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LACTANTIUS AND THE SUCCESSION TO DIOCLETIAN

CHRISTOPHER S. MACKAY

LACTANTIUS *De mortibus persecutorum* 18.13–14 is cited as evidence that the emperor known as Maximinus Daza was the nephew of Galerius.¹ The passage in fact says nothing of the sort, and attentive reading of it in context indicates that Lactantius actually intends to convey a much different impression. Study of this passage has important implications for the interpretation and assessment of Lactantius' version of the abdication of Diocletian. Since Lactantius' account is the fullest source for this important event, proper appreciation of Lactantius is a prerequisite for an accurate historical understanding of the abdication.

Diocletian had established a new hierarchy, called in modern works the tetrarchy, and the passage of Lactantius must be examined against the background of this tetrarchic system.² Diocletian became emperor in 284 and the next year appointed to the rank of Caesar his friend Maximianus, whom he then made his fellow Augustus in 286, assigning to him the Western half of the empire. In 293 the two Augusti each appointed an heir with the title Caesar, Diocletian adopting Galerius, and Maximianus, Constantius.³ In 305 Diocletian and Maximianus abdicated and were succeeded as Augusti by their Caesars, who in turn appointed new Caesars. This new system of appointive succession worked only this one time, collapsing under the hereditary claims of imperial offspring who had been passed over as successors.⁴

1. Maximinus is commonly called Daia. For the correct form, see the Additional Note at the end of this article. Since this name does not form part of the man's imperial titulature, I will refer to him only as Maximinus unless speaking of his earlier name.

2. For the principles of the tetrarchic system, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602* (Oxford, 1964), 41–42; T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 8–9.

3. The full name of Galerius was C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus, and he is known by Lactantius only as Maximianus. To avoid confusion with Diocletian's colleague as Augustus, I follow the modern convention of calling him Galerius.

4. It should be emphasized that the so-called tetrarchy (the term is a purely modern one) should be taken to signify nothing more than the mode of succession, i.e., that the two Augusti designated their successors with the title Caesar and that upon the death of the former the latter would succeed to the rank of Augustus and appoint two more Caesars. There is no evidence whatever that there was a conscious decision to abandon the dynastic principle of hereditary succession. It was merely happenstance that in 293 neither Augustus had an adult son with whom to share the imperial burden. Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 41 claims that in 293 "Diocletian thus broke away from the hereditary principle and reverted to the second century system of adoption" (though he is uncertain about Diocletian's thoughts at the time of his abdication). But there was of course no such thing as a principle of adoption, even in the second century. By accident a series of emperors had no direct heirs and did the best they could. There is no abstract principle involved, and even these adoptions had strongly dynastic overtones (see M. Hammond, "The Transition of the Power of the Roman Emperor from the

In Chapter 18 of *De mortibus persecutorum*, Lactantius analyzes the events of 305 in retrospect and has a single aim—the promotion of the claims of his hero, the ultimate victor in the battle for succession and the champion of the Christians, Constantine.⁵ We shall see how this leads Lactantius to give a unique and fundamentally unreliable and unacceptable version of events.

We begin in 303. Diocletian was in Rome that year to celebrate his *vicennalia*, the start of his twentieth year in power. This celebration took place on November 20. The pagan sources tell us that Diocletian abdicated voluntarily and that Maximianus had to be coerced much against his will to join in the abdication.⁶ Two passages in the *Panegyrici Latini* indicate that the two Augusti had an agreement between themselves to abdicate and that an oath was sworn in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter.⁷ This agreement must therefore have been made at the time of Diocletian's visit to Rome in late 303.

Now we can turn to Lactantius. After a description of the great persecution of the Christians, he returns to his narrative ("sed redeamus ad ordinem rerum," 16.11). The narrative in this case means the events leading up to the abdication. Lactantius begins this narrative in chapter 17 with the events following the *vicennalia*. He tells us that after celebrating his *vicennalia* Diocletian was so wearied by the outspokenness (*libertas*) of the Roman people that thirteen days before the new year he fled Rome. On the way he caught a slight but chronic illness and after spending the summer of 304 on the Danube he returned to his capital, Nicomedia. Here his illness worsened so that by December 13 he was near death and was not seen in public again until March 1, 305. Lactantius asserts that, although he recovered from his near-death, Diocletian was now deranged, and alternated between periods of rationality and bouts of insanity ("demens enim factus est, ita ut certis horis insaniret, certis resipisceret," 17.9). This chapter thus constitutes the background to the abdication. Lactantius tells us nothing of the plans for abdication formed in Rome in 303. To the contrary, for Lactantius the trip to Rome resulted in nothing but Diocletian's debilitating illness.

