

WHEN DID DIOCLETIAN DIE?

ANCIENT EVIDENCE FOR AN OLD PROBLEM

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INTRODUCTION

Why do precise dates matter? This is almost the same question as: Why does history matter? Dates, names, places and events are building elements to make sense of history, to see the chronology. I believe we need to do our utmost in trying to establish the accurate dates of historical events out of respect for the past and for our heritage but also because we know that understanding the past is to preparing for the future. And then there is, of course, the pure joy in solving a puzzle.

What about the date of Diocletian's death? The chronology for much of the third and fourth centuries counts many uncertainties as well as white spots. When was Constantine born? When did Constantine deliver his oration "*To the assembly of the saints*"? When did Lactantius write "*De Mortibus Persecutorum*"? Where did he live when writing it? When did he die? At what year was Domitius Alexander defeated? And so on.

And then we have Diocletian, this formidable man, reigning for more than twenty years and stabilizing Rome. He was the first emperor to voluntarily and purposefully abdicate. Living his remaining life as a private citizen and as such alone in history may have become deified after his death¹². And the date of his passing is still open to debate. Since any historical moment, like reality, has a structure that in principle lends itself to analysis – for instance, a certain person cannot be in two different places at the same time. Any fact that can be established without, or with very little, doubt will help to untangle the clew of obscurity. Furthermore, an established fact will also help to determine what sources are to be trusted, how and in what respect.

I will give one example of the intricacy of dates. Barnes has beautifully demonstrated this in "*Constantine and Lactantius*"³. The date of Diocletian's death had by the power of tradition been strongly identified to late 316. Since Lactantius mentions his death he must have been writing *De Mortibus Persecutorum* after Diocletian's death. The period of production would then be the following years of 317-318. By 317 Lactantius worked in Trier as the Latin tutor of Crispus, Constantine's son. A world famous rhetorician, appointed by Constantine and placed in the very heartland of the same emperor, just how unbiased could one expect such a man to be? Through guilt by association, the credibility of Lactantius did not gain support.

¹ Eutr. *Brev.* IX.28

² Jer. *Chron*, pp 312

³ Barnes, 1973, p 41

When scholars suspected that Lactantius was wrong, it was then easy to disregard his writings as the result of a propagandist, a court agitator.

PURPOSE

The date for Diocletian's death has been discussed at least since the end of the nineteenth century, e.g. Otto Seeck's work⁴. During the last century various years have been proposed: 316, 313, 312 and 311. Timothy D Barnes re-examined the problem and opted for the year 311⁵. Byron J Nakamura recently suggested 312⁶. In reply to Nakamura's claim of new evidence Barnes analyzed, just one year ago, the validity of Nakamura's claim⁷. It is my purpose here to offer a new argument in defense of either of these two years and while doing this I will also briefly discuss the credibility of Lactantius, why he is to be trusted and in what way.

SOURCES

Which are our sources on Diocletian's death? This will not be an exhaustive list but I will mention a few. The *Chronicle of Jerome*, which is generally dated to around 380 CE. The work itself is a Latin translation of a chronicle composed by Eusebius of Caesarea. The Greek original is lost but there exists a near complete Armenian translation. Eusebius' chronicle extends to about 325. Jerome lists Diocletian's death to 316⁸. But he also dates the war at Cibalae to 313, which for a long period was thought to have occurred in 314 but today is settled to 316. The death of Galerius is given to 309 while there is no doubt about 311 being the correct year. The election of Sylvester as pope he marks to 310 while 314 is undisputed. Jerome gets the year right for the death of Maxentius. All this is a bit surprising since Eusebius was contemporary and, for one, would most likely not get Sylvester's ascension wrong. Thus, the exact dates of Jerome cannot be trusted. According to Barnes⁹, two derivatives of Jerome's Chronicle, *Prosper Tiro* and a Gallic chronicle of 511, both offer 315. Barnes mentions two other sources¹⁰. *Chronicon Paschale* from the seventh century and

⁴ Seeck, 1919, p 165

⁵ Barnes, 1973

⁶ Nakamura, 2003

⁷ Barnes, 2010

⁸ Jer. *Chron.* pp 311-312

⁹ Barnes, 1973, p 33

¹⁰ Barnes, 1973, p 33

Hydatius' *Fasti Consulari* from the fifth century both place the time of Diocletian's death to 316.

