine.

Considering the importance Maxentius seems to have at-

tached to the traditions of Rome, one might perhaps even hazard a guess that the proclamation would have taken place on 21 April, the *dies natalis sacrae urbis*. The following year, Maxentius chose to inaugurate his first consulate together with his son Romulus on that day, and he stressed that *Roma* was his *auctrix imperii*,⁶⁴ probably as opposed to his father Maximianus' authority. In 308, that would have been all the more important after the débâcle caused by Maximianus at the *contio* earlier in April,⁶⁵ but I believe that Maxentius had the same intentions in 307. It is probable that Maximianus by April had travelled to Constantinian Gaul, so that Maxentius' adoption of the *augustus* title would have been in his father's absence. On his own, I find it likely that he would have emphasized his own "profile" as a ruler by making his appearance as *augustus* coincide with Rome's own festival.⁶⁶

FATHER AND SON—THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *PRINCEPS* TITLE

Having studied the changing titles of Maxentius and Constantine and suggested an approximate date for Maxentius relinquishing his *princeps* title, it should be possible to enter into a discussion of its significance.

All sources agree that the coup itself was instigated and carried out by Maxentius, but there is some confusion about the time at which Maximianus came into the picture. One version is that he himself decided to come to the rescue when his son was threatened by Severus' invasion, but Lacortius states that it was Maxentius who called for his father by sending him the purple.⁶⁷ This would seem to be a more likely version as it would explain the confidence with which Maxentius set himself against a ruling emperor, residing as close as Milan and with an entire army at his command, against which it could appear useless to pit the garrison of Rome. By assuring himself of Maximianus' cooperation, Maxentius could exploit the bonds of *pietas* which existed between Maximianus and his veterans. He could count on the support of the latter and would have *imperium* given to him by his father, the *senior augustus*.⁶⁸

⁵⁶ RIC 6, 432 nos. 59—61.

⁵⁷ RIC 6, 477 nos. 186—188.

⁵⁸ RIC 6, 514 nos. 31b & 32b.

⁵⁹ RIC 6, 534 nos. 30—31 & 32—34 respectively.

⁶⁰ RIC 6, 561 nos. 48—49b & 51—52 respectively.

⁶¹ RIC 6, 584 no. 30b (Cyzicus); 673 no. 63 (Alexandria); Antioch, Constantine made his first appearance as *caesar* on reduced bronze in 308: *ibid.*, 628 no. 87b.

⁶² Sutherland assumes (RIC 6, 100) that it started in Constantine's territory; J.-P. Callu, *La politique monétaire des empereurs romains de 238 à 311* (= BEFAR 214), Paris 1969, 459, believes it was initiated by Maxentius.

⁶³ Lact. 27.1.

⁶⁴ RIC 6, 373 no. 173.

⁶⁵ Lact. 28.

⁶⁶ To judge from *Paneg.* 9.16.2 and Lact. 44.7, however, Maxentius considered 28th October to be his *dies imperii*.

⁶⁷ Zosimus 2.10.2; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.21; Lact. 26.7.

⁶⁸ Lact. 26.6. Cf. J. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike*.

Maximianus would have had his price—he insisted on being re-instated as ruling emperor. It was impossible for his title to be any other than that of *augustus*. So what of Maxentius? If Maximianus insisted on resuming his title as an active emperor, Maxentius could hardly dare refuse at this stage. But Maximianus also refused to make his son *augustus*. To have two *augusti* in Rome, both active, was unthinkable. Maxentius could of course have been named *caesar*, which would have given him a position clearly inferior to his father's. Constantine accepted it earlier in the year from Galerius, but he possessed his own territory and his own army. In Rome, it would have relegated Maxentius to a lower position of authority.

Perhaps Maximianus would have preferred Maxentius as a *caesar* in Africa, and that might explain the early terming of Maxentius as that by the mint of Carthage. In the first postrevolt *folles* issue at Carthage, Maximianus has the first *officina*, earlier used by Galerius, coining for him. Maximinus and Constantine received the second and third (earlier third and fourth) respectively, and Maxentius the fourth. This shows a strict order of seniority in accession. But in the next issue (Maximinus lacking), which is the first *princeps* one, Maxentius has both the second and third *officinae*, while Constantine has the fourth.⁶⁸ Obviously, Maxentius has strengthened his position.