Death of Nero in A.D. 68 to that of Alexander Severus in A.D. 235," *MAAR* 24 [1956]: 61–133 at 86–107 for the evidence for succession in the Antonine period). The first emperor of the second century to have a surviving son, the "philosopher" M. Aurelius, promptly reverted to straightforward hereditary succession. M. Hammond, *The Antonine Monarchy* (Rome, 1959), 4–5 claims that "Diocletian after his own curious fashion sought to revive the Augustan scheme of succession in virtue of merit supplemented for practical purposes by adoptive or blood relationships." This seems an unjustified interpretation of both the Augustan and Diocletianic periods.

5. For the dating and historical context of the work, see T. D. Barnes, "Lactantius and Constantine," *JRS* 63 (1973): 29–46. On pp. 41–43 Barnes argues that Lactantius is more hostile to Maximianus and less hostile to Maxentius than strict adherence to the official position of Constantine would demand. Whatever Constantine's position within the broader aims of the work, there is no doubt that in the context of the dynastic struggles after 305 he is the hero of the drama—*illo fastigio dignissimus* (18.10).

6. Aur. Victor 39.47–48; *Epit. de Caes.* 39.5; Eutr. 9.27.

7. *Pan. Lat.* 7(6).9.2: "Tale [sc. a lamentable event] est, imperator [sc. Maximiane], quod omnibus nobis incluso gemitu maerentibus facere voluisti, non quidem tu rei publicae negligentia aut laboris fuga aut desidia cupiditate ductus, sed consilii olim, ut res est, inter vos placiti constantia et pietate fraterna ne, quem totius vitae summarumque rerum socium semper habuisses, in alicuius facti communitate desereres neve illius, viderit quali, certe novae laudi cederes;" 6(7).15.6: "Hunc (sc. Diocletianum) ergo illum (sc. Maximianum), qui ab eo fuerat frater adscitus, puduit imitari, huic illum in Capitolini Iovis templo iurasse paenituit."

In Chapter 18 Lactantius gives his version of the abdication, which he ascribes fully to the machinations of Diocletian's power-hungry Caesar, Galerius. Lactantius has Galerius, a few days after Diocletian's public appearance on March 1, 305, seek an interview with Diocletian to force him to abdicate ("ut eum cogeret imperium cedere," 18.1). Lactantius adds that Galerius had already clashed recently with Maximianus and threatened him with civil war (18.1). There is no other evidence for such a clash and the report contradicts the evidence that it was Diocletian who in 303 persuaded Maximianus to agree to give up the purple. It might be argued that Galerius and Maximianus quarreled over the latter's reluctance to comply with his agreement to abdicate. Such a view, however, clearly contradicts the natural interpretation of Lactantius, who makes no mention of any such agreement.

In any case, Lactantius has Galerius first use persuasion on Diocletian. Galerius points out that the aged Diocletian is no longer up to the burden of governance, and, citing the precedent of Nerva's abdication, urges that Diocletian do likewise (18.2). Diocletian, apparently as ill informed about Roman history as Lactantius, rejects the precedent only on the grounds that while Nerva had been able to afford to abdicate after reigning for only one year, Diocletian himself had, after twenty years' rule, too many enemies to return to a private station.⁸ Diocletian then suggests that if Galerius wants the title of Augustus, he and Constantius are free to adopt it (18.3–4). Galerius rejects the suggestion, asserting that continuance of the tetrarchic succession is necessary for the maintenance of peace. Furthermore, he adds, adopting a harsher tone, that he is tired of playing second fiddle and if Diocletian does not yield, he, Galerius, will look after his own interests (*se sibi consulturum*, 18.6). At this point the feeble (*languidus*) Diocletian, who has already received a letter from Maximianus about Galerius' threats (although he has apparently done nothing about such treason!) and learned that Galerius has been increasing his army, yields in tears (*lacrimabundus*)—*Fiat si hoc placet* (18.7).

At this point Lactantius begins a conversation in direct discourse between Galerius and Diocletian. It is a clumsy fiction: twice the speakers respond not to the last quotation but to intrusions in the third person by Lactantius the narrator.⁹ The inauthenticity of the conversation is generally granted, but the political analysis in it has been defended as valid.¹⁰ In fact, however, Lactantius misrepresents and distorts the situation on behalf of his hero, Constantine.

8. Nerva, of course, did not abdicate, but conveniently died of natural causes a few months after adopting Trajan.

9. In 18.8 Lactantius states, "supererat ut communi consilio omnium Caesares legerentur," to which Maximianus replies, "quid opus est consilio cum sit necesse illis duobus placere quicquid nos fecerimus?" In 18.9–10 Lactantius interjects a lengthy description of the sons of Constantius and Maximianus. The interlocutors apparently hear him, since they then go on to discuss these possible Caesars using the pronouns *ille* and *hic*, clearly in reference to Lactantius' explanation (18.11).

