

LACTANTIUS AND CONSTANTINE*

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

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

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

*The modern bibliography on Constantine is vast: for the literature before 1930, see N. H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church* (1931), 30 ff. (the whole monograph is reprinted from *Proc. Brit. Acad.* xv (1929), 341 ff.); for subsequent work, see the surveys of A. Piganiol, *Historia* i (1950), 82 ff.; K. F. Stroheker, *Saeculum* iii (1952), 654 ff.; J. Vogt, *Mullus. Festschrift für T. Klauser* (1964), 364 ff.; A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*² (1969), viii ff.; H. Chadwick's preface to the second edition of Baynes, o.c. (1972). No need, therefore, to encumber the following footnotes with excessive references to studies there catalogued and discussed.

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¹Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 24, 8 ff., with evidence from other sources collected in the excellent commentary of J. Moreau, *Lactance De la Mort des Persécuteurs*. Sources chrétiennes xxxix (1954), 341 ff.

²Thus the pagan Praxagoras of Athens, according

to the summary of Photius, *Bibl.* lxii = *FGrH* 219 T 1. He was writing before 330, cf. F. Jacoby, *FGrH* ii D (1930), 632.

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

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

⁵Now collected in two scholarly and critical catalogues: C. H. V. Sutherland, *RIC* vi: *From Diocletian's Reform (A.D. 294) to the death of Maximinus (A.D. 313)* (1967); P. Bruun, *RIC* vii: *Constantine and Licinius A.D. 313-337* (1966). Too much modern scholarship has relied on erroneous dates and attributions, or sometimes even unverified types, in J. Maurice, *Numismatique constantinienne* i (1908); ii (1911); iii (1912).

time, and even to establish a reliable factual narrative, the more articulate testimony of the contemporary literary productions still extant is needed: principally five panegyrics delivered before Constantine (in the years 307, 310, 311 or 312, 313, 321),⁶ and the subject of the present investigation. If Lactantius' *De Mortibus Persecutorum* can be dated accurately and precisely, it will serve as irrefragable evidence of attitudes voiced in a particular historical context, and perhaps also of facts later suppressed or embellished.

I. THE WORK

The *De Mortibus Persecutorum* addresses itself to the confessor Donatus, who had been tried and tortured nine times by three magistrates (the praetorian prefect Flaccinus, and Sossianus Hierocles and Priscillianus, successive governors of Bithynia),⁷ and who had subsequently languished in prison in Nicomedia until the dying Galerius decreed an amnesty for all Christians (1, 1; 16, 3 ff.; 35, 2; 52, 5). The opening words appear to proclaim clearly the occasion of writing: God has heard Donatus' incessant prayers, the enemies are destroyed, a tranquil peace has returned to the world, the church so lately almost ruined is rising again. For God has raised up emperors to annul the wicked and cruel ordinances of the tyrants, and he has dried the tears of those who sorrowed by destroying the plots of the impious. Those who attacked God lie dead, and Lactantius proposes to relate the manner of their deaths, that both those who were afar off and future generations may know how God displayed his virtue and majesty in utterly destroying his foes (1, 1 ff.).

After a brief survey of the fate of earlier persecutors of the Christians (Nero, Domitian, Decius, Valerian and Aurelian: 2, 4–6, 3), Lactantius launches into a savage and detailed description of the persons, families and actions of Diocletian, Maximian and Galerius, with an account of the beginning of the persecution, of the abdication of Diocletian (1 May 305) and the nomination of two new Caesars, Severus and Maximinus Daia (7, 1 ff.).⁸ There follows an equally severe and detailed account of Galerius' actions as Augustus (20, 1 ff.), which leads into the proclamation of Constantine as his father's successor—whose first action (so it is stated) was to restore to the Christians full freedom of worship (24, 9). From here Lactantius follows the tangled political events of the next four years:⁹ Galerius' recognition of Constantine as Caesar, the proclamation of Maxentius, the death of Severus, Galerius' failure to reassert his authority in Italy, Maximian's attempt to dethrone Maxentius, the conference of Carnuntum at which Licinius was named Augustus, Maximian's final flight to Constantine and his subsequent death (25, 1 ff.).

Maximian was the first of the persecutors to die (30, 6). At once God turned his eyes to the other Maximian (i.e. Galerius), the instigator of persecution, who was already thinking about his *vicennalia* and extorting funds for their celebration (31, 1 ff.) In the course of his eighteenth year (310/11),¹⁰ God struck him with an incurable disease (33, 1). Neither doctors nor Apollo and Asclepius could effect any improvement, and Galerius wasted away in great agony (33, 2 ff.). After a whole year, chastened by his misfortune, he was compelled to acknowledge God and proclaimed his intention of making restitution for his crimes (33, 11). Finally, as he was dying, he issued an edict (which Lactantius quotes) allowing his subjects once more to be Christians and build meeting-places, and requesting Christians to pray for himself and

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

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

⁸ On the details, see Moreau, o.c. 231 ff. Lactantius' accuracy on specific facts has often had to

await very recent discoveries for decisive confirmation: e.g., that Diocletian's *dies imperii* was 20 November (17, 1, cf. *P. Beatty Panop.* 2, 162, etc.).

⁹ For a significant omission, see p. 42.

¹⁰ Galerius proposed to celebrate his *vicennalia* from 1 March 312 (*Mort. Pers.* 35, 4): therefore, his official *dies imperii* was 1 March 293. For the hypothesis that his actual investiture as Caesar occurred on 21 May 293, see W. Seston, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie* i (1946), 91 ff.

the state (34).¹¹ This edict was posted in Nicomedia on 30 April 311 (35, 1): the prisons were opened, but soon came news of Galerius' death (35, 4).

As soon as he heard, Maximinus occupied Asia Minor, made a treaty with Licinius on board ship in the straits between Europe and Asia, and proceeded to enforce in Asia Minor the policies he pursued in Syria and Egypt. Although Galerius had issued his edict of toleration in the name of all the emperors, Maximinus abolished it, ostensibly in response to petitions from his pagan subjects.¹² He instituted chief priests in every city, to sacrifice daily, to prevent Christians from either building or even meeting and to help in compelling them to sacrifice.¹³ Further, he pretended to be merciful. Christians were not killed in the diocese of Oriens, only maimed: their eyes were put out, hands amputated, feet lopped off, and their ears or noses mutilated (36). Maximinus was preparing to institute the same régime in his new dominions, when he was deterred by a letter of Constantine (37, 1, cf. 36, 6). He therefore resorted to dissimulation, secretly drowning any Christian who fell into his hands (37, 1), and practising a wide variety of types of extortion and corruption on his subjects (37, 3 ff.).

With the death of Diocletian (42, 3), Maximinus was the only one of the foes of God left alive (43, 1). He entered into alliance with Maxentius, who was already at war with Constantine (43, 1 ff.). Soon Constantine defeated Maxentius, entered Rome in triumph and gave his sister in marriage to Licinius at Milan (44, 1 ff.). Maximinus attempted to surprise Licinius by an unexpected invasion of Europe but was defeated near Adrianople (45, 2 ff.).¹⁴ Licinius, who had defeated him with God's aid (46, 3 ff.), advanced to Nicomedia, where on 13 June, in gratitude to God, he published a letter which he had sent to the governor of Bithynia: it gave everyone, including Christians, the right to follow whatever religion he pleased and restored to the Christians any property which had been seized from them (48, 1 ff.).¹⁵ Licinius also, in a speech, encouraged churches to be restored, thus ending persecution after ten years and about four months (48, 13). He then pursued Maximinus, who killed himself at Tarsus when Licinius' army broke through the Cilician Gates (49, 1 ff.).

Three chapters of epilogue conclude the work. First, Licinius' execution of the sons of Galerius and Severus and the son and daughter of Maximinus, together with the suicide of Maximinus' widow (50). Then the capture of Galerius' wife Valeria after fifteen months, and her execution with her mother (51).¹⁶ Finally, a claim to accuracy and a paean of gratitude to God for protecting his flock or people and extirpating the 'evil beasts', closing with a prayer that he guard his flourishing church in perpetual peace (52).

Lactantius was clearly writing in the immediate aftermath, or at least under the immediate impact, of persecution: 'nunc post atrae tempestatis violentos turbines placidus aer et optata lux refulsit' (1, 4). The publication of the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* should therefore follow very close on the death of Maximinus, the last of the persecutors, who perished in the summer of 313.¹⁷ But a difficulty obtrudes. Lactantius includes later events. The chapters appended to the main narrative (50 f.) include not only the executions of Candidianus, the son of Galerius, in Nicomedia (perhaps as early as June 313), of the son of Severus, and of the family of Maximinus (in Antioch, therefore autumn 313), but also that of the widow and daughter of Diocletian, the latter after fifteen months of flight, i.e. no earlier than July or August

¹¹ Also reproduced, in Greek translation, by Eusebius, *HE* viii, 17, 3 ff.

¹² For these petitions, cf. *OGIS* 569; Eusebius, *HE* ix, 2, 1; 7, 12; 9 a, 4 ff.

¹³ For the epigraphic attestation of one such priest, H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* viii (1933), 49 ff.

