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# MAXIMINUS AND THE CHRISTIANS IN A.D. 312: A NEW LATIN INSCRIPTION\*

By STEPHEN MITCHELL

(Plate XVI)

Two historical events occupy central positions in the conversion of the Roman empire to Christianity. To study them makes for a radical and intriguing contrast in historical method. One, the conversion of Constantine, can surely only be approached by examining private and personally held beliefs as they were made public by a single individual, Constantine himself.<sup>1</sup> A biographical approach will be the only way to approach the truth about an individual conversion. The other, the persecution of Christians at the beginning of the fourth century, initiated by an edict of Diocletian of 24 February 303, and concluded by the so-called 'edict of Milan', issued by Licinius on 13 June 313, cannot be understood except by examining the public documents which made known the various imperial decisions which implemented persecution, or toleration, of the Christian community at large.

These documents are known almost exclusively from literary sources, Lactantius in the *de mortibus persecutorum*, and Eusebius in books VIII–X of the *Church History*, and in the *Martyrs of Palestine*. Original documentary evidence, which can with certainty be directly related to the persecutions, is confined effectively to a very fragmentary inscribed allusion to the anti-Christian oracle delivered to Diocletian at Didyma in 302;<sup>2</sup> a petition, hostile to the Christians, addressed to the emperor Maximinus by the province of Lycia and Pamphylia in 312 and six incomplete lines of his reply in Latin;<sup>3</sup> the epitaph of bishop Eugenius of Laodicea Catacecaumene, which refers to his earlier persecution under Maximinus, and perhaps two other epitaphs from Asia Minor;<sup>4</sup> and a handful of papyri which appear to demonstrate some of the practical consequences of anti-Christian legislation.<sup>5</sup>

It is instructive to compare this with the very similar record in the years which immediately followed the great persecution. Merely to trace the personal progress of Constantine's conversion does not, of course, explain the Constantinian revolution.

\*I am grateful to the General Directorate of Antiquities in Turkey, and its director Dr Nurettin Yardımcı for granting permission for the field research during which this new inscription was discovered. Financial support for the Pisidian survey has come from the British Academy, the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, the Roman Society and the Craven Committee. Versions of this paper have been given to a colloquium of staff and students of the Classics departments of the University of Wales at Gregynog in January, and at Fergus Millar's seminar at Oxford in March 1987. I would particularly like to acknowledge the suggestions made by Ewen Bowie, Peter Brunt, Keith Hopwood, Andrew Lintott, Fergus Millar and Jeremy Patterson. Three recent books have placed the study of the events of this period on an entirely new footing, and I cite them by short title: Barnes, *CE*=T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981); Barnes, *NE*=T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (1982); Millar, *ERW*=Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977). When occasionally I have disagreed with these, I have done so with trepidation. In general I have avoided multiplying references to the enormous modern literature on the great persecution.

<sup>1</sup> Barnes, *CE*; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986), 609–62.

<sup>2</sup> *CIG* 2883d; H. Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure* (1922, repr. 1980), 70–1 no. 224; A. Rehm, *Die Inschriften von Didyma* (1958), no. 306.

<sup>3</sup> *CIL* III. 12132; *OGIS* 569; Grégoire, *Recueil*, no. 282; *TAM* II. 3. 785; see below.

<sup>4</sup> *MAMA* I. 170. Millar, *ERW*, 576 n. 58 sees in the

expression *κελεύσεως φοιτησάσης ἐπὶ Μαξιμίνου τοῦ Χριστιανοῦς θύειν καὶ μὴ ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι τῆς στρατίας* a reference to Maximinus' edict of 305–6 (see F below), but that had no clause forbidding Christians to leave military service, and at that date Maximinus would have had no authority in Pisidia. Barnes, *NE*, 156 n. 45 suggests the possibility that Maximinus could have been inscribed in error for Maximianus, a name used by Galerius, which makes it possible to retain the date of 305/6. However, since Maximinus was by far the most active persecutor of these emperors, it seems preferable to refer the order to him (cf. S. Mitchell, *Anat. Stud.* 32 (1982), 110). The epigraphic evidence for Valerius Diogenes' governorship of Pisidia is consistent with a tenure that covered the years 311–13. Most of the relevant inscriptions are from Pisidian Antioch and have been collected and re-edited in Appendix 1 of S. Mitchell and M. Waelkens, *Pisidian Antioch. The Site and its Monuments* (forthcoming). W. M. Calder, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 8 (1924), 345–64, cites two other epitaphs which probably relate to victims of this period. One is a tombstone for Παῦλον τὸν μάρτυρα from the Isauro-Lycanian borderland (*MAMA* VIII. 200), the other is the verse epitaph of Gennadius from the central Anatolian plateau, ὁ ἱερογ[ρ]αφεὶν γὰρ ἀνέτλη | οἰκτιστὸν θνήσκων, καὶ δυσμενέων ἀνοσείων | ἥπιος ὧν ἐταίων μινυνθᾶδειος δ' ἐτελεύτα (*MAMA* I. 157). In this text I take the term ἱερογραφείη to be a reference not to Holy Scripture, but to an imperial letter authorizing persecution, for which ἱερὰ γράμματα would be the *vox propria*.

<sup>5</sup> *P. Oxy.* 2601, 2673.

Constantine himself promulgated an extraordinary and unparalleled series of edicts, letters and other communications, establishing the institutional platform on which Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire was built.<sup>6</sup> With the single exception of the so-called *edictum de accusationibus*, dating either to 314 or to 320, whose terms are familiar, in whole or in part, not simply from the *Codex Theodosianus* and the *Codex Iustinianus* but from six epigraphic copies found in the eastern provinces,<sup>7</sup> all of these are also known only from literary sources. It is salutary to reflect, given a general preoccupation with the importance of original documentary sources in ancient history, that the central episodes within the most important event in the history of the Roman empire, namely its conversion to Christianity, would not only be unintelligible but quite probably imperceptible without the survival of literary evidence.

A new original document, albeit one which reproduces information that was already known from Eusebius, should be welcome. On 12 July 1986 during a preliminary exploration of the territory of Sagalassus, as part of a wider survey of Graeco-Roman Pisidia, together with my government representative Lütü Önel of the Konya Museum, I visited the village of Kuşbaba, a few kilometres west of the main road from Antalya to Burdur, where an important ancient site had already been noticed by George Bean.<sup>8</sup> Beside the road through the village, opposite the main mosque, was a block of fine grained limestone, which had been carried from the site. It proved to be a rectangular pilaster capital with a series of mouldings at the top. On three sides a narrow raised band or fillet divides the main section of the shaft. Above this on the front are male and female busts, and on the left a more damaged male bust. The rear, which would originally have been hidden from view, is plain. The capital which probably came from a fine public building, was put to a quite different use at a later date. The pilaster was turned upside down and the rear face was inscribed with the final section of a Latin inscription. This is broken at the top, damaged slightly at the right and more seriously at the left, but complete below (see Pl. XVI). According to the villagers some of the damage to the stone came about when it was used as an anvil for welding and hammering metal strips. The stele as it survives is 60 cm high, 75 cm wide (at the pediment), and 55 cm deep. The inscription itself is 63 cm wide and occupies almost the whole expanse of the shaft; its fifteen lines are 36 cm high. The individual letters, which are carefully and clearly carved, are 1–1.2 cm high.

In July 1987 I returned to Kuşbaba with my government representative Sabri Aydal of Antalya Museum, and we were able to collect the stone and take it to Burdur Museum.

The last word of the text settles the dispute about the identity of the site at Kuşbaba. It had been set up in the Pisidian city of Colbasa. The city is known only from Hierocles 681, and from its coins, issued between the principates of Antoninus Pius and Herennius Etruscus with the reverse legend ΚΟΛΒΑΣΕΩΝ or ΚΟΛΒΑΣΕΩΝ.<sup>9</sup> Ramsay proposed that it should be identified with a site four miles NNE of Lake Kestel, which has produced a civic inscription of the early third century (*IGR* III. 397), while Radet suggested the town of Kestel itself, on the north side of the lake.<sup>10</sup> George Bean's exploration in the late 1950s established that there were two substantial sites in the area, at Kaynar Kalesi in the mountains north of the lake, and above the large village at Kuşbaba at its NE corner. He suggested that the latter might be either Colbasa or the equally obscure Pisidian city of Codrula, and the first

<sup>6</sup> Most of these are conveniently collected and translated in P. R. Coleman-Norton's indispensable *Roman State and Christian Church. A collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535* I (1966).

<sup>7</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 128; C. Habicht and P. Kussmaul, 'Ein neues Fragment des *Edictum de Accusationibus*', *Mus. Helv.* 43 (1986), 135–44.

<sup>8</sup> *Anat. Stud.* 10 (1960), 44 ff. I should like to thank Lütü bey for his invaluable help on this and other occasions.

<sup>9</sup> H. von Aulock, *Jahrb. f. Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 19 (1969), 80–3; *Münzen und Städte Pisidiens* 1 (Istanbuler Mitteilungen Beihefte 19, 1977), 34, 101. Twenty-six specimens of the mint are known.

<sup>10</sup> W. M. Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* 1. 1 (1895), 327; G. Radet, *Rev. arch.* 23 (1893), 197; cf. W. Ruge, *RE* XI (1922), 1070.