10. "The fact that the conversation between Diocletian and Galerius (18.7ff.) is an imaginative reconstruction does not impair the validity of the political analysis which it contains" (Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, p. 297, n. 95). "Imaginative reconstruction" is presumably a euphemism for "plausible fiction," but is misleading since "reconstruction" implies that something of the kind was said. J. L. Creed, *Lactantius, "De mortibus persecutorum"* (Oxford, 1984), 97 concurs with Barnes' assessment.

After Diocletian's agreement to abdicate, Lactantius comments that it remained for the new Caesars to be chosen by the general agreement of everyone (*communi consilio omnium*), presumably meaning Diocletian, Galerius, Maximianus, and Constantius (18.8). Galerius replied (to Lactantius?) that there was no need for consultation since the rulers in the West would perforce have to abide by Galerius' and Diocletian's decision ("quid opus est consilio, cum sit necesse illis duobus placere quicquid nos fecerimus?" 18.8). Diocletian agreed, because, he said, the children of the former would have to be proclaimed as Caesars ("ita plane. nam illorum filios nuncupari necesse est," 18.8). At this point, Lactantius again interrupts to explain that these are Maximianus' son, the reprehensible Maxentius ("homo perniciosae ac malae mentis," 18.9), and Constantius' son, the physically, morally, and personally outstanding Constantine ("sanctissimus adulescens et illo fastigio dignissimus qui insigni et decoro habitu corporis et industria militari et probis moribus et comitate singulari a militibus amaretur, a privatis et optaretur . . .," 18.10). Lactantius' reasons for supporting the claim of Constantine are obvious, and this Constantinian perspective has imposed itself on modern commentators. From the perspective of the dynastic situation of 305, however, things are not so clear.

The problem arose from the fact that both Maximianus and Constantius, the Augustus and Caesar in the West, had sons, while their counterparts in the East, Diocletian and Galerius, were without male issue. If Constantius became Augustus, his natural heir would be his son Constantine. But what of Maxentius? If a hereditary principle was to be adhered to, he and not Constantius should have been heir to Maximianus in the first place. Was he then to be heir to Galerius? This solution might have solved dynastic problems in the West but, on Lactantius' own evidence, was unacceptable to Galerius. Maxentius, although Galerius' son-in-law, had shown him nothing but contempt (18.9). Therefore Maxentius could not be accommodated, and if he was to be passed over, then equity dictated similar treatment for Constantine. Thus, from the start, the tetrarchy was incompatible with a dynastic principle of succession. As we shall see, Galerius seized this opportunity to turn the situation to his own dynastic advantage. First we have to return to Lactantius' portrayal of the situation.

After explaining who Maxentius and Constantine are, Lactantius has Diocletian, who when he last spoke had taken it for granted that they were to be made the new Caesars, now ask, "Quid ergo fiet?" (18.11). Galerius objects to Maxentius because of his contemptuous attitude towards him. Diocletian replies with praise for Constantine. Galerius now confesses as his main goal (as Lactantius sees it) that he wants his own creatures as Caesars so that he can do as he pleases ("eos igitur oportet nuncupari qui sint in mea potestate, qui timeant, qui nihil faciant nisi meo iussu," 18.11). After Diocletian's request for specifics, Galerius first proposes Severus, whom Diocletian then characterizes as a drunken reprobate. Galerius replies that Severus is a loyal commander, adding that he has already sent him to Maximianus for investiture (18.12). In reality, Severus is somewhat of a cipher, not having left a vivid picture of himself in the historical record.

Diocletian once more cravenly gives in and asks who the other Caesar should be. “Hunc, inquit [Galerius], ostendens Daiam adulescentem quendam semibarbarum quem recens iusserat Maximinum vocari de suo nomine” (18.13). Though he had at least known Severus for his iniquity, Diocletian disclaims any knowledge of this candidate—“Quis est hic quem mihi offers?” (18.14). Galerius replies, “Meus adfinis” (18.14). This statement is presumably why this passage is cited as evidence that Maximinus was Galerius’ nephew.¹¹ We know this relationship from elsewhere.¹² But what does *adfinis* mean here? The jurist Modestinus is explicit (*Dig.* 38.10.4):

Adfines dicuntur viri et uxoris cognati. Adfinium autem nomina sunt socer, socrus, gener, nurus, noverca, vitricius, privignus, privigna, glos, levir etc.