¹⁴ On the site of the battle, see H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* xiii (1938), 585 f. Grégoire proposed to emend the 'campus Severus' to 'Campus Ergenus' (*Mort. Pers.* 46, 9). Perhaps unnecessary, cf. P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Constantiniana*. Studi e Testi clxxi (1953), 78 f.

¹⁵ Eusebius preserves substantially the same document with a different preamble (*HE* x, 5, 1 ff.).

¹⁶ i.e. Prisca, the wife of Diocletian (*Mort. Pers.* 15, 1).

¹⁷ The precise date would be worth knowing (*PLRE* i, 579, offers no opinion). It is usually held to be late summer, probably September (C. H. V. Sutherland, *RIC* vi, 35; P. Bruun, *RIC* vii, 76). But news of Maximinus' death had reached Karanis before 13 September 313 (*SB* 7675 = *P. Cair. Isid.* 103).

314 (51, 1, cf. 50, 3).¹⁸ What is the explanation? Can Lactantius have added these episodes, or at least the last of them, some months after the work was otherwise complete? Although the argument cannot rise above the purely subjective, at least some readers of Lactantius think they perceive a slight incoherence in these chapters indicative of addition or rewriting by the author.¹⁹ For most practical purposes, however, it will make little difference whether Lactantius added to an already finished draft, began the work in 313 and only completed it during or after the autumn of the following year, or wrote the whole tract together (before or during winter 314/5).

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

II. THE DEATH OF DIOCLETIAN

The ancient sources (it is commonly asserted) offer two dates for the death of Diocletian: 313 and 316.²⁰ Modern scholars have naturally not been unanimous in choosing either of the two, but the weightier names appear to prefer the later date.²¹ And there is a further complication not always clearly perceived: the earliest and best evidence may indicate, not 313 rather than 316, but an even earlier date.

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

Διοκλητιανὸς μὲν τελευτᾷ τρισὶν ἑνιαυτοῖς ὕστερον, ἤδη δὲ καταστάντες αὐτοκράτορες Κωνσταντῖος καὶ Μαξιμιανὸς ὁ Γαλέριος ἀνέδειξαν Καίσαρας Σεβήρον καὶ Μαξιμῖνον . . . (ii, 8, 1).

Three years later than the last date mentioned in the digression (the third consulate of Constantine and Licinius in 313) brings one to 316. But there are two difficulties. Zosimus has been employing inclusive reckoning.²⁶ Moreover, he should surely calculate from the point from which the digression started and to which the following clause returns: that is, the abdication of Diocletian and the proclamation of Severus

¹⁸ That is, reckoning something over fourteen months from Licinius' entry into Nicomedia, a few days after 30 April 313 (*Mort. Pers.* 47, 5 ff.). The argument perforce operates on the assumption (inevitable though not provable) that the ms. 'quindecim' is what Lactantius wrote. Disproof would not surprise the present writer.

¹⁹ K. Roller, *Die Kaisergeschichte in Laktanz 'de mortibus persecutorum'* (Diss. Giessen, 1927), 18 ff.; A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (1948), 45.

²⁰ 'Sur la date de la mort de Dioclétien il y a deux traditions: 316, que suit Zosime (cf. la corr. de Heyne) . . . , et 313, fondée sur Lact., *Mort.* 42, 3 . . .' (F. Paschoud, *Zosime* i (Budé, 1971), 192 f. More erroneous still, 'his death is dated 313 by Lact., *Mort. Pers.* 42, 3' (R. T. Ridley, *Byz. Zeitschr.* lxxv (1972), 288).

²¹ E. Schwartz, *Nachr. Göttingen*, Phil-hist. Kl. 1904, 536; O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste*

für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr. (1919), 165; W. Ensslin, P-W vii A, 2493; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* i² (1958), 93. Also, recently, *PLRE* i, 254.

²² J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 421 ff.

²³ J. A. Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca e codd. manuscriptis Bibliothecae Regiae Parisiensis* ii (1839), 398, whence John of Antioch, frag. 167, 2 (*FHG* iv, 602).

²⁴ Frag. 167, 2: Διοκλητιανὸς καὶ Μαξιμιανὸς . . . τὴν βασιλείαν κατέθεντο. καὶ Διοκλητιανὸς μὲν δώδεκα ἔτη πρωτεύσας ἀπέθανε· Μαξιμιανὸς δὲ βουλευθεὶς πάλιν ἀναλαβέσθαι τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ ἀποτυχῶν ἀπήγατο. W. Ensslin paraphrased 'Johannes Antiochenus . . . gibt dem D. zwölf Jahre als Privatmann' (P-W vii A, 2493).

²⁵ Cedrenus, p. 472 Bonn; [Leo the Grammarian], p. 82 Bonn.

²⁶ ii, 7, 2: 101 years between the *Ludi Saeculares* in 204 and Diocletian's ninth consulate (304), 110 between 204 and the third consulate of Constantine and Licinius (313).

and Maximinus as Caesars (1 May 305).²⁷ Third, the *Chronicle* of Jerome and two of its derivatives, Prosper Tiro and a Gallic chronicle of A.D. 511, both the latter offering 315, not 316.²⁸ Little reliance can be based on a chronicle which has so many erroneous dates in the near vicinity: for example, the deaths of Maximian, Galerius and Maximinus Daia in 308, 309 and 311 respectively (instead of 310, 311 and 313) and the war of Cibalae in 313 (316/7).²⁹ Now Jerome presumably took all these dates from Eusebius' *Chronicle*, which he used in an edition which went as far as the *vicennalia* of Constantine.³⁰ Accordingly, equally little reliance can probably be placed in the *Paschal Chronicle*, which also derives its date of 316 for the death of Diocletian from the same source.³¹ Perhaps the date has been misplaced in transmission,³² or Eusebius made a mistake. For one hypothesis or the other must be invoked to explain Eusebius' chronology for the reign of Diocletian, which seriously misdates events of his own lifetime.³³

By itself stands a chronicle, apparently composed in Rome shortly after 330, which was later incorporated in the document known as the *Fasti* of Hydatius or, misleadingly, as the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*. This proffers a very precise date for Diocletian's decease: 3 December 316.³⁴ However, although the other contents of the document suggest that the original compiler possessed reliable information on day, month and year, any or all of these elements may have been distorted in transmission.³⁵

The evidence against 316, on the other hand, cannot all be impugned or explained away.³⁶ One might waive the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, composed in or soon after 396, or Socrates, who was writing nearly another fifty years later.³⁷ But Lactantius can only be discounted either on an accusation of grave and deliberate falsification or through sheer forgetfulness.³⁸ He states unambiguously that Maximinus Daia, who died in the summer of 313, outlived Diocletian.³⁹ Further, the evidence of successive editions of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, though not entirely easy to interpret, unmistakably implies that Diocletian died somewhat earlier than December 316.⁴⁰

The *Epitome de Caesaribus* reports that Diocletian declined an invitation to attend the marriage of Licinius to Constantia, which was celebrated in Milan early in 313. Angry vituperation greeted the refusal and the retired emperor (so it was said) poisoned himself.⁴¹ Socrates more vaguely dates his death after the marriage and Licinius' subsequent departure to the east.⁴² The *Epitome* adds that Diocletian lived sixty-eight years, of which almost nine fell after his abdication, thus implying, on

²⁷ Hence 'τρισὶν ἑνιαυτοῖς' was emended to 'ὀκτώ' by C. G. Heyne, in J. F. Reitemeier, *Zosimi Historiae* (1784), 633. But note the *Souda* Δ 1156: Διοκλητιανὸς δὲ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ κατεγήρα ἐν ἔτει τρισίν (ii, 104 Adler).

²⁸ *GCS* xlvi, 230; *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 448; 643 (the ninth year of Constantine, which corresponds to 315 on Jerome's reckoning).

²⁹ *GCS* xlvi, 229.

³⁰ *GCS* xlvi, 6 f.; 231.

³¹ *Chron. Pasch.* p. 523 Bonn (Confusing him with Galerius), cf. pp. 526 f. (indicating use of Eusebius). The Armenian translation of Eusebius, which originally went to 325/6, breaks off at 301 (*GCS* xx, 227, cf. 34; 62).

³² A common enough phenomenon in chronicles, cf. C. Courtois, *Byzantion* xxi (1951), 23 ff.

³³ The Armenian translation of The *Chronicle* (*GCS* xx, 227) gives Diocletian twenty years (he ruled from 20 November 284 to 1 May 305), dating the proclamation of Constantius and Galerius to his seventh year, i.e. 290/1 (in fact, spring 293), and the beginning of the revolt in Egypt in which Achilleus was prominent to the ninth, i.e. 292/3 (it probably began in July 297, cf. T. C. Skeat, *Papyri from Panopolis* (1964), xii; *PLRE* i, 6; 263, Domitianus 6).

³⁴ *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 231. On the peculiar and diverse nature of the document, see T. Mommsen, *ib.* 199 ff. An apparent derivative exists in the fragment of a Greek chronicle, *P. Berol.* 13296, published by H. Lietzmann, *Quantulacumque. Studies*

presented to K. Lake (1937), 339 ff. = *Kl. Schr. i* (*Texte u. Unters.* lxvii, 1958), 420 ff.