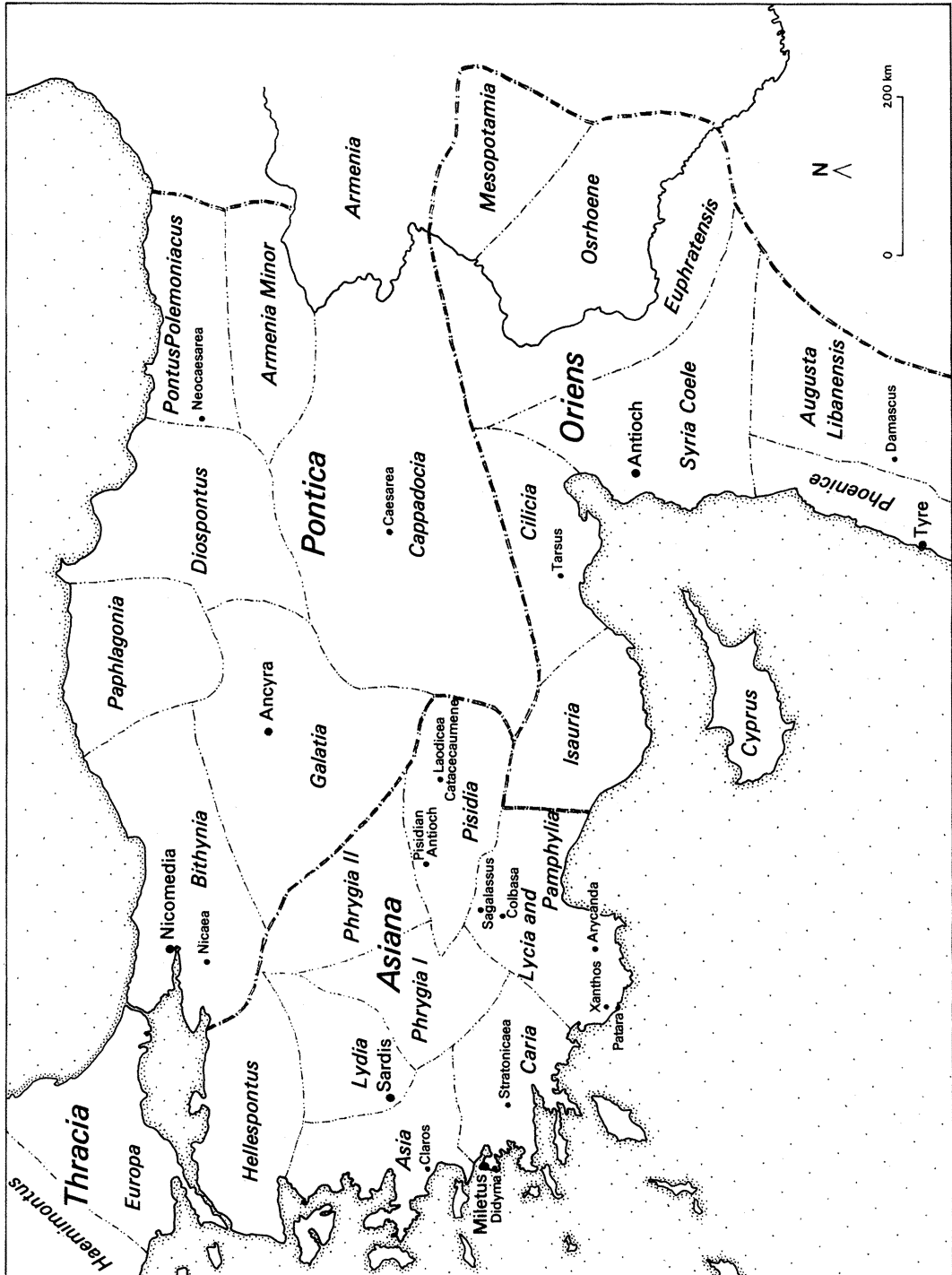


FIG. 1. DIOCESES, PROVINCES AND THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS BY MAXIMINUS IN A.D. 312

suggestion is now confirmed. The remains indicate that a fortified Hellenistic settlement there developed into a small city under the principate.<sup>11</sup>

Text:

- ... pelr otia tandem sibi permissa laetentur; adque illi qui de [illis] caeci[s]  
[et va]gis ambagibus liberati ad rectam bonamque mentem redierunt plurimum  
[gra]tulentur, ac sicut ex repentina tempestat[e] servati vel gravi morbo repti  
iucun-  
diorem deinceps vitae sentiant volu(p)tatem. Hi vero qui in exsecranda supersti-  
tione  
5 duraverunt longe a civitate ac territorio vestro, ita ut post(u)latis, segregati sint  
adque summoti, quo iuxta petitionis vestrae praed(i)cabile studium ab omnis  
inp[ie-]  
[t]atis macula civitas vestra seiuncta, sicut instituit, deorum immortalium ca[eri-]  
[moni]is debita cum veneratione respondeat. Ut autem sciretis in quantum  
petitio ves-  
[tra nob]is esset accepta, en, sine ullo decr(e)to ullisque precibus spo(n)ta(n)ea  
voluntate nos-  
10 [tro iu]sto benivoloque animo dicationi vestrae permittimus ut qualemcumque  
[munificentia]m volueretis, pro istius modi vestro religioso proposito petere. [A]c  
[h]oc  
[iam agatis ac pos]tuletis, eandem sine ulla recrastinatione scilicet impetraturi  
quae  
[in omne aevum v]estrae praestita civitati tam nostram iuxta deos immortales  
religiosam p-  
[ietatem attes]tetur quam vero condigna praemia vos instituti vest <r> i a nostra  
clement-  
15 [ia consecutos fil]iis ac nepotibus indicet vestris. Bene valet(a)e. Dd. Nn.  
Constanti-  
[no et Licini]o Augg. II cons. dat. II idus Aprilis {Sar}Sardis Colbassensibus

Translation:

... let them take delight through the peace that has finally been allowed to them. And may those who, after being freed from those blind and wandering(?) by-ways, have returned to a right and goodly frame of mind, rejoice most of all, and, as though preserved from a sudden tempest or snatched from a grave illness, let them henceforward feel a more pleasant enjoyment of life. But as for those who have persisted in the abominable cult, let them be separated, just as you ask, far from your city and territory, and be removed, whereby, in accord with the praiseworthy zeal of your petition, your city, separated from the stain of every impiety, may respond, as it has been accustomed, to the sacred rites of the immortal gods with the worship which is owed to them. Moreover, so that you may know the degree to which your petition has been gratifying to us, behold, without any decree or any prayers on your part, with spontaneous accord according to our just and benevolent spirit, we grant permission to your devotion to request, in return for your religious resolution of that sort, whatsoever bounty you want. And may you do and request this now in the knowledge that you will obtain without any postponement something which, when granted to your city for all time, may as much bear witness to our own religious piety towards the immortal gods as it may show to your sons and grandsons that you have achieved rewards worthy of your traditions from our clemency. Fare well.

Issued on 6 April in the second consulship of the emperors Constantine and Licinius (A.D. 312) at Sardis to the people of Colbassa.

<sup>11</sup> G. E. Bean, *Anat. Stud.* 10 (1950), 44 ff. I hope to publish elsewhere a full account of the site with other

new inscriptions.

### Notes on the Text

On the relation of the new document to the Greek extracts in Eusebius, *HE* ix. 7 and the inscription from Arycanda in Lycia (*CIL* III. 12132) see Commentary below. References here to the Greek translation are to Eusebius, *HE* ix. 7. 11–14, and to the Arycanda version are to the inscribed Latin fragment from there, which are both discussed below.

1 The tail of a letter, probably R, survives at the beginning of the line. In the middle the stone appears to show SIBIPERMIS ... SA, but I see no alternative to *permissa* at this point and suppose that the stone had been damaged here in antiquity, obliging the mason to leave a *vacat* in the middle of the word.

2 Again the line seems to start with the tail of a letter. *Vagis* gives a meaning closer to the Greek, but the stone suggests an adjective ending. *]ris*, perhaps [*et du*]*ris*.

3 [*gra*]*tulentur*. The Greek version has χαιρέτωσαν.

4 The stone reads *voluntatem* but this is presumably a mistake for *voluptatem*. The Greek translation reads ἡδεῖαν ζωῆς ἀπόλαυσιν. *Voluptas* and ἀπόλαυσις are virtually synonymous.

5 POSTOLATIS has been cut.

6 SINP is legible at the end of the line. There is room for one or two more letters. At the beginning of l. 7 the stone has space for one or two letters, the top of an A, then TIS. Restore *ab omnis in[p]iet[at]is macula*, rendered into Greek as παντός μιάσματος καὶ ἀσεβείας ἀποχωρισθεῖσα.

7–8 *ca[er]imon[is]* (Greek ἱερουργίας) was suggested by Keith Hopwood.

9 DECRITO and SPORTAHEA have been cut. The stone clearly has VILIS but *ullis* was obviously intended.

9–10 *nos[tro iu]sto benivoloque animo*; Greek, ἡ ἡμετέρα προθυμοτάτη φιλαγαθίας ψυχή.

11 [*munificentia*]*m*: the Arycanda fragment (below) has [*munific*]*entiam*; Greek, μεγαλοδωρεάν.

11–12 At end PETERE.C.OC/[c. 12]TULETIS. The Arycanda fragment has ... JEREI-AMNUNCHOC[ ... ; Greek, αἰτῆσαι καὶ ἡδὴ μὲν τοῦτο ποιεῖν καὶ λαβεῖν ἀξιῶσατε. The proposed restoration was suggested by Andrew Lintott. For *recrastinatione*, compare *CIL* xiv. 4570 (Ostia, A.D. 205) cited by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 'Locus consecratus ... ut sine recrasti(nati)one mundetur', a similarly bureaucratic context.

13 [*in omne aevum v*]*estrae* or [*in aeternum v*]*estrae*; Greek, εἰς ἅπαντα τὸν αἰῶνα.

13–14 *p[ro]ietatem attes*]*tetur*; Greek, εὐσεβίας παρέξει μαρτυρίαν. The editors of the Arycanda text restored future tenses in the text at this point, corresponding directly with the Greek. However, *indictet* in l. 15 shows that the Latin used the present subjunctive at this point. There is a *vacat* after the *i* of *condigna*. VESTI has been cut.

14–15 *clement[ia consecutos fil]iis*; *consecutos* is preserved in the Arycanda text; Greek, τετυχηκέναι. Arycanda continues with *liberis ac n[on]epotibus*, but ... *iis* is clear on the new stone, and so this is an example of slight variation between the Latin exemplars (see below). VALETAE has been cut.