An *adfinis* is simply a relation by marriage. While the Romans could at times be lax in their terminology, regarding this word they were not. There is apparently no attestation in Classical prose of this word’s being used as a loose synonym of *cognatus*, that is, a blood relative.¹³ The difficulty of *adfinis*’ being used in our passage apparently of a blood kin was recognized from the very moment of the discovery of the single MS containing the *De mortibus persecutorum* in 1678. In his comments printed in 1684, Cuperus noted, “Laxo sensu haec vox sumitur pro sororis filio.”¹⁴ He clearly recognized the difficulty and tried to get around it by imputing carelessness to Lactantius. Cuperus added, “Occurrit eadem in nummo quem vulgavit Du Cagne in Famil. Byzant. IMP. MAXENTIUS DIVO CONSTANTIO ADFINI: erat autem Maxentius frater ex matre Flaviae Maximianae Theodoraе, uxoris Constantii.” One wonders what exactly this additional note was intended to show, inasmuch as it provides official contemporary evidence that *adfinis* was used in the strict sense delineated by Modestinus. Maxentius was Constantius’ *adfinis* by virtue of being the half-brother of Constantius’ wife Theodora.¹⁵

As it turns out, this evidence is more complicated. This coin is part of a large issue minted by Maxentius in honor of deified members of the imperial family. He honored his own father (DIVO MAXIMIANO PATRI), his father-in-law Galerius (DIVO MAXIMIANO SOCERO) and his own dead son (DIVO ROMULO N. V. FILIO).¹⁶ In addition to the coin noted by Cuperus, there is another commemorating Constantius as DIVO CONSTANTIO

11. For example, *PLRE* 579, s.v. Maximinus (12).

12. “Galerius Maximinus, sorore Armentarii (sc. Galerii Augusti) progenitus . . .” (*Epit. de Caes.* 40.18); . . . ἀδελφῆς ὄντα παῖδα τοῦ Γαλερίου . . . (Zos. 2.8.1).

13. An examination of *OLD*, Lewis and Short, *TLL*, and Morelli’s *Lexicon Latinitatis* fails to reveal any such laxness of usage. For a contemporary example of maintaining the distinction between *adfinis* and *cognatus*, see Diocletian’s edict on incestuous marriages (*Mosaicarum et Romanarum legum collatio* 6.4.5). Compare *De mort. pers.* 41.3, where Diocletian sends *cognatum suum quendam* to seek the release of his daughter. This is the phrase that Lactantius would have used if he had meant to indicate in a vague way Maximinus’ blood relationship to Galerius.

14. Quoted in L.-B. LeBrun and N. L. Dufresnoy, *Lucii Caecilii Firmiani Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1748) ad loc.

15. For present purposes it does not matter whether Constantius’ wife Theodora was the daughter of Maximianus’ wife Eutropia by a previous marriage or of an earlier, unknown wife of Maximianus (for full discussion, see T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* [1982], 33–34). Either way she is a blood relation of Maxentius, and hence Constantius is his *adfinis*. It is also to be noted that Maxentius’ full sister was the wife of Constantius’ son Constantine, which provides another source of *adfinitas* between Constantius and Maxentius.

16. *RIC* 6.381, 403.

COGN(ATO).¹⁷ While Maximianus, Galerius, and Romulus have their relationship to Maxentius spelled clearly with an overt indication, Constantius is called both *adfinis* and *cognatus*. How is this possible? Constantius was adopted by Maximianus, the father of Maxentius, at the time he became Caesar under Maximianus in 293. Hence, he was Maxentius' adoptive brother and thus his *cognatus* in addition to being his *adfinis* through the marriage of his half-sister. But why is reference made on the coins to both the relation by blood and the relation by marriage? And why are the vague terms *adfinis* and *cognatus* used in preference to the much more specific indications of relationship on the other coins? It is worthwhile to consider the purpose of these commemorative issues. The thrust of these coin types would seem to be to put Maxentius, who never received recognition from the established emperors, in a legitimate dynastic context as the son of one recognized emperor, son-in-law of another, relative (by blood *and* marriage) of yet another, and father of a *divus*.¹⁸ Seeking desperately to find all the legitimacy he could, he wished to include Constantius in his personal pantheon, but this was made difficult by his uncertain relations with Constantius' son and his own rival, Constantine. Perhaps he wished to avoid underlining the absurdity of his adoptive relationship with Constantius (and his ostensible adoptive nephew Constantine), as he would do by calling him *frater*, while still pointing out his relation to the last undisputed Augustus in the West. It is conceivable that this would have been taken ill by Constantine or that Maxentius wanted to avoid drawing out the implied relationship to Constantine while still alluding to that with Constantius.¹⁹ In any case, the usage on Maxentius' coins does not indicate any confusion in the terminology of family relations. Rather it shows that Maxentius was related to Constantius in both ways.

