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“EX MARTE SE PROCREATUM” – DID THE ROMAN EMPEROR GALERIUS MAKE MARS HIS PERSONAL PROTECTIVE DEITY?

Abstract. Lactantius referred in his work *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (*De mortibus persecutorum*) to a great victory which Caesar Galerius won over the Persians. From then on, he demanded for himself the title of Augustus and, we are made to believe, insisted upon being called a son of Mars as second Romulus. Did he thus deviate from the truth? Or, on the contrary, did Galerius render Mars his divine patron and does Lactantius’ account remain in agreement with other sources and reflect the true course of events. The aim in this article is to resolve this issue.

It thus seems that as a result of the triumph over the Persians, which he was believed to owe to Mars, Galerius gained a new position already under the first tetrarchy, which Lactantius testifies to in his work *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*. It is thus clear that Lactantius’s testimony according to which Galerius recognized Mars as his divine patron is credible and remains in agreement both with a number of other sources and with the true course of events.

Keywords: Galerius, Lactantius, Mars, Tetrarchy

Lactantius, a rhetor who taught in Nicomedia and became a Christian apologist, referred in his work *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (*De mortibus persecutorum*) to a great victory which Caesar Galerius won over the Persians while resisting the invasion of *Imperium Romanum* by the Persian king Narses. Lactantius recounts that Galerius easily crushed his enemies in Armenia and, swelling with pride, returned with huge spoils and many captives. From then on, he demanded for himself the title of Augustus and, we are made to believe, insisted upon being called a son of Mars as second Romulus. In Lactantius’ account Galerius: *insolentissime agere coepit, ut ex Marte se procreatum et videri et dici vellet tamquam alterum Romulum*. According to some scholars, these suggestions should not be given too much weight. Lactantius, so goes their argument, was ill-disposed towards the emperors who persecuted Christians and, consequently, tended to depict them

in a caricatured manner¹. Did he thus deviate from the truth? Or, on the contrary, did Galerius render Mars his divine patron and does Lactantius' account remain in agreement with other sources and reflect the true course of events. My aim in this article is to resolve this issue.

Choosing divine patrons was the typical way in which Roman leaders sought supernatural protection. Great military leaders were viewed as God's chosen already in the times of the Republic. Their victories, and later the victories of Caesars, were attributed in polytheistic Rome to various gods². The latter were seen as emperors' companions (*comites*), defenders (*conservatores*) or assistants (*auxiliatores*). The search for divine protection stemmed from Romans' unshakable conviction of God's power to ensure Roman *civitas'* good fortune³.

Diocletian's tetrarchy system (the rule of the four: two Augustuses – Diocletian and Maximian, and two Caesars – Constantius and Galerius), was based on the religious conception according to which rulers were believed to be born of gods, Jupiter⁴ and Hercules, and were considered to be members of a divine family. Diocletian assumed the nickname of Jovius, while the second Augustus, Maksymian, began to be referred to as Herculus⁵. Under tetrarchy, emperors' special worship

¹ LACTANTIUS, *De mortibus persecutorum*, ed. J. MOREAU, Paris 1954 [= SC, 39] (cetera: LACTANTIUS), p. 262; O.P. NICHOLSON, *The Wild Man of the Tetrarchy: a Divine Companion for the Emperor Galerius*, B 54, 1984, p. 253–275 (who suggests that it was Dionizos-Liber); this opinion is followed by B. LEADBETTER, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian*, London–New York 2009 [= RIM], p. 105, footnote 72. Cf. also R. SUSKI, *Galeriusz. Cesarz, wódz i prześladowca*, Kraków 2016, p. 187–188.

² Cf. M. JACZYŃSKA, *Religie świata rzymskiego*, Warszawa 1987, *passim*; M. BEARD, J. NORTH, S. PRICE, *Religions of Rome*, Cambridge 1998, *passim*; G.H. HALSBERGHE, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, Leiden 1972 [= EPOLR, 23]; S. BERRENS, *Sonnenkult und Kaisertum von den Severern bis zu Constantin I (193–337 n. Chr.)*, Stuttgart 2004, p. 89–97; J. BARDILL, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age*, Cambridge 2011, p. 42–63.

³ The Romans believed that it was their piety that led the gods to allow them to build a great empire, and that made them superior to all the other nations. Cf. H. WAGENVOORT, *Pietas*, [in:] *Pietas. Selected Studies in Roman Religion*, ed. IDEM, Leiden 1980 [= SGRR, 1], p. 1–20; J. CHAMPEAUX, “*Pietas*”. *Piété personnelle et piété collective à Rome*, BAGB 3, 1989, p. 263–279. In pagan Rome *Pietas* was not only considered to be among the essential moral virtues, which later became the emperors' cardinal virtue, but was also one of the most important ideas of the state. The gods were believed to lavishly reward the Romans for their *pietas*, bestowing them with *felicitas*; cf. M.P. CHARLESWORTH, *The Virtues of Roman Emperor and the Creation of the Belief*, PBA 23, 1937, p. 105–133; J.R. FEARS, *The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology*, [in:] ANRW, vol. II, 17.2, ed. W. HAASE, New York–Berlin 1981, p. 864–870; A. WALLACE-HADRILL, *The Emperor and his Virtues*, *Hi* 30.3, 1981, p. 298–323.