16 SARSARDIS has been cut.

This 'original' Latin version of Maximinus' rescript has implications for the manuscript text of Eusebius' Greek translation. *HE* ix. 7. 12 reads

iv' οὕτως κατ' ἀκολουθίαν τῆς ἀξιεπαίνου ὑμῶν περὶ τοῦτο σπουδῆς πάντος μιάσματος καὶ ἀσεβείας ἀποχωρισθεῖσα ἡ ὑμετέρα πόλις καὶ τὴν ἐμφυτον αὐτῇ πρόθεσιν μετὰ τοῦ ὀφειλομένου σεβάσματος ταῖς τῶν ἀθανάτων θεῶν ἱερουργίαις ὑπακούοι.

The phrase καὶ τὴν ... πρόθεσιν is difficult to construe unless it is taken with the preposition κατὰ which also governs ἀκολουθίαν. However, this hyperbaton is unacceptably long. The Latin version has no connecting particle corresponding with καί, and suggests that we should simply read κατὰ τὴν ... πρόθεσιν here, a version that was apparently reproduced by the Syriac version of *HE* at this point.<sup>12</sup>

### COMMENTARY

The substance of this text, with the exception of the details about its publication in the last two lines, is not new. This is a Latin version, presumably the original, of a

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. Bardy, *Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica* III. *Sources chrétiennes* 55 (1967), 55–6.

famous rescript in which Maximinus responded to petitions brought against the Christians. Eusebius, *HE* ix. 7 gives two substantial extracts of this rescript, which had been translated into Greek from a Latin text set up in the city of Tyre.<sup>13</sup> *HE* ix. 7. 3–7 seems to contain the beginning of this reply, extolling the excellence and describing the characteristics of pagan belief and worship. There is a break, indicated by Eusebius' comment, τούτοις μεθ' ἑτερα ἐπιλέγει, before sections 10–14 which conclude the rescript. The newly discovered copy corresponds to paragraphs 11–14 of the version in Eusebius.

Since the Tyre stele carried the entire text, it seems reasonable to assume that the new inscription also contained the whole of Maximinus' response. It is possible to calculate the minimum space which the full text would have occupied. The incomplete Greek translation in Eusebius occupies 103 lines of print in the Loeb edition. The final thirty lines correspond to fifteen lines of the Latin inscription. The remaining seventy-three lines ought then to have filled some thirty-six lines of inscription. The actual text from Colbasa, including the final details not in Eusebius, is sixteen lines long, occupying thirty-six cm. Thirty-six further lines would have filled about eighty-one cm. These would have been carved on a separate stone, probably a plain rectangular block which rested on top of the surviving portion. Above this again there should have been a decorated pediment, probably a reused pilaster capital identical with the one at the base of the monument. So we should envisage a stele made from three separate blocks which originally stood a little over two metres high. The minimum height of the inscribed section, discounting whatever Eusebius omitted in his translation, would thus have been 117 cm, with about fifty-two lines of text.

Another very fragmentary copy of the rescript is known from a famous inscription found at Arycanda in eastern Lycia. This contains the damaged text of a petition in Greek from the province of Lycia and Pamphylia asking Maximinus to act against the Christians, preceded by the central section of six lines of the imperial reply in Latin. These were soon identified by Harnack as a translation or near equivalent of the final part of the rescript in Eusebius.<sup>14</sup> The force of this observation was diluted in Mommsen's commentary on the text in *CIL*: 'Rescripta autem imperatoris ad petitiones illas quamquam non eodem exemplo dari potuerunt habetque id quod Eusebius servavit Tyri propositum non pauca ei urbi propria [but see below], verisimile est ita tantum diversa fuisse ut ad formam omnibus communem propria illa adderentur', but its full implications are now confirmed by the new text, which enables earlier restorations of the Arycanda inscription to be modified.

[permittimus qualemcumque munific]entiam vol[ueritis pro istius modi ves-]  
[tro religioso proposito pet]ere. Iam nunc h[oc agatis ac postuletis, sine]  
[ulla recrastinatione scilicet impetraturi ea[m quae in omne aevum ves-]  
[trae praestita civitati t]am nostram iuxta deos i[mmortales religiosam]  
[pietatem atteste]tur quam vero condigna prae[mia vos instituti]  
[vestri a nostra cl]ementia consecutos liberis ac n[epotibus in-]  
[dicet vestris.]

This reconstruction, which has been made on the basis of the newly discovered inscription, may be compared with the version of E. Kalinka, made with the help of J. Keil, in *TAM* 11. 3. 785. The comparison underlines the excellence and acumen of that edition, which in turn incorporates the outstanding work of Mommsen and Harnack for *CIL*:

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, *HE* ix. 7. 2: ἀντίγραφον ἐρμηνείας τῆς Μαρτυρίας πρὸς τὰ καθ' ἡμῶν ψηφίσματα ἀντιγραφῆς ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν Τύρῳ στήλης μεταληφθείσης.

<sup>14</sup> In the notes to *CIL* III. 12132 (cf. n. 3). Millar, *ERW*, 446 overlooks the effective identity of the Tyre rescript and the Arycanda text. The point was well

taken by Coleman-Norton, op. cit. (n. 6), 24, although he is excessively severe in condemning the various attempts to restore the Latin of the Arycanda text (27 n. 12). The text of the petition is translated by G. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (1957), 297 no. 257, and by Lewis and Reinhold, *Roman Civilisation* 11, 600–1.

[quamcumque munific]entiam vol[ueritis pro hoc pio vestro proposi-]  
 [to permittimus pet]ere. Iam nunc h[oc facere et accipere constitua-]  
 [tis sine mora scili]cet impetraturi ea[m quae in omne aevum urbi ve-]  
 [strae praestita t]am nostram iuxta deos i[mmortales religiosam]  
 [pietatem testabi]tur, quam vero condigna prae[mia ob hanc vitae ratio-]  
 [nem vos a nostra cl]ementia consecutos liberis ac n[epotibus vestris]  
 [declarabit.]

In preparing an alternative reconstruction of the Arycanda text I have tried to make it correspond as closely as possible to the new, almost complete version, but have allowed for differences in l. 2, where the new inscription cannot have read *iam nunc hoc*, in l. 3 where the final Arycanda letters are clearly EA, and the earlier restoration seems unavoidable, and in l. 5 where *liberis* was inscribed, not *filiis*. Minor variations between the inscribed versions of official documents are not unusual. See the variety between the versions of Diocletian's Price Edict, the comments on the copies of the *edictum de accusationibus* by C. Habicht and P. Kussmaul, *Mus. Helv.* 43 (1986), 135–44, and the slight differences between the several known copies of the Severan rescript which confirmed that senators should be exempt from the duty of receiving guests against their will (most recently, C. P. Jones, *Chiron* 14 (1984), 93–9 with earlier bibliography).

#### EMPERORS AND CHRISTIANS 303–313

The stages of the great persecution are marked by a series of imperial pronouncements which variously increased or relaxed the pressure on the Christian community, and ranged from complete outlawry, through toleration to positive and substantial encouragement.<sup>15</sup> A survey of these decisions will indicate the context into which Maximinus' rescript falls, and also help to provide a preliminary outline of Maximinus' own policies and attitudes towards the Christians.

A. Diocletian, supposedly enraged when sacrificial victims failed to show the usual signs to the *haruspices* because Christians were present, forced everyone in the palace to perform sacrifices, and wrote to provincial governors ordering them to compel soldiers under their command to do the same, or be discharged from service (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 10. 1–5; cf. Eusebius, *HE* VIII. 1. 7). The episode perhaps took place at Antioch in 302 (T. D. Barnes, *HSCP* 80 (1976), 254–6).

B. On 24 February 303 an edict was issued at Nicomedia by Diocletian which was designed as a general attack on Christians. Its exact terms are nowhere recorded, but the accounts indicate that it ordered that churches be destroyed and copies of the scripture burned (Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* 1. 1; *HE* VIII. 2. 4; Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 13. 1); Christians should be stripped of any honour or rank that they held, and should be liable to torture, whatever their prior status. Any action in court against them should prevail, while they themselves were prevented from bringing charges of any sort.<sup>16</sup> Eusebius adds the detail that members of households who remained Christians should be reduced to slavery, a provision which is plausibly interpreted as referring to the re-enslavement of dissident imperial freedmen.<sup>17</sup> The edict was posted up at Nicomedia, and torn down by perhaps the first victim of the persecution, but its substance was conveyed elsewhere by imperial letters, which were to reach Palestine in March or April, and Africa in early June.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Millar, *ERW*, 573–84.

<sup>16</sup> Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 13; Eusebius, *HE* VIII. 2.

4. The provisions effectively reduced high-ranking Christians to the status of *humiliores*. The measures concerning Christians and the courts were presumably made effective by requiring plaintiffs and defendants

alike to offer sacrifice before cases were heard. This appears to be illustrated by *P. Oxy.* 2601.

<sup>17</sup> N. Baynes, *CAH* XII, 665–6; Millar, *ERW*, 574.

<sup>18</sup> Millar, *ERW*, 254, noting the conflict between *HE* VIII. 2. 4 and *Mart. Pal.* 1. 1.



C. Soon after this another imperial order, or *prostagma basilikon*, was given for the arrest and imprisonment of leaders of the church everywhere (Eusebius, *HE* VIII. 6. 8–9; *Mart. Pal.* 1). The order is subsequently referred to as a letter (VIII. 6. 10), no doubt because, like the first edict, it had been conveyed to provincial officials in this form.

D. The number of prisoners created by this order was large, and a further letter followed with instructions that imprisoned Christians be required to offer sacrifice. Those that complied would be freed, while those that resisted were to be tortured, but presumably freed also (*HE* VIII. 6. 10; cf. VIII. 2. 5 for C and D).

E. In the second year of the persecution, that is 304/5, a further universal order (*katholikon prostagma*), reached Palestine in the form of an imperial letter, giving instructions that entire civic communities should sacrifice and make offerings to the pagan gods (*Mart. Pal.* III. 1).