Around 500 Zosimus writes "But when Constantine and Licinius were in their third consulship, the 110 years were completed, and the festival ought to have been kept according to custom; but it was neglected, and affairs consequently declined to their present unfortunate condition.", and then "Three years after Dioclesian died"¹¹. The festival Zosimus refers to is the Secular game (Ludi Saeculares) and should have been held in 314. Considering the Roman notion of years, three years may well mean that the third year had just started, which would place Diocletian's death anywhere between the summer of 316 and the summer of 317.

In the *Epitome of Caesaribus* written around 390 it is said about Diocletian¹²,

He lived sixty-eight years, out of which he passed almost nine in a common condition. He was consumed, as was sufficiently clear, by voluntary death as a result of fear. Inasmuch as when, called by Constantine and Licinius to the celebrations of a wedding which he was by no means well enough to attend, he had excused himself, after threatening replies were received in which it was being proclaimed that he had favored Maxentius and was favoring Maximian, he, regarding assassination as dishonorable, is said to have drunk poison.

'Almost nine' years after his abdication indicates a date of his death before May 314. A death after the wedding means later than the first of March, 313.

Eutropius, writing in the latter half of the fourth century, states in his history¹³ "That happened to him, therefore, which had happened to no one since men were created, that, though he died in a private condition, he was enrolled among the gods." But he does not provide any clue as to when this happened.

Philostorgius, Orosius and Sozomen are all silent on the matter.

Socrates Scholasticus, writing in the middle of the fifth century, tells us that Constantine was victorious against Maxentius in his seventh year¹⁴. He continues to say that Licinius was married to Constantine's sister and he concludes the chapter with the following words:

¹¹ Zos. *Hist. Nov.*, 2

¹² *Epit. de Caes.* 39,7

¹³ Eutr. *Brev.*, 9, XXVIII

¹⁴ Socr., *Hist. Eccl.*, 1, 2

“About this time Diocletian, who had abdicated the imperial authority, died at Salona in Dalmatia”. ‘About this time’ can only refer to a date in the vicinity of the mentioned events, which would give a time frame of let us say half a year prior to Milvian Bridge and half a year later than the wedding, in other words between April 312 and October 313. And if placed right in between the events would support the date of December 3, 312.

John, the Bishop of Nikiu composed a chronicle around 700. Regarding the time of Diocletian it is both loaded with errors and it excels in exaggerations and as such it will here represent the kinds of chronicles that are untrustworthy. One amusing example¹⁵,

And in the third year after the close of the persecution which he had instituted against the Christians, the impious Diocletian in the midst of such enterprises fell sick of a grievous bodily disease and lost his mind and reason. And in consequence thereof he was deposed and in accordance with a decree of the Roman senate sent in exile to the island named Waros, in which there were great forests, and it lay in the west. And he remained there alone.

Two concrete facts can be found in this example. The first one would be “in the third year”. If this refers to Galerius toleration edict in April 311, it would suggest a date between May 313 and May 314. If it refers to Licinius edict of June 313, it would give a date for Diocletian’s insanity to the year preceding June 316. Subsequently he is sent westwards into exile to the island of Waros, which is otherwise unknown in history.

AND WHAT DO CONTEMPORARY SOURCES TELL?

Neither the *Panegyrici Latini* of 313 nor of 321 mentions Diocletian’s death. In fact they do not even mention him by name. Then we have two other sources, Eusebius of Caesarea and Lactantius himself.