Maximianus was *augustus*, i.e., senior in power. Maxentius, who had started the revolt by winning the support of the city of Rome (a city where the tetrarchs were not very popular⁷⁰) and who had had a firm footing there for perhaps many years, would not move away. Maximianus must have been well aware of his son's support in Rome and did not dare leave for his former capital, Milan for fear of losing his primacy.

They both stayed on, and I believe it was this situation that was reflected in their titles. Maximianus once more became *augustus* and Maxentius, who could not, for the moment, for political reasons, demand the same dignity as his father, however had his independent status stressed by the title *princeps*. The title facilitated, indeed made possible, the situation in Rome with two closely connected, yet very independent and mutually distrustful, rulers in the same city.

If one accepts this view, other conclusions follow. That Maxentius took the title as his first one, without any intermediate *augustus* or *caesar* status, would seem to indicate that Maxentius must have prepared his father's return to politics well in advance of 28th October, 306. Maxentius had lived in the city for a while, and his later consistent pro-Roman attitude may well have been formed and thought out during the years preceding 306.⁷¹ He would have counted on his father conferring on him the status of *augustus* while being content to remain a retired emperor himself.

It might be argued that Maximianus was the one who planned his own "come-back", but I believe that the "Roman" character of the revolt in Italy is more in keeping with Maxentius as its instigator. Furthermore, I doubt if Maximianus would ever have allowed Maxentius to play such an important part in his plans. In this case, too, the available sources agree that Maxentius planned the insurrection.⁷²

Predictably, the situation was untenable. As soon as Maxentius felt more sure of his position, he assumed the same title as his father. During the months following Maximianus' return, there must have been a constant struggle between father and son. Exactly what decided the outcome cannot be known for sure, but that Maxentius was more popular in the *Urbs* than Maximianus is not surprising; it is of more interest how he won over the troops whose loyalty his father had been instrumental in securing. According to Lactantius, Maxentius earned respect by having taken power himself only to offer it to his father; perhaps this rare example of filial *pietas* at work made a favourable impression on the veterans.⁷³

Maximianus proved to be less pious in 308, when he tried to depose his son. In one of the *Panegyrici Latini*, Maximianus is described as having been banished from Rome and driven from Italy.⁷⁴ In some way Maxentius had managed to gain the confidence of the soldiers of Italy.

Maxentius' use of the *princeps* title has thus been proposed to indicate his position at Rome during the first six months of his reign in an uneasy partnership with Maximianus Herculeus. It secured him Maximianus' cooperation, yet also allowed him to act independently of his father.

THE EARLY REIGN OF MAXENTIUS—A RECONSTRUCTION

An historical outline of these eventful years emphasizing the situation of Maxentius would thus run on the following lines:

The nomination of Severus and Maximinus as the two new *caesares* on the 1st May 305 left Maxentius and Constantine outside the imperial power. Maxentius, especially, must have been disappointed at being passed over; already in the early 290s he had been hailed as successor to the

tike (= *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte*, 18), Stuttgart 1939, 90; Straub, however, sees this as a consequence of Galerius' earlier refusing to recognize Maxentius.

⁶⁸ RIC 6, 431f.

⁷⁰ Lact. 17.2 describes Diocletian as unable to stand the city of Rome, and in 27.2 writes that Galerius intended to destroy the senate and murder the people. Certainly, this is not impartial evidence, but I believe that it can be taken as expressions of the discontent with the tetrarchs which existed in Rome. It is worth noting that nothing of the same kind is said of Maxentius. Cf. also Seston (supra n. 17), 219.

⁷¹ Ps.Aur.Vict. *Epit.* 40.2 has Maxentius living just outside Rome by the Via Labicana; two inscriptions dedicated by Romulus to his parents (ILS 666–667) and dating before October 306 have been found by the road. The fact that the son was named Romulus may of course mean nothing, though it is tempting to see that as an expression of a thought-out Roman, traditionalist stance.

⁷² Supra n. 1.

⁷³ Lact. 28.1. According to Straub (supra n. 68), 37f., Maxentius could claim to be his father's *auctor imperii* and thus superior to him.