³⁵ These *fasti* offer 1 April 305 for the abdication of Diocletian (*ib.* 231). Lactantius' date of 1 May (*Mort. Pers.* 19, 1) appears to be confirmed by the inscription recording a senator's taurobolium in Rome 'dd. nn. Constantio et Maximiano nobb. Caess. V. cons. xviii k. Mai.' (*ILS* 4145). More serious, the same *fasti* have 314 (not 316) for the battle of Cibalae (o.c. 231).

³⁶ J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 421 ff.

³⁷ The *Epitome* closes with the burial of Theodosius in Constantinople on 8 November 395 (48, 20), Socrates' narrative extends to Theodosius' seventeenth consulate in 439 (*HE* vii, 47).

³⁸ O. Seeck averred that Lactantius deliberately moved the death from 316 to 310/11 in order to make his (invented) story of suicide more plausible (*Jahrb. für class. Phil.* cxxxix (1889), 628 f.); *PLRE* cites the *Epitome* as giving a date of 316 and Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 42, 3 as supporting 313 (i, 254).

³⁹ Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 42, 3 f.: 'ita viginti annorum felicissimus imperator . . . in odium vitae deductus, postremo fame atque angore confectus est. Unus iam supererat de adversariis dei <Maximinus>; cuius nunc exitum ruinamque subnectam'.

⁴⁰ C. Habicht, *Hermes* lxxxvi (1958), 376 ff.

⁴¹ *Epit. de Caes.* 39, 7.

⁴² Socrates, *HE* i, 2, 10.

inclusive reckoning, that he died shortly before May 313. But before this date can be accepted a question arises. What were the immediate or ultimate sources of the *Epitome* and Socrates? The connection of Diocletian's death with the marriage alliance between Constantine and Licinius may be an imaginative guess or rationalisation not due to an immediate contemporary.⁴³ The primary witness still remains to be examined in detail.

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

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

⁴³ The sources of neither the *Epitome* nor Socrates for the fourth century are easy to discover, cf. Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. d. röm. Litt.* iv, i² (1914), 76 f.; F. Winkelmann, *Sb. Berlin*, Klasse für Sprachen, Lit. u. Kunst 1965, Nr. 3, 25 ff.

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

⁴⁵ So, recently, J.-R. Palanque, *Mél. Carcopino* (1966), 714.

⁴⁶ Moreau, o.c. 418: 'il semble que Constantin n'ait pas pris l'initiative de cette condamnation.'

⁴⁷ W. Ensslin, *P-W* xiv, 2515 f. For Gelasius, see Theophanes, a. 3796, p. 11 de Boor (with the name); Philippus of Side, frag. 3 (C. de Boor, *Texte u. Unters.* v, 2 (1888), 183) = G. C. Hansen, *Theodoros*

Anagnostes Kirchengeschichte (GCS, 1971), 158 §2. John of Nikiu alleged that the Senate exiled Diocletian after he was deposed (trans. Zotenberg, p. 418).

⁴⁸ C. H. V. Sutherland, *RIC* vi (1967), 33.

⁴⁹ *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 2, 1 ff.

⁵⁰ *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 14, 1: 'de quo ego quemadmodum dicam adhuc ferme dubito et de nutu numinis tui exspecto consilium.' Such a performer was not long baffled: he adopted the principle 'neminem hominum peccare nisi fato et ipsa scelera mortalium actus esse fortunae, contra autem deorum munera esse virtutes' (14, 3).

⁵¹ *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 14, 5 ff.

⁵² For the σύγκρισις standard in encomia, cf. L. B. Struthers, *Harv. Stud.* xxx (1919), 52; 83 ff.

realised that his own good fortune had passed to someone unworthy and disgraceful.⁵³ The way was open for Maximian's full rehabilitation: his statue appears on a relief on the arch which the Senate dedicated to Constantine in Rome in 315,⁵⁴ and in 317/8 the coinage of Constantine was styling him Divus Maximianus.⁵⁵ The *damnatio memoriae* must surely (even on this evidence alone) precede the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312).

Maxentius' attitude to his father inevitably differed from that of Constantine. When the old man fled after attempting to depose him, silence was the best policy. But once dead he could safely be exploited for propaganda. Maxentius' coinage began to commemorate Divus Maximianus,⁵⁶ and he professed to be waging war on Constantine in order to avenge his murdered father (*Mort. Pers.* 43, 4). The *damnatio memoriae* was surely Constantine's *riposte* to this claim. Can the date be more closely determined? Lactantius places it some time after the death of Galerius (May 311). The next step is mere conjecture. The consuls recognized in Rome on 3 December 311 were C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus and Aradius Rufinus.⁵⁷ Perhaps a chronographer has confused this pair ('Volusiano et Rufino') with the consuls of 316 ('Sabino et Rufino'), and thus entered the death of Diocletian under 316 when it really occurred on 3 December 311.⁵⁸ If this conjecture (it is no more) be admitted, then Constantine abolished the memory of Maximian in autumn 311, and Lactantius was correct in claiming, before he described the war of Constantine and Maxentius, that only one of the emperors who had persecuted Christians still survived (*Mort. Pers.* 43, 1).⁵⁹ Let it be proposed, therefore, that Diocletian died on 3 December 311. To be sure, more evidence could be marshalled in favour of 3 December 312, a date not incompatible with the *Epitome* and Socrates. However, on any view, some items of evidence must be discarded as untrustworthy,⁶⁰ and both the earliest witness (Lactantius) and external considerations (the political situation) point to late 311 or early 312.

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁸ The date of February 312 is stated, without

argument, by F. Corsaro, *Lactantiana* (1970), 40.

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

⁶⁰ A law which bears the date of 313 poses special problems: 'Idem A. (i.e. Constantine) ad Eusebium v.p. praesidem Lyciae et Pamphyliae. Plebs urbana, sicut in orientalibus quoque provinciis observatur, minime in censibus pro capitatione sua conveniatur, sed iuxta hanc iussionem nostram immunis habeatur, sicuti etiam sub domino et parente nostro Diocletiano seniore Aug. eadem plebs urbana immunis fuerat. Dat. Kal. Iun. Constantino A. III et Licinio III cons.' (*C.Th.* xiii, 10, 2). Though the law appears to show Diocletian alive on 1 June 313 (Seston, o.c. 44 f.), something is clearly amiss with its attribution and date. In June 313 Constantine controlled neither Lycia and Pamphylia nor the diocese of Oriens. Accordingly, the law might be attributed to Licinius (H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* xiii (1938), 551 ff.). But, on 1 June 313, Licinius did not yet control the 'orientales provinciae', the law's reference to which surely designates Maximinus Daia as its promulgator (O. Seeck, *Zeitschr. für Social- und Wirtschaftsgesch.* iv (1890), 290 ff.; *Regesten* (1919), 52 f., cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* i (1964), 63). What then is the date of the law? Hardly as late as 1 June 313, after Maximinus' invasion of Europe and defeat by Licinius. Possibly, therefore, 1 July 312 or 1 January 313, as proposed by A. Demandt, *Gnomon* xlv (1972), 693. Better, 1 June 311, which enables the law to be brought into connection with a measure recorded by Lactantius: after Galerius' death, Maximinus occupied Bithynia and 'cum magna omnium laetitia sustulit censum' (*Mort. Pers.* 35, 1). For a discussion, see H. Castritius, *Studien zu Maximinus Daia*. Frankfurter Althistorische Studien ii (1969), 9 ff.

III. FROM MILAN TO CIBALAE

Constantine fought two wars against Licinius. For the decisive battle in the latter, two chronological sources offer 324.⁶¹ But both 323 and 324 had notable adherents, until a papyrus published forty years ago showed that Licinius was still recognized as emperor in Egypt as late as 3 September 324, thus confirming the explicit ancient testimony.⁶² Matters stand otherwise, however, with the earlier war, the first battle of which (at Cibalae) the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* date to 8 October 314.⁶³ The correctness of this date was scarcely ever doubted until twenty years ago, and some were even bold enough to argue that, since Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* apparently puts the beginning of Constantine's discord with Licinius after his *decennalia* (celebrated for one year from 25 July 315), Eusebius could not be its author.⁶⁴ It was thus of the highest significance that a critical study of the coins minted by Constantine redated the war to 316.⁶⁵ The redating naturally provoked attempts at disproof (all ineffectual),⁶⁶ and some scholars, loath to give up old habits and sanctified dates, now posit wars in both 314 and 316.⁶⁷ But subsequent work has buttressed the new date, which receives confirmation not only from literary and legal sources,⁶⁸ but also from the coinage of Licinius.⁶⁹ Therefore, Constantine fought Licinius in 316/7 and 323/4. Nevertheless, knowledge of this signal advance in understanding the period and contemporary writers seems not yet to have percolated everywhere,⁷⁰ and ignorance of it has led a recent manual of reference to the remarkable deduction that Constantine (Augustus 337-340) was not the son of his father's lawful wife.⁷¹ More than mere relevance to Lactantius, therefore, will justify a brief recapitulation of the decisive evidence.