F. In the third year of the persecution, 305/6, Eusebius reports a second onslaught against the Christians by Maximinus, who had recently been proclaimed Caesar, and exercised authority in the diocese of Oriens.<sup>19</sup> His first letters to reach Palestine required city magistrates to enforce sacrifice on the whole population once and for all. At Caesarea, heralds were instructed by the governor to call upon men, women and children to comply, and tribunes (*chiliarchoi*) called out the names of each individual according to the lists of the census, which was apparently conducted at the same moment.<sup>20</sup> The episode, seen through the eyes of Eusebius, characteristically shows Maximinus enforcing existing anti-Christian measures with the greatest possible rigour. Two passages in the *Martyrs of Palestine* refer to his personal involvement in persecution at this period. Firmilianus, the governor of Palestine, claimed to be following an imperial command when he inflicted particularly savage mutilations on captive Christians (*Mart. Pal.* VIII. 1), and a woman was beaten and tortured when she attacked the tyrant who had given such orders to cruel judges (*Mart. Pal.* VIII. 5).

G. A later passage of the *Martyrs of Palestine* (IX. 2) records the despatch of further letters by Maximinus, and associated edicts, letters and public pronouncements by provincial governors and the praetorian prefect, which instructed local officials, specifically *logistai* (*curatores*), *strategoi* and *tabularii*, to enforce the imperial order to the limit. Temples that had fallen into disrepair were to be energetically restored, and again whole populations were compelled to perform sacrifices or make offerings. During 309/10 the governor of Palestine informed Maximinus that Christian prisoners held in the copper mines had built churches for themselves. A newly arrived official in charge of the mines, allegedly on Maximinus' orders, dispersed the prisoners to Cyprus, Lebanon and other parts of Palestine (*Mart. Pal.* XIII. 1).

H. Following Maxentius' declaration of toleration towards the Christians of Rome and Italy, which he controlled together with Africa (Eusebius, *HE* VIII. 14. 1; cf. *vita Const.* 1. 33. 7), the three emperors, Galerius, Constantine and Licinius, who between them ruled the remaining western and Balkan regions of the empire as well as the dioceses of Asiana and Pontica in Asia Minor, issued an edict which was posted at Nicomedia on 30 April 311, ending the persecution and declaring toleration for all

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 65–6.

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* IV. 8: γραμμάτων τε τοῦ τυράννου τοῦτο πρῶτον διαπεφοιτηκότων, ὡς ἂν πανδημῇ πάντες ἀπαξ ἀπλῶς μετ' ἐπιμελείας καὶ σπουδῆς τῶν κατὰ πόλεις ἀρχόντων θύοιεν, κηρύκων τε καθ' ὅλης τῆς Καισαρέων πόλεως ἀνδρας ἅμα γυναικῶν καὶ τέκνοις ἐπὶ τοὺς εἰδώλων οἴκους ἐξ ἡγεμονικοῦ κελεύσματος ἀνα-

βοωμένων, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ὀνομαστὶ χιλιάρχων <ἀπ'> ἀπογραφῆς ἕκαστον ἀνακαλουμένων. The phrasing recalls the edict of 304/5: γραμμάτων τοῦτο πρῶτον βασιλικῶν πεφοιτηκότων, ἐν οἷς καθολικῶς προστάγματι πάντας πανδημῇ τοὺς κατὰ πόλιν θύειν τε καὶ σπένδειν τοῖς εἰδώλοις ἐκελεύετο. For the census see Barnes, *NE*, 227–8 and below.

Christians. The Latin text and details of its first publication are given in Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 33. 11–35. 1. The announcement was transmitted by an imperial letter to the rest of the empire, and Eusebius gives a Greek translation of this version, addressed ‘to the provincials’ (*HE* VIII. 17. 3–10). This announcement, described as a law and decision of the emperors (νόμῳ τε καὶ δόγματι βασιλικῶ, *HE* VIII. 17. 1), allowed the Christians a legal existence and gave them the right to build places of assembly. The last point appears to have made a particular impression, for in summarizing the effect of the decision, Eusebius says that the Christians were actively encouraged to build their churches. In return, and in accordance with the intention of the edict, which was to encourage all men to worship the gods, whatever their religion, in the interests of the state, Christians were to ask for God’s help for the welfare of the emperor and the common good. The text also mentions a further letter, whose details are nowhere recorded, to be sent to judges instructing them what rules to observe. It is likely that this would have contained advice on the vexed question of the restoration of Christian property.

I. A week after the proclamation of the edict of toleration Galerius died, and Maximinus, who moved at once from the diocese of Oriens to occupy Asia Minor, began to subvert its effects. Maximinus’ name is absent from the list of emperors who promulgated the edict of toleration. The reasons for this are disputed,<sup>21</sup> but Eusebius asserts that he enforced the decision reluctantly, deliberately shirking its full implications. He merely gave verbal instructions to subordinate magistrates to relax the persecution, and they passed on the content of these instructions to one another by letter (*HE* IX. 1. 1). This generalization, however, is misleading, for Eusebius then shows quite specifically what happened. Maximinus gave verbal instructions to his praetorian prefect Sabinus to write to provincial governors (IX. 1. 2), and Sabinus’ letter, translated from the original Latin, is reproduced in full (IX. 1. 3–6). At the end it enjoined on governors the task of writing to *logistai*, *strategoi*, and those who had charge of the *pagi* of each city to ignore ‘that letter’. The reference is presumably to one of the earlier communications of Maximinus or his officials. The list of subordinate magistrates who were to receive these instructions is the same, except for the last category, as those who had been told, perhaps in 308/9, to enforce the imperial order of persecution to the utmost degree (see G). The leaders of the *pagi* were obviously rural magistrates, and Eusebius soon afterwards glosses them as οἱ κατ’ ἄγρους ἐπιτεταγμένοι (IX. 1. 7).<sup>22</sup>

The tone of Sabinus’ letter is grudging towards the Christians. His reference to the obstinacy and most rugged determination with which they defied imperial orders (IX. 1. 4) no more than echoes the residual hostility of the edict of 311, which even implied that Christians were of unsound mind (the apostasy of Christians was described as ‘ut ... ad bonas mentes redirent’ (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 34. 2), a phrase that is echoed in the new inscription), and were driven by *stultitia* and wilfulness.<sup>23</sup> However, the substantive message of the letter fell short of that in the edict. It merely stated that Christians should be free from molestation (ἐνόχλησις), and no one should be charged with professing the religion. There was no mention of freedom of assembly, still less any encouragement to build churches.

<sup>21</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 22–3. All the manuscripts give the names and titles of Galerius and Constantine; some omit Licinius; none includes Maximinus. It is commonly assumed that mention of the last two names was partially or completely suppressed because both were later seen as implacable persecutors.

<sup>22</sup> More than simply village head-men, they were perhaps the overseers of imperial estates. The one inscription of Asia Minor that mentions a *pagarches* occurs at Laodicea Catacecaumene, the centre of the largest imperial holdings in central Anatolia (W. M.

Ramsay, *Ath. Mitt.* 13 (1888), 238 no. 11; S. Mitchell, *ANRW* II. 7. 2 (1980), 1078–9 for the estates).

<sup>23</sup> Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 34. 2, ‘siquidem quadam ratione tanta eosdem Christianos voluntas’ (Greek πλεονεξία, N. H. Baynes, *CAH* XII, 672 proposes that < mala > voluntas should be read) ‘invasisset et tanta stultitia occupasset ...’ See the comment of J. L. Creed in his commentary (1984). Several Eusebian manuscripts omitted this clause in the Greek translation, doubtless because of its pronounced anti-Christian tone.

J. This final point may be relevant to Maximinus' next measure. According to Eusebius, *HE* ix. 2. 1, he took steps, whose character is unknown, to prevent Christians from meeting in cemeteries (cf. *HE* vii. 9. 2).

K. At this point Maximinus was approached by embassies from various cities in his part of the empire, which now comprised the dioceses of Asiana, Pontica and Oriens, asking that Christians once more be persecuted. Both Eusebius, *HE* ix. 2, and Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 36. 3, allege that the petitions were not spontaneous but had been instigated by the emperor. Most explicitly, the people of Antioch, led by their *curator* Theotecnus, are said to have asked him to forbid Christians to live in their city. These embassies prompted the rescript partially recorded in the new inscription and more fully by Eusebius' translation of the reply to the people of Tyre (*HE* ix. 7. 3–14). In response to the request Maximinus allowed or encouraged the cities to expel Christians from their territories. The detailed implications of this rescript will be discussed below. The new inscription tells us that it was delivered in Sardis on 6 April 312. The rescript to Tyre, however, may not have been published before May or June (see N below).

L. On 24 October 312 Constantine defeated Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian bridge, on the outskirts of Rome, and after the battle devised with Licinius a fully explicit and effective law favouring the Christians (Eusebius, *HE* ix. 9. 12). News of the victory and their pro-Christian stance was brought to Maximinus by letter (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 37. 1; cf. 44. 10–12; Eusebius, *HE* ix. 9. 12; 9a. 12).

