

**Primary Source:** *Lactantius, De Mortibus Persecutorum, ed. and trans. J.L. Creed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) pp. 11–13*

*On the Death of the Persecutors* is a historical account written by the Christian author Lactantius after the year 316 CE. He was motivated by his personal hatred of Diocletian's regime as he suffered under the Christian persecutions instated by the empire at this time. This hatred of the emperor is thinly veiled within the source, presenting an incredible amount of bias that readers must be aware of while interpreting his work. With that bias under consideration, Lactantius' writing in this context can be transformed into a simple list of major changes that were applied to the emperor as part of Diocletian's regime. This list of events can be treated as a good starting point for understanding this period of the Roman Empire.

The first historical event that Lactantius refers to is the formation of the Tetrarchy and the changes that this brings to military and administrative structure. This is directly referred to in the text as he describes how Diocletian "appointed three men to share his rule, dividing the world into four parts." The following lines of the source describe how the total size of the Roman army increased in this period, with more soldiers being drawn from the populace to keep each of the four sections of the empire secure. Lactantius sees this change in military structure as a negative thing for Rome, claiming that farmer's fields lay barren due to the strain of the increased military requisitions. Additionally, provinces of Rome were cut further down into smaller fragments, with an increased number of governors and officials being assigned to administrate these areas. Lactantius claims that the people assigned to these new administrative duties engaged in "repeated condemnations and confiscations" and incessant exactions of resources. This can be interpreted as an increase of bureaucracy and accountability on the citizens of the empire. Lactantius' account of these events are significant for understanding the changing political and

military landscape that came along with the creation of the Tetrarchy and how they affected regular people within the empire.

The second section of the source considers the Roman economic reforms imposed by Diocletian. Lactantius claims that these changes are due to "Diocletian with his insatiable greed" and that they caused rapid inflation on the prices of all goods in the empire. The rest of this part of the source discusses *The Edict of Diocletian on Maximum Prices* as the emperor attempted to define the price of every item in the empire put up for sale. Diocletian attributes the rise of prices to be due to the greed of merchants, hoping that prices would have settled to their natural level without any governmental interference (Michell, p. 37). Lactantius reports an increase in violence caused by this edict. This bloodshed continues until the edict is repealed due to the number of deaths caused by angry mobs of would-be purchasers incidentally killing merchants not following the edict (Michell, p. 39). This section of the source is an important resource for understanding the basic economic reforms established by Diocletian at this time in the Roman empire.

The final section of Lactantius' account of Diocletian and this period of the empire regards the emperor's "limitless passion for building." This can be understood as an increase in monumental architecture during this period in an attempt to portray the empire as powerful and bolster the economy. Lactantius again claims that Diocletian has purely selfish reasons for this, scouring the provinces to construct houses for his wife and daughter. However one can interpret these building projects as a positive for the empire, providing jobs to workers, craftsmen, wagons, and other necessary components for building. The resulting basilicas, circuses, mints, arms-factories, and housing are beneficial to Roman society as a whole. Interpreting Lactantius' writing of the increase in building projects provides insight on the general allocation of workers and resources in this period.

**Secondary Sources:**

Michell, H. "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire." *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue Canadienne d'Economie et de Science Politique*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1947, pp. 35-47. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3314009>.

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