Most explicit is Aurelius Victor:⁷² Maximinus was defeated by Licinius and died at Tarsus after two years of rule as Augustus (i.e. two years from the death of Galerius):⁷³ the two remaining emperors, different in character though related by marriage, maintained an anxious peace for three years; the ensuing war ended with the proclamation of Crispus, the younger Constantine and Licinianus as Caesars (formally invested at Serdica on 1 March 317);⁷⁴ then, an eclipse of the sun portending a short peace,⁷⁵ hostilities were resumed after six years, and Licinius was finally overwhelmed. Victor's chronology can easily be inferred: three years of anxious peace from 313 to 316, the first war in 316/7, six years' respite from 317 to 323, the second war, 323/4, with the investiture of Constantius as Caesar (8 November 324) correctly stated to be contemporaneous with Licinius' final defeat (18 September 324).⁷⁶

⁶¹ viz. the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* and the *Chronicon Paschale* (*Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 232; the latter also p. 526 Bonn).

⁶² For 323, T. Mommsen, *Codex Theodosianus* i, 1 (1904), ccxvii; i, 2 (1904), 350, on *CTh* vii, 20, 1; E. Schwartz, *Nachr. Göttingen Phil.-hist. Kl.* 1904, 540 ff.; N. H. Baynes, *JRS* xviii (1928), 218 f. In disproof, *P. Osl.* ii, 44, cf. E. Stein, *Zeitschr. für d. neutest. Wiss.* xxx (1931), 177 ff.

⁶³ *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 231.

⁶⁴ H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* xiii (1938), 561 ff.

⁶⁵ P. Bruun, *The Constantinian Coinage of Arelate*. Finska Fornminnesföreningens Tidskrift lii:2 (1953), 17 ff.

⁶⁶ J. P. C. Kent, *NC* xiv (1954), 225 f; xvii (1957), 30 f.; J. P. Callu, *Genio populi Romani* (1960), 87 ff.; D. Kienast, *Hamburger Beiträge zur Numismatik* v (1963), 687 f.

⁶⁷ W. Seston, *Relazioni del x Congresso Int. di Scienze Storiche ii: Storia di Antichità* (1955), 426; R. Andreotti, *Diz. Epig.* iv 1002 ff.; *Latomus* xxiii (1964), 543 ff.

⁶⁸ C. Habicht, *Hermes* lxxxvi (1958), 360 ff.

⁶⁹ P. Bruun, *Studies in Constantinian Chronology*. Numismatic Notes and Monographs cxlvi (1961), 10 ff.

⁷⁰ The battle of Cibalae is still dated to 314, not only in unscholarly works, but also by A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* i (1964), 82; R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (1969), 97; 107; H. Dörries, *Constantine the Great* (trans. R. H. Bainton, 1972), 232. The old

date is also sometimes assumed by the editors of *PLRE* (e.g. i, 600, Mestrianus).

⁷¹ *PLRE* i, 223: 'Born Feb. 317 ... probably illegitimate since his brother Constantius II was born to Fausta on 317 Aug. 7 while no source refers to his descent from Maximianus.' In refutation, see P. Guthrie, *Phoenix* xx (1966), 330 f. Theophanes registers the relationship twice (pp. 5; 19 de Boor), an inscription explicitly describes Constantine as the son of Fausta (*CIL* xii, 688 = *AE* 1952, 107), and Julian states that Fausta was the daughter of one and mother of 'many emperors' (*Orat.* i, 9D). *PLRE* prints a stemma which shows Fausta as the mother of but two emperors (i, 1129), ascribes to Constans (220) an acephalous inscription perhaps better referred to Constantine (*ILS* 723: ... nepoti M. Aureli Maximiani ...), and has a separate entry for the invented mother (1040, Anonyma 25).

⁷² *Caes.* 41, 1 ff., cf. Habicht, o.c. 362 f.

⁷³ Not from the date at which Maximinus began to style himself Augustus (towards the middle of 310), as supposed by R. Andreotti, *Latomus* xxiii (1964), 543 f.

⁷⁴ *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 231, cf. *Pan. Lat.* iv (x), 1, 1; 2, 2 ff.; 38, 2; *P. Osl.* 44, etc.

⁷⁵ Explicitly, but erroneously, dated to early 317 (41, 7). Victor must refer either to the eclipse on 6 July 316 or to that on 6 May 319 (F. Boll, *P-W* vi, 2362).

⁷⁶ For these two dates, see *CIL* i² p. 276; *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Auct. Ant. ix, 232.

The other literary evidence exhibits confusion of various types, due not least to a tendency to conflate and confuse the two wars.⁷⁷ Further, even authors who can distinguish the two wars are unaware of a fact clearly implied by the coinage: before the formal joint proclamation of Caesars on 1 March 317, Constantine had already begun to style Crispus and the younger Constantine by that title.⁷⁸ Yet certain significant facts, very relevant to the date of the war, are preserved by various authors. Licinius' son was about twenty months old when proclaimed Caesar (1 March 317);⁷⁹ but he and his mother were at Sirmium at the time of the battle of Cibalae;⁸⁰ therefore, the battle occurred no earlier than summer 315.⁸¹ Eusebius speaks allusively of plots which Licinius directed against Constantine after his *decennalia*,⁸² while a normally well-informed writer supplies what seem to be the pertinent names and details: Licinius induced Senecio to persuade his brother, Bassianus, the husband of Constantine's sister Anastasia, to attempt to assassinate Constantine; Bassianus was caught in the attempt, convicted and executed; Licinius' refusal to surrender Senecio then led to war.⁸³ Such evidence is clearly incompatible with a date of autumn 314 for the war.

The movements of Constantine can partly be deduced from the *Codex Theodosianus*, which normally states the author, date and place of promulgation of each law. Unfortunately, on any view, some of the subscriptions contradict one another,⁸⁴ and the standard register of dates for the period bases itself on the assumption that in the autumn of 314 Constantine was campaigning in the Balkans.⁸⁵ However, let it be assumed that consular dates by private citizens are more reliable than dates given by imperial consulates—the normal working principle when seeking to harmonise dates in the law codes.⁸⁶ Then a clear picture emerges. In the autumn of 314 (consulate of C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus for the second time, and Petronius Annianus),⁸⁷ Constantine remained in Trier.⁸⁸ During 315, the fourth consulate of both Constantine and Licinius, three laws appear to show the former in residence at Sirmium, Naissus and Thessalonica.⁸⁹ But there are some clear errors in this year, which offers one law purporting to be issued at Constantinople, and another issued by Constantine from Antioch.⁹⁰ On the other hand, one law dated to March 315 has the emperor at Cavillunum (Châlons-sur-Marne).⁹¹ In 316 and 317, the consuls are again private citizens: in 316 Antonius Caecina Sabinus and Vettius Rufinus, in 317 Ovinus Gallicanus and Caesonius Bassus, who were recognised at Rome from 17 February⁹²—an indication that Constantine and Licinius negotiated an agreement in January.⁹³ During these two years, if two obvious errors can be ignored,⁹⁴ the *Codex Theodosianus* shows Constantine residing in Gaul until August 316 (with a visit to Rome in 315), but at Serdica by 6 December.⁹⁵ Less ambiguous perhaps is a

⁷⁷ Habicht, o.c. 375 f.

⁷⁸ P. Bruun, *RIC* vii (1966), 66. Hence the younger Constantine cannot have been born as late as February 317, the date implied by Zosimus ii, 18, 1 ff.; *Epit. de Caes.* 41, 4—the only evidence cited by *PLRE* i, 223.

⁷⁹ *Epit. de Caes.* 41, 4; Zosimus ii, 20, 2.

⁸⁰ *Exc. Vales.* i, 17.

⁸¹ A. Chastagnol, *Rev. num.* 6 iv (1962), 328.

⁸² *Vita Const.* i, 48 ff. On which, see now F. Winkelmann, *Klio* xl (1962), 226 ff.

⁸³ *Exc. Vales.* i, 15.

⁸⁴ For the years 314-317, see T. Mommsen, *Codex Theodosianus* i, 1 (1904), ccx ff.

⁸⁵ O. Seeck, *Regesten* (1919), 162 ff.

⁸⁶ Seeck, *ib.* 65 f.; 154 f.

⁸⁷ *PLRE* i, 978; 68.

⁸⁸ *C.Th.* vi, 35, 1 (29 October); i, 2, 1 (30 December).

⁸⁹ *C.Th.* viii, 7, 1 (8 March); xi, 27, 1 (13 May); ii, 30, 1 (2 June). The third of these laws names no magistrate, so that its date is beyond the possibility of correction; but the first is addressed to a *consularis aquarum*, the second to Ablabius. They can accordingly be redated to 324 and 329, cf. *PLRE* i, 371; 3; 1048.

⁹⁰ *C.Th.* xi, 1, 1 (normally redated to 360, cf. *PLRE* i, 741, Proclianus 2); x, 14, 1 (of 346, cf. Seeck,

o.c. 38; *PLRE* i, 614).

⁹¹ *C.Th.* ix, 40, 2.

⁹² For the first pair, *PLRE* i, 793; 777; for the second, *ib.* 383; 154.

⁹³ Habicht, o.c. 365 f.