Lactantius wrote his *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (On the manner in which the persecutors died) right after the death of Maximinus Daza in the summer of 313¹⁶. There are some amendments to the story of the persecutors’ death, the last one being the report of the execution of Valeria (Diocletian’s daughter, Galerius’ wife) and Prisca (Diocletian’s wife). The execution was performed at the earliest fifteen months after the death of Maximinus Daza (*Mort. Pers.*,50). If the fifteen months refer to when Valeria fled the surroundings of Licinius’

¹⁵ *John Chron.*, LXXVII, 18-19

¹⁶ Barnes, 1973, p 33

new court at Nicomedia, then some additional time will have to be allowed. Altogether, this means that Lactantius should have been writing “*On the manner in which the persecutors died*” between July 313 and January 315. With that history fresh in mind he states unambiguously that Diocletian dies before Maximinus Daza. Lactantius also says (*Mort. Pers.*, 42): “At this time, by command of Constantine, the statues of Maximian Herculus were thrown down, ... Thus Diocletian lived to see a disgrace which no former emperor had ever seen, and, under the double load of vexation of spirit and bodily maladies, he resolved to die. So he, ..., expired.” Lactantius begins this paragraph with ‘At this time’ and that points to where the previous paragraph ends, the time of Diocletian’s negotiations with Maximinus Daza for the return of his wife and daughter.

Eusebius of Caesarea says about Diocletian in the chapter named “*The revocation of the rulers*”¹⁷: “He who was first in honor and age perished through a long and most grievous physical infirmity”. In the same chapter Eusebius mentions Galerius’ death (311) before and Maximian’s death (310) after that of Diocletian. Eusebius puts his death in the proximity of the other emperors’ death, but that is mostly a result of his logic by naming the instigating persecutor first and then the others of the original tetrarchy after their rank. If one would guess, I believe a date closer to the deaths of Maximian and Galerius is to be preferred to a much later date. And I think that the disposition of Eusebius’ history may support this notion as well. “The revocation of the rulers” ends book VIII. Then follows a separately named book, “*The martyrs of Palestine*”, before he returns to the numbering of books. At the end of book IX Eusebius goes on to describe the death of Maximinus.

Summing up. From ancient sources all the years between 312 and 317 are possible. The contemporary source Lactantius places Diocletian’s death unequivocally before the death of Maximinus. Lactantius also puts the death of Diocletian near the events of Constantine’s damnatio memoriae of Maximian, that is with the overthrow of the intertwined statues of Maximian and Diocletian. Eusebius places the death of Diocletian in a textual context with the other emperors’ deaths and a few chapters before the death of Maximinus.

Before moving on to the recent discussion on Diocletian’s death, I want to reflect upon the damnatio memoriae. Maximian died during the summer of 310, probably through a forced suicide. In the panegyric from the same year the rhetor asks Constantine in the middle of his

¹⁷ Eus. *HE*, VIII, 18, 3

speech for a clue on how he should treat Maximian in the oration¹⁸. That marks the earliest possible time for damnation. Three years later another panegyrist says in his oration that the tyrant Maxentius was justly killed (by Constantine) while the orator at the same time distances the father's, Maximian's, virtues from that of his son's, Maxentius' vices¹⁹. So, it is not an adventurous guess to place the damnation between July 310 and July 313.

That Maxentius commemorated his father Maximian as Divus Maximianus can be seen in his coinage from 310. This could only have happened after Maximian's death (at the earliest possible opportunity) and can only be interpreted as a hostile action against Constantine the executor. In 311 both Maxentius and Constantine were preparing for war. Constantine's damnation of Maximian is then logical as means of diminishing the legitimacy that Maxentius was trying to strengthen for himself, i.e. the *damnatio memoriae* must be placed before the death of Maxentius. In reality, the damnation must have been evoked before Constantine's Italian campaign. Altogether this gives an interesting and rather small window for the *damnatio memoriae*, from 311 to the spring of 312.

RECENT DISCUSSION - 311 OR 312?