⁷⁴ *Paneg.* 7.14.6.

throne, while Constantine had seen his chances of advancement diminish through the re-marriage of his father Constantius.⁷⁵

Maxentius had lived in Rome for several years and had perhaps, influenced by the current ideas of the *renovatio Romae*, adopted a truly Rome-centred view of the empire. Anyhow, he must have realized the immense prestige that the city still enjoyed in the Roman world and seen its value as *auctrix imperii*. If one wished to make a bid for power, Rome was the ideal point from which one could challenge the tetrarchs. Its one drawback was the lack of troops to support any claim.⁷⁶

Secretly, Maxentius was in touch with prominent citizens and one may imagine that he also would have played some part in the city's public life as well.

During 306, Galerius' census plans for Rome became known and the city's garrison was weakened. Obviously, the absent emperors did not care for Rome any more and discontent spread more quickly.⁷⁷

Constantine's succession to his father proved that the loyalty of the army still was bound more to their commanders than to any constitutional idea. At this point, if not earlier, Maxentius will have realized that the solution to Rome's military weakness lay in exploiting the authority of the former emperor and commander of the Italian and African legions, his father Maximianus. The old *augustus* would also confer *imperium* on his son and create the impression that Rome once more had its own dynasty of emperors. It was widely known that Maximianus had not abdicated willingly and his co-operation could be counted on.⁷⁸ However, Maxentius soon realized that his father had no intention of resuming power only to hand it over to his son; Maximianus would once more be emperor, and there was no possibility to refuse: he was too important in Maxentius' plans.⁷⁹

A temporary solution was agreed upon: Maximianus would keep the *augustus* title for himself and his son chose the title of *princeps*, being a general term for a person equipped with authority of some kind, but which was not related to an *augustus* in any definite hierarchical way.

The revolt on October 28th quickly secured the city for Maxentius. The *vicarius* Abellius, the official representative of Severus, was killed.⁸⁰ Maxentius was probably hailed as *augustus* but immediately made it known that he would restore the *imperium* to his father, to whom he sent the purple.⁸¹ It is likely that the immediate support of Africa for Maxentius' revolt was due to the influence of the senior emperor who had been on several campaigns in the provinces.

The arrival of Maximianus (celebrated by *aurei* with the legend *felix adventus sen aug*⁸²) inaugurated a joint rulership with strong internal tensions from its outset. On the one hand, Maximianus was the senior emperor and was immediately successful in the war against Severus. On the other hand, he was in a city which he had never favoured during his reign, but where his son enjoyed a wide popularity and also had the armed forces on his side. He could not risk provoking Maxentius too much.

Africa termed Maxentius *caesar*, perhaps because its

allegiance was more closely connected with Maximianus and it found the son's subordination evident. Soon the result of the negotiations between father and son became known, however, and Maxentius promptly became *princeps* at Carthage, too. Both there and at Rome coins were issued for Constantine and Maximinus, demonstrating that the two *caesares* would not have to fear that their status was questioned by Rome. Severus, whose territory had been taken from him, and Galerius, whose "anti-Roman" decision had caused the city to support Maxentius were both disregarded. It is possible that Maximianus had less interest in antagonizing Galerius than Maxentius, who had to consider his own position in Rome. When the new consuls for 307 were announced (Severus and Maximinus), it was Maximianus who, probably in disagreement with his son, recognized the choice, though he substituted Galerius for Severus. As Severus' army could be expected to arrive within a month or two, Maxentius did not openly oppose his father's will in this case.⁸³

Severus' campaign was a disaster and he fled to Ravenna but probably continued to block the road to Northern Italy. He was besieged, and capitulated to Maximianus, whose more open attitude towards Galerius perhaps convinced him of safety. It seems that Severus abdicated, giving back the purple to the man who had bestowed it on him.⁸⁴

Severus' army had reacted exactly as Maxentius had imagined; it remained loyal to Maximianus. But it is also well attested that Maxentius had acted to win over the troops by wholesale bribery.⁸⁵ His position vis-à-vis Maximianus was improving.

When Maximianus realized that conflict with Galerius was inevitable, he left for Gaul, probably in March 307, to secure the support or neutrality of the so far neutral *caesar* Constantine.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Maximinus declared himself loyal to Galerius and Maxentius did not wait for his father's approval when he dropped the consuls and assumed the *augustus* title in April 307.

In Gaul, Constantine proved to be very cautious, and

⁷⁵ *Paneg.* 2.13.1–3.

⁷⁶ Cf. J. Gagé, 'Le Templum Urbis et les origines de l'idée de "renovatio"', in *Mélanges Franz Cumont* (= *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves*, 4), Bruxelles 1936, 151–187.