Cuperus' attempt at a solution to the problem of Lactantius' use of *adfinis* was passed on from one commentary to the next until the problem ceased to be a problem. Two recent scholarly translations avoid the issue by rendering the term as "parent" (in French) and "relation."²⁰ This will not do. It is methodologically unacceptable to give a word a meaning nowhere else attested in order to make the passage in which it appears agree with information known from other sources. If Lactantius uses a word that is nowhere attested as meaning anything other than "relation by marriage," then that is what he must have meant to say. The question now becomes, why did Lactantius choose to represent in this way the relationship between Galerius and Maximinus?

It is possible that Lactantius simply did not know any better. In light of the emphasis placed in this passage on relations by blood, however, this explanation seems unlikely. It is much more plausible to interpret Lactantius'

17. RIC 6.381, 403.

18. All of the coins directly name Maxentius in varying nomenclature in the same legend as the *divus* in the dative. The divinity of Romulus of course was recognized only by Maxentius, but that does not affect the issue.

19. The fact that Galerius, who died in 311, is included in the series shows that it dates from Maxentius' final year, when the situation was very uncertain and a showdown with Constantine likely.

20. J. Moreau, *Lactance. "De la mort des persécuteurs"* (Paris, 1954) and Creed, "*De mortibus persecutorum*."

choice of this word in the context of his obvious attempt to support Constantine's claim to the throne and to present the succession of 305 in the most unfavorable light possible. As we have seen, while Diocletian is presented as at least knowing Severus' reputation, he could not even recognize Maximinus in person. This impression of Maximinus' obscurity is heightened by Lactantius' characterization of him as *adulescentem quandam semibarbarum*.²¹ Is it really credible that Diocletian could not have known the nephew of the man who had been his heir for twelve years? Or, even if by chance he did not, that Galerius would not have pointed this out as a point in Maximinus' favor? Simply posing these questions makes the answer obvious: no.

The reason for Lactantius' obfuscation is close to hand. He had, through Diocletian's words, made it seem natural that the sons of Maximianus and Constantius should be appointed as the new Caesars. Lactantius himself refers to Maxentius as completely unsuited to the purple (*homo perniciosae ac malae mentis*, 18.9), and this naturally leaves his hero Constantine as the sole legitimate and acceptable candidate for the throne. Accordingly, it is Lactantius' intent to make the succession of 305 seem as unreasonable as possible, and it is therefore incumbent upon him to misrepresent the relationship of Maximinus to Galerius. It is true that he has Diocletian refer to the succession of Maximianus' son Maxentius as a matter of course, and thus one might expect Lactantius to find nothing objectionable in the dynastic appointment of Galerius' nephew as his Caesar. In the broader scheme, this application of the principle of succession by blood may have strengthened Constantine's claim to the throne, but one factor militated against any use of this appointment as a precedent for Constantine's claim, and rendered unacceptable to Lactantius any interpretation of the appointment of Maximinus that appeared to lend him legitimacy. Maximinus turned out to be one of the worst persecutors of the Christians, which made him a completely uncongenial character in Lactantius' eyes.²² Thus, while Lactantius plays up the notion that it was natural for Constantine to succeed his father, he must undercut this principle in connection with the other claimants. Maxentius is ruled out because of his unsuitable character, and the fact that Maximinus was in fact related by blood to Galerius is entirely suppressed.

This bias against Maximinus is further illustrated in Lactantius' presentation in chapter 19 of Diocletian's abdication and the investiture of Maximinus before a group of select military leaders. In this episode, Lactantius emphasizes the putative unreasonableness of the appointment by pointedly noting the expectation of the army that Constantine would be appointed and their astonishment that he was passed over in favor of someone supposedly of no standing. All eyes, claims Lactantius, were on Constantine (*Constantinum omnes intuebantur*, 19.1). When Galerius' *adfinis* was proclaimed Cae-

21. Note that the vague *quandam* is passed over in Creed's translation.

22. Lactantius himself emphasizes this aspect of Maximinus, who was so hostile to the Christians that upon taking over Galerius' territory in 312, he implicitly revoked the toleration granted to them in 311 (36.3–37.2). Recently, an inscription (AE 1988 1046) has come to light preserving the end of the Latin text of the imperial epistle by which he did this through a favorable response to a petition against the Christians (cf. *De mort. pers.* 36.3); previously the edict had only been known through the translation of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 9.7.3–14 [the inscription corresponds to ll. 11–14]).

sar with the name Maximinus, everyone was astonished and wondered if Constantine's name had been changed. Galerius, symbolically shoving Constantine out of the way, dragged Maximinus to the front. Once more no one knew who he was or where he had come from ("mirari omnes qui esset, unde esset," 19.4). Once more this will not do. In his glowing description of Constantine, Lactantius called him *tribunus primi ordinis* (18.10), a title nowhere else attested. The whole passage deserves quoting for comparison with Lactantius' treatment of Maximinus (18.10):

... Constantius, sanctissimus adulescens et illo fastigio dignissimus, qui insigni et decoro habitu corporis et industria militari et probis moribus et comitate singulari a militibus amaretur, a privatis et optaretur, eratque tunc praesens iam pridem a Diocletiano factus tribunus ordinis primi.