⁹⁴ *C.Th.* viii, 12, 2 (apparently issued on 20 April 316 at Serdica); viii, 12, 3 (allegedly issued at Rome on 1 May 316). Both laws are addressed to magistrates who cannot have held office at the time: Aco Catullinus as proconsul of Africa, and Cassius as *praefectus urbi*, cf. Seeck, o.c. 165; 173; *PLRE* i, 187; 733 f., Probianus 3 (proconsul of Africa from August 315 to August 316); 184 f.

⁹⁵ *C.Th.* i, 22, 1 (11 January 316, Trier); ii, 6, 1 (6 May, Vienne); xi, 30, 5 f. (13 August, Arelate); ix, 1, 1 (4 December, Serdica); ix, 10, 1 (17 April 317, Serdica); xi 30.7 (6 June, Sirmium). P. Bruun, *RIC* vii, 76, also adduces *Frag. Vat.* 290 as showing Constantine in Verona on 20 September 316, and *C.Th.* viii, 7, 1 and the non-existent *C.Th.* vi, 1, 4 as showing him in Thessalonica on 8 March and 27 June 317. But the date in *Frag. Vat.* 290 is no longer fully extant (Data iii Kal. Oct. Verona . . .), *C.Th.* viii, 7, 1 is dated 8 March 315 (n. 89) and *C.J.* vi, 1, 4 (the correct reference) belongs rather to 330, cf. Seeck, o.c. 180; *PLRE* i, 938, Valerianus 4.

communication of Petronius Annianus and Julianus (i.e. the pretorian prefects) to Domitius Celsus, *vicarius* of Africa.⁹⁶ The prefects inform Celsus that, after certain clerics came to Gaul to see Constantine on his orders, he instructed them to return home. Consequently, the prefects have provided free transport and lodging as far as the port of Arelate, where the clerics are to embark for Africa, and they apprise Celsus of the fact. The letter concludes with the note that the beneficiaries received the diploma on 28 April at Trier.⁹⁷ The year is not stated, but it can only be 315.⁹⁸ Therefore, Constantine was in Trier in April 315, not in northern Greece or the Balkan lands.

Finally, and clearest of all, the coinage of Constantine and Licinius.⁹⁹ In rapid succession (therefore in 316/7), most western mints dropped Licinius to coin in the name of Constantine alone, added Crispus and the younger Constantine, and then reinstated Licinius, now with Licinianus as Caesar.¹⁰⁰ A similar picture obtains for the mint of Siscia, which Constantine seized during the war.¹⁰¹ Among the Licinian mints, the clearest evidence comes from Alexandria: the same issue includes obverses both of Valens, whom Licinius put up as emperor during the war, and of the two new Caesars, Crispus and Constantine.¹⁰²

The historical outline which results from the new chronology should be clear. After their meeting in Milan (early 313), Licinius left to confront Maximinus, while Constantine proceeded to Gaul.¹⁰³ Licinius defeated Maximinus in Europe (30 April 313) and pursued him through Asia Minor, travelling at least as far as Antioch.¹⁰⁴ Licinius' further movements appear to be unknown.¹⁰⁵ Constantine resided in Gaul, dealing with Christians and barbarians, and visited Rome in 315 to celebrate his *decennalia*, entering the city on 18 or 21 July and departing on 27 September.¹⁰⁶ He travelled first to Mediolanum, but soon proceeded to Trier and remained in Gaul until the next summer.¹⁰⁷ The plot (real or alleged) which Licinius instigated against his life belongs to 316: in a letter apparently written in winter 315/6, Constantine states his intention of visiting Africa to put a decisive end to bickering between Christians.¹⁰⁸ Also to 316 belongs the birth of Fausta's first son, Constantine, whom she bore at Arelate:¹⁰⁹ probably during August, when Constantine is attested there.¹¹⁰ Relations between Constantine and Licinius gradually soured, until there was open war (autumn 316). If the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* fails to mention the conflict, an easy explanation avails. Lactantius wrote before it occurred.

⁹⁶ Optatus, App. viii (*CSEL* xxvi, 212) = H. von Soden-H. von Campenhausen, *Urkunden zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Donatismus*². Kleine Texte cxxii (1950), no. 22. For Petronius Annianus and Julius Julianus as colleagues in the pretorian prefecture, *ILS* 8938 (Tropaeum Traiani); *AE* 1938, 85 (Ephesus).

⁹⁷ *CSEL* xxvi, 212, 24 f.: 'Hilarius princeps obtulit iiiii Kal. Maias Tribemis.' Presumably Hilarius was *princeps officii* of the pretorian prefect at Trier (so *PLRE* i, 434).

⁹⁸ *PLRE* i, 195, Celsus 8. Seeck felt compelled to emend the date to 27 February, i.e. of 316, precisely because he believed that Constantine was not at Trier in April 315 (o.c. 142 f.; 164).

⁹⁹ Bruun, o.c. (1953), 17 ff.; o.c. (1961), 10 ff.

¹⁰⁰ *RIC* vii, 172 ff. (Trier); 240 ff. (Arles); 298 ff. (Rome); 366 ff. (Ticinum).

¹⁰¹ *RIC* vii, 425 ff. (coinage in the name of Licinius alone, then of Constantine alone, before the Caesars appear); 498 ff.

¹⁰² *RIC* vii, 706. There seem to exist only two undoubtedly genuine types of Valens (*RIC* vii, 644 no. 7 (Cyzycus); 706 no. 19), but very many forgeries, cf. R. A. G. Carson, *NC*⁶ xviii (1958), 55 ff. It is therefore unfortunate that *PLRE* i, 931, Valens 13, cites only Cohen, whose 'inaccuracy or even negligence in even important details renders him useless for the purpose of modern numismatic research' (Bruun, o.c. (1953), 56).

¹⁰³ *Exc. Vales*, i, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Eusebius, *HE* ix, 11, 6.

¹⁰⁵ That is, once deductions from his alleged presence at Cibalae in October 314 are discarded (cf. O. Seeck, P-W xiii, 224 ff.).

¹⁰⁶ The Chronographer of 354 records 'advent(us) divi' on 18 and 21 July, and 29 October (*CIL* i², pp. 268; 274). Since the last entry refers to Constantine's entry into Rome in 312 (after the 'evictio tyranni', ib. 274), the others must refer to 315 and 326. It records 'profectio divi' on 27 September (ib. 272): almost certainly 315 rather than 326, cf. Seeck, *Regesten* (1919), 164; 177.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *Epp.* xliiii, 7, 20; *Frag. Vat.* 273 (19 October 315, Mediolanum); *C.Th.* i, 22, 1 (11 January 316, Trier).

¹⁰⁸ Optatus, App. vii (*CSEL* xxvi, 211, 19 ff.).

¹⁰⁹ *Epit. de Caes.* 41, 4; Zosimus ii, 20, 2.

¹¹⁰ *C.Th.* xi, 30, 5 f. (13 August 316). Polemius Silvius enters 'natis Constantini minoris' under 7 August (*CIL* i², p. 271). Since Constantius was certainly born on 7 August (*CIL* i², p. 270; *C.Th.* vi, 4, 10), this is normally taken as an error. Yet the coincidence does not surpass belief, and August is approximately the correct month, as was seen long ago by E. Stein, *Zeitschr. für d. neutest. Wiss.* xxx (1931), 183 f.; J.-R. Palanque, *Rev. ét. anc.* xl (1938), 249 f. Polemius Silvius, the only direct testimony to the exact day of his birth, is nowhere adduced in the articles on the younger Constantine by J. Moreau, *JAC* ii (1959), 160 f.; *PLRE* i, 223.

The *De Mortibus Persecutorum* combines three features which long seemed to contradict one another. Lactantius writes as if persecution has very recently ceased, he records the death of Diocletian, and he betrays no hint of conflict between Constantine and Licinius. The date of composition consequently presented a vexing problem, with no universally agreed solution. If the work was written close to the events which it describes, then one of three implausible hypotheses seemed to be imposed.¹¹¹ Either its completion fell within the brief (or non-existent) interval between Lactantius' learning of the capture and execution of Valeria (hardly earlier than September 314) and the outbreak of war (before the end of the same month),¹¹² or Lactantius wrote 'restituta per orbem tranquillitate' and 'pax incunda et serena' (*Mort. Pers.* 1, 2 f.) during the war,¹¹³ or else the passages which refer to events of 314 (either chapter 51 alone, or both 50 and 51) had to be deleted as interpolations.¹¹⁴ Then came wide acceptance of the notion that Diocletian died on 3 December 316.¹¹⁵ That entailed a date for the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* which solved or alleviated the existing difficulty: Lactantius was writing between 317 and 321. Such was the opinion which prevailed in recent times,¹¹⁶ with the corollary (not always clearly enunciated) that Lactantius indulged in a deliberate artifice: whether or not he has displaced the death of Diocletian, he omitted the war and he purported to be writing from four to seven years earlier than the genuine time of composition.¹¹⁷ Correct chronology redeems Lactantius' candour and accuracy.¹¹⁸ No longer does either the death of Diocletian (certainly no later than 312/3 and possibly as early as 3 December 311)¹¹⁹ or the war (316/7) present any problem. The implications of the text may now be accepted: the author completed the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* in autumn 314 or (at the very latest) during the following winter.

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

¹¹¹ P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* iii (1905), 305 f.; Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. d. röm. Litt.* iii³ (1922), 431.