⁷⁷ *Lact.* 26.2–3 *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 39.47, also mentions a depletion of the garrison of Rome during the reign of Diocletian as a serious matter.

⁷⁸ *Lact.* 26.7.

⁷⁹ Perhaps the short observation in *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 40.5 that Maxentius was proclaimed emperor . . . *retractante diu patre Herculo* . . . might refer to the conflicting plans of the two at this early stage.

⁸⁰ *Zosimos* 2.1.3.

⁸¹ *Lact.* 26.7.

⁸² *RIC* 6, 369 no. 145.

⁸³ Anyhow, rank and authority was little affected by one's right to appoint the relatively unimportant consuls; cf. Hartke (*supra* n. 24), 155. Cf. also n. 33.

⁸⁴ *Lact.* 26.9–10.

⁸⁵ *Zosimos* 2.10.1.

⁸⁶ *Lact.* 27.1.

refused to compromise himself before the outcome of Galerius' campaign was clear. However, he accepted Maximianus as once more being an active ruler with the *augustus* title. Maxentius is absent from his coins, and it is not very surprising that Maximianus did not insist on that point. Firstly, he was on alien territory, secondly, his own relations with his son were strained; Maxentius had proved rather too ambitious for his taste. Maybe he hoped to find Constantine more willing to comply with his own plans. If Maxentius were defeated, Maximianus might perhaps have hoped to be sole ruler of Italy and Africa again.

Maxentius' victory over Galerius in the summer of 307 made Constantine decide for an alliance and he agreed to the marriage with Fausta. But he could state his own terms and received the *augustus* name too. Though he is described in the wedding panegyric as a *caesar* in the earlier tetrarchy, keeping the peace along the borders while the *augustus* Maximianus quietly stays in his residence, he is entitled to the same rank as Maximianus.⁸⁷

The latter returned to Italy only to find that his son's position had been strengthened in his absence. The aura of Rome had been put to good use in the war with Galerius, and the *Urbs*-centred stance that Maxentius had adopted from the beginning of his reign had been fortified.⁸⁸ The last months of coregency in Rome must have been characterized by incessant quarrels between the two, with Maxentius steadily gaining at the expense of his father. Maximianus felt inferior in power to his son and their disagreement is perhaps mirrored by the vacancy for consuls in early 308 (*consules quos iusserint dd nn*).

In April 308 Maximianus desperately tried to regain the loyalty of his troops and the people at the *contio* convoked by him to discuss the *mala rei publicae*. Perhaps the inflation, indicated by the sharp drop in coin weights the year before, was alluded to. His attempt to declare Maxentius as the source of all problems and the sudden, dramatic depriving of the son's purple robe proved a complete failure. Maximianus hastily left Rome and went back to Gaul.⁸⁹

Soon afterwards, Africa revolted in its turn. It created its own *augustus*, Domitius Alexander, and never coined for any other ruler in the three years of his reign.⁹⁰ It is possible that Maximianus could have been involved in this, but I believe that he was to all intents a spent force by this time, rebuffed by Maxentius, of no more use to Constantine, and hardly welcome in the East. However, the fact that the African legions, too, were veterans of Maximianus may have played a part in their lack of loyalty to Maxentius when his father was no longer with him. Obviously, Maxentius had concentrated on making himself ruler of Rome and Italy in the first place, and Africa came second. He would come to regret that during the famines of the following years which undermined his popularity at Rome, too.

CONSERVATOR URBIS SUAE

Maxentius then reigned alone as *augustus* and his title did not differ from those of the other emperors. Still, I wish to stress that at no stage of his reign can I imagine Maxentius

as being in need of recognition from the established tetrarchs. Constantine disappeared from his coins, as Maxentius himself had vanished in Gaul and Britain. No doubt Constantine already at this stage had ambitions of supreme rulership for himself, but I believe that so had Maxentius.

Maxentius continued to use the *princeps* title during the years after his father's departure but in another way, still unique for his times. On gold from Rome occurs the reverse legend *principi imperii romani* accompanied by the picture of Mars.⁹¹ Sutherland has argued, I find convincingly, that this should be connected with the person of Maxentius, who was, protected by Mars, the leading ruler of the empire.⁹² *Princeps* had acquired a new meaning: with the addition of *imperii romani*, it was a quite exclusive title, impossible to combine with the idea of an imperial college as that which had ruled the empire for fifteen years.