M. Maximinus' response to what Eusebius describes as an order (τὸ κελευσθέν) was to write a letter to governors in his jurisdiction which restored Christians to favour, but which suggested that the initiative was his own and did not come from Constantine and Licinius. Eusebius provides a Greek translation of the copy addressed to Sabinus (*HE* ix. 9a. 4–9). This letter is particularly important because it gives a detailed and naturally highly apologetic account by Maximinus himself of his own changing attitudes towards the Christians. It is thus the only passage in the ancient sources which explicitly contradicts the very hostile interpretation of Maximinus' actions given by Eusebius and Lactantius, both of whom naturally impugn the emperor's sincerity (*HE* ix. 9. 13; 9a. 10; cf. Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 37. 1, 'dissimulavit ergo'). Maximinus claimed that he had supported the initial moves by Diocletian and Maximinus to force Christians, who were alleged to be very numerous (σχέδον ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους ... πλείστους),<sup>24</sup> to comply with pagan worship (*HE* ix. 9a. 1), but when at a fortunate moment (i.e. after being made Caesar in 305) he came to the east and perceived that the outlawing of Christians was leading to a severe drain on the number of persons able to act in the public interest, that is by fulfilling local liturgies, he instructed judges to act leniently and to use persuasion not punishment to win them back to pagan beliefs (ix. 9a. 2–3). This recalls Maximinus' reaction to the edict of toleration of Galerius of 311, which gave precisely the same motive for relaxing the persecution, without, of course, acknowledging that this earlier pronouncement was itself a reaction to pressure brought by other emperors. Maximinus claimed that he had resisted initial petitions from Nicomedia to expel Christians from their city, on the grounds that Christians there were plentiful (πλείστους) and the request to expel them not universal. There is no mention of this refusal in the Eusebian narrative (ix. 9a. 4). Maximinus then asserted that the deputations from other cities which followed the Nicomedian embassy compelled him to act against the Christians, because it was the custom of earlier emperors to grant requests made to further the worship of the gods, and this was pleasing to the gods themselves (ix. 9a. 5–6). This interpretation of events naturally contradicted the Christian view that Maximinus had instigated the petitions in the first place. In the final section Maximinus pointedly avoided referring to earlier letters which had urged his officials

<sup>24</sup> For the exaggeration see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 591–2, citing R. M. Grant in J. Neusner

(ed.), *Studies for Morton Smith* 4 (1975), 161 n. 86.

to be energetic in persecution (see F and G), but mentioned only the letter addressed to Sabinus and instructions to the effect that the provincials should not be harshly treated (I). He implies that no officially sanctioned persecution had taken place and that the present letter should be seen as an attempt simply to put a stop to insulting or extortionate behaviour by minor officials (*beneficiarii*) or others. On the other hand, attempts to win over Christians to paganism by friendly means were not to be abandoned (ix. 9a. 7–9). The falsehoods and omissions in this account are patent, provided that we accept the tradition preserved in Eusebius and Lactantius as essentially correct. The new copy of the rescript helps to test and confirm their hostile interpretation (see below).

The letter of Maximinus belongs after the battle of the Milvian bridge, but before the end of 312. In the more sweeping edict of toleration which Maximinus published later (N), he claims that a letter of toleration, clearly this one, had been sent to provincial governors in the previous year (*HE* ix. 10. 8).

N. In the early spring of 313 Licinius marched east against Maximinus, driving him to ever more savage behaviour against his subjects, especially the Christians, as he prepared for civil war (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 37. 3–42, corresponding to the much briefer account in Eusebius, *HE* ix. 10. 1–2). As events turned against him his adherence to paganism was shaken; in a last attempt to win support and to persuade Licinius to abandon his hostility, he issued a law which in detail and effectively restored freedom to the Christians. Eusebius mentions this in exactly the terms used to describe the pro-Christian measures of Licinius and Constantine (L), and there can be no doubt that Maximinus was deliberately claiming to emulate this (Eusebius, *HE* ix. 10. 6, cf. ix. 9. 12; see L). Like the previous letter to Sabinus, this order (*diatagma*), preserved in a Greek version by Eusebius, is apologetic and tendentious. It stressed Maximinus' overriding concern for the welfare of the state; since the anti-Christian measures of Diocletian and Maximianus had given rise to extortion and robbery by officials (*ὀφφικιαλίων*), which had increased until the provincials were being deprived of their possessions (*οὐσίων*), he had already written to governors with instructions for religious toleration (*HE* ix. 10. 8). However, it was obvious that judges were still misinterpreting the imperial orders, and many people were afraid to follow their own religious observances (ix. 10. 9). This passage finds an echo in Eusebius' narrative, which states that after the letter of late 312 Christians still feared to declare themselves or to assemble (ix. 9a. 10–11). Eusebius attributes this continued repression to imperial hostility, Maximinus to the rapacity and arbitrary actions of local officials and judges. To removal all ambiguity Maximinus now ordered that there should be complete freedom of religious practice, that the Christians be permitted to rebuild their churches, and that Christian property which had been confiscated, including that which had subsequently been sold or given away, should be restored to the original owners (ix. 10. 10–11). According to Eusebius the order came less than a year after Maximinus' rescript, which we now know to have been issued on 6 April 312 (K above). This might suggest that this final edict was issued in the early spring of 313, before Maximinus' defeat at Adrianople on 30 April (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 46. 8–9). However, Eusebius firmly places the edict after the battle. Presumably he calculated, not from the actual date of issue of the rescript, but from the publication date of the Tyre copy which he had seen. Like the Ancyra text the Tyre copy could have omitted the protocol giving the date of issue, but may have been prefaced by the date at which it had been received in Syria. There had been a lapse of perhaps a month before the first edict of Diocletian had reached Palestine, and over three months before it reached Africa (see B), and we may similarly suppose that the rescript to Tyre was not displayed until some time in May or June 312. Maximinus' final edict should then belong, as has been generally supposed, to May 313.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 68 and Millar, *ERW*, 582.

O. The change of heart did not save Maximinus, who died by his own hand at Tarsus in the summer of 313. Meanwhile the victorious Licinius occupied Nicomedia and on 13 June issued his own edict on behalf of the Christians. This 'Edict of Milan', so-called because it had been drawn up by Constantine and Licinius when they had met there in February 313, had taken all measures necessary for the common good.<sup>26</sup> The substance of the order, whose Latin text is given by Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 48. 2–12, with a Greek translation in Eusebius, *HE* x. 5. 2–14, was to guarantee religious freedom to all, and to provide not only for the restoration of Christian property, but also for compensation to be paid by the treasury to all those who legally and in good faith had come by confiscated property. These matters were to be resolved speedily and effectively, and the decision publicized. Even before this date Constantine, in two letters to the proconsul Anullinus, had taken an active part in restoring church property and conferring privileges on Christians in Africa.<sup>27</sup> The stage was thereby set for the extensive grants of further favours to the church by Constantine that were to ensure its ultimate triumph.

#### THE RESCRIPT OF 312

The Christian chroniclers of the great persecution exaggerate its importance. For the most part anti-Christian measures were perpetrated only by officials, and often with little enthusiasm. The number of martyrs was probably much smaller in reality than it was in the imagination. The very sparse evidence preserved by the impartial chance of epigraphic survival may well be a truer reflection of the impact of the great persecution at the time, although not of its subsequent effects, than the outpouring of document and comment from the contemporary Christian observers, Lactantius and Eusebius.<sup>28</sup> Above all, perhaps, it seems virtually impossible to judge how significant a factor official attitudes to Christianity were in the politics of the period. The reader of Eusebius might believe that the outcome of civil wars depended on the skill with which the various emperors judged the religious leanings of their subjects, and the effectiveness with which they harnessed them. In reality the power struggles of the early fourth century were fuelled by many other issues, although modern ears may be deafened to them by the stridency of the Christian voice.

Despite this, it seems beyond dispute that religious or political conviction led Maximinus to pursue anti-Christian measures more vigorously than his fellow rulers. He had been declared Caesar on 1 May 305, and since he was probably resident at Caesarea from 306 to 308, he was prominent in conducting the persecution which Eusebius describes in the *Martyrs of Palestine*.<sup>29</sup> Beyond the official orders for which he was responsible (see F and G), the intensification of compulsory sacrifice which took place in late 308 involved sprinkling goods for sale in the market place, and ordering bath superintendents to scatter bathers with sacrificial blood (*Mart. Pal.* ix. 2). His instructions, which made local officials, such as civic *logistai* or *strategoi*, responsible for enforcing persecution, characteristically went further than the actions of his imperial colleagues, who seem to have intervened largely through the agency of provincial governors. Eusebius stresses Maximinus' devotion to magicians, his superstition and his attachment to divination and oracles. He ordered the restoration of temples and sanctuaries and appointed priests in every community, and high priests in each province, who were chosen from the leading citizens and escorted by a military guard. Appointments to provincial governorships and other high positions were given to those who appeared to be pious and dear to the gods (*HE* viii. 14. 8–9). This description is no doubt coloured by Maximinus' conduct as Augustus, but it precedes the full account of his activities as emperor between 311 and 313, and probably to some extent relates to his behaviour as Caesar, when his predilections will

<sup>26</sup> Eusebius, *HE* x. 4. 5; Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 48. 2–3. For the date, see Barnes, *NE*, 71, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Millar, *ERW*, 583–4.

<sup>28</sup> Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 592, 596 ff.;

G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *Harvard Theological Review* 1954, 75 ff.; cf. Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* xiii. 12 on the limited extent of persecution in the western provinces.

<sup>29</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 6–7; 65–7.

have been well known to Eusebius, who must have been an eye witness to much of what he did. At this time he was acting in conformity with the policy of his co-rulers. His own personal attitudes necessarily emerge more clearly from his actions as Augustus, between spring 311, when he reluctantly endorsed the Galerian edict of toleration (I), and his death in the summer of 313, a period when his policies conflicted openly with those of his colleagues. The full record of this period in *HE* ix, seen by some as the climax of Eusebius' whole work,<sup>30</sup> can be supplemented by the briefer account of Lactantius, a bare handful of saints' lives,<sup>31</sup> and, crucially, by Maximinus' own words in the rescript of 312.

Six months elapsed between the edict of toleration at the end of April 311 and renewed anti-Christian measures, the first of which was to prevent Christians assembling in their cemeteries (J above). Then, according to Eusebius, Maximinus contrived to have embassies sent to himself requesting that persecution be resumed. In the letter which he wrote after receiving news of Constantine's victory over Maxentius in late 312 (M above) he said that the first of these had been made up of leading citizens of Nicomedia itself, carrying images of their gods and asking that Christians be removed from their city. The story is unlikely to be false; if the emperor hoped to organize demonstrations of support by sympathetic pagans, it would be natural to begin in the city where he was resident (*HE* ix. 9a. 4). This embassy by itself, as Maximinus indicates, achieved nothing, and Eusebius did not note it in his narrative. More influential was the petition from Antioch, the other main imperial residence in the east, which had been organized by the city *curator* Theotecnus, who had been active locally in previous persecutions (*HE* ix. 2–3). The people of Antioch asked, as the greatest favour that could be received of an emperor, that Christians should be utterly forbidden to live in their city. The request is, of course, echoed in the rescript, which authorized its recipients to expel Christians from their city and territory.<sup>32</sup> However, it is revealing to compare this request with the petition of the province of Lycia and Pamphylia preserved by the inscription from Arycanda. Although the text is damaged and the restorations not beyond argument, it did not specifically ask for the expulsion of Christians. It refers to them as persisting in their habitual disease, and to their dangerous worship, but merely asked the emperor to put a stop to 'the hated cult of the atheists'.<sup>33</sup> The absence of the usual close correspondence between the request and the rescript provides a strong argument for believing that the latter, as its critics alleged, had been drafted in the spirit of a general imperial command, essentially if not formally similar to the various edicts and letters concerning the persecution that had been issued over the previous nine years. This argument is all but confirmed by the fact, which has now emerged, that the three known copies of Maximinus' response, from Tyre, Arycanda, and now Colbasa, are to all intents and purposes identical with one another. Eusebius' judgement of the rescript to Tyre, that it was not simply an *ad hoc* response to a specific request, is clearly correct.