CONSTANTINE AND LACTANTIUS

Timothy Barnes makes a convincing argument for either of the two years. He concludes his argument with²⁰

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, and both the earliest witness (Lactantius) and external considerations (the political situation) point to late 311 or early 312.

C.TH. XIII, 10, 2

The evidence that must be discarded concerns a law in the *Theodosian code*²¹. The law:

¹⁸ *Pan. Lat.*, VI, 14,1

¹⁹ Barnes, 1973, p 34

²⁰ Barnes, 1973, p 35

²¹ *C.Th.* xiii, 10, 2

The same Augustus to the most perfect Eusebius, Governor of Lycia and Pamphylia. The urban plebs, as is observed also in the Oriental provinces, shall not be sued at all in the tax assessment for capitation taxes, but they shall be held exempt according to this our command, just as aforesaid urban plebs were exempt also under Our Lord and father Diocletian, the senior Augustus. Given on the calends of June in the year of the third consulship Constantine Augustus and of Licinius. – June 1, 313; 311

‘The same Augustus’ refers to Constantine. The Theodosian Code is a unique source for many reasons. One is that it often gives both the place where it was given and the date. Sometimes it also gives the same information from where it was received. Unique as it is, it is not infallible. The code starts with Constantine but it was compiled during Theodosius II and it was published in 438. The Roman custom of naming the year after the two consuls sometimes get the years confused since different years can have the same consular names attached to it. Another source of errors may be incomplete original fragments and the compilers effort to get things straight. A further source of mistakes can arise from recompilations or recopying.

Constantine and Licinius were consuls for their third time 313, for their second time in 312 and none of them were consuls in 311. No dead emperor would be addressed this way. If at all, they would be addressed as “Divi”. Diocletian was thus alive when the law was posted. In 313 Maximinus was on the run, heading for Tarsus, and Licinius had not yet entered Nicomedia. The law itself would certainly not be any of Constantine’s business at the time.

Giving the substance of the law it must be a law emanating from Maximinus. Right after the death of Galerius the competition for Galerius’ domains started between Licinius and Maximinus. Licinius and Constantine were already allies through the betrothal between Constantine’s sister and Licinius. The events had forced Maxentius and Maximinus to cooperation. After the conference at Carnuntum in 308, Licinius had a superior rank in relation to Maximinus. Maximinus needed to build his own platform for legitimacy, hence the polite words “Our Lord and father Diocletian, the senior Augustus”. In the aftermath of the truce (summer 311) between Licinius and Maximinus the latter also proposed to marry Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian and the widow of Galerius. It is not difficult to see the same strife for increased legitimacy here. Valeria, however, turned him down and Maximinus sent her in exile. According to Lactantius Maximinus even put her court ladies to death. Diocletian made numerous calls to Maximinus for the return of his daughter. All of these

were rejected. The evidence points to 311 for the law. This would be the time for the issue of legitimacy. I have some difficulty with a Maximinus addressing Diocletian in such a positive way while he at the same time is angry with Valeria and impudent towards Diocletian. There are also some time constraints about the year 312 that I will discuss later. A peculiar aspect of the law is then that it predates Constantine's arrival in Rome and thus, as far as we know now, is the very first law in the Theodosian code.

WHEN DID DIOCLETIAN DIE? NEW EVIDENCE FOR AN OLD PROBLEM

Byron J Nakamura presented a claim for new evidence on the problem of Diocletian's death²².

Nakamura bases his new evidence on numismatic material:

Starting from 309 and continuing until the battle of the Milvian bridge on October 28, 312, Maxentius issued a series of coins commemorating the memory of his son Romulus (d. 308/9), and three of the deceased members of the first tetrarchy: Constantius (d. 306), Maximian (d. 310), and Galerius (d. 311).