¹¹² F. Görres, *Philologus* xxxvii (1877), 596 ff.

¹¹³ S. Brandt, *Sb. Wien* cxxv, 6 (1892), 107 f.

¹¹⁴ A. Ebert, *Ber. Leipzig* xxii (1870), 124; A. Harnack, *Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius* ii (1904), 422 f.

¹¹⁵ O. Seeck gave the lead, mainly through the first volume of his *Geschichte* (first edition, 1895).

¹¹⁶ e.g., J. Quasten, *Patrology* ii (1953), 400; J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 34 ff.; W. Seston, *RAC* iii (1957), 1037; M. F. McDonald, *Lactantius, The Minor Works*. Fathers of the Church liv (1965), 127; J. Stevenson, *OCD*² (1970), 576. It has even been asserted that Lactantius' narrative continues to c. 318 (J. Vogt, *Der Niedergang Roms* (1965), 178).

¹¹⁷ Moreau claimed that the opening sentences are little more than a rhetorical commonplace, and that Lactantius was simply copying Cyprian, *Laps.* 1 and possibly also Curtius Rufus x, 9, 1 ff. (o.c. 190 f.).

¹¹⁸ J.-R. Palanque, *Mél. Carcopino* (1966), 711 ff.

¹¹⁹ p. 35.

¹²⁰ Jerome, *De vir. ill.* 80, also reporting other works now lost (for the fragments, *CSEL* xxvii, 155 ff.).

¹²¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 2627, ff. 1^r-16^r. The ms. is ascribed to the eleventh century by S. Brandt, *CSEL* xxvii, ix; Quasten, o.c. 401; Moreau, o.c. 73; to the ninth by Schanz-Hosius, o.c. 431; P. de Labriolle, *Histoire de la littérature latine chrétienne* i³ (1947), 275. Professor L. E. Boyle advises me that the earlier date is palaeographically preferable.

¹²² For attestations of 'Caecilius', see S. Brandt's critical notes (*CSEL* xix, 94; 580; xxvii, 64; 132). It is held to be the correct form of Lactantius' *nomen* in Schanz-Hosius, o.c. 414, adducing *CIL* viii, 7241 (Cirta): D. M. L. Caecilius Firmianus v.a. xxv h.s.e. 'Perhaps an ancestor', according to *PLRE* i, 338.

¹²³ First edited by S. Baluzius, *Miscellaneorum Liber Secundus* (Paris, 1679), 1 ff.

¹²⁴ Observe the recent verdict that Baronius' *Annales*, published in Rome between 1588 and 1605, 'remained till the nineteenth century the standard text of Catholic ecclesiastical history' (H. Jedin, *Handbook of Church History* i (1965); 25).

two hundred years.¹²⁵ The decisive arguments in favour were formulated at the beginning of the present century: the historical accuracy and detail of *De Mortibus Persecutorum* prove a date within Lactantius' lifetime; the differences of style from Lactantius' undisputed works derive from differences of genre, of audience and in the author's state of mind, while pervasive similarities of thought indicate the same author.¹²⁶ Few have subsequently doubted Lactantius' authorship.¹²⁷

Lactantius' movements help to identify the audience which his work envisages. He was in Nicomedia when the 'Great Persecution' began (early 303) and implies that he remained there for at least two years.¹²⁸ Hence a strong temptation to infer that his vivid narrative of later events in Nicomedia represents the report of an eyewitness. Lactantius (it is commonly and perhaps correctly supposed) was there, not only when Diocletian abdicated on 1 May 305 (*Mort. Pers.* 35), but also when Galerius' edict of toleration was posted there on 30 April 311 (35, 1) and when Licinius ordered the publication of a letter on 13 June 313 (48, 1).¹²⁹ However, the validity of the inference may awake doubt or scepticism when it is applied to events outside Nicomedia. From the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* alone, it has been deduced that Lactantius may have been also in Gaul in 310 (29, 3 ff.),¹³⁰ and in Serdica in 311 and perhaps early 313 (33; 45 ff.).¹³¹ With equal plausibility, he might be supposed to have accompanied Constantine in Italy in 312 (43 f.).¹³² Not all of these deductions are likely to be valid, and the vividness of the narrative may come from Lactantius' rhetorical skill rather than autopsy.¹³³ Since he could discover and question eye-witnesses of most of the events which he describes, the narrative need not reveal anything about his movements.

Lactantius left Bithynia not long after 305, and wrote at least part of his *Divinae Institutiones* elsewhere.¹³⁴ Neither the date nor the place can be specified exactly, but a reference to persecution should indicate that he was writing before April 311, perhaps in the territory of Constantine.¹³⁵ In 311 Lactantius may have returned to Bithynia, since he reproduces the texts of the edict of Galerius and letter of Licinius which were published in Nicomedia (*Mort. Pers.* 35; 48). Yet he could have acquired copies from friends there, or even from the recipient of the work: the only evidence outside the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* shows him still (or again) in the west a little later, as the tutor to Crispus Caesar.¹³⁶

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

¹²⁵ For the details, F. Corsaro, *Lactantiana* (1970), 6 ff.

¹²⁶ R. Pichon, *Lactance. Étude sur le mouvement philosophique et religieux sous le règne de Constantin* (1901), 337 ff. In a review, S. Brandt conceded the case (*Berl. phil. Wochenschr.* xxiii (1903), 1257).

¹²⁷ Note the half-hearted attempt at disproof by J. W. P. Borleffs, *Mnemosyne*, N. S. lviii (1930), 223 ff. Most of the facts there adduced favour authenticity rather than the reverse, cf. J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 25 ff.

¹²⁸ *Div. Inst.* v, 2, 2; 11, 15.

¹²⁹ Harnack, o.c. 417; Schanz-Hosius, o.c. 428. B. Altaner–A. Stuiber, *Patrologie*⁷ (1966), 185 state that he remained there continuously until c. 317.

¹³⁰ Pichon, o.c. 359.

¹³¹ H. J. Lawlor, *Eusebiana* (1912), 242.

¹³² So Pichon playfully suggested (o.c. 358 f.). Lawlor advanced the same hypothesis seriously (o.c. 241), and a written source was invoked by K. Roller, *Die Kaisergeschichte in Laktanz 'de mortibus persecutorum'* (Diss. Giessen, 1927), 12 ff.

¹³³ Even the apparently explicit claim 'vidimus' need not always prove autopsy, cf. *Tertullian* (1971), 245 f.

¹³⁴ *Div. Inst.* v, 2, 2: 'ego cum in Bithynia oratorias litteras accitus docerem . . . , duo extiterunt ibidem . . .'

¹³⁵ *Div. Inst.* vi, 17, 6: 'spectatae sunt enim semper spectanturque adhuc per orbem poenae cultorum dei.' A serious problem is posed by passages not included in all mss., particularly two long invocations of Constantine (i, 1, 13 ff.; vii, 26, 11 ff.). Three, and only three, solutions can be devised. Either the passages are interpolations (S. Brandt, *Sb. Wien cxviii*, 8 (1889); cxix, 1 (1889)—retracted in *Berl. Phil. Wochenschr.* xxiii (1903), 1225), or they belong to a second edition of the work by Lactantius himself (A. Pignaniol, *Rev. d'hist. et de phil. rel.* xii (1932), 368 f., dated i, 1, 13 ff. to 322 or 323, vii, 26, 11 ff. to the period between Licinius' defeat and his execution), or they originally stood in the sole edition which Lactantius published and were expunged by another hand (Pichon, o.c. 4 ff.).

¹³⁶ Jerome, *Chronicle*, under A.D. 317 (*GCS* xlvi, 230), *De Vir. Ill.* 80. Since Jerome merely appends the notice to Crispus' investiture as Caesar in 317, his date has no authority. Pichon argued that Lactantius left Nicomedia for Gaul, never to return, between 306 and 308 (o.c. 356 ff.).

envisaged? He states that he writes so that all who were afar off and all who shall come after may know how God showed his excellence and majesty in destroying the enemies of his name (1, 7). Moreover, he was writing primarily, if not exclusively, for Christians: contrary to the practice of his apologetical writings, he uses specifically Christian terminology.¹³⁷ A double purpose may thus be detected. Lactantius had contacts enough to be able to inform himself about contemporary happenings in both East and West. Since few were in such a position, his work probably contained something new for Christians everywhere. It is thus misleading to view Lactantius either as intent on informing Christians in the Western Empire of Licinius' virtues or as circulating Constantine's version of events among the subjects of Licinius. Lactantius was writing at a time when he could attempt to portray Constantine and Licinius with relative accuracy for an audience which embraced the subjects of both.¹³⁸ On the correct chronology, it becomes possible to consider him more as an impartial witness to the policies of the later rivals than as a propagandist for either.

V. CONSTANTINIAN PROPAGANDA

Lactantius' relationship to Constantine has often been misunderstood. If the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* were written c. 318-320, then Lactantius was surely disseminating an official version of events acceptable in Constantinian circles at that time,¹³⁹ he omitted the war between Constantine and Licinius at the emperor's express command,¹⁴⁰ and some of his information came from Constantine in person.¹⁴¹ An earlier date for the work will clearly require such hypotheses to be either reformulated or discarded.¹⁴² Lactantius' treatment of Maximian and Maxentius discountenances the idea that he was closely following changes in official attitudes.