⁴ Already in the times of the Republic, military leaders sought protection from Jupiter the Best and the Greatest, a god worshiped on Capitol, with whom the triumph ceremony was bound up. Cf. H.S. VERSNEL, *Triumphus. An Inquiry into the Origin, Development, and Meaning of the Roman Triumph*, Leiden 1970, p. 66–93; K. BALBUZA, *Triumfator. Triumf i ideologia zwycięstwa w starożytnym Rzymie epoki Cesarstwa*, Poznań 2005, *passim*.

⁵ As Jupiter's chosen, the senior Augustus assumed the nickname of Jovius and became an intermediary between the people and the highest god of the Roman pantheon. The junior Augustus, bearing the nickname of Herculus, acted as an intermediary between the people and Hercules. H. MATTINGLY,

was also given to Mars and Apollo. Religion played a very important role in the system, as was clearly shown by the practice of entrusting the state and its tetrarchs to divine patrons' protection, which is hardly surprising in view of the revival of traditional cults in the third century.

Given the above, it must have been natural for Galerius to link his military victories to the gods' intervention. Galerius came from Dacia Ripensis (Dacia Nova)⁶. Nothing is known of his early life except for his mother's name, Romula⁷. His rise to power in *Imperium Romanum* took place within the system of the tetrarchy established by Diocletian who elevated him to the position of Caesar, hoping to benefit from his military experience⁸. This appointment is likely to have taken place on 1, March 293⁹, that is, in the month dedicated to Mars. According to Timothy D. Barnes Galerius was at that time holding the office of the Praetorian Prefect¹⁰. Before his elevation to Caesar, he was called Maximinus, but Diocletian ordered him to change his *nomen gentile* to Maximianus¹¹. In 296, when the Persians ruled by Narses¹², the son of Shapur I, launched an invasion of the Empire, Diocletian entrusted Galerius with the task of defending its eastern border. The defeats suffered by the Romans over the past few decades and the fact that the Persians as the invading force were certainly ready for war must have made Galerius's task look extremely difficult. In the years 232–233, in the struggle against the Sassanid

Jovius and Hercules, HTR 45.2, 1952, p. 131–134; J. BARDILL, *Constantine...*, p. 28–125; According to Frank KOLB (*Ideal późnoantycznego władcy. Ideologia i autoprezentacja*, trans. A. GIERLIŃSKA, Poznań 2008, p. 29) Diocletian created the most perfect conception of the theocratic legitimization of power.

⁶ LACTANTIUS, IX, 2; EUTROPIUS, *Breviarium ab urbe condita*, IX, 2, trans., comm. H.W. BIRD, Liverpool 1993 [= TTH, 14] (cetera: EUTROPIUS).

⁷ R. SUSKI, *Galeriusz...*, p. 102–107.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 107–109.

⁹ LACTANTIUS, XXXV, 4; *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. Panegirici Latini*, VIII(V), 3, 1, ed. R.A.B. MYNORS, C.E.V. NIXON, B.S. RODGERS, Berkeley–Los Angeles–Oxford 1994 [= TCH, 21]. In his chronology of the first tetrarchy, Frank KOLB (*Chronologie und Ideologie der Tetrarchie*, ATa 3, 1995, p. 22) points to 1 March as the day on which Constantius and Galerius were elevated to Caesars. However, in his commentaries he considers it likely that only Constantius became Caesar on 1 March, while Galerius was bestowed the honour a little bit later, that is, on 21 May of the same year (according to the author of *Chronicon Paschale* the elevation of both of them took place on 21, May – *Chronicon Paschale*, vol. I, rec. L. DINDORF, Bonn 1832 [= CSHB], p. 512), and in his opinion it is impossible to determine which of the two dates is correct. According to Robert SUSKI (*Galeriusz...*, p. 114–115) they were both appointed to the position of Caesars on 1 March, 293.

¹⁰ Cf. T.D. BARNES, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge Massachusetts–London 1982, p. 136; B. LEADBETTER, *Galerius...*, p. 61.

¹¹ Although LACTANTIUS (XVIII, 13) is the only author who conveys this information, it seems reliable, since Diocletian, too, changed his name from Diocles to Diocletian. Cf. T.D. BARNES, *New Empire...*, p. 38; F. KOLB, *Diocletian und die Erste Tetrarchie. Improvisation oder Experiment in der Organisation monarchischer Herrschaft?*, Berlin 1987 [= ULG, 27], p. 16; R. SUSKI, *Galeriusz...*, p. 92.