Lactantius writes of Maximinus in the investiture scene (19.6):

Daia vero sublatus nuper a pecoribus et silvis, statim scutarius, continuo protector, mox tribunus, postridie Caesar . . . qui neque militiam neque rem publicam sciret, iam non pecorum sed militum pastor.

Apart from the tendentious characterizations of personality and experience, there is fundamentally no difference in their careers before the purple: both reached the rank of tribune. Presumably the title *tribunus primi ordinis* was concocted to make Constantine's position seem more honorable.²³ It should also be noted that *sublatus* suggests the raising of a foundling and gives no hint of the familial relationship leading to Maximinus' advanced career. More immediately, whatever Lactantius' rhetoric might suggest, the two men held the same rank. Furthermore, why should the son of the Caesar in the West be better known in the East than the nephew of the Caesar in the East? The very notion that the closest male relation to the heir apparent, a man given no less distinction in the army than Constantine, should have been so obscure that his face was not recognized is ridiculous. Just as Lactantius has distorted the relationship between Galerius and Maximinus, so too he presents the investiture of the latter in a way that continues to be based on the premise that Maximinus was an obscure nobody, and ascribes a thoroughly implausible reaction to the assembled soldiery.

Thus we see that Lactantius consistently attempts to present Galerius' choice of Maximinus as his Caesar as a completely unreasonable decision. Not only was the man himself unsuitable because of both his character and his obscurity, but the obvious and natural choice would have been Constantine—so Lactantius would have us believe. In order to heighten the reader's sense of Maximinus' obscurity, Lactantius must misrepresent his relationship to Galerius, calling him a marriage relation rather than his nephew.

23. Moreau, "*De la mort des persécuteurs*," 313–14 suggests that it is a conflation of *tribunus* and *comes primi ordinis*. As is pointed out by Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 41, n. 57, Constantine was the first to institute gradations of the *comitatus* (Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 4.1.2). It may, however, be the case that Lactantius chose this expression because of its resonance with the title *comes primi ordinis*. Presumably what he means is that Constantine's tribunate was among one of the leading units, most likely a unit of *comitatenses* or *palatini*; for the varying status of tribunates, see Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 640. There is also a reference to the high rank of Constantine's tribunates in a panegyric addressed to Constantine: "cum per maximos tribunatus stipendia prima conficeres" (7(6).5.3). *Primi ordinis* is thus a general term and not a technical title (cf. *primi nominis titulus* in *De mort. pers.* 44.11).

Lactantius goes on to give his own explanation of Galerius' motives in chapter 20. Galerius intended to use the combined forces of himself and his appointees against Constantius, the Augustus in the West. Upon Constantius' death, Galerius would leave Severus as Caesar in the West, appointing his friend Licinius as Augustus in place of Severus. In this way Galerius would reign supreme as the senior Augustus in the East with Licinius as his colleague as Augustus and his associates Severus and Maximinus as Caesars. With the empire in the hands of men he trusted, he would finally lay down power in favor of his son Candianus, ignoring the claims of Maximinus to succeed as Augustus in the East. This explanation is clearly nonsense. There is no reason to suppose that at the time of Diocletian's abdication Galerius did not intend to allow the tetrarchic principal to continue with each Caesar succeeding his Augustus; in any case it is extremely doubtful whether in 305 Galerius could have foreseen passing over Severus in favor of his friend Licinius. It was only after the chaos of Constantine's and Maxentius' refusal to be passed over in the succession and the resulting death of Severus that Licinius enters the picture.²⁴ All the less likely is any idea that Maximinus could have been relied on to relinquish his claim to the position of Augustus in favor of Galerius' son. With his unlikely scenario, Lactantius is simply reading back into the time of the succession in 305 the later events that brought Licinius to prominence. Galerius had a more complicated procedure in mind.

It is not hard to guess at Galerius' aims if one looks at the situation prevailing in 305 from his point of view. Galerius had a son of his own, Candianus, who was about nine in 305 and therefore could not be appointed.²⁵ Galerius accordingly chose his nearest male relation, his nephew Daza. Indeed, the very name that Galerius chose to give Daza upon his appointment indicates his dynastic intentions. Galerius' original name may have been Maximinus, which Diocletian perhaps changed to Maximianus as a good omen because of the loyalty of his fellow Augustus.²⁶ Thus, when Galerius bestowed on Daza his original name of Maximinus, he was emphasizing the dynastic nature of the appointment. This aspect is further illustrated by a later betrothal. In addition to a son Maximus (born ca. 305), Maximinus had a daughter who was born in about 306, and she was betrothed to Galerius'

24. The exact details of the disputed circumstances and date of Severus' death need not detain us. He abdicated in the spring of 307 and died in the fall of that year (Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 5, n. 13). Licinius, who had served Galerius well in his invasion of Italy in the fall of 307, was appointed Augustus in November of the next year at the council of Carnutum (Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 32).