Constantine had (in 307) allied himself with Maxentius and Maximian: he married Fausta, the daughter of the latter (*Mort. Pers.* 27, 1), and was invested by him as Augustus.¹⁴³ Later, after the Conference of Carnuntum had finally forced him to retire (November 308), Maximian attempted to seize power from Constantine by occupying Massilia, failed and was allowed (or compelled) to commit suicide (early 310).¹⁴⁴ The explanation which found immediate official favour represented the episode as a family tragedy: the ungrateful Maximian sinned by fate or fortune, then perceived that he did not deserve to live and met an entirely voluntary death.¹⁴⁵ Soon, however, Maxentius was waging war on Constantine as if to avenge his father (*Mort. Pers.* 43, 4). Constantine therefore ordered the condemnation of Maximian's memory (311 or 312) and a second plot was revealed. After failure at Massilia and pardon, Maximian had tried to murder his son-in-law with his own hand: forewarned of the impending attempt by Fausta, whom her father urged to betrayal, Constantine placed a eunuch in his bed and apprehended Maximian after he killed the substitute. The old man was allowed to choose how to die and hanged himself (*Mort. Pers.* 30, 1 ff.). This

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

¹³⁸ For the extent of knowledge of Latin in the East, see the works cited by W. Christ-W. Schmid-O. Stählin, *Gesch. d. griech. Litt.* ii⁶ (1924), 945 f.; 960 f.; E. Stein, *Historie du Bas-empire* i² (1958), 500 f. Observe that the town of Orcistes, on the borders of Galatia and Phrygia, petitioned Constantine in Latin (*MAMA* vii, 305).

¹³⁹ A. Piganiol, *L'empereur Constantin* (1932), 48; J. Moreau, *Scripta minora* (1964), 115.

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

¹⁴¹ J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 44.

¹⁴² On the possibility of reformulation, note J.-R. Palanque, *Mél. Carcopino* (1966), 715 f.

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

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

¹⁴⁵ *Pan. Lat.* vi (vii), 14, 3 ff.; 20, 3 ff. The speech was delivered in 310, on the 'natalis dies' of Trier (22, 4).

story shows clear signs of being invented during Constantine's war against Maxentius.¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, it was officially ignored: Maximian soon became Divus Maximianus and the grandfather of Constantine's sons.¹⁴⁷

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

ubi sunt modo magna illa et clara per gentes Ioviorum et Herculiorum cognomina, quae primum a Dioclete et Maximiano insolenter adsumpta et postmodum ad successores eorum translata vigerunt (52, 3)?

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

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

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

¹⁴⁷p. 35. For a slightly different hypothesis of two successive stories, cf. A. Maddalena, *Atti Ist. Veneto* xciv, 2 (1934/5), 575.

¹⁴⁸An important distinction, cf. Moreau, o.c. 44 ff.

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

¹⁵⁰Which was, presumably, the legal basis of

Constantine's claim, ratified by the Senate in November 312, to be the senior emperor (*Mort. Pers.* 44, 11).

¹⁵¹Maximian's relations with the Roman Senate are not discussed in M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (1972).

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

¹⁵³Above, n. 54.

¹⁵⁴Impossible, therefore, to suppose that 'un des objectifs de Lactance... était de justifier l'attitude de Constantin à l'égard de Maximien' (Moreau, o.c. 366).

¹⁵⁵p. 34 f.

¹⁵⁶*Pan. Lat.* xii (ix), 3, 6; 4, 3 ff.; Eusebius, *HE* viii, 14, 2 ff. On the conventional nature of the charges, cf. J. Ziegler, *Zur religiösen Haltung der Gegenkaiser im 4. Jh. n. Chr.* Frankfurter Alt-historische Studien iv (1970), 9 ff.; 35 ff.

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

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

VI CONSTANTINE AND THE CHRISTIANS

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

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

Lactantius presents a clear and almost unambiguous account of how the persecuting edicts of Diocletian were enforced by different emperors, and how the Christians gained freedom from molestation in one part of the empire after another. Galerius was the moving force and cowed the senile Diocletian into executing his wishes (*Mort. Pers.* 10, 6 ff.).¹⁶¹ Letters were sent to Maximian and Constantius bidding them take similar action: in Italy Maximian gladly obeyed, but in Gaul Constantius frustrated the intentions of his colleagues by allowing churches to be destroyed but preserving unharmed God's true temple in men's hearts (15, 6 f.). When Diocletian abdicated, Galerius was then able to practise on all the savage tortures he had learnt to apply to Christians (22, 1). But God's judgement was drawing near, and Galerius' position began to be threatened when Constantius died (24, 1). On his death, Constantine was proclaimed Augustus, and immediately allowed the Christians to worship God—a step which Lactantius clearly regards as something more than a mere continuation or reaffirmation of his father's policy (24, 8 f.).¹⁶³

In the subsequent narrative, Lactantius marks several more steps in the deliverance of the Christians. The dying Galerius issued an edict of toleration in the name of all the emperors (i.e. himself, Maximinus, Constantine and Licinius), which was published in Nicomedia on 30 April 311 (33, 11 ff.; 36, 3) and in the other cities of the east.¹⁶⁴ But Maximinus, who had been harriving Christians in Syria and

¹⁵⁷ *ILS* 687 ff.; *RIC* vi, 387 nos. 303/4: LIBERATORI URBS SUAE.

¹⁵⁸ In fact, a full sister (*Epit. de Caes.* 40, 12).

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

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

¹⁶¹ For discussion of the real role of Galerius, see N. H. Baynes, *CQ* xviii (1924), 192 f.; M. Gelzer, *Vom Wesen und Wandel der Kirche. Festschrift E. Vischer* (1935), 35 ff. = *Kl. Schr.* ii (1963), 378 ff.; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *HTR* xlvii (1954), 108 f.

¹⁶² On the enforcement of the various edicts (four

in number) in different areas, see de Ste. Croix, o.c. 75 ff. This fundamental study appears to be unknown to a recent writer on the subject (J. Molthagen, *Der römische Staat und die Christen im zweiten und dritten Jahrhundert*, Hypomnemata xxviii (1970), 101 ff.).

¹⁶³ H. Kraft, *Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung* (1955), 7.

¹⁶⁴ For a Greek translation, with the names and titles of the emperors (except Maximinus), see Eusebius, *HE* viii, 17, 3 ff. It is not a necessary deduction from Eusebius' 'ἠπλωτο κατὰ πόλεις βασιλικά διατάγματα' (ib. 2) that the edict was published in the territory of either Maxentius or Constantine.

Egypt, at once occupied Asia Minor and introduced the same policies there, though later compelled by a letter of Constantine to resort to subterfuge (36, 1 ff.). Two years later, however, when Licinius defeated Maximinus, he guaranteed religious liberty to all his subjects and restored the Church in Asia and later (a fact only implied by Lactantius) in Syria and Egypt (48, 1 ff.).¹⁶⁵

On Lactantius' showing, the Christians gained freedom in several distinct stages: first, in Gaul and Britain (306), then in the Balkan lands (311), and finally throughout the East (313). The only uncertainty left by Lactantius concerns Italy and Africa, which were ruled by Maxentius until 312,¹⁶⁶ and Spain, about whose allegiance in these years there seems to exist no explicit evidence.¹⁶⁷ The explanation for this apparent uncertainty can easily be discerned. Lactantius, who makes no statement whatever about Maxentius' attitude toward the Christians, has deliberately omitted his actions in their favour. Maxentius (it is known) put an end to persecution in Africa (perhaps as early as 307),¹⁶⁸ and ordered the Prefect of the City of Rome to aid the Christians in recovering what had been taken from them during the persecution.¹⁶⁹

Lactantius' picture is reproduced in very few modern accounts of the period, and some lengthy books on Constantine disdain to mention what Lactantius asserts to be his first act as emperor.¹⁷⁰ Instead, the edict of Galerius is presented as the first occasion on which the illegality of being a Christian was 'explicitly revoked' by 'direct imperial enactment'.¹⁷¹ Alternatively, 'the very famous "Edict of Milan" . . . marks the decisive turning point in the history of the relations between the Church and the State'.¹⁷² And even those who perceive that Lactantius' account not only fails to mention an 'Edict of Milan',¹⁷³ but also renders it impossible to suppose that Constantine and Licinius needed to promulgate any edict ordaining toleration in their own territories as late as 313, incline to keep the term for its symbolic value.¹⁷⁴ But on what basis has Lactantius' express testimony been discarded? It will be wise to review the arguments advanced with some care.