If Eusebius and Lactantius are right in saying that the petitions were instigated by the emperor himself, how were they organized? The Arycanda stone speaks of a request by the whole province of Lycia and Pamphylia. The body that represented the province would surely have been the provincial *koinon*, but the Arycanda inscription cannot be the copy addressed to the *koinon* itself, for that would have been published at a major provincial centre, such as Xanthos or Patara.<sup>34</sup> It may have been posted in the relatively insignificant city of Arycanda on the grounds that the *koinon* was held to speak for the whole province, and this would justify sending the reply to any of its cities. This procedure did not preclude individual cities from petitioning the emperor on their own behalf. Colbasa itself, although a Pisidian community, seems to

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Barnes, *CE*, 158.

<sup>31</sup> See Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 599–601.

<sup>32</sup> *HE* ix. 2. 1: (Theotecnus) τοὺς Ἀντιοχείων παρορμήσας ἐπὶ τὸ μηδαμῶς τινα Χριστιανῶν τὴν αὐτῶν οἰκίαν ἐπιτρέπεσθαι πατρίδα ὡς ἐν μεγίστῃ δωρέᾳ παρ' αὐτοῦ τυχεῖν ἀξιῶσαι. Eusebius' summary may echo some of

the phrasing of the original petition.

<sup>33</sup> *TAM* II. 3. 785: εἰ ὑμετέρῳ θεῷ καὶ αἰωνίῳ | [νεύματι παντάπ]ασιν κατασταίῃ ἀπειρήσθαι μὲν καὶ κεκωλύσθαι | [τὴν κακοουργίαν] τῆς τῶν ἀθέων ἀπεχθοῦς ἐπιτηδεύσεως.

<sup>34</sup> Millar, *ERW*, 446.

have been part of the province of Lycia and Pamphylia, which, as I hope to show elsewhere, extended as far north as the Burdur lake to include the territory of Sagalassus.

The organization of provincial opinion would have been made easier by Maximinus' innovation of appointing provincial high priests with a view to restoring pagan worship. Eusebius and Lactantius clearly state that this policy was enacted in 312, and they are confirmed by an independent source, the *Life of Saint Theodotus* of Ancyra, as well as by contemporary inscriptions. The accounts stress that the high priests' main concern was with furthering pagan cult, but they would obviously have been very suitably placed to promote provincial petitions, and the *Life of Saint Theodotus* confirms precisely this point.<sup>35</sup>

Provincial governors, who in any case had a prominent part to play in the activities of provincial *koina*, were also in a strong position to influence public opinion; according to Eusebius they played their part by suggesting to civic officials that they sponsor petitions which would be bound to find imperial favour (*HE* ix. 4. 2). Indeed, in general, banishment and persecution were carried out by governors in every province (ix. 6. 1). The *Life of Saint Theodotus* confirms Eusebius' observation that Theotecnus, the *curator* of Antioch, received a governorship, and shows him actively persecuting Christians in Ancyra, as governor of Galatia.<sup>36</sup> At the same date Valerius Diogenes was governor of Pisidia, engaged in an important programme of public building in Antioch, its metropolis. The epitaph of bishop Eugenius of Laodicea states that he had been tortured while serving on Diogenes' staff.<sup>37</sup> A rapid reading of the *Martyrs of Palestine* will confirm the obvious fact that governors of provinces were the principal agents of imperial policy, and the example of Theotecnus merely confirms Eusebius' earlier generalization that Maximinus appointed governors precisely because of their readiness to attack the Christians (*HE* viii. 14. 9; cf. T. D. Barnes, *HSCP* 80 (1976), 243–4).

Governors persuaded civic officials to act, and Eusebius speaks of the emperor willingly assenting to *psephismata* (ix. 4. 2), not the petitions as such, but the civic decrees which would be presented by representatives of the cities as the main part of their petition, thus affording unimpeachable official evidence of local anti-Christian feeling. The subscript of the new inscription shows that unlike the Arycanda text it was addressed specifically to the people of Colbasa, and thus purported to be a response, not to the petition of the province as a whole, but to a particular city decree. The significance of such decrees in the whole process of petitioning the emperor is brought home precisely by the final section of Maximinus' reply, which invited cities to submit a request for a further favour, without this customary formality, 'sine ullo decreto ullisque precibus' (see below).

The place and date of issue of the rescript also give some indication of the way in which Maximinus manipulated the voices of his subjects. On 26 November 311 Peter, the bishop of Alexandria, was beheaded, the first known victim of the renewed persecution. He was followed by Lucian, the most prominent and outspoken Christian priest of Antioch, who was tried by the emperor and executed at Nicomedia on 7 January 312.<sup>38</sup> One can reasonably assume that the latter had been arrested in connection with the machinations of his fellow citizen Theotecnus, and this would confirm that the Antioch petition occurred in the last months of 311. On 6 April 312, as we now know, Maximinus gave his reply in the rescript from Sardis. The first three months of the year would have been an appropriate length of time for news of the emperor's requirements to be sent out as far as Tyre and beyond, for the mobilization

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S. Mitchell, 'The Life of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra', *Anat. Stud.* 32 (1982), 109–10. Note especially *vita* S. Theodoti 26, where Theodotus is promised that if he becomes high priest, διὰ σου δὲ προστασίαι ἔσονται πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχοντας ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος καὶ πρεσβείαι πρὸς βασιλέας ὑπὲρ τῶν ὄλων πραγμάτων.

High priests occur in *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 900 (discussed below), and on the inscription for Epitynchanos from the Upper Tembris Valley (see the references at *Anat.*

*Stud.* 32 (1982), 110 n. 93 and, for the provenance, M. Waelkens, in R. Donceel and R. Lebrun (edd.), *Archéologie et religions de l'Anatolie ancienne. Mélanges en l'honneur du professeur Paul Naster* (1984), 285.

<sup>36</sup> *Anat. Stud.* 32 (1982), 107–8.

<sup>37</sup> *MAMA* 1. 170, with W. M. Calder, *Gnomon* 10 (1934), 503 ff.; cf. Barnes, *NE*, 156, and n. 4 above.

<sup>38</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 66, 68 with Eusebius, *HE* ix. 6. 3 and vii. 32. 31.

and presentation of local opinion in the form of civic or provincial decrees, and for these to be brought back to the court by embassies. The choice of Sardis may also be significant. At an unknown date in 312, probably in the late spring, Maximinus was to be found further south in Asia, leading troops against local brigands in the neighbourhood of Carian Stratoniceaea, and by July he had reached Syrian Antioch.<sup>39</sup> In the interim, it has been suggested that he may have been personally responsible for the trial and execution on 20 June of Bishop Methodius at Patara, the metropolis of Lycia.<sup>40</sup> The usual imperatives of imperial politics and military prudence would probably have kept Maximinus closer to the direct Anatolian route between Nicomedia and Antioch. The itinerary through western and southern Asia Minor needs some explanation, and the anti-Christian campaign itself may supply it. Sardis was a pagan intellectual centre where Maximinus might hope to find sympathetic and influential supporters for his policies.<sup>41</sup> It was also more accessible to the inhabitants of the numerous cities of Asia than Nicomedia, and an emperor who was ready to instigate petitions to himself would certainly have given thought to arranging convenient meeting places to receive them. The visit to Stratoniceaea is also significant. The two extra-mural sanctuaries of Zeus at Panamara and of Hecate at Lagina were thriving centres of pagan cult.<sup>42</sup> Precisely at the moment of Maximinus' visit the chief priest of Zeus at Panamara was Sempronius Arruncius Theodotus, whose benefactions and liberalities outdid any that are ascribed to his predecessors. Unlike them he is called not priest but high priest, surely one of the new leaders of paganism appointed by Maximinus. Stratoniceaea, therefore, can be seen as a natural stopping point on the imperial journey. In the rescript itself the emperor asked his subjects to take heart at the sight of their fields flourishing with fine crops during the mild and fertile spring climate, and to rejoice that in response to the emperor's own piety and the sacrifices which he had conducted the air itself had been made mild, and peace and serenity established (*HE* ix. 7. 10–11). The allusion would correspond precisely with an imperial tour around major pagan shrines designed to win the gods' favour. It seems reasonable to hope that further evidence may be unearthed or detected to show Maximinus passing through other Asian cities, especially assize centres or the homes of significant sanctuaries, where he could advertise his cause, pray publicly to the gods, and receive pagan delegations from further afield.

The contents of the rescript were designed to provide pagans with considerably more than a licence to expel Christians. The emperor began by expressing his pleasure at receiving a request that demonstrated the godly disposition of his subjects and the benevolent providence of the gods themselves (ix. 7. 3–4). The wording of this section was deliberately phrased to appear to flatter individual petitioners, while remaining applicable to all communities. It conveniently but evasively referred to ἡ ὑμετέρα πόλις θεῶν ἀθανάτων ... ἱδρυμα καὶ οἰκητήριον (ix. 7. 5). The recipient's city was protected by Zeus, ὁ προκαθήμενος τῆς λαμπροτάτης ὑμῶν πόλεως ὁ τοὺς πατρώους ὑμῶν θεοὺς ... ἀπὸ πάσης ὀλεθρίου φθορᾶς ρύόμενος. Nothing in this remark is specific to the circumstances of a particular city. On the contrary, the diversity of the patron deities of the various cities of the empire was embraced under the umbrella of an all-pervading Zeus. There is no need to seek to explain why Zeus has replaced Heracles as the chief god of Tyre.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 900; *IK* XXI: *Stratonikaia* 1, no. 310; Barnes, *NE*, 68.