25. *De mort. pers.* 20.4 (*qui tunc [304] erat novennis*). This notice appears in a historically unacceptable report by Lactantius of Galerius' aims (for its unreliability, see Creed, "*De mortibus persecutorum*," on 20.30), but there is no reason for Lactantius to have falsified Candianus' age.

26. The only sure information is that Galerius "iusserat Maximinum vocari de suo nomine" (*De mort. pers.* 18.13). This could be taken to mean that Maximus was Galerius' original Roman name (his name at birth was supposedly Armentarius: Aur. Vic. 39.24, 40.1.6; *Epit. de Caes.* 39.2, 40.1). If so, it would seem that Galerius' name was modified at the time of his investiture as Caesar in 293. However, Lactantius may only mean that Maximinus was a derivative of Maximianus. (The MS in *De mort. pers.* 181.3 actually reads *Maximianum*, but this has to be changed as is the case in many instances elsewhere in the work.) It is also worth noting that it is hard to imagine that Daza had been acting as a tribune in the *comitatus* without possessing a proper Roman name. Presumably, then, Galerius would have changed that Roman name rather than the putative name Daza.

son Candidianus.²⁷ Galerius presumably intended that when Maximinus succeeded him as Augustus he should appoint as his own Caesar this Candidianus, who was nine years older than Maximinus' own son. Maximinus could have been relied on to support such an arrangement as the son of his son-in-law Candidianus would be his own grandson.²⁸ Of course, these plans came to naught. The chaos in the West that followed the death of Constantius in 306 ultimately caused Galerius to appoint as Augustus in the West his friend Licinius in 308. Licinius turned out to be a viper. For after Galerius' death he killed not only Maximinus and his two children but also Galerius' son Candidianus and his widow Galeria Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian.²⁹ Fortune thus ruined the schemes of Galerius, but while they were detrimental to Constantine's hopes they were not in themselves unreasonable. After all, they were based on the same hereditary premises as Constantine's own claims.

The unreliability of Lactantius in his entire presentation of the succession to Diocletian in general and the appointment of Maximinus as Caesar to Galerius in particular is clear. He completely misrepresents this situation in order to bolster the claims of his hero Constantine. Indeed, it should be a general principle that all information deriving solely from Lactantius, and even more so that in which he contradicts other sources, should be *prima facie* suspect. This principle arises directly from the nature of his work. So far from abjuring *studium et ira* he openly embraces these qualities. He declares as the purpose of his work (1.7):

ut omnes qui procul remoti fuerunt vel qui p(ostea fu)turi sunt scirent quatenus virtutem ac maiestatem suam in ex(tinguen)dis delendisque nominis sui hostibus deus summus ostenderit.

The corollary of this is to extol the Christian emperors, especially Constantine (cf. 1.3). Amid the ill-attested history of the early fourth century, Lactantius' detailed account is welcome. Yet this account is idiosyncratic and deeply prejudiced. We must not allow our thirst for information to blind us to either the shortcomings of the author or the unreliability of his work.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON THE EMPEROR MAXIMINUS' ORIGINAL NAME

Lactantius and the *Epitome de Caesaribus* state that the emperor Maximinus was of peasant origin.³⁰ His birthplace is unknown but his mother's

27. In narrating Licinius' eradication of Maximinus' relatives in 313, Lactantius states: "ipsius quoque Maximini filium [suum] Maximum agentem iam annos octo et filiam septennem quae desponsa fuerat Candidiano, extinxit" (50.6). Though the thrust of this article is to impugn Lactantius' account of Maximinus' succession, there is no reason not to accept his dating of the ages of Maximinus' children.

28. One might compare the expectation that Tiberius was to prefer his adoptive son Germanicus, the husband of Augustus' granddaughter, to his own son Drusus. While it may have been unreasonable of Galerius to expect Maximinus to prefer his son-in-law to his own son, there was always the possibility that Maximinus' son would die before Maximinus, an eventuality by no means impossible in antiquity. In any case, such a solution was the best that Galerius had in the absence of a son.

29. For this blood bath, in which the son of the Augustus Severus was also executed, see Lactantius *De mort. pers.*, 50–51. The murders of Galeria Valeria and of Candidianus were particularly repellent, as Galerius had (if Lactantius is to be believed!) on his death bed commended them to Licinius' care (35.3).