For centuries, Rome had been the centre of the empire and the seat of the emperor. An emperor *of* as well as *at* Rome was a challenge to any principle of collegiate and equal sharing of power and had an obvious claim to supremacy. Maxentius' position differed markedly from that of the other rulers. It is interesting to note that rulers as, for example, Carausius and Domitius Alexander, i.e., "provincial" emperors, took great care to manifest their attachment to *Roma*; evidently it supplied them with an aura of rightful rulership.⁹³ Maxentius had Rome itself.

The aged *Urbs Roma* and the tradition of a sole emperor reigning from there, possibly with the aid of subordinate *caesares* was a concept of centralized power, and I find Maxentius' propaganda a clear statement of his independence of the tetrarchy and his intention of setting it aside and instead to move back to the traditions of the third century with its insistence on *renovatio Romae* as a leading idea.⁹⁴ Maxentius meant to make an end to the tetrarchy; he certainly did not seek any "recognition" from the representatives of such a system. By initially having both

⁸⁷ *Paneg.* 6.14.1.

⁸⁸ *Lact.* 27.3.

⁸⁹ *Lact.* 28.

⁹⁰ An alliance with Constantine has been suggested by H.-G. Pflaum, 'L'alliance entre Constantin et Lucius Domitius Alexander', *Bulletin d'archéologie algérienne* 1, 1962–1965, Paris 1967, 159–161, from epigraphical evidence. I find this a somewhat slender support for any idea of a working alliance. It should, in my view, best compare with the odd coins struck for Maximinus by Maxentius: an attitude of non-aggression.

⁹¹ *RIC* 6, 343, 373 no. 172, 375 no. 186.

⁹² Sutherland (*supra* n. 7), 19. Maxentius dedicated a statue group to Mars, Romulus and Remus (*ILS* 8935). Wrede (*supra* n. 11), 140–142, interprets this together with statues of Maxentius and Romulus as a consciously anti-tetrarchic monument, celebrating the concept of *Roma aeterna* and which also emphasized the hereditary principle over the election of the tetrarchs in matters of succession to the throne.

⁹³ *RIC* 5, 496f.; *RIC* 6, 434 nos. 70–72. Noted by Seston (*supra* n. 17), 219.

⁹⁴ Cf. Gagé (*supra* n. 76), esp. 164–167, and M. Vogelstein, *Kaiseridee-Romidee und das Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche seit Constantin* (= *Historische Untersuchungen*, 7), Breslau 1930, 41–45, where this concept is connected to the emperor's person.

Constantine and Maximinus on his coins, he would only have tried to prevent a united counterattack from the other emperors. Constantine had already given proof of his ability to act independently of Galerius. I believe that Maxentius must have had in mind, probably as early as 306, his own ultimate emergence as sole emperor of Rome, on the "old" model of earlier centuries.

To challenge the rest of the empire in this way may be thought of as indicating a certain lack of political realism, but it was not the first time someone made the attempt and Maxentius had an excellent propaganda weapon—Rome, whose *conservator* he was. Once more, the *Panegyrici Latini* offer valuable information. It has recently been pointed out that in one of them, Maximianus' return to politics from his retirement is described as being in answer to the call of *Roma*, who grieved at the present state of chaos.⁹⁵ Rome called her own emperors, and any other legitimacy would only have been supplementary.⁹⁶ Later, Maxentius too, on one of his coins declares *Roma* his *auctrix imperii*.⁹⁷ I suspect that Maxentius realized very well just how fragile the *concordia* of the tetrarchy was and how Rome could be used to promote his own aims. Furthermore, his opponents, too, were aware of this. Maxentius was described after his death as having appeared as a *falsus Romulus*, profiteering on the majesty of the *Urbs*.⁹⁸

The weakness of the tetrarchy had been visible since Constantine's sudden appearance as *caesar* in 306, and that emperor soon left it behind him, as can be seen exposed at length in the panegyric delivered to him in 310 where his descentance from Claudius Gothicus is stated. At about the same time, shortly after Galerius' death, Maxentius chose another way of reinforcing his claims to the empire. He coined for the deceased rulers of the tetrarchy, completely ignoring Constantine, Licinius and Maximinus (and Diocletian, for that matter) and presented himself as the rightful heir to the power that these earlier enemies of his had wielded. One may notice that Maxentius insisted on his kinship with the dead emperors—he was the son of Maximianus, the son-in-law of Galerius and also related to Constantius.⁹⁹ Maxentius in fact gave proof of an immense *pietas*, and in that way behaved as became an heir to the throne, whose first duty in preceding centuries had been to see to the divinization of his predecessor.