<sup>40</sup> Barnes, *CE*, 193; *JThS* 30 (1979), 48–55. It is disputed whether Methodius was bishop of Olympus or Patara. Perhaps, as Barnes suggests, he was promoted from the former to the latter. There is, however, a difficulty here. If it is correct that Maximinus granted exemption from the urban poll tax to Lycia on 1 June 312, after exemption had already been given to the diocese of Oriens, and that this decision was made in Syrian Antioch, as the priority of Oriens over Lycia and Pamphylia suggests (see below), then Maximinus must have reached Syria well before the reported date of Methodius' martyrdom. Perhaps, then, the trial of Methodius was conducted by the provincial governor,

known from the poll tax decision to have been Eusebius.

<sup>41</sup> C. Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* (1976), 13–17 on the school of the fourth century founded by Chrysanthius, who was made high priest of Lydia by Julian in his pagan revival. For the persistence of paganism at Sardis see Foss, 28–9.

<sup>42</sup> Note R. MacMullen's remark in his *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (1981), 48 on the sanctuary of Hecate at Lagina: 'Were we to choose one point in space and time that brought to a focus the beliefs and practices [of Graeco-Roman paganism under the empire], surely it would be this columned portico on some morning around the year 200'.

<sup>43</sup> Bardy, *op. cit.* (n. 12), *Eusebius. Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 54; Barnes, *CE*, 160.



This first section is followed by what has been called 'a remarkable statement of pagan belief'.<sup>44</sup> 'Who is so obtuse as not to see that the benevolent concern of the gods is responsible for the fertility of the earth, for keeping the peace and defeating unrighteous enemies, for curbing storms at sea, tempests and earthquakes, which have occurred only when the Christians with their ignorant and futile beliefs have come to afflict almost the whole of the world with their shameful practices (*HE* ix. 7. 8–9)?' The origin of this creed can be detected. At Antioch Theotecnus is said to have erected a statue of Zeus Philios, which gave oracular replies; one of these had recommended the expulsion of Christians from the city and territory around it, since they were his enemies.<sup>45</sup> The influence of this oracle on the Antiochian petition is clear, since it corresponds exactly with their request; but the oracle evidently said more than this, for Maximinus' reply reveals that it was Zeus Highest and Greatest who inspired the souls of the petitioners with the will for salvation, by showing and demonstrating (ἐπιδεικνύς καὶ ἐμφαίνων) how excellent, splendid and saving a thing it is to worship the immortal gods with the reverence that is due to them (ix. 7. 7). This explicit and emphatic wording is surely an allusion to what Zeus had said through his oracle. The petition, then, had directly cited the oracle, and the point was acknowledged in the reply. We know nothing of the theological stance of Zeus Philios, but from the late second until the early fourth century oracular shrines, especially those of Apollo at Claros and Didyma, were intimately concerned not only with the appropriate forms of worship for pagan cults—matters on which oracles had always been consulted—but with the formulation of explicit pagan theology.<sup>46</sup> Prophets of Apollo and pagan intellectuals of the late empire joined forces to construct a way of talking about the gods which also pervades later Greek philosophical writing. In the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, written some ten years after these events, Eusebius' mind turned back to the oracles of Zeus Philios. What sort of men had been associated with it? Not obscure riff-raff, but the ruling class of Antioch who professed that wonderful and noble pagan philosophy, and who distinguished themselves in their violent behaviour during the persecution; and the philosopher prophet himself subscribed to the pronouncements current at Miletus.<sup>47</sup> Theotecnus' oracle of Zeus Philios at Antioch, therefore, belongs to precisely the same pagan world as Apollo's oracle at Didyma whose answers had encouraged Diocletian and Galerius to activate the policy of Christian persecution in A.D. 303.

The interruption in the text of the Tyre copy is followed by the passage which refers to the peaceful and prosperous times brought about by the emperor's own piety, a hazardous prediction as Eusebius knew and pointed out (ix. 8. 3), and this leads to the main point of the rescript, the assent given to the request to exclude Christians from the city and territory of the petitioners, if they remained obdurate in refusing to return to the pagan fold (ix. 7. 11–12, corresponding to ll. 1 to 8 of the inscription). It seems clear that Maximinus did not envisage formal trials leading to the penalty of *relegatio*, for that would be the proper business of Roman governors or local *dikastai*, who were, of course, involved in other types of persecution which he had initiated.<sup>48</sup> Rather, in the spirit of other decisions which tried to make local people, and not simply imperial officials, responsible for attacking the Christians among them, this measure virtually invited local town councils to hound Christians out of their city. The law of the lynch mob would show the true feelings of the loyal inhabitants of Maximinus' empire. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the interdiction in too literal a sense. Had all the cities in Maximinus' part of the empire

<sup>44</sup> Millar, *ERW*, 446.

<sup>45</sup> *HE* ix. 3: (Theotecnus) τὸν δαίμονα καὶ τὸν θεὸν δὴ κελεύσαι φησὶν ὑπερορίου τῆς πόλεως καὶ τῶν ἀμφὶ τὴν πόλιν ἀγρῶν ὡς ἂν ἐχθροὺς αὐτῷ Χριστιανούς ἀπελάσαι. For oracular statues, see C. P. Jones, 'Neryllinus', *Classical Philology* 80 (1985), 40–6.

<sup>46</sup> Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 168–261.

<sup>47</sup> *Praep. Ev.* iv. 2. 10–11: ὅποιοι δὲ ἦσαν οὗτοι; μὴ δὴ νόμιζε τῶν ἀπερριμένων καὶ ἀφανῶν τινάς; οἱ μὲν γε αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς θαυμαστῆς ταύτης καὶ γενναίας φιλοσοφ-

ίας ὠρμῶντο, τῶν ἀμφὶ τὸν τρίβωνα καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ὀφρὺν ἀνεσπακότων, οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τέλει τῆς Ἀντιοχείων ἡλίσκοντο πόλεως, οἱ δὲ μάλιστα καὶ ἐπὶ ταῖς καθ' ἡμῶν ὕβρεσιν ἐν τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς διωγμῷ λαμπρυνάμενοι. ἴσμεν δὲ καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον ὁμοῦ καὶ προφήτην τὰ ὅμοια τοῖς εἰρημένοις κατὰ τὴν Μίλητον ὑπομεινάντα. For the oracle in the fourth century see T. D. Barnes, *HSCP* 80 (1976), 252.

<sup>48</sup> See G above. The point was made to me by Jeremy Patterson.

carried out such expulsions, Christians would, quite literally, have been hounded into the sea. There is no evidence for such drastic action. Local conditions would have meant compromise and partial implementation, as Maximinus will have anticipated. The intention of the rescript was not to exterminate Christians root and branch, but to provide the most explicit possible symbol of imperial hostility to them, and the greatest encouragement to loyal pagans. The actual form that pagan repression might take was clearly a matter for locals to decide.

The message of this section of the rescript is uncomplicated, but it raises an issue which emerges elsewhere in Maximinus' approach to persecution. The petitions from Antioch and Nicomedia had demanded that Christians be outlawed from their *patris*; the rescript is quite specific, 'longe a civitate ac territorio vestro ... segregati sint'; they were to be banished from city and territory. A similar concern that Christianity should not be allowed to flourish undisturbed outside the cities emerges in Maximinus' order that anti-Christian propaganda be displayed in villages as well as cities. Official persecution hitherto, indeed Roman officialdom *tout court*, had made little impression on the countryside of much of the empire. Retreat to the *chora* was a natural and effective response of threatened Christians, if they had the means and opportunity to do so. Gregory Thaumaturgus urged his flock at Pontic Neocaesarea to take to the countryside during the persecution of Trajan Decius; the grandparents of Basil of Caesarea simply retreated to their Pontic estates during the great persecution; and the *Life of Saint Theodotus* itself shows clearly how the martyr and other Christians could gather unmolested in a village by the river Halys, and only faced danger in the metropolis Ancyra where the governor and other officials resided.<sup>49</sup> Maximinus' own earlier official communications had been designed to reach rural communities (see H above). Now, in a strenuous campaign to discredit Christianity he gave approval to local pagan leaders to display everywhere, both in the cities and the countryside, forged memoirs of Pilate, which blasphemed Christ, and gave orders that one of his commanders, a *dux*, in Damascus should publish a memorandum of incriminating confessions which had been forced out of some alleged Christian prostitutes, and these were to be posted in every place and city (*HE* ix. 5. 1-2). Publicity, indeed, was a major weapon in Maximinus' campaign. Eusebius significantly remarks that the publication of the anti-Christian petitions together with the rescript itself was something that had not happened before, at least during the great persecution (*HE* ix. 7. 1).

The final section of the rescript is enigmatic. The petitioners were told that without being solicited the emperor would grant them whatever favour they wanted as a reward for their pious declarations. There was no need to go through the formalities of passing a civic decree or preparing a full petition; they needed only to ask, and they would receive, without delay, an eternal benefit which would be a permanent reminder to them both of his and their virtues (*HE* ix. 7. 13-14; inscription ll. 8-15). There is a superficial parallel to this promise in Caracalla's edict of A.D. 216 from Banasa in Mauretania, which granted the city immunity from existing debts, whether in cash or kind, to the *fiscus*; by this benefit the emperor presumed that the recipients would be all the more prepared to hand over their other annual dues, and indicated that they might now anticipate that he, of his own accord, would offer new remedies and generous indulgences that they had neither petitioned nor even hoped for (*AE* 1948, no. 109). But in the context of an edict the promise of future favours, while unusual, is quite intelligible. This section of the rescript, however, reads very oddly. Even against the background of a 'beneficial ideology' which obliged the emperor to assent to most requests made of him,<sup>50</sup> and Maximinus' urgent need to win pagan support, the promise to grant whatever his subjects asked for sounds imprudent. Maximinus would doubtless not have known the story of

<sup>49</sup> For Gregory Thaumaturgus, see Gregory of Nyssa, *PG* 45, 945D; Basil's grandparents, Gregory Nazianzenus, *PG* 36, 500B ff.; Theodotus, *Anat. Stud.* 32 (1982), 108-9.