All this coinage refers to the depicted rulers (and son) as "Divi" and Nakamura asks the rhetorical question whether a dead Diocletian wouldn't have been included in the divi-series if he would have died the same year as Galerius. Constantius (adopted by Maximian) was his brother, Maximian his father and Galerius his father-in-law. Since Diocletian had adopted Maximian as his brother, Maxentius would be Diocletian's nephew. Thus, he concludes that the only reason that Diocletian was not commemorated along with the other consecrated rulers is that he was still alive when Maxentius' mint in Ostia produced the divi-series. If he was alive in December 311 he would have had to die in December 312.

MAXENTIUS AND DIOCLETIAN

Barnes starts out with identifying a flaw²³: "The four recent *divi* are not, as Nakamura mistakenly alleges, all 'consecrated rulers.'" Romulus, as Maxentius' son, was destined to become one, but he never shared the imperial power of his father. Barnes then goes on to ask what these four divi have in common. His answer is that they are relatives. Romulus was Maxentius' son, Maximian his father, Galerius his father-in-law and Constantius both a brother-in-law and a brother (by his father's adoption). What about Diocletian, were they related? Barnes states that the only possible way for Maxentius to be related to Diocletian is if Diocletian's daughter Valeria (Galerius' wife) had been the mother of Maxentius' wife

²² Nakamura, 2003, pp 287-288

²³ Barnes, 2010, p 320

Maximilla. Given 293 as an earliest date for the wedding between Galerius and Valeria and that Maximilla bore Maxentius a son no later than 307 it is highly unlikely that Maximilla would be Valeria's daughter, i.e. there is no relationship between Maxentius and Diocletian. Barnes fails to mention the relationship Nakamura offers, the one through Diocletian's adoption of Maximian as brother²⁴.

Assuming that Diocletian died in late 311, I can see more reasons for why Diocletian was not minted as divi in this period. The four mentioned divi were not minted all at once. This coinage started with Romulus and the last one added was Galerius who died in May 311. Romulus as divi may just have been grief, but it is probable that the other three served as means to amplify his legitimacy. From autumn in 311 the tension between Constantine and Maxentius escalated. Even though many speeches, columns, coins and so forth were loaded with significant political symbolism I believe it is prudent to allow for ad hoc or whimsical decisions. Maxentius may just have shifted his attention from legitimacy to war preparation. The explanation that he just did not want to include Diocletian is also plausible.

ANCIENT EVIDENCE

LACTANTIUS

Lactantius is the one source closest in time to the events. Considering the likelihood that he reemerged in Nicomedia in June 313 he is also quite close geographically as well.

How trustworthy is Lactantius' reporting? That is a question many scholars have struggled with. Quite a few scholars dismiss Lactantius' reliability rather lightly, I think. One example is from Nakamura's article²⁵: "As valuable as the DMP is, I think there is an overreliance on this source, particularly in determining the sequence of events during the fourth century." To be able to evaluate the soundness of *De Mortibus Persecutorum* I believe one has to consider Lactantius wider production. He was Arnobius' pupil and his career carried him as far as to become the official professor of rhetoric in Nicomedia. And there he converted to Christianity before the persecutions started. He had a mind trained in skeptical thinking which he put to use in his works, among others, *The Divine Institutions* and *On the Wrath of God*. In the latter he sat out to dismantle the belief systems of the epicureans and of the stoics with the aim to prove their inherent inconsistencies.

²⁴ The nature of this omission ought to be clarified

²⁵ Nakamura, 2003, p 286

Letizia Panizza discusses the role of skepticism in Lactantius reasoning²⁶. In *The Divine Institutes* Lactantius says²⁷ “Philosophy appears to consist of two subjects, knowledge and conjecture, and of nothing more. ... knowledge is concerned with that which is certain, conjecture with the uncertain.” Here we have a man who himself has struggled with categories such as what is certain and what is conjecture. Panizza adds²⁸ “Lactantius is the only Father of the Church to adopt a plainly sceptical attitude, derived explicitly from Cicero's *Academica* ...” I believe this example suffices to make it credible that Lactantius would be careful with facts, what he knows for sure. When it comes to conjectures he would feel free to make such after his best judgment. Lactantius is writing in a tradition that encompasses both truthfulness and compassion. Therefore I strongly agree with Barnes²⁹ “in accordance with my general thesis that Lactantius was normally accurate on matters of fact, though often grossly misleading on their interpretation and in his presentation,”.

MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

One thing remains to be discussed and that is my so called “ancient evidence”. Lactantius’ chapter 41 in *De Mortibus Persecutorum* deals with Diocletian’s effort to correspond with Maximinus. Before we move into that chapter some other dates need to be addressed.

Galerius died in May 311. On the first of June Maximinus wrote the letter to Eusebius, the governor (probably from Nicomedia) in which he acclaims the seniority of Augustus Diocletian³⁰. On the tenth of June in 311 Licinius was still in Sardica³¹. The truce and peace negotiation between the two must have taken place later, that is at the earliest during the second half of June. The sources do not tell us in what manner Valeria and Prisca came to be under Maximinus’ protection. At his death Galerius handed them over into Licinius’ care³² and later Maximinus proposes to Valeria³³. Maybe the delivery of Valeria and Prisca was part of the peace negotiations. Maybe they fled to him. Anyhow, the proposal and Valeria’s succeeding refusal were in themselves enacted over some time, especially considering that Maximinus probably had his base in Chalcedon or Nicomedia while Valeria and her court

²⁶ Panizza, 1978

²⁷ *Lact. Div. Inst.*, 3, 3

²⁸ Panizza, 1978, p 84

²⁹ Barnes, 2010, p 319

³⁰ *C.Th.* xiii, 10, 2

³¹ Corcoran, 1996, pp 145-146

³² *Lact. Mort. Pers.*, 36

³³ *Lact. Mort. Pers.*, 39

ladies were stationed in Nicea. In sum this puts the date of Valeria's refusal sometime during July 311, most likely during the latter half.

MORT. PERS., 41

When Maximinus was turned down he sent Valeria and her mother into exile. And in chapter 41 Lactantius writes³⁴,

But the empress, an exile in some desert region of Syria, secretly informed her father Diocletian of the calamity that had befallen her. He despatched messengers to Daia, requesting that his daughter might be sent to him. He could not prevail. Again and again he entreated; yet she was not sent. At length he employed a relation of his, a military man high in power and authority, to implore Daia by the remembrance of past favours. This messenger, equally unsuccessful in his negotiation as the others, reported to Diocletian that his prayers were vain.

How did geographical distances affect communication and transportation at that time? Is there any relevance in these aspects for the question posed, when did Diocletian die? To elucidate this, I have chosen to implore a calculation exercise that takes its stance not only from the previously discussed credibility of Lactantius but also from the assumption that he can be viewed as exact on facts. At least exactitude is worth considering.

The map roughly shows the distances to be considered. Since Lactantius only mentions "a desert region in Syria" I have for the sake of calculation suggested that Valeria wrote from the caravan station of Rasafa. Diocletian lived at Salona and my supposition for the following calculation is that Maximinus resided in Nicomedia and that Valeria was placed in Rasafa.

³⁴ Lact. *Mort. Pers.*, 41



Itinerarium Burdigalense is a good source of distances along the main roads in the Roman Empire. The pilgrim from Bourdeaux methodically reports all the changes and halts from Bourdeaux to Jerusalem. To get an idea of the distances involved, I have approximated the distance between Salona and Nicomedia with the pilgrim's documented distance between Cibalae and Nicomedia. In the same manner, the distance between Rasafa and Nicomedia is approximated with the documented distance between Tripolis and Nicomedia. From the itinerary: between Salona (Cibalae) and Nicomedia 839 (Roman) miles and one crossing, and between Nicomedia and Rasafa (Tripolis) 815 miles.

And how fast did mail travel at that time? An average of 50 miles per day with a span between 41 and 67 has been argued for³⁵. An empress would travel at a considerably lower speed.