I would like to add that Maxentius probably was as well off as ever in 311 and not in the least "desperate". Constantine was not more dangerous than he had been earlier. Licinius was troubled by the growth of Maximinus' realm and the latter had never actively opposed Maxentius before. Perhaps there may be some truth in the rumours about an alliance between him and Maxentius.¹⁰⁰ Africa was reconquered, and the unpopularity Maxentius had incurred during the famines could confidently be expected to dispell soon. The massacre of citizens by soldiers during the fire of 308 was of course a disaster, but Zosimos expressly states that it was Maxentius himself who intervened and ascertained his authority over the troops by stopping it.¹⁰¹ In short, Maxentius was once more proving his legitimacy by being successful. He could even permit himself to be styled as the sole ruler of the empire, if a passage (albeit jeering)

in Constantine's victory panegyric can be believed. Maxentius described himself as ruling alone together with his soldiers, while the other emperors and their armies fought for him along the borders. Once more, Rome had one emperor.¹⁰²

In one of the earlier *Panegyrici Latini*, the orator praised two virtues as being in-born marks of a good emperor, while all others were only gained through years of ruling. The two virtues were *pietas* and *felicitas*, the two contained in the standard title of any emperor—*pius felix augustus*.¹⁰³ By all rights, Maxentius could claim to be both pious and felicitous in 311, and he certainly never worried about any lack of legitimacy.

One might finally add that Maxentius' monarchic and Rome-based rule turned out to be victorious, though it was Constantine who finally destroyed the last remains of the tetrarchy and though a new Rome at the Bosphorus replaced the old one by the *flavus Tiber*. It has been my wish to show that Maxentius was a ruler who acted quite as independently as Constantine (or any other emperor), whose final victory at Pons Milvius has overshadowed the political shrewdness of Maxentius. In the 1930s, Maxentius "own ideas of government" were stated as "cruelty, lust and greed".¹⁰⁴ I would contend that they were rather more sophisticated than that.

Maxentius proclaimed his *aeterna victoria* as did his fellow emperors, but historians have generally tended to treat him rather like an eternal loser, of interest mainly because he lost to Constantine. To challenge this traditional view of Maxentius, I have attempted to use mainly one category of evidence, the coins, collated with the literary sources and confronted with the background of later research on the political history and character of the tetrarchy. I hope to widen this preliminary investigation by studying what further Maxentian material there is, e.g. building and inscriptions and involve them in the process of reinterpretation. The numismatic evidence, however, by far remains the most important source for any knowledge of

⁹⁵ *Paneg.* 6.11.4.

⁹⁶ MacCormack (supra n. 21), 177f.

⁹⁷ *RIC* 6, 373, no. 173.

⁹⁸ *Paneg.* 9.18.1.

⁹⁹ Cf. supra n. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Lact. 43.3–4; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 8.14.7. T. Christensen, *Galerius Valerius Maximinus. Studier over politik og religion romerriget 305–13* (Festschrift udgivet av Københavns universitet København 1974, 197–203, denies this; Maximinus would not have stood to lose by associating with a "usurper", the "politically isolated" Maxentius, who also had very little to offer by way of military support. It has been argued above that Maxentius was indeed a legitimate ruler, and the later war with Constantine shows that Maxentius had a considerable army. Maximinus may well have found an alliance with Maxentius a means of checking Licinius' ambitions.

¹⁰¹ Zosimos 2.13.

¹⁰² *Paneg.* 9.14.6.

¹⁰³ *Paneg.* 3.19.2.

¹⁰⁴ H. Mattingly, 'The imperial recovery', *CAH* 12, Cambridge 1939, 348f.

Maxentius' own ambitions, and should be the subject of a more thorough analysis in the future. This may possibly not only present a more "fair" assessment of the character of Maxentian politics, but also contribute to wider fields of inquiry, e.g. the development of the idea of *romanitas* in its different forms, the history of the changing concepts of ruler and power and the propagandistic means of presenting these to the *SPQR*. Last but not least, it is always good to

realize how those assumptions regarding the past that are often taken for granted can be questioned anew.

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