<sup>50</sup> V. Nutton, in P. D. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (ed.), *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (1978), 209; Fergus Millar, *JRS* 73 (1983), 77.

Jephtha's daughter, but classical mythology provided plenty of alternative cautionary tales to deter rulers from making rash promises. Moreover, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the emperor knew what it was that he was about to give away, since he is aware that it would be a permanent possession for the beneficiaries, and an entirely worthy reward for their piety. The origin of the awkwardness lies, at least in part, in the paradoxical nature of the document itself. In the normal way a rescript confirmed a favour given by an emperor to his subjects. Since they had asked for the benefit which it contained, there was no place to include further inducements for them to accept it. In this instance, however, the form of the rescript had been designed to hide the fact that the emperor had been looking for the favour and support of his subjects. The real substance of the transaction had led him to ask something of them, not they of him. He, therefore, had to offer inducements, but to acknowledge this explicitly would have exposed the fraud at the heart of the whole transaction. Maximinus' solution to the dilemma was to ask them to make a request for a further favour. But if this was not allowed to appear in the official imperial announcement, the inducement must have been put before the petitioners informally as part of a deal that would be satisfactory to both sides. Eusebius gives a clear hint of the bargaining that was taking place in his earlier comments that the outlandish superstition of the ruler was inducing all under him, both governors and subjects, to do everything against the Christians in order to secure his favour; in return for the benefits which they expected to gain from him, they bestowed on him the greatest of boons, namely an eagerness to take bloody action against Christians and to display their malice towards them (*HE* ix. 4. 3). This section of the rescript must surely refer back to these negotiations.

What could the offer have been? It must have been a gift that would be universally welcome, and only one possibility seems to fit the conditions. In 306, as the demands of the imperial treasury grew more pressing, Galerius had carried out a census of the entire empire, which embraced both city and rural populations,<sup>51</sup> and made all of them liable to the poll tax. This unpopular move was much resented. The novelty lay not only in the thoroughness of the census but in the fact that city dwellers were included as they had not been under Diocletian (*CTh* xiii. 10. 2, see below). Even the *plebs* at Rome was not spared (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 23. 2), and Eusebius shows Maximinus himself putting the policy into effect at Caesarea (*Mart. Pal.* iv. 8). Five years later the census was renewed, but Maximinus, who had rushed from Antioch to Nicomedia at the death of Galerius on 5 May 311 in order to prevent Asia Minor being claimed by Licinius, sought immediate popularity by abolishing the census in Bithynia (Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 36. 1). The Theodosian Code contains an imperial letter, dated 1 June 313 and addressed to the governor of Lycia and Pamphylia, which promised that in accordance with the emperor's order the urban *plebs* of the province should be exempt from capitation in the census, as had already happened in the diocese of Oriens, and as had been the case under Diocletian (*CTh* xiii. 10. 2). The evidence of contemporary sources indicates that no other issue caused more discontent among the inhabitants of the cities than the imposition of the poll tax, and there are excellent grounds for thinking that exemption was the benefit which is so coyly disguised in the rescript.<sup>52</sup>

The rubric ascribes the letter in the Theodosian Code, like its predecessor in the collection, to Constantine, but this is certainly impossible at this date. In 313 the emperor responsible for the dioceses of Oriens and Asiana must have been either Licinius or Maximinus. Commentators have also, for the most part, sought to emend the date, usually to 1 June 311, seeing it as a sequel to Maximinus' decision to cancel the census in Bithynia.<sup>53</sup> This, however, is unwarranted. For one thing the reply to the governor of Lycia and Pamphylia did not exempt the whole province from the poll tax, which seems to have been the intention of the Bithynian decision, but only the city dwellers; for another, a gesture which was evidently made to secure Maximinus'

<sup>51</sup> Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 23. 1; 26. 1–2; for this and for what follows, cf. Barnes, *NE*, 227–32.

<sup>52</sup> Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 632 suggests the idea, without arguing the case.

<sup>53</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 232, following Seeck.

immediate popularity did not necessarily entail similar action to relieve his other subjects. The financial pressures on him were urgent enough to prevent that.<sup>54</sup> For all that, there are good reasons to emend the transmitted date. If the letter is ascribed to Maximinus, it could be interpreted as a last desperate attempt by him to secure popularity in the early summer of 313, between his defeat at Adrianople and his death at Tarsus, coming less than two weeks before Licinius posted his edict of 13 June. But the chronology is desperately tight, and nothing that we know of Maximinus' situation in the last month of his life suggests that he would have been coolly and effectively administering the empire in the way implied by the letter. The suggestion that the letter was issued by Licinius on 1 June 313 cannot be retained, for it would thereby have predated even the pro-Christian edict given at Nicomedia on 13 June, which was surely the first major administrative or political announcement after the victory at Adrianople.<sup>55</sup> Further, strictly speaking the text transmitted in the Theodosian Code implies that Diocletian was still alive at the time, since he is not described as *divus*. T. D. Barnes has recently argued that the date of Diocletian's death is likely to have fallen in December 311, his own slight preference, or 312.<sup>56</sup> A date for the letter in 311 or 312 still seems inevitable.

In fact, it can be convincingly and economically associated with the rescript. The people of Lycia and Pamphylia would have received Maximinus' rescript on the Christians in the spring of 312, not long after it was issued in early April. They would surely have needed no further urging to act swiftly on the emperor's invitation to put in the further request. Maximinus, meanwhile, after touring south-west Asia Minor had advanced to Syrian Antioch where he held court through the summer before his campaign in Armenia.<sup>57</sup> It was here that he would have awaited the delegations that the rescript prompted. The diocese of Oriens, naturally enough, would have claimed his attention first, for Antioch was its chief city. Delegates from Lycia and Pamphylia would have made an appearance soon afterwards. All this can be accommodated if, with most other commentators, we assign *CTh* XIII. 10. 2 to Maximinus and accept a single minute emendation to the text, namely changing the date from 'Constantino et Licinio coss. III' (313) to 'Constantino et Licinio coss. II' (312), a proposal that has already been made.<sup>58</sup> No doubt the other provinces under Maximinus' control received the same favour soon afterwards.

It is particularly valuable to be able to link Maximinus' anti-Christian campaign with a promise to abolish capitation for an important class of the inhabitants of his provinces, since it provides, almost for the first time among the many official pronouncements on the Christians, some index of the political significance of the religious issue. We cannot, of course, attach a cash value to the gesture, but we can say that Maximinus was, in the literal sense, prepared to pay a high price for his convictions. Taxation, or over-taxation, was certainly perceived as a major grievance by contemporaries, and it was a matter that must have been close to the heart of imperial decision making. The deal which Maximinus offered his subjects in April 312, even more than the rhetoric of Eusebius and Lactantius, is the clearest proof of the significance which he attached to persecution and the importance which he attached to the religious issue.

Again, however, as with the interpretation of the order which outlawed Christians from city and territory, this gesture should not be interpreted in an over-literal sense. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that by this date Maximinus had resolved to abolish the urban poll tax, as he had already done in Bithynia, and the negotiations which he conducted with local pagan leaders gave away nothing that he did not intend to relinquish in any case. We need not presuppose a rash and impractical outburst of imperial generosity. Rather it is the symbolic significance of the gesture that made the most impact. Persecution of the Christians and the alleviation of the single most

<sup>54</sup> Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 37.

<sup>55</sup> H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* 13 (1938), 551 ff.

<sup>56</sup> *JRS* 63 (1973), 35 n. 60.

<sup>57</sup> Barnes, *NE*, 66.

<sup>58</sup> A. Demandt, *Gnomon* 43 (1971), 693. He suggests either 1 June or 1 January 312, the latter involving a second emendation from *Kal. Iun.* to *Kal. Ian.* The minimal alteration of the consular date alone seems preferable.

important grievance that Maximinus' subjects held against him were to be joined in a single act of policy. So provincial perceptions of their emperor's beneficence and their feelings of gratitude went hand in hand with a readiness to pursue his Christian enemies. The emperor's dealings with his subjects were not unskillful.

At two crucial points in the rescript, then, matters which at first sight seem to have had a concrete material significance were probably of even greater symbolic importance. That serves to bring Maximinus' actions against the Christians a little more closely in line with those of his immediate predecessors, who had clearly been more concerned with creating an impression of hounding Christians than with rigorously and energetically condemning them to severe punishment. Indeed, the very publication of the rescript itself, a lengthy, detailed, and difficult Latin text, in communities such as Colbasa, Arycanda, or even Tyre where few if any of the population would have been able to understand it,<sup>59</sup> was emphatically a symbolic gesture, not a literal attempt to communicate imperial law. The symbolic role that inscriptions played in the Graeco-Roman world is a subject that has scarcely been investigated.<sup>60</sup> There are few better illustrations of the theme than the policy followed by Diocletian and his successors in the early fourth century of promulgating long and elaborate texts in a language which deliberately evoked their own revival of the ideals of Rome and the Roman Empire, but which would have been unintelligible to those at whom they were directed. Alongside the Price Edict of Diocletian, Maximinus' rescript against the Christians of A.D. 312 stands as a prime illustration of the principle that the most significant aspects of the emperors' communications with their subjects at this period were symbolic, not substantive.

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<sup>59</sup> There is no evidence that Latin was current among the population of Arycanda at any date. Roman settlement in Pisidia may have brought a few Latin speakers to the region of Colbasa in the early empire (see S. Mitchell, *JRS* 66 (1976), 116–17), but the language had surely been entirely superseded by Greek in the early fourth century. Tyre became a Roman

colony in the third century (Ulpian, *Dig. L.* 15. 1) but there is no evidence that this led to Latin becoming current among the inhabitants, although the fact might provide an explanation for the use of Latin on an official inscription of the community.

<sup>60</sup> See M. Beard, *PBSR* 53 (1985), 114–62 for an interesting study on this topic.



A NEW LATIN INSCRIPTION FROM COLBASA (KUŞBABA)