30. "Daia vero sublatu nuper a pecoribus et silvis . . ." (*De mort. pers.* 19.6); ". . . ortu quidem atque instituto pastorali" (*Epit. de Caes.* 40.18).

brother, the emperor Galerius, was born in Dacia Ripensis, part of the former province of Moesia Superior (*Epit. de Caes.* 41.14). Maximinus' native name is usually cited in the form given by the MS of the *De mortibus persecutorum*—Daia. It should long since have been recognized that this form is unacceptable.

Since at least the time of Seeck's *RE* article on Maximinus, *CIL* 8.10784 (=18659) has been cited to explain it.³¹ This inscription reads as follows:

D(is) m(anibus) s(anctum) | Daia vix annis | lx | h(ic) s(itus) e(st).

Is this the inscription of a man or woman? The name looks feminine and *CIL* 8.25873 (=10616) provides the form Daius. This parallel strengthens the natural assumption that a form like Daia is a normal first-declension noun. Furthermore, the form is probably not even correct. The editor suggests at *CIL* 8.18659 that Daia should be read as Data, and at *CIL* 8.25873 the form Daius is in fact read Datus. As Datus/Data is very common in Africa this correction of Daia seems almost certain.³² In any case, an African epitaph—most likely of a woman—seems a poor parallel for the name of a male peasant from Dacia Ripensis.

More recently, a very fragmentary inscription from Ephesus has been restored to show the form Maximinus Daia. (The * represents a hedera.)

Maximin]o * Daia [
] et dedicaru]nt

This restoration is subject to objections on both internal and external grounds. First, if *Maximino* is to be restored, surely the form of Daia expected is *Daiae*.³³ After all, Lactantius offers the accusative form Daiam. Yet the space after Daia in the transcription seems to indicate that Daia is a complete word. Second, there is no other evidence for the appearance of this name in Maximinus' imperial titulature.³⁴ He elsewhere uniformly appears as Galerius Valerius Maximinus.³⁵ Certainly one would never expect that such a literally barbarous name would appear in an emperor's titles, even in the late period. There is no documentary attestation of the use of the name Daia (whatever its form) and not even Lactantius ever joins Maximinus and Daia. The form Maximinus Daia is a modern concoction. Not much can be said of the inscription on the basis of the transcription in *Inscripfen von Ephesos*. There is no picture of the inscription and the transcription itself seems to be based on a sketch. One could suggest that, as in *CIL* 8.10784, Data could be read instead of Daia.³⁶ In any case, the inscription can hardly be used to confirm the Lactantian form Daia.

31. O. Seeck, "Daia," *RE* 4 (1901) 1986.

32. In so-called rustic capitals, of course, horizontal strokes tend to be shortened and thus "T's" and "I's" are often virtually indistinguishable.

33. If this were a date in the ablative, one would expect it to appear at the end.

34. So Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 5, n. 11.

35. E.g., *ILS* 656, 657, 663.

36. See n. 32 above.

Back to Maximinus. There is an alternative to Daia. The *Epitome de Caesaribus* also informs us of Maximinus' native name. Pichlmayr's text reads: *ante imperium Dacia dictus* (40.18). Dacia can only mean "a female Dacian," and perhaps a presumption that Maximinus was, like his uncle Galerius, born in Dacia Ripensis led to a preference of this reading. For relegated to the apparatus is the correct form—Daza.

Daza is a well-attested Illyrian name. It is particularly common among the Dalmatians and Pannonians but it is attested epigraphically in the area of Dacia Ripensis.³⁷ The connection with Maximinus has hesitantly been made³⁸ but the obvious conclusion not decisively drawn: Daia cannot be correct.

What then to make of the form in Lactantius? The tradition of the *De mortibus persecutorum* rests on a single manuscript. Perhaps Lactantius used the incorrect form himself; perhaps it was corrupted during the transmission. Lactantius supplies one oblique form, the accusative *Daia*m (19.4). The Illyrian name Daza was a consonantal stem, the genitive *Dazantis vel sim.* being firmly attested in inscriptions as a patronymic.³⁹ This implies a Latin accusative ***Dazantem*. Lactantius may well not have been (or have chosen not to be) conversant with the proper declension of Illyrian names, and presumably understood Daza to be exactly what it looks like, a first declension noun. Even if Lactantius did use an incorrect accusative form, there can be no question that *Dazam* is to be preferred to *Daia*m, a form that should be banished from modern works.

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37. Anton Mayer, *Die Sprache der alten Illyrier* (Vienna, 1957), s.vv. "Dasa(s)"; "Daza(s), -antis"; and "Dase(s), -entis."

38. The connection with the emperor is hesitantly recognized by I. I. Russu, *Illiri, Istoria, limba si onomastica romanizarea* (1969). The alternative reading is also noted in *TLL Onomasticon*, 3.13, s.v. "Daia" (!).

39. Mayer, *Die Sprache*, 248 on consonantal stems.