So, let us now return to what Lactantius exactly says.

³⁵ Ramsay, 1925, pp 73-74

- “desert region of Syria”. If Valeria and her mother would travel with half the speed of post it would take them 32 days to reach the caravan station ($815/(50/2)$).
- “secretly informed her father”. This would not be an easier task than openly informing her father. If she could use a personal courier, then it would take him 34 days to cover the 1654 miles, including a day for the crossing.
- “He despatched messengers to Daia, ... Again and again he entreated”. ‘Again and again’ implies more than twice. If Lactantius knew it was only one messenger, he would write that. If he knew it was exactly two messages sent, he would write that. If he was uncertain whether it was two or more, he would express that. If he knew it was at least three but was not certain of the total number, he would express himself with ‘again and again’.
If he was to follow up his first messenger with a new one he must first receive news back. Allowing at least one day in Nicomedia for the message to reach Maximinus or for the messenger to understand that Maximinus would not answer, each messenger back and forth would take 36 days including two crossings. If Diocletian replied immediately, then two messages would take 72 days and three messages 108 days.
- “At length he employed a relation of his, a military man high in power and authority, to implore Daia”. That would be another 36 days.

The time lapse from Valeria’s exile to the final report of the military man would then be 210 days. If the general’s trip is included in ‘again and again’ then we would arrive at 174 days from Valeria’s marriage refusal. If we propose that Licinius immediately went from Sardica on June 10 and that peace negotiations, marriage proposal, proposal refusal and that Valeria’s exile was carried out immediately and that all this could be compressed to ten days, then 174 days would mean a date for the general’s report in the middle of December 311. If our calculations include a less intense time schedule for Valeria’s exile, provide time for general probing and time for reflection at Salona and at Nicomedia, then we arrive at a date at the end of March 312, still with a compressed time schedule. Considering that the speed of post is just premised to an average of 50 miles per day I come to a conclusion. The death of Diocletian may have taken place at the end of 311. I believe the evidence from Lactantius suggests an earliest date of March, 312. And if I were to choose between December 3, 311 and December 3, 312 I would choose the latter.

In his next chapter Lactantius places Diocletian's death at the time, and in connection with, when the statues of Maximian were brought down by Constantine³⁶. This piece of evidence will support both a date for late 311 and for 312.

A FINAL REMARK ON THE MANNER IN WHICH DIOCLETIAN DIED

Some source claims that he took his own life, either by self-starvation or poison, one late and not so reliable source claims that he was executed and others just indicate that he perished. The reasons for his dying vary as well; grief, humiliation, lunacy. In fact many of the reasons for his dying are congruent with each other. At the time of his death Diocletian was an old man. He had witnessed a collapse of his tetrarchial construction. He had been humiliated indirectly by Maxentius through the omission of him in the divi coinage, indirectly by Constantine by his overthrow of the statues of Maximian and Diocletian and directly and brutally by Maximinus when this man refused him his own daughter and wife. He was also marked by disease. About seven years earlier he had almost died of a malady. In whatever manner he actually died, I would like to believe that he just expired tired of living.

SUMMARY

The question "When did Diocletian die?" has been open to scholarly debate for a considerable time. The purpose of this paper is to introduce an argument that supports the period including late 311 and 312. While doing this, ancient sources and current academic debate on the topic are presented and to some extent discussed. A special focus is given to Lactantius, a source contemporary to Diocletian. A brief discussion is given on why, and in what respect, he should be regarded as a reliable source. Based on implicit geographical details, given in chapter 41 in Lactantius' *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, a calculation of the required time for conveyance of messages at that time points to a date of Diocletian's death that allows for late 311 but suggests a likelihood from spring 312 and onwards.

Many sources give the December 3 as the very day for Diocletian's death. If this date is accurate I am inclined to state that he died on December 3, 312.

³⁶Lact. *Mort. Pers.*, 42

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