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Brill's New Pauly

Diocletianus

(1,598 words)

[\[German version\]](#)

A. Origin and career

Roman emperor AD 284–305. Full name (first adopted after his elevation): C. Aurelius Valerius D. (CIL III 22), previously Diocles (Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 9,11; 19,5; 52,3; Lib. Or. 19,45f.; [Aur. Vict.] *Epit. Caes.* 39,1; P.Oxy 3055). Born in 241 or 244 in Dalmatia (Malalas 311 Bonn; [Aur. Vict.] *Epit. Caes.* 39,1), presumably in Salona (Theoph. 10,13 de Boor). In a purely military career he advanced to the position of *dux Moesiae* (Zon. 12,31) and after that to commander of the bodyguard (*protectores domestici*) of Emperors Carus and Numerianus (Zon. 12,31; Aur. Vict. *Caesares* 39,7). The entry in Syncellus (725 Mosshammer) is a misunderstanding of a source also used by Eutropius 9,19,2 and does not prove any suffect consulship of the later emperor. After the death of Numerianus on 20 November 284, he was elevated to the rank of Emperor (Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 17,1; P.Beatty Panopolis, 2, 162f., 260f.), probably in a place located in the vicinity of Nicomedia (Zos. 1,73,2; Jer. Chron. a. 2302), where later the elevation of Galerius to Caesar and the abdication occurred and which was probably decorated with a Jupiter column by D. (cf. Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 19,2; Jer. a. 2321). On 1 January he took up the consulship (Chron. pasch. p. 511) in Nicomedia and in the spring marched against Carinus who was ruling in the West. Although Carinus defeated D. in the vicinity of the mouth of the Morava, he fell victim to a conspiracy of his own officers (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39,11). In order to win over Carinus' supporters for himself, he left Aristobulus, the praetorian prefect of Carinus, in office and even accepted him as co-consul for 285 (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39,14f.; Amm. Marc. 23,1,1). In spite of demonstrative attestations of respect towards the Senate (SHA *Car.* 18,4), D. did not travel to Rome (incorrect

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Zon. 12,31), but proceeded from Upper Italy to the Danube to fight there against Teutons and Sarmatians. Since overcoming the Bagaudae rebellions demanded a large detachment, he sent officer Maximianus, whom he had previously appointed Caesar in December 285 (perhaps on 13 December, cf. [1. 28ff.]) to Gaul. From Danube D. returned to the East and stayed in Nicomedia, the beginning of 286 (Cod. Iust. 4,21,6). During the course of the year, perhaps in summer, Maximianus was elevated to Augustus. As D.'s 'brother' (Pan. Lat. 6,15,6) Maximianus also carried the names Aurelius Valerius.

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B. Organization of the rulership

Soon after the elevation of Maximianus to Augustus both emperors seem to have adopted in parallel the epithets Iovius and Herculius. It is disputed whether D., who by reserving for himself the name derived from Jupiter, intended to maintain priority over his 'brother' Maximianus, who otherwise was on equal footing (Tetrarchy). From 286 to 288, D. appears to have been mainly concerned with the fortification of the eastern border that was threatened by the Sassanids, mainly by starting the extension of the *strata Diocletiana* from Sura on the Euphrates to the Arabian Desert [2. 136ff.]. In 287, it was presumably inner political difficulties that induced the Sassanid ruler Bahram II to conclude a truce with D., whereby the Euphrates border was respected (Pan. Lat. 10,7,5-6; 9,1-2; 10,6). Upon receiving news of usurpation of Carausius', D. travelled west. After battles with Alemannians and Iuthungi in the Raetian region, he met with Maximianus in the vicinity of Augsburg (Pan. Lat. 2,9,1) to coordinate the battle against Carausius and measures to defend the border. Via the middle Danube, where he fought against the Sarmatians, D. returned to the eastern border, where he was able to gain victories against invading Saracen tribes (Pan. Lat. 11,5,4), who presumably were in alliance with the Sassanids. Whether therefore the Arsacid Trdat, who only a short time later conveyed his congratulations to the ruler Narseh on his coming to power, was in turn installed as ruler over part of Armenia, remains an open question. However, obviously Armenia was considered a Roman sphere of influence only a few years later (Amm. Marc. 23,5,11). Renewed battles against the Sarmatians, upheavals in Egypt and the still unresolved problem of the Carausius' usurpation finally prompted D. to implement a step that had perhaps been planned for a long time, namely the elevation of Constantius [1] and Galerius Maximianus to subordinate Caesars on 1 March 293 (Tetrarchy). Galerius was successful in suppressing the rebellions in Egypt [2. 62], while Constantius Chlorus and his praetorian prefect Allectus were able to defeat Carausius' successor. Probably in 297, the uprising of Domitius [II 14] Domitianus compelled D. to travel to Egypt, while Galerius, from Syria, took action against Narseh, who attacked simultaneously, but was defeated in the Osrhoene between Kallinikon and Carrhae. For the controversial chronology cf.

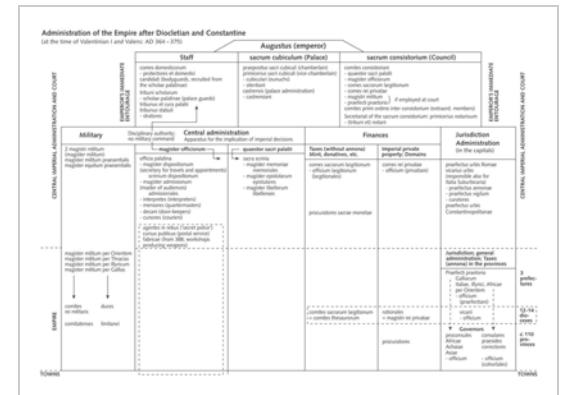
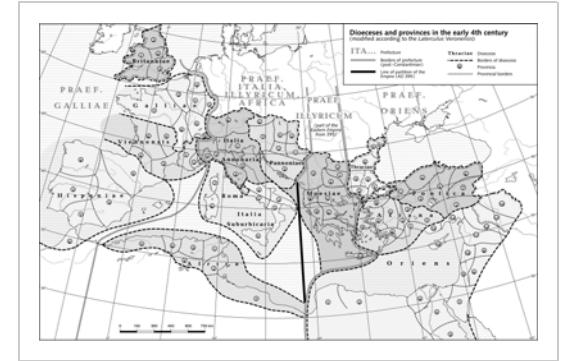
now [5; 9]. After eight months, D. put an end to the usurpation of Achilles by cutting off the water supply of besieged Alexandria (Aur. Vict. Caes. 39,33; 38; Eutr. 9,23; Malalas 308 Bonn) and he inspected the southern border of Egypt overrun by the Blemmyes, where he decided to give up the Dodekaschoinos (Procop. Pers. 1,19, 29-37). In Antioch he met up with Galerius, who had been defeated. The tale that he humiliated his Caesar by forcing him to walk on foot in front of his chariot (Eutr. 9,24; Fest. 25; Amm. Marc. 14,11,10) is a tendentious misunderstanding of a conventional gesture of demonstrating respect [3. 25f.]. In the second campaign, Galerius invaded Armenia, where he was able to capture the Persian camp. While Galerius penetrated far into Persian territory, D. occupied former Roman Mesopotamia with a second army. Working from reconquered Nisibis, D. (via Saporius Probus, who was sent to Narseh) pursued peace negotiations with the Sassanid ruler. He, in turn, ceded Nisibis and Mesopotamia in exchange for the return of his imprisoned relatives and acknowledged Roman sovereignty over Armenia and Iberia (on Petrus Patricius fr. 14 = FHG 4,189; [4. 133]).

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C. Reform of the Empire

The long-lived government, secured by foreign policy successes, enabled D. to carry out many administrative and military reforms (cf. fig.). However, it can no longer be determined how much of this can actually be attributed to D. With regard to fiscal issues, in addition to supporting measures of coin reform and the Price Edict, the tax system of the *capitatio-iugatio* was to guarantee continuity of public revenue. Italy was subjected to taxation for the first time and divided into numerous (over 100) new provinces like the rest of the empire. Generally, it is presumed that D. created a new middle authority between province and *praef. praet.* at the same time as the dioceses (different to [6]). The extension of large residences — in D.'s part of the empire Antioch and above all Nicomedia — provided the appropriate architectonic framework for the new ceremony that corresponded to the monarchial superelevation decisively expedited under D. The reform was rounded off by religious policy. Immediately following the successful war against the Sassanids, Christian soldiers and palace staff were to face repressive measures (Lactant. De mort. pers. 10,4). In 297 or 302, following the inquiry of the governor of Africa D. issued a rescript with sharp regulations against the Manichaeans. On 23 February 303, persecution of Christians began (Lactant. De



mort. pers. 12,2) with the church in Nicomedia being destroyed. One day later, a (most likely the only) general persecution edict against the Christians was made public [7]. The motive for the persecution of Christians remains in the dark, but it seems probable that, in addition to the program of a conservative renewal, there was a connection with D.'s long-planned retreat from rulership and with the planned perpetuation of the tetrarchic order, which had to be guaranteed by the favour of the gods. After the Vicennalia (20 November 303), combined with a triumph that D. celebrated together with Maximianus in Rome, he resigned simultaneously with Maximianus on 1 May 305 and travelled as *senior Augustus* from Nicomedia to Salona, where the construction of a palace had already begun in 300. In November 308 he met with Galerius and Maximianus in Carnuntum to re-organize the tetrarchy that was in the process of breaking up, and he elevated Licinius to Augustus [8] and his daughter, the wife of Galerius, to Augusta on 11 November 308. Presumably in the summer of 313, D. committed suicide after he had to fear the worst for himself with the end of Maximinus Daia and the successful alliance between Constantius [1] and Licinius ([Aur. Vict.] Epit. Caes. 39, 7; Socr. 1,2,10). He was divinized and interred in Salona (Eutr. 9,28; Sid. Apoll. Carm. 23,497).

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Cite this page

Bleckmann, Bruno (Strasbourg), "Diocletianus", in: *Brill's New Pauly*, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Consulted online on 24 July 2018 <http://dx.doi.org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e318200>

First published online: 2006

First print edition: 9789004122598, 2010510