¹² C. ZUCKERMAN, *Les campagnes des tétrarques, 296–298. Notes de chronologie*, ATa 2, 1994, p. 68.

Persia, a defeat was inflicted on Alexander Severus¹³. Emperor Gordian III who reigned in 238–244 was killed during his expedition against the Persians. Consequently, the Empire lost Armenia¹⁴. Military campaigns conducted during the reign of Valerian (253–260) ended all in complete failure. During the last of those campaigns, Valerian, suffering defeat near Edessa, was taken into captivity where he was humiliated and eventually killed. The victorious Persians plundered Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia. When it seemed that this streak of defeats had eventually been reversed by Emperor Carus's successful campaign at the turn of 282/283, (Carus managed to take Seleucia and Ctesiphon), the victorious ruler was unexpectedly killed, probably struck by thunder. His son and successor, Emperor Numerian, died on his way back in mysterious circumstances, most likely falling victim to a plot. The defeats suffered in wars against the Persian Empire seemed to be something of a curse and must have aroused negative emotions. One was thus led to raise questions about the gods' support, especially as military victories achieved thanks to the Roman *virtus* seemed to be of no avail, a fact to which the Carus case clearly bore witness.

All of this must have been all too clear to Emperor Diocletian who took part in Carus's Persian expedition and who, after Numerian's death, was elevated to the position of Augustus. However, at the moment of Narses's invasion, the situation looked somewhat better. During his first years in power, Diocletian, convinced of the gravity of the existing threat, attempted to strengthen the Empire's eastern border by erecting a line of defence consisting of a number of fortresses and cavalry camps. The line ran from Sura on the Euphrates river, across the Syrian Desert, and through Palmira to Damascus. Carus's previous successes, in which Diocletian had a part, gave the Romans hope to win.

Little is known about the war's initial phase except for the fact that the clash between the Persians and the Romans took place in northern Mesopotamia and that the former emerged from it victorious. In the spring of 297, Galerius, we are made to believe, was dealt a heavy defeat between Carrhae and Callinicum, probably as a result of the enemy's significant advantage in numbers¹⁵. Galerius' failure must have caused disappointment in him as a leader, bringing back past

¹³ R. SUSKI, *Wyprawa Aleksandra Sewera przeciwko Persom w świetle późnorzymskiej i bizantyjskiej historiografii*, [in:] *Armia, systemy obronne i ideologiczno-religijne aspekty wojny w imperium rzymskim*, ed. H. KOWALSKI, P. MADEJSKI, Lublin 2015, p. 195–214.

¹⁴ Cf. D. MACDONALD, *The Death of Gordian III, Another Tradition*, *Hi* 30, 1981, p. 502–508.

¹⁵ *The Breviarium of Festus*, 25, ed., comm. J.W. EADIE, London 1967 (cetera: FESTUS); EUTROPIUS, IX, 24; AURELIUS VICTOR, *Liber de caesaribus*, XXXIX, 33–34, [in:] AURELIUS VICTOR, *Liber de Caesaribus Sexti Aurelii Victoris (Sextus Aurelius Victor). Praecedunt Origo gentis Romanae et liber de viris illustribus urbis Romae. Subs. epitome de Caesaribus*, ed. F. PICHLMAYR, R. GRÜNDEL, Leipzig 1966 [= BSGR] (cetera: AURELIUS VICTOR); OROSIUS, *Historiae adversus paganos*, VII, 25, 9, vol. I–III, ed. M.-P. ARNAUD-LINDET, Paris 1990–1991 (cetera: OROSIUS). Cf. T.D. BARNES, *New Empire...*, p. 63; B. DIGNAS, E. WINTER, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity. Neighbours and Rivals*, Cambridge–New York 2007, p. 28.

nightmares and arousing fears for the Empire's future fate. The fears are clearly reflected in Lactantius' remarks regarding Diocletian who is reported to have decided to send Galerius against the Persians in order to avoid sharing Valerian's fate in the event of defeat¹⁶. Even if what Lactantius, a Christian, wrote was affected by his dislike of Diocletian, who persecuted Christ's followers, it still seems to mirror Roman concerns for the final outcome of the conflict with Persia. Failures in the war against Rome's 'eternal' enemy in the east threatened to undermine Diocletian's efforts to reform *Imperium Romanum*. In line with Roman mentality, Diocletian believed that in order to win the war with Persia, it was necessary to secure the support of *numen caeleste*. That Galerius was devoid of it was made clear by his defeat. It can thus be assumed that Diocletian's frustration, to which there are references in a number of sources, was actually a fact. We are told that it led to Galerius's humiliation. Diocletian is reported to have ordered him to run in purple robes alongside his chariot. This story can be found in Festus¹⁷, Eutropius¹⁸, Orosius¹⁹, Hieronymus²⁰ or Ammianus Marcellinus²¹. Other authors such as Aurelius Victor²², Lactantius²³ or Eusebius of Caesarea²⁴ remained silent about it. There has been an ongoing scholarly debate surrounding this issue²⁵. After weighing all the arguments hitherto advanced, it seems that the information provided by the sources in question should not be rejected as completely untrue²⁶. One can agree with Robert Suski that it would have been irrational for Diocletian to behave in such a way as described above, but human reactions are often driven by emotions that have nothing to do with any kind of rationality. Bearing that in mind,

¹⁶ LACTANTIUS, IX, 6.

¹⁷ FESTUS, 25.

¹⁸ EUTROPIUS, IX, 24.

¹⁹ OROSIUS, VII, 25, 9.

²⁰ HIERONYMUS, *Chronicon*, 270, ed. R. HELM, Berlin 1956 [= GCS, 7].

²¹ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res Gestae libri qui supersunt*, XIV, 11, 10, vol. I–II, ed. C.V. CLARK, Berlin 1910–1915 (cetera: AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS).

²² AURELIUS VICTOR (XXXIX, 34) mentioned only that before defeating the Persians Galerius had been harassed by them.

²³ LACTANTIUS (IX, 7) omitted information about Galerius's initial defeat, and wrote only about his easy and sneaky victory over the Persians.

²⁴ In his *Church History* Eusebius makes no reference to any of the wars between the Romans and the Persians, and his first mention of Galerius's name comes in his citation of the toleration edict issued by the ruler in 311. The reference regarding Galerius's humiliation can admittedly be found in Hieronymus's translation of Eusebius's chronicle, but it is most likely an interpolation, for it is absent from the Armenian version of the chronicle. On the chronicle's different versions cf.: A. KOTŁOWSKA, *Obraz dziejów w Chronici Canones Euzebiusza z Cezarei*, Poznań 2009, p. 18–42.

²⁵ It is also discussed by Robert Suski in the article *Upokorzenie Galeriusza przez Dioklecjana. Prawda czy mit*, [in:] *Chrześcijaństwo u schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze*, vol. II, ed. T. DERDA, E. WIPSYCKA, Kraków 1999, p. 153–182.

²⁶ It has been rejected, among others, by William SESTON (*L'«humiliation» de Galère*, REA 42, 1940, p. 515–519), and Robert SUSKI (*Upokorzenie...*, p. 136–140; IDEM, *Galeriusz...*, p. 134–150).

we should regard the relevant information as testifying both to a crisis that afflicted the eastern part of the tetrarchy, and to a significant weakening of Galerius's position in the system of power established by Diocletian. This hypothesis is made even more probable by the fact that Diocletian had been a Caesar for less than four years and his prestige as a ruler had not yet been established. He may even have intended to remove Galerius from the front line, which seems to be indicated by sending the latter to the Balkans immediately after the defeat. However, the situation soon became even more complicated because of the necessity for Diocletian to intervene in Egypt where, in the August of 297, L. Domitius Domitianus usurped power²⁷. If his plans were to take upon himself the task of continuing the war with the Persians, he had now been forced to change them. Fortresses that formed part of the defence line prepared in Syria allowed for a possibility of resisting the Persians for some time, while the consequences to be suffered by the Empire if the situation in Egypt got out of control might be catastrophic²⁸. It seems that Diocletian arrived at the conclusion that Domitianus's usurpation presented a more immediate threat than the Persians and, consequently, decided to personally pacify the Egyptian province, especially as he may have lost his confidence in Galerius's military skills and the gods' support for him. Besides, it seems that Galerius was already in the Balkans. The developments in Egypt kept Diocletian busy until September the next year. The first Augustus may thus have been forced to give Galerius one more chance and to allow him to conduct another campaign against the Persians using the forces raised in the Balkans. However, it cannot be excluded that Galerius acted on his own initiative, taking advantage of the fact that Diocletian had to turn his attention to Egypt. Signs of disagreement between Augustus and his Caesar can be discerned in Aurelius Victor's account according to which after his impressive victories Galerius was prevented by Diocletian from continuing his conquests. Victor Aurelius was not able to explain what determined Diocletian's conduct: *incertum qua causa abnuisset*²⁹.

We know for a fact that Galerius was acting in haste, which can be explained both by the Persian threat, significantly heightened after the Romans' defeat to

²⁷ Scholars differ in dating the rebellion. Among those who argue that it took place in 296/297 are W. SESTON, *Dioclétien et la tétrarchie. Guerres et réformes (284–300)*, Paris 1946, p. 137–183 and, among others, F. KOLB, *Die Datierung des ägyptischen Aufstands unter L. Domitius Domitianus und Aurelius Achilleus*, E 76, 1988, p. 325–343. However, most date it to 297/298, cf. A.K. BOWMAN, *The Military Occupation of Upper Egypt in the Reign of Diocletian*, BASP 15.1/2, 1978, p. 27; T.D. BARNES, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge Massachusetts–London 1981, p. 11–12; C. ZUCKERMAN, *Les campagnes...*, p. 68–69; B. LEADBETTER, *Galerius...*, p. 91; R. SUSKI, *Galeriusz...*, p. 139, n. 92.

²⁸ Even if Narseus's invasion of Syria of which ZONARAS gave an account (*Ioannis Zonarae Epitome historiarum libri XIII–XVIII*, XII, 31, rec. T. BÜTTNER-WOBST, Bonnæ 1897 [= CSHB]) actually took place at the time, the fact that Diocletian was absent from the front line proves that the situation was under control and did not require his presence.

²⁹ AURELIUS VICTOR, XXXIX, 36. However, Aurelius stresses that in conducting the campaign against the Persians, Galerius was following orders from Diocletian.

which I have referred above, and also by Galerius's precarious position. While in the Balkans, Galerius was supposed to mobilise new troops, made up both of veterans and of new recruits³⁰. Rufus Festus estimated the troops at 25 000 soldiers³¹. If Galerius suffered a defeat between Carrhae and Callinicum in the Spring of 297 and, relying on the newly raised and reinforced troops, resumed the fighting as early as the turn of 297/298, then he must have been extremely motivated³².

Galerius entered Armenia from Cappadocia³³, where he won a great victory at the Battle of Satala³⁴, thus named after the location of the Roman camp. The Caesar managed to take the Persians by surprise, destroy their army and capture their camp in Osxay, along with the royal harem and its treasures³⁵. Following his success, he crossed the uplands of Armenia and Media to reach Nisibis which he captured after laying siege to it. He continued through Mesopotamia, along the Euphrates river, to finally get to the Roman border. Some scholars have presumed that he also took Ctesiphon³⁶. According to Peter the Patrician, Diocletian arrived at the captured Nisibis where he met with Galerius³⁷. The rulers decided to start peace negotiations with the Persians³⁸, sending Sicorius Probus as an envoy to Narses³⁹. It was at that point that Diocletian must have restrained Galerius's desire to continue the fighting, a fact reported by Aurelius Victor who, as has already

³⁰ FESTUS, 25; EUTROPIUS, IX, 25; AURELIUS VICTOR, XXXIX, 34; OROSIUS, VII, 25, 10.

³¹ FESTUS, 25.

³² Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite (*The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 7, trans., praef. F.R. TROMBLEY, J.W. WATT, Liverpool 2000 [= TTH, 32]) suggests that the Romans captured Nisibis in 609 of the Seleucid era, that is, between 30 September 297 and 30 September 298. The time that passed from the defeat to the victory and the capture of the fortress was maximum one year and a half.

³³ Cf. AURELIUS VICTOR, XXXIX, 34.

³⁴ A laconic account of it is offered by Faustus of Byzantium (P'AWSTOS BUZAND's, *History of the Armenians*, III, 21, trans. R. BEDROSIAN, New York 1985).

³⁵ Cf. FESTUS, 25; EUTROPIUS, IX, 25; AURELIUS VICTOR, XXXIX, 34–35; OROSIUS, VII, 25, 10–11. Cf. T.D. BARNES, *Imperial Campaigns, A.D. 285–311*, Phoe 30, 1976, p. 182–186; M.H. DODGEON, S.N.C. LIEU, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars. A.D. 226–363*, London 1991, p. 124–132; B. DIGNAS, E. WINTER, *Rome and Persia...*, p. 84–88.

³⁶ Cf. W. SESTON, *Dioclétien...*, p. 172; T.D. BARNES, *Imperial Campaigns...*, p. 184; B. LEADBETTER, *Galerius...*, p. 109. Others held a different opinion, cf. A.H.M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, Oxford 1964, p. 38; C. ZUCKERMAN, *Les campagnes...*, p. 70. The discussion of Galerius's possible capture of Ctesiphon has been presented by Robert SUSKI (*Zwycięska kampania Galeriusza w wojnie z Persami 298–299*, [in:] *Chrześcijaństwo u schyłku starożytności...*, p. 162–171; IDEM, *Galeriusz...*, p. 166–181).

³⁷ Cf. *Petri Patricii Excerpta de legationibus Romanorum ad gentes*, 14, [in:] *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum*, vol. IV, ed. K. MÜLLER, Parisiis 1851 (cetera: *Petri Patricii Excerpta*), p. 189.

³⁸ On the peace negotiations cf. T.M. BANCHICH, *The Lost History of Peter the Patrician. An Account of Rome's Imperial Past from the Age of Justinian*, London–New York 2015 [= RCT], p. 136–140. On the peace treaty concluded between the Persians and the Romans cf. R. BLOCKLEY, *The Romano-Persian Peace Treaties of A.D. 299 and 363*, F 6, 1984, p. 28–49; B. DIGNAS, E. WINTER, *Rome and Persia...*, p. 122–130, 195–207.

³⁹ *Petri Patricii Excerpta*, 14, p. 189.

been pointed out, was not able to understand the ruler's motives⁴⁰. An explanation of this question seems to be provided by Amianus Marcellinus, according to whom Galerius behaved very boldly, as though forgetting that *he was prophesied to die after entering foreign territories*⁴¹. This prophesy may have worried Diocletian who participated in Carus's expedition which, although victorious, ended in the emperor's death. A skill in conducting military operations and the bravery of army commanders and their soldiers were considered by the Romans to be no guarantee of a final success if unaccompanied by the gods' support. This way of thinking, which can be assumed to have also been part of Diocletian's outlook, must have affected the way in which he viewed the existing situation. Bearing witness to this is the preamble to the edict on the prices of goods in which the ruler indicated that the Empire's prosperity, understood as a common good, depended on the gods' support which was believed to ensure the Romans' military victories⁴². Similar suggestions can be found in the preamble to the edict regarding marriage and incest⁴³. Diocletian thus had reasons to make a quick peace with the Persians, and to content himself with territorial gains which, after all, were not insignificant.

Following his victory over the Persians, Galerius, based on what we know from Lactantius, put much pressure on Diocletian, demanding for himself the title of Augustus⁴⁴. Diocletian eventually succumbed to the pressure and abdicated on 1 May 305, encouraging Maximian to do the same. Peter the Patrician made a reference to some apparition that, we are told, forced Diocletian to renounce power⁴⁵. New Caesars, under what is known as the second tetrarchy, were appointed at Diocletian's instigation: Severus⁴⁶, a military commander from Pannonia remaining on friendly terms with Diocletian, in the West, and Maximin Daia⁴⁷, Galerius's nephew, in the East. It is thus clear that Galerius obtained a dominant position in Roman politics, even though it was Constantius⁴⁸, Constantine's father⁴⁹, who

⁴⁰ AURELIUS VICTOR, XXXIX, 36.

⁴¹ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, XXIII, 5, 11.

⁴² *Edictum Diocletiani de nuptiis et incestiis, praeambula*, 5, [in:] *Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio*, ed. M. HYAMSON, Oxford 1913 (cetera: *Edictum Diocletiani*).

⁴³ *Edictum Diocletiani, praeambula*.

⁴⁴ LACTANTIUS, XVIII.

⁴⁵ *Petri Patricii Excerpta*, 13, 6, p. 198.

⁴⁶ An anonymous author of *Origo Constantini* (*Origo Constantini. Anonymus Valesianus*, IV, ed. I. KÖNIG, Trier 1987; cetera: *Origo Constantini*) wrote about Galerius's friendship with Severus: *ebrosius et hoc Galerio amicus*; according to LACTANTIUS (XVIII, 11–12) Severus belonged to Galerius's close circle. Cf. T.D. BARNES, *New Empire...*, p. 38–39.

⁴⁷ Cf. T.D. BARNES, *New Empire...*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ It could only be the result of Constantius's older age. Cf. R. SUSKI, *Galeriusz...*, p. 115.

⁴⁹ It seems that Constantine took part in the victorious war against the Persians and was witness to the great victory which Galerius won over them. Cf. *Origo Constantini*, II, 2; CONSTANTINUS IMPERATOR, *Oratio ad sanctorum coetum Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum*, XVI, 2, [in:] EUSEBIUS, *Werke*, vol. I, ed. J.A. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902 [= GCS, 23].

was formally the first Augustus. It is quite remarkable that both Constantius, who earlier seemed to be getting groomed to rule⁵⁰, and Maxentius⁵¹, Maximian's son, who even got engaged in 293 and was for a few years married (298–300) to Galerius's daughter, Valeria Maximilla⁵², were excluded from the political reshuffle. The fact that their fathers, Maximian, Augustus under the first tetrarchy and Constantius, a Caesar, accepted the choice without protest shows that they not only were aware of Galerius's position but also agreed to it.

Granting the title of Augustus to Galerius and that of Caesars to dignitaries linked to him testifies to his rise to a dominant position in the *Imperium Romanum*. Information provided by Lactantius clearly indicates that it was Galerius himself who demanded to be put in charge of a high office guaranteeing a wide range of power. It is reported that in pursuing his goals, Galerius went so far as to use the threat of a civil war⁵³. The threat must have been quite serious, if ailing Diocletian yielded to the pressure to which he was subjected. It seems that he was afraid not only of the military force Galerius had at his disposal, but also of the celestial powers that supported him. Diocletian may also have hoped that by designating Galerius, he would ensure the Empire's good fortune.

Lactantius's account regarding the demands Galerius made to Diocletian seems, at least in its general outline, quite probable. The victories he won may have convinced him of the support of the gods. In the toleration edict issued at the end of his life, he did not confine himself to mentioning his ordinary titles. He also pointed to his numerous victories, introducing himself as a victor over the Germans, the Egyptians, the Armenians, a five-time victor over the Sarmatians, a two-time victor over the Persians, and a six-time victor over the Carpi⁵⁴. He may thus be considered to have had a litany of triumphs to his credit, even if he did not win all of them personally. Tetrarchs were in the habit of ascribing to themselves victories won by their co-rulers, regardless of the inflation of such titles.

Sure of his ground and convinced of the gods' protection, Galerius could now set tough conditions, especially as not so long ago, at the outset of the conflict with the Persians, the situation on the military front was not good for him, and his initial failures had a harmful effect upon his relations with Diocletian who, as is indicated by primary sources, did not hesitate to humiliate him. Galerius's attitude may thus have arisen partly as a reaction to his previous unpleasant experiences.

⁵⁰ He stayed in Diocletian's court in Nicomedia.

⁵¹ Timothy BARNES (*Constantine. Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 2011, p. 57) presumes that Galerius, as a fanatical advocate of traditional cults, rejected the candidatures of Constantine and Maxentius for religious reasons, because of their sympathy for Christianity.

⁵² Cf. *Origo Constantini*, III, 7; AURELIUS VICTOR, XXXX, 14; LACTANTIUS, XVIII, 9. Cf. also R. DONCIU, *L'empereur Maxence*, Bari 2012, p. 48; T.D. BARNES, *Constantine. Dynasty...*, p. 48.

⁵³ LACTANTIUS, XVIII.

⁵⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VIII, 17, 3, ed. H. PIETRAS, Kraków 2013 [= ŻMT, 70].

Why did Galerius ascribe his victory over the Persians to Mars? It seems that he aimed to emphasise his uniqueness. His decision may also have been affected by the fact that he was elevated to Caesar on 1 March, 293, and was thus made to start participating in the exercise of power at the beginning of the month dedicated to Mars. Not without significance, it seems, was his mother's name, Romula, which was bound up with Mars. Lactantius's testimony is not the only one indicating that Galerius ascribed the victory to Mars when, in a state of euphoria after the triumph in question, he recognized him as his parent and himself as second Romulus⁵⁵. Bearing witness to this are the surviving reliefs that adorn the base of the columns which were erected in *Forum Romanum* in Caesars' honour on the occasion of their *decennalia*⁵⁶. The scene of making an offering contains not only a young Mars wearing a helmet but also Mars's bearded priest wearing a characteristic head covering. On the opposite side of the relief, from behind the sitting goddess, Roma, who personifies Rome, there emerges the head of the god of sun (Sol Invictus) adorned with sun rays⁵⁷. The juxtaposition of a solar deity with Roma may suggest that the deity served as a divine patron of Constantius who ruled in the West, while Mars played a similar role for Galerius.

Mars also appears on the preserved decoration of Galerius' arch in Thessalonica⁵⁸, on which the ruler as *novus Alexander* is depicted as the conqueror of the Persians. On the northern side of the southern pillar, third strip from the top, the Augustuses are presented as *principes mundi*, surrounded not only by Caesars but also by the gods – both of the West and of the East. Among them, on the right-hand side, there is Mars holding *tropaeum*, a sign of victory, and on the left-hand side, there is Mars's counterpart, *Virtus*⁵⁹. On the southern side of the southern pillar, in the scene showing an altar over which there is a round votive shield, surrounded by two Victorias, one finds Mars, on one side, and *Virtus*, on the other, grabbing

⁵⁵ LACTANTIUS, IX, 9. Cf. P. BRUGGISSER, *Constantin aux rostres*, [in:] *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Perusinum*, ed. G. BONAMENTE, F. PASCHOUD, Bari 2002, p. 84, footnote 39.

⁵⁶ On the front wall of the base, on the round shield supported by two Victorias, there is an inscription CAESARVM DECENNALIA FELICITER. The base is associated with the column of Constantius. Cf. J.A. OSTROWSKI, *Starożytny Rzym. Polityka i sztuka*, Warszawa 1999, p. 425.

⁵⁷ H. KÄHLER, *Das Fünfsäulendenkmal für die Tetrarchen auf dem Forum Romanum*, Köln 1964 [= MARO, 3], p. 8; J.A. OSTROWSKI, *Starożytny Rzym...*, p. 422–425; P. BRUGGISSER, *Constantin aux rostres...*, p. 78.

⁵⁸ The arch is believed to have been erected in 303, on the occasion of Galerius's *decennalia*, which were also celebrated by Caesar Constantius. Diocletian and Maximin in turn celebrated at the time the twentieth anniversary of their rule. H.P. LAUBSCHER, *Die Reliefschmuck des Galeriusbogens in Thessaloniki*, Berlin 1975, p. 107–108; J.A. OSTROWSKI, *Starożytny Rzym...*, p. 415.

⁵⁹ Cf. H.P. LAUBSCHER, *Die Reliefschmuck...*, p. 73; F. KOLB, *Ideal...*, p. 171. Some scholars claim that the relief does not show Mars, but Honos. Cf. M.S. POND ROTHMAN, *The Panel of the Emperors Enthroned on the Arch of Galerius*, *ByzS* 2, 1975, p. 24; J.A. OSTROWSKI, *Starożytny Rzym...*, p. 417; M.S. POND ROTHMAN, *The Thematic Organization of the Panel Reliefs on the Arch of Galerius*, *AJA* 81, 1977, p. 444.

the hair of some barbarians. On the edge on both sides, there are trophies⁶⁰. Thus, Galerius’s main gratitude for his victory over the Persians was directed to Mars and to Virtus, that is, the personification of bravery closely connected with Mars. The fact that Mars served as Galerius’s protective deity is attested to by one of the three inscriptions which survive in Thamugadi and which were part of the altar erected by the governor of Numidia in the honour of the tetrarchs’ protective deities⁶¹. References to Mars (rare)⁶² and to a nearly identical goddess, *Virtus*⁶³, (more frequent) are also found on Galerius’s coins, both in their legends and in their iconography⁶⁴. One should also mention here a new legion, which was established by Galerius. Based in the East, it bore the name of *Martia*⁶⁵.

It thus seems that as a result of the triumph over the Persians, which he was believed to owe to Mars, Galerius gained a new position already under the first tetrarchy, which Lactantius⁶⁶, who had taught in the imperial town of Nicomedia at least by the outbreak of the anti-Christian persecutions, testifies to in his work *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*. The fact that Lactantius’s account is pro-Christian and partial does not change anything. The chronicler was as critical of Diocletian as he was of Galerius. He seems to have had no reason to misrepresent the relations, certainly known in the imperial court, between Galerius and Diocletian. The information he provided on Galerius’s dominant position seems to be credible, all the more so as it is confirmed by the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian

⁶⁰ H.P. LAUBSCHER, *Die Reliefschmuck...*, p. 89; M.S. POND ROTHMAN, *The Thematic Organization...*, p. 447.

⁶¹ *CIL*, VIII, 2345; *ILS*, 633; Cf. T.D. BARNES, *Constantine. Dynasty...*, p. 57.

⁶² According to Erika MANDERS (*Coining Images of Power. Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193–284*, Leiden–Boston 2012 [= IE,15], p. 118) the reason why the references to Mars on the coins of the first tetrarchy were rather rare was because the preferences were given to Jupiter and Hercules. As a result, the latter gods were omnipresent on the coins of the time.

⁶³ On the coins minted in the latter half of the third century, Mars is usually linked to *virtus Augusti*; cf. *ibidem*, p. 120.

⁶⁴ References to Mars appear on Galerius’s coins minted in Sisak in 295–296, with a legend MARTI PROPVGNATORI (C.H.V. SUTHERLAND, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. VI, *From Diocletian’s Reform (A.D. 294) to the Death of Maximinus (A.D. 313)*, ed. IDEM, R.A.G. CARSON, [s.l.] 1967 (cetera: *RIC VI*), p. 457, no 17b) and MARTI VICTORI (*RIC VI*, Sisak, no 27b); minted in Trier in 295–305 with a legend MARTI PROPVGNATORI (*RIC VI*, Trier, no 62, 63); and a wide range of coins with legends containing references to *Virtus*: VIRTVS MILITVM minted in Sicilia (*RIC VI*, no 44b, 45, 47b, 48, 53, 61, 62, 67b, 71b), in Thesalonica (*RIC VI*, no 12b, 14b, 16b, 18), in Trevir (*RIC VI*, no 103b, 110b, 111b, 117b, 121, 124b, 133); in Alexandria (*RIC VI*, no 75), with a legend VIRTVS EXERCITVS or VIRTVTI EXERCITVS, in Antioch (*RIC VI*, no 85), in Cyzikus (*RIC VI*, no 47, 52, 59, 72), in Heraclea (*RIC VI*, no 51), in Nicomedia (*RIC VI*, no 59), in Serdyce (*RIC VI*, no 44).

⁶⁵ According to LEADBETTER (*Galerius...*, p. 105, footnote 72) the suggestion that the Legion’s name reflects Galerius’s link with Mars is tempting but needs to be rejected, since it is impossible to prove that the god served as Galerius’s protective deity.

⁶⁶ LACTANTIUS, IX–XIV, XVIII–XXI. Cf. also T.D. BARNES, *Constantine. Dynasty...*, p. 56.

(despite the latter's protests), which benefited Galerius, and by the appointment of new Caesars who had close links to Galerius and who were appointed to the exclusion of Constantine and Maxentius, that is, the sons of the previous tetrarchs, Constantius and Maximian. Their willingness to accept the nominations without protest is additional proof that they were not only aware of Galerius's position, but also agreed to it. It is thus clear that Lactantius's testimony according to which Galerius recognized Mars as his divine patron is credible and remains in agreement both with a number of other sources and with the true course of events.

Translated by Artur MękarSKI

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