

DIOCLETIAN AND THE GOTHES

PETER BRENNAN

THE HISTORY OF RELATIONS between Romans and Goths under Diocletian is bedevilled by the vagaries of the title *Gothicus* intermittently appearing or restored in several imperial titulatures, and used or ignored without argument. A recent magisterial reference work on the period ignores the title.¹ That, implying that Diocletian never assumed it, may be the right solution. It will not satisfy those who have accepted the title, while the impressive wealth of evidence for it remains unsifted. And even when the count of instances is reduced to its proper weight, the title *Gothicus* will not quite go away.

Neither Diocletian nor Galerius wished to record the title *Gothicus* in any titlature from the time of the Currency Edict by September 301.² The significance of that omission should not be denied by turning the title *Carpicus*, which always appears in these titulatures, into an equivalent of *Gothicus*,³ an expedient both improbable and unnecessary. For one thing, no instance, or restored instance, of *Gothicus* occupies the place in the order of titles otherwise occupied by *Carpicus*. More important, although equivalent and interchangeable titles sometimes occur, where one is ethnic and the other geographical (e.g., *Persicus* and *Cappadocius*: *ILS* 8942 and 696), Gothi and Carpi were recognised by Rome as separate peoples in titulatures that record both titles.⁴ The only reason for proposing their equivalence in tetrarchic titulatures is the interpretation of *Gothicus* in a Constantinian titlature of 315 (*ILS* 695 [Sitifis]) as a reference to the sixth Carpic title won by Galerius.⁵ But *Gothicus* here, as on parallel African inscriptions of

¹T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1982) = hereafter Barnes, *New Empire*; what follows accepts and builds on the general principles for imperial titlature established by Barnes' articles, and now his book; my debt to Barnes is obvious and enormous, despite disagreements on detail. For a brief review of attitudes to a Diocletianic Gothic title, see J. D. Thomas, *Ancient Society* 7 (1976) 301–303.

²*AE* 1973.526; for this and later documents, Barnes, *New Empire* 17 ff.

³T. D. Barnes, *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 187, n. 53, citing inscriptions discussed by J. Kolendo, *Eirene* 6 (1966) 139 ff.; it is hard to see how these inscriptions, a fragmentary one with *Gothicus* and two with neither *Gothicus* nor *Carpicus*, establish the equivalence of the two titles.

⁴E.g., Aurelian's titles, see P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraka et les inscriptions d'Égypte* (Brussels 1964) 123; *CIL* 6.1112.

⁵T. D. Barnes, *ZPE* 20 (1976) 149 f. and *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 192.

315 and 318 (*ILS* 8942 [Semta] and 696 [Sitifs]), relates instead to a Gothic title taken by Licinius by early 315.⁶ Although this war goes unrecorded in the literary sources, the reconstruction at Tropaeum Traiani in 314/316 (*ILS* 8938) hints at it. One should not be surprised to find Gothic raids more serious than usual at this time across a lower Danubian frontier weakened by the traditional detaching of troops to the eastern war which is implied by the string of eastern titles preceding *Gothicus* in these inscriptions. Licinius will have fought a war on his return.

Since Diocletian late in his reign did not wish to advertise a victory won over Goths, what is the evidence that he ever assumed the title *Gothicus*? It occurs once certainly (*AE* 1936.10) and is restored in three other titulatures (*PThead* 2.2; *CIL* 8.7003 and 21447–49); the titles in *POxy* 889 have now been properly ascribed to Constantine.⁷ The restorations are of dubious significance. *PThead* 2.2 incorporates an imperial letter of 306 in which the most recent editor, surely correctly, restores the fragmentary title as *Armenicus*, the only title here omitted from the standard titles used in the period 301/306; it is better to restore a misplaced *Armenicus* than *Gothicus*, which would be unique to titulatures of this period.⁸ The fragmentary title in *CIL* 8.7003 = *ILAlg* 2.579 (Cirta),⁹ whatever its original reading (and there is no adequate criterion for restoration), is part of a titlature impossible to relate to the known realities of imperial victories; arbitrary in its order of titles in placing a Persian before a Sarmatian victory, it may be equally arbitrary in its selection of titles from the established stock. *CIL* 8.21447–49 (Gunugu) reassembles three fragments into the titlature: *G[ermanico maximo G]otico maximo [Sarma]tico maximo Brit[tanico maximo]*. One cannot give much credence to a titlature of 297 that both places a Gothic victory before a Sarmatian one and omits *Persicus* (certainly taken by then). Nor is the restoration above suspicion, for the emendation of two letters, each at the edge of broken and scabrous fragments, would remove all anomalies and produce an unexceptional titlature for early 297:

⁶T. D. Barnes, *ZPE* 20 (1976) 154, elucidates these inscriptions and draws attention to Licinius' Gothic victory title; he does not relate it to *Gothicus* in *ILS* 695. The Constantinian Gothic title of 324 (*POxy* 889, as corrected, see next note) should also refer to Licinius' victory.

⁷T. D. Barnes, *ZPE* 21 (1976) 279–281 and *New Empire* 234–237; J. S. Thomas, *Ancient Society* 7 (1976) 301 ff.

⁸W. Ensslin, *SBMunich* 1942.1 18 f., restored *Gothicus* where the original *PThead* 2.2 restored *Parthicus*; neither fits the letter traces or the space allocation indicated by the editor. G. M. Parassoglou, *The Archive of Aurelius Sakaon* (Bonn 1978) 149, no. 59, restored the more appropriate *Armenicus* from a photograph (not printed) without explaining his different letter traces.

⁹Again Ensslin (above, n. 8) restored *Gothicus* instead of an originally suggested *Parthicus*.

*G[ermanico maximo Sarm]atico maximo [Per]sico maximo Brit[tanico maximo].*¹⁰

In short, none of these texts, whose restorations are dubious, and whose idiosyncrasies betray ignorance or whim, would compel the conclusion that Diocletian officially assumed a Gothic title. The text from Durostorum on the Gothic front (*AE* 1936.10) is not so easily dismissed. The title may be due to error,¹¹ an always available explanation of a unique instance, or to local indulgence, but it may also record a campaign, and perhaps an actual title. The text does not emanate from the emperor, but it does seem to come from the bureaucracy,¹² and a context can be found within the known events of the 290s for Diocletian to have fought the Goths, taken a Gothic title, and later let it lapse.

The earliest date for the assumption of such a title is 292, for a panegyrist, well-informed at the end of 291 on military activities of Diocletian to that date, does not mention Roman-Gothic warfare (*Pan.Lat.* 11[3].17). If all but the intrusive *Gothicus* in the fragmentary Durostorum titulature (*AE* 1936.10) is in accord with the standard formula, then the Gothic title must precede the Persian title assumed by 296 (i.e., before *Brittanicus*). Since neither Diocletian nor Galerius was on the Danube from November 294, and the Persian title must antedate their return, a Gothic war must be earlier.¹³ Granted our ignorance of Diocletian's movements in 292, a closer date within the limits of 292–294 cannot be properly tested, but it should be noted that Diocletian, after accompanying his new Caesar to Byzantium, returned quickly (and perhaps unexpectedly—why had he gone to Byzantium?) to a puzzling itinerary around Thrace and the lower Danube in late spring and summer of 293. Had Gothic raiders seized the opportunity offered by the departure of both emperors and parts of the lower Danubian army?¹⁴ And had Diocletian returned to drive them out of the Empire, even to mount a hot pursuit across the Danube? An imperial salutation might have accrued.

Any Gothic title was dropped before the assumption of the title *Carpicus*, won for a victory known in distant Gaul by 1 March 297 (*Pan.Lat.*

¹⁰A corollary of this emended text of 297 omitting *Carpicus* is to date the Carpic war to winter 296/7 (note also *Pan.Lat.* 8[5].5.2 of 1 March 297: *proxima illa ruina Carporum*) rather than to summer/autumn 296 (see Barnes, *New Empire* 54).

¹¹So I. I. Russu in first publishing the text (*AISC* 2 [1933–1935] 210 f.) according to Kolendo (above, n. 3) 146, who, like others (see A. Arnaldi, *RIL* 106 [1972] 36 n. 33), was unduly impressed by the count and the apparent weight of the accumulating evidence.

¹²See Kolendo (above n. 3).

¹³For the movements of Diocletian and Galerius in this period, see Barnes, *New Empire* 52 ff., 162 ff.

¹⁴The lower Danubian legionary detachments in Egypt in January 295 (*POxy* 43 recto) will have gone with Galerius in 293; perhaps the two cohorts of *legio II Herculia* which went to Africa with Maximian in 296/7 (*CIL* 8.8440) were also detached at this time.

8[5].5.2). That is implied by two lower Danubian inscriptions whose titulatures have neither *Gothicus* nor *Carpicus*.¹⁵ The omission of *Carpicus* seems more significant than the iteration of the title *Persicus*, which appears on the one of these inscriptions that is extant—and one element must be wrong, since they provide chronologically incompatible dates. Even if the numeral is read correctly, and it comes where two stone fragments join, erroneous iteration is paralleled;¹⁶ and if *Persicus II* was meant, one would also have expected the string of titles (*Armenicus Medicus Adiabenicus*) normally associated with it, and here lacking.

A context can be suggested for dropping *Gothicus* in 296/7. In 296 Rome suffered a serious reverse in the East. Galerius returned to the Danube to collect reinforcements from the Danubian armies.¹⁷ He also collected military help from the Goths (Jord. *Get.* 110). That presumes negotiations with major Gothic authorities, not mere raiding bands, and a diplomatic agreement. The careful words of the panegyrist of 1 March 297 (*Pan.Lat.* 8[5].10.4), *submittente se Gotho pace poscenda*, which contrast strikingly with those stressing actual warfare against other peoples, *cum totiens proculcata esset Alamannia, totiens obstricta Sarmatia, Iuthungi Quadi Carpi totiens profligati*, fit such an agreement, naturally interpreted in the context of panegyric as a Gothic defeat. The reality was different. It was traditional Roman policy to shore up diplomatic agreements on one front while waging major warfare on another; as well, in this instance there is good reason to believe that the troops taken from the lower Danubian armies were to remain in the East as an essential part of a projected Roman military reorganisation there after the expected Roman victory. That hypothesis cannot be argued here (and will appear in another article in preparation), but it would give greater weight to Rome's need to come to an agreement with the Goths. Rome may have dropped the title *Gothicus* as an easy earnest of its good intentions. The niceties of Roman-Gothic diplomatic exchange remain a secret, but the assumption of such a title, particularly if it celebrated a victory won over mere raiding bands, may have rankled with the Gothic leaders, particularly if it had been accompanied by a repudiation of an agreement that had governed Roman-Gothic relations since Aurelian (Amm. Marc. 31.5.17). Rome could have accommodated them, for victory titles were not, apparently, sacrosanct. Constantine was to drop *Britannicus*.¹⁸

So, what of Diocletian and the Goths? According to Ammianus (31.5.17), from their repulse in the time of Aurelian the Goths (as distinct

¹⁵CIL 3:6151 with p. 1349; J. Kolendo (above, n. 3). Kolendo preferred to regard the iteration of *Persicus* as more significant than the omission of *Carpicus*, and thus dated them after 297.

¹⁶E.g., AE 1958.190 (*Armenicus II* in a title of 304/5).

¹⁷Victor *Caes.* 39.34; Eutrop. *Brev.* 9.24; Festus *Brev.* 25; Julian *Or.* 1.18B.

¹⁸The title appears in two inscriptions only, see T. D. Barnes, *ZPE* 20 (1976) 149 ff.

from individual Gothic raiding bands, who did cross into the Roman Empire, but rarely and to their own destruction) had remained quiet *per longa saecula*. This description clearly fits the reign of Diocletian. There was no major Roman-Gothic warfare before 292. The Goths were heavily involved with their barbarian neighbours (*Pan.Lat.* 11[3].17) and Roman attention was focussed on other fronts.¹⁹ Diocletian may have won a victory over Goths, probably marauding bands, between 292 and 294, and assumed an official Gothic title, or had one assumed for him by local authorities on the Gothic front for morale-boosting purposes. In either case it represented in fact, whatever its portent at the time of its assumption, at most a brief interruption of the good relations between Rome and the Goths. By 296/7 more immediate, and more serious, military needs on the eastern front led Rome to negotiate or to renegotiate a diplomatic agreement with the Gothic authorities. That agreement remained the underlying condition of Roman-Gothic relations until Constantine repudiated it and took the attack into Gothic lands (*Eus. VC* 4.5, *Socr. HE* 1.18). It could not prevent occasional raids,²⁰ particularly when civil disharmony and more pressing military priorities turned Roman attention elsewhere, but it minimized the Gothic threat as a whole and it provided the Roman emperors with military assistance on a number of occasions. The Goths, too, will have enjoyed the relative freedom it gave them to pursue their own objectives elsewhere²¹—and the subsidies. The title *Gothicus*, even if official, was no more than a temporary interlude in normal Roman-Gothic relations under Diocletian.

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¹⁹T. D. Barnes, *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 175 ff.; P. Brennan, *Chiron* 10 (1980) 563 f.

²⁰Such as the Gothic actions before February 303 alluded to by Lactantius (*Mort.Pers.* 13.2), but there was no victory title; no emperor may have taken the field.

²¹For Gothic interests outside the Roman Empire, see H. Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten* (Munich 1979) 57 ff.