Two statements of Lactantius are at issue: that Constantine restored religious liberty in 306 (*Mort. Pers.* 24, 9), and that he wrote to Maximinus in 311 discouraging him from persecution (37, 1). Lactantius (it is argued or assumed) has antedated the letter: he refers in fact to a letter which Constantine wrote to Maximinus after the battle of the Milvian Bridge (cf. 44, 11),¹⁷⁵ or to the 'most perfect law' which Constantine and Licinius communicated to Maximinus at the same time,¹⁷⁶ and which should accordingly be identical with the letter.¹⁷⁷ Apparent disproof of Constantine's earlier action comes from Africa: the Donatist bishops (it is contended) were totally

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

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

¹⁶⁷ R. Grosse, *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* viii: *Las fuentes desde César hasta el siglo v d. de J. C.* (1959), 55 f., cites only alleged coins of Tarraco, which were in fact minted at Ticinum (C. H. V. Sutherland, *RIC* vi, 6 f.; 266 ff). It thus becomes possible to draw the obvious deduction from the absence of any mention of Spain in *Pan. Lat.* xii (ix): Constantine ruled the peninsula from 306 in succession to his father (cf. E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* i² (1958), 435 f.).

¹⁶⁸ Optatus, i, 18. Usually dated to 311, as by H. von Schoenebeck, *Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius und Constantin. Klio*, Beiheft xliii (1938), 4 ff. But Eusebius states explicitly that Maxentius began by pretending to be a Christian (*HE* viii, 14, 1, cf. *Mart. Pal.* 13, 12).

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

¹⁷⁰ e.g. H. Dörries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins. Abh. Göttingen*, Phil.-hist. Kl.³ xxxiv

(1954). Nor is there any discussion of *Mort. Pers.* 24, 9 in the article 'Constantinus der Grosse', by J. Vogt, *RAC* iii (1957), 306-379.

¹⁷¹ N. H. Baynes, *CAH* xii (1939), 671.

¹⁷² F. Lot, *The End of the Ancient World* (trans. P. and M. Leon, 1931), 28.

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

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

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

¹⁷⁶ J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 404 ff.

¹⁷⁷ Eusebius, *HE* ix, 9, 12; 9a, 12. In favour of identifying the letter implied by *Mort. Pers.* 44, 11 and the 'νόμος τελεώτατος', N. H. Baynes, *CQ* xviii (1924), 193 f.

unaware of it when they appealed to Constantine, and in 314 the legal basis of the Christians' position in Africa was the edict of Galerius, not the alleged enactment of Constantine.¹⁷⁸ However, the first argument rests on the false premiss that Lactantius consistently echoes Constantinian propaganda. If he wrote c. 314, then the alleged anachronism could only be a deliberate and implausible distortion. For, on Lactantius's showing, Maximinus was preparing to introduce open persecution of Christians into his newly conquered domains in Asia Minor, when he was deterred by the letter of Constantine and therefore resorted to subterfuge (36, 6; 37, 1). Further, the letter precedes the account of Maximinus' crimes (37, 1 ff.). The narrative thus unambiguously implies a date in summer or autumn 311. The second argument (it may be maintained) relies upon evidence which should be otherwise interpreted.

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

rogamus te, Constantine optime imperator-quoniam de genere iusto es, cuius pater inter ceteros imperatores persecutionem non exercuit, et ab hoc facinore immunis est Gallia, nam in Africa inter nos et ceteros episcopos contentiones sunt—petimus, ut de Gallia nobis iudices dari praecipiat pietas tua. datae a Luciano, Digno, Nasutio, Capitone, Fidentio *et ceteris episcopis partis Donati* (i, 22).¹⁷⁹

Since the Donatist bishops mention only Constantius' favourable behaviour to the Christians, then it might seem that Constantine himself has so far done nothing comparable.¹⁸⁰ Such an argument, however, assumes that Optatus quotes the petition in full,¹⁸¹ and that 'hoc facinore' refers to persecution. Neither assumption is correct. For the crucial clause means 'and Gaul is immune from this crime', and thus refers to a present (not a past) occurrence:¹⁸² hence the crime should be dissension among Christians, and the demonstrative refers back to an earlier clause which Optatus does not quote. In order to interpret the crime as being persecution, the wording of the petition has not always been properly respected: one English translation blandly transposes the order of the clauses,¹⁸³ another takes 'nam' as lacking any reference whatever to what precedes ('whereas there are disputes . . . , we pray . . .'),¹⁸⁴ while a third omits the embarrassing 'nam' and renders the present tense 'immunis est' by the past 'remained free'.¹⁸⁵ If Optatus is not quoting the full text of the petition, then the Donatists' words can be allowed their natural meaning, and cease to prove that Constantine had so far done nothing to benefit the Christians. The conclusion ought not to surprise. For in his reply Constantine angrily objected to the appeal: 'You seek judgement from me on earth, when I myself expect the judgement of Christ.'¹⁸⁶ He had already, therefore, begun openly to declare himself a Christian.¹⁸⁷

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

Aelianus proconsul dixit: <Constantinus> Maximus semper Augustus et Licinius Caesar<es> ita pietatem Christianis exhibere dignantur, ut disciplinam corrumpi nolint, sed potius observari religionem istam et coli velint. noli itaque tibi blandiri, quod cum mihi dicas dei cultorem te esse [ac] propterea non possis torqueri. torqueris, ne mentiaris, quod alienum Christianis esse videtur. et ideo dic simpliciter, ne torquearis. Ingentius dixit: iam confessus sum sine tormento (Optatus, App. ii).¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁸ J. Moreau, *Scripta minora* (1964), 121 f.

¹⁷⁹ *CSEL* xxvi, 25 f. The words 'et ceteris episcopis partis Donati' are Optatus' summary of an originally longer list, cf. L. Duchesne, *Mél. d'arch. et d'hist.* x (1890), 608 f.

¹⁸⁰ H. Grégoire, *Byzantion* vii (1932), 650.

¹⁸¹ As Duchesne unequivocally asserted (o.c. 598; 608).

¹⁸² So it is apparently taken by A. Piganiol, *L'empereur Constantin* (1932), 101.

¹⁸³ O. R. Vassall-Phillips, *The Work of St. Optatus* (1917), 43: 'we beseech . . . that we be granted judges from Gaul; for between us and other Bishops in Africa disputes have arisen'.

¹⁸⁴ A. H. M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (1948), 104. 'Nam' is a coordinating, not a subordinating conjunction, cf.

Leumann — Hofmann — Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik* ii (1965), 504 ff.

¹⁸⁵ W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (1952), 147. Similarly, Grégoire has 'la Gaule est restée indemne', with 'donc' for 'nam' (o.c. 650).

¹⁸⁶ Optatus ii, 23 (*CSEL* xxvi, 26): 'quibus (i.e. the petition) lectis Constantinus pleno livore respondit. in qua responsione et eorum preces prodidit dum ait: petitis a me in saeculo iudicium, cum ego ipse Christi iudicium expectem.'

¹⁸⁷ The document quoted by Optatus can be identified as one of the two *libelli* which the proconsul of Africa forwarded to Constantine on 15 April 313 (Augustine, *Epp.* lxxxviii, 2).

¹⁸⁸ M. J. Routh, *Reliquiae Sacrae*² iv (1846), 293; *CSEL* xxvi, 203. 5 ff.

The apparent allusion to a phrase in Galerius' edict (*Mort. Pers.* 34, 4: 'denuo sint Christiani . . . ita ut ne quid contra disciplinam agant') has been judged to show that in 314 in Africa this edict was the only legal basis of the Christians' position.¹⁸⁹ The deduction does not follow from the evidence. Respect for 'disciplina' is a principle so rooted in Roman law and Roman attitudes that no specific reference to Galerius' edict need be supposed.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the proconsul is not telling Ingentius the law as it concerns Christians, but stating imperial policy on the use of torture. Although Constantine and Licinius (he explains) show respect for Christians, they do not intend Christians to be absolved from observing either normal proprieties or the moral standards expected of Christians. Thus it is reasonable for Ingentius to be tortured, since he is suspected of perjury. No cause or justification, therefore, for inferring from Aelianus' words either that Galerius' edict was in force,¹⁹¹ or that it had been superseded,¹⁹² or that it had ever been promulgated in Africa. For, in Africa, persecution had been formally ended by Maxentius, who also ordered restitution of church property.¹⁹³ Constantine needed to reiterate the latter ordinance, since its terms had not been completely fulfilled.¹⁹⁴ But he did not need to re-enact freedom of worship for the Christians of Africa. Only those acts of Maxentius were rescinded which offended the canons of justice: the rest simply continued in force, or were perhaps confirmed if challenged.¹⁹⁵

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

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

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

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

¹⁹¹ J. Moreau, *Lactance* (1954), 405, assumes that Galerius' edict automatically replaced Maxentius' legislation relating to Christians.

¹⁹² i.e. by the 'Edict of Milan', as argued by P. Batiffol, *La paix constantinienne et le catholicisme* (1914), 240.

¹⁹³ p. 44.

¹⁹⁴ Note the emphasis on speed in the letter to Anullinus: Eusebius, *HE* x, 5, 15 ff.

¹⁹⁵ Constantine enunciated the principle clearly: 'tyranni et iudicium eius gestis infirmatis nemo per calumniam velit quod sponte ipse fecit evertere nec quod legitime gestum est' (*CTh* xv, 14, 2); 'quae tyrannus contra ius rescriptis non valere praecipimus, legitimis eius rescriptis minime impugnandis' (*CTh* xv, 14, 3). These two laws bear the dates 12 February 325 and 8 July 326, but the latter should be redated to 6 January 313, and thus refers to Maxentius (O. Seeck, *Regesten* (1919), 64 f.; 160).