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## Hamstrung Horses: Dating Constantine's departure from the court of Galerius

Writing in the period 314-15, the notoriously creative Christian apologist Lactantius penned an account of the departure of Constantine to his dying father Constantius. Lactantius records that Constantine, hostage at the court of Galerius and intentionally exposed by the that emperor to considerable physical danger, escaped Galerius's clutches in the East to careen headlong across the Empire, killing the horses of the imperial post at each *mansio* through which he passed, in order to frustrate any attempt at pursuit. By this daring getaway, Constantine slipped the Galerian net and joined his father at York for one last heartfelt goodbye before the pious Constantius slipped this mortal coil and Constantine was acclaimed emperor by his father's soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Lactantius was clearly himself reporting a story that was widely accepted at the time he was writing, for in the next decades we see it crop up in the *Vita Constantini* of Eusebius, the *de Caesaribus* of Sextus Aurelius Victor, the anonymous *Origo Constantini imperatoris*,<sup>2</sup> and Aurelius' continuator, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.<sup>3</sup>

It is now established historical orthodoxy that this story was a fiction created by Constantine's court sometime after 311 and gleefully adopted by historians favourable to his regime. The aim of this fiction was to distance the (newly?) Christian emperor from the tetrarchs and to imply that there had always existed a divide between Constantine (and his father Constantius) and the persecutors Diocletian and Galerius. A 'more prosaic reality' has been detected, however, that – it is claimed – demonstrates that Constantine in fact joined his father not in Britain in the summer of 306, but in Gaul in the summer of 305, and that Constantine therefore spent as much as a year in his father's company before he was acclaimed emperor on 25<sup>th</sup> July 306. This new orthodoxy is based upon four key evidential pillars, which for maximum clarity I number and list in their order of importance. In the first place are the two central pillars:

1. A military diploma issued at Rome on 7<sup>th</sup> January 306 lists the Augusti Galerius and Constantius as *Britannici maximi II*. Given that the tetrarchs were styled only *Britannici maximi* (no numeral) in 304, clearly a British victory had been secured between 304 and 7<sup>th</sup> January 306. The only possible candidate is Constantius's campaign against the Picts in northern Britain, which must therefore be dated to the campaigning season of 305.<sup>4</sup>
2. In the panegyric delivered to Constantine at Trier in 310 (*Pan. Lat. VI*), the orator states unequivocally that Constantine had joined his father in Gaul as Constantius was setting out for the British expedition that would prove to be his last.<sup>5</sup> Given the chronology imposed by the diploma, we are forced to conclude that Constantine must have joined Constantius in mid-to-late 305.

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<sup>1</sup> Lact. Mort. Pers. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the *Anonymus Valesianus pars prior* after its seventeenth century editor, Henri Valois.

<sup>3</sup> Euseb. *VC* 21-22; *Origo* ii.4; Aur. Vict. *de Caes.* 40.1-4; *Epit. de Caes.* 41.2-3. Other sources simply report the accession without the story of the escape: Jer. *Chron.* s.a. 306; Eutr. X.2; Oros. VII.25.16-26.1, 28.1; Zos. II.9.1.

<sup>4</sup> *AE* 1961.240.

<sup>5</sup> *Pan. Lat.* VI.7.5: *cum ad tempus ipsum quo pater in Britanniam transfretabat classi iam vela facienti repentinus tuus adventus inluxit, ut non advectus cursu publico sed divino quodam advolasse curriculo videreris.*

Two further pieces of evidence, less central to the argument, nonetheless seem to corroborate this new position:

3. The panegyric delivered to Constantine and Maximian in 307 (*Pan. Lat.* VII), delivered perhaps a year after Constantius's death, makes no mention of Constantine's equicidal flight.
4. Like *Pan. Lat.* VI, the *Origo Constantini imperatoris*, a source that current scholarly opinion accords a privileged status in terms of accuracy and reliability, reports that Constantine joined his father at Boulogne (Bononia) on the Channel coast.<sup>6</sup>

On the strength of these four pillars, the case seems to be considered firmly closed. Virtually all modern accounts of the period now produce the revised chronology that Constantine joined his father in Gaul in 305 and was with him for his Pictish campaign and through the winter and spring of 306.<sup>7</sup> Many authors also explore the full implications of this revised chronology, for if Constantine had travelled to his father and resided with him for such an extended period without any evidence of a breakdown of relations between the courts of Constantius and Galerius, the story of Constantine's hostage status ought also to be firmly rejected. In its strongest incarnation, this reading reinstates Constantine as a fully legitimate heir apparent within Galerius's tetrarchy. This being the case, Galerius was in fact happy for Constantine to join his father, Constantius happy to receive him, and everybody generally happy that Constantine would succeed his father when he died; thus, Timothy Barnes has said that 'Constantine was always at his father's side, again a destined heir to the imperial purple.'<sup>8</sup>

It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate that these four pieces of evidence do not provide anything like the airtight case either for the new chronology or for the rejection of a Constantinian escape from the court of Galerius. Importantly, there is a very significant contradiction that goes unrecognised in the combination of the first and second items – the diploma and *Pan. Lat.* VI – and it is out of an attempt to reconcile this contradiction that this article is born. Though *Pan. Lat.* VI does indeed state that Constantine joined his father in Gaul, it also states clearly that he reached him as he was dying. If the departure for Gaul is relocated to 305, we thus have three individual pieces which fit poorly together: that Constantius was in Britain from the middle of 305, that Constantine joined him in Gaul, and that Constantine joined him on his deathbed. What is more, this account offers no explanation for why the panegyrics of 306-10, which work so hard both to vaunt the military achievements of Constantius and of Constantine and to connect the two emperors in any way possible have nothing to say about a victory against the Picts so impressive that it earned Constantius (for the second time) the title *Britannicus maximus*.

In what follows, I wish first to make the case for the historical grounds on which it seems self-evident that Galerius had reason to keep Constantine from his father, and to demonstrate that all actions that we can see Galerius taking in relation to the management of the imperial college point to a determined effort to keep natural sons from inheriting their fathers' position (section I). This context lends *prima facie* credibility to the Lactantian account. Were this the only objection one could raise, then the new account would stand regardless. It is not, however. In section II, I will consider the military diploma that forms the basis of our revised chronology, and explore the strength of its evidence. As I will show, there are good grounds

<sup>6</sup> *Origo* ii.4.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Barnes 1976a, 191; König 1987, 71-4; Neri 1992, 240; Bleckmann 1996, 41-3; Drake 2002, 165-6; Odahl 2004, 65-6 (accepting the chronology but keeping the story of the post horses); Potter 2004, 337-8; Lenski 2005, 61; Cameron 2006, 19-20; Barnes 2011, 47-66; Bardill 2012, 82; Potter 2013, 111-4.

<sup>8</sup> Barnes 1981, 27.

for questioning the *Britannicus maximus II* title, not least that the diploma's original publishers expressed considerable reservations about its testimony. Following this, in section III, I look at the panegyrics in order to demonstrate that they in every way confirm the suspicion that Constantius cannot possibly have claimed the title *Britannicus maximus II* – not in 305 nor in 306 – since such conflict as there was between Constantius as the Picts in northern Britain was clearly so unremarkable that not even a determined flatterer could make something praiseworthy of it. This British campaign, which the a victory title would suggest was one of the most important of Constantius's reign, is utterly ignored by *Pan. Lat. VII* and rather shamefacedly apologised for in *Pan. Lat. VI*. This was not how orators celebrated victories, and the iteration of the *Britannicus maximus* title ought firmly to be rejected. Finally, in section IV, I will examine the panegyric accounts of the period 306-10 in order to demonstrate, firstly, that there are again good historical reasons why speeches delivered in this period would omit the story of Constantine's escape from the court of Galerius even were it a known fact and, secondly, that both panegyrics actually strongly imply a last minute flight rather than a lengthy sojourn. Given the sensitivity of Constantine's position in the period 306-10, we would hardly expect that speeches delivered in his praise would dwell on his tearing across the Empire as a fugitive, or on a rupture between him and the senior Augustus, Galerius.

It is the contention of this article that the Roman diploma errs in naming Constantius and Galerius *Britannicus maximus II*, that Constantine joined his father in Gaul in 306 after an escape from the court of Galerius, that they travelled to Britain together, that conflict with the Picts in the spring or early summer of 306 was so trifling as to hardly merit notice, and that Constantius died very soon afterwards.<sup>9</sup>

## I. Galerius's dynastic management and Constantine's hostage status

Crucial at the outset is a firm understanding of the fact that Galerius very clearly did not want Constantine to succeed his father and to see what considerable effort Galerius, and Diocletian before him, had expended on removing hereditary succession from the system of the tetrarchy. Though Galerius did everything he could to manoeuvre people close to him into the college, Galerius's every action in managing that college seems designed to keep children from inheriting their father's power.<sup>10</sup>

We possess no clear statement of the constitution of the tetrarchy, and it seems reasonable to posit, given what we know about the undefined nature of Roman imperial power, that no such document ever existed. As such, our inferences about the rules that were understood to govern that system must remain just that: inferences. Nonetheless, it seems absolutely evident from the evidence that we do possess that both Diocletian and Galerius were committed to the principle that natural sons would not succeed their fathers. In the early years of the diarchy, a Gallic orator had confidently looked forward to the days when Maximian's son, Maxentius, would take up imperial power.<sup>11</sup> Just two years after this speech had been delivered, however, Diocletian and Maximian had already contracted marriage alliances through their daughters which it seemed were immediately recognized to have significant

<sup>9</sup> [redacted for peer review – contains explicit references to my own work]

<sup>10</sup> Whilst Galerius wanted *other people's* children away from the succession, it may well be that he would happily have included his own. He appears to have had an illegitimate son, Candidianus, perhaps nine years old in 305, whom he may ultimately have wanted to bring into the succession, given that he betrothed him to a daughter of Daia. Galerius died when Candidianus was still only fifteen, and Candidianus himself was executed just two years later (Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 20.4, 50.2-3).

<sup>11</sup> *Pan. Lat.* X.14.1.

political implications, and in 293 those alliances bore fruit in the two new Caesars, Constantius and Galerius.<sup>12</sup>

Twelve years to the day after that, imperial power changed hands again. Though the deliberations which we find in Lactantius about how and why this change of power should take place may be dismissed as that author's own inventions, nonetheless the pattern of dependencies that can be seen in the appointment of the two Caesars make very clear, firstly, that Galerius was the power behind the second tetrarchy and, secondly, that he had no intention of allowing natural sons to be involved. Maxentius, now an adult (he had been as young as ten in 293), was again passed over, as was Constantine, the adult son of Constantius. Severus and Daia, the new Caesars, were allies of Galerius, respectively a close companion and the emperor's nephew.<sup>13</sup> Constantine and Maxentius were placed in positions that would keep them safely distant from the possibility of asserting a role for themselves, Maxentius in suburban retirement in Italy, Constantine as a military officer of Galerius (as he had been under Diocletian).<sup>14</sup> Such sources as pronounce on the issue make clear that Constantine was, in some senses, a hostage, and the reticence of the 307 *Pan. Lat. VII* (discussed shortly) in discussing this period would seem to confirm this.<sup>15</sup> Constantine's marriage to Minervina, c. 303, appears to have offered no imperial connection, and this likewise implies that no imperial future was being imagined for Constantine.<sup>16</sup> The age of Constantius's children by Theodora is not known, but the eldest of them, in 305, is unlikely to have been older than fifteen, and may well have been considerably younger.<sup>17</sup> This notwithstanding, their youth in Gaul, cloistered in Toulouse far from their father's seats of power in the north, was remembered as an exile, and it seems reasonable to infer that they were likewise being kept from proximity to the court.<sup>18</sup> Finally in 308, at the conference of Carnuntum, it was another comrade in arms, Licinius, that Galerius chose to create as the new Augustus of the West, subordinating Constantine to him (a subordination Constantine clearly never accepted). In other words, at every moment where we can see the decision making process of the tetrarchy's main orchestrators, Diocletian and Galerius, in action, the effort appears to have been to keep sons excluded from the succession and to keep sons distant from involvement in imperial power; they were placed in comfortable exile away from major imperial centres or were kept near to home and under close supervision. Given this clearly discernible pattern of behaviour, the willingness of Galerius to let Constantine travel to his father (on what pretence we cannot guess, since Constantius cannot have been dying already in 305) is exceptionally hard to credit.

There are therefore compelling historical grounds on which to be nervous of the idea that Galerius would have been willing to let Constantine travel to his father's court, particularly if that travel took place at a time when Constantius's health was failing and there was thus a danger that an imperial acclamation was in the offing. The clear pattern and policy in the way Galerius behaved in relation to the tetrarchic succession – a pattern and policy that Galerius

<sup>12</sup> Leadbetter 1998; Rees 2004, 77-8; Leadbetter 2009, 60-73.

<sup>13</sup> Barnes 1981, 25; Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 188-90; Mackay 1999, 198-209; Rees 2004, 76-80; Leadbetter, 2009, 134-46; for Lactantius's account, see *Mort Pers.* 17-20.

<sup>14</sup> Maxentius: *Epit. De Caes.* 40.2; Eutr. X.2.3. Constantine: Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 18.10; *Origo* ii.2; Euseb., *VC* 1.19.

<sup>15</sup> Both Aur. Vict. *de Caes* 40.2 and *Origo* ii.2 call him an *obses*. On *Pan. Lat. VII*, see below pp. ???.

<sup>16</sup> On this marriage, see Pohlsander 1984, 80-2. As Humphries 2008, 89 points out, Maxentius *had* made an imperial marriage, and this perhaps points to the ambitions Maximian once had for him (see above, n. 11).

<sup>17</sup> The marriages had been contracted in 289 (cf. *Pan. Lat.* X.11.4). Theodora seems to have borne six children, two girls and four boys, though the precise order of their births is unclear: Chausson 2007, 116-22; Barnes 2011, 41-2.

<sup>18</sup> Aus., *Comm. Prof. Burdig.* 16.11-12, 17.9-13. Whether this 'exile' should be considered to have been begun by Galerius in 305 or Constantine in 306 is unclear, and I would not want to press the point too hard here.

seems to have adopted from Diocletian – is detectable in texts outside the ambit of Constantinian bias (in prosopography, panegyric, and epigraphic evidence) and is therefore independent of any hypothesised myth-making on the part of Constantine, Lactantius, and others. It therefore urges extreme caution upon us in believing that Galerius so spectacularly reversed this policy by allowing Constantine to travel to his father at a moment of supreme fragility for the fledgling second tetrarchy.

## II. The military diploma of Valerius Clemens

We turn now to the evidence that has been mustered in support of a new chronology and the attendant reinterpretation of the macropolitical situation in 305-6. Perhaps the central piece of evidence in this discussion is the military diploma which records the *Britannicus maximus II* title. Unearthed in June 1958 by a farmer working in the vicinity of Grosseto, Tuscany, the diploma records the discharge from the praetorians of one Valerius Clemens on 7<sup>th</sup> January 306 (*VII id Ian dn Constant Aug VI et Maximian Aug VI cos*).<sup>19</sup> Amongst the titles listed for the emperors on both the external and internal face of the diploma is the vital *Br(itannici) m(aximi) II*. Given that the tetrarchs last claimed a British victory in 297 with the defeat of Allectus, and that a diploma of 7<sup>th</sup> January 304 (or possibly 305) still lists the emperors solely as *Britannici maximi* (with no iteration), it seems a British victory title has been earned in the period 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 304/5 – 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 306.<sup>20</sup> If we accept the testament of the diploma (as most do), this victory can only be the victory won against the Picts by Constantius and it must therefore have occurred, at the very latest, by the autumn of 305, in order to be known about in Rome by January 306.

This argument holds only so long as we are willing to credit the diploma as being correct. There are, however, significant grounds to question its accuracy. In the first place, it should be noted that there are unquestionably errors concerning imperial titular with the text of this diploma. In the first place, its inner and outer faces records different sets of titles for the emperors. The outer face, importantly, records Constantius and Galerius as *Ger(manici) m(amximi) V*, but the inner records them simply as *Ger(manici) m(amximi)*. Likewise, both faces record the emperors as *tr(ibunicia) p(otestate) XVI*, but Constantius and Galerius were, in January 306, in only the fourteenth year of their tribunician power (*tr p XIII*). Because of these (and other issues that they found with its text), the original editors of the diploma expressed considerable reservations about the title *Britannicus maximus II* (a point almost never cited in discussion of this source): ‘si rimane incerti sulla confidenza da nutire e sul fondamento storico da annettere alla iterazione del soprannome *Britannicus maximus* nel diploma del 306...’<sup>21</sup> Nor are they lone voices in cautioning of the pitfalls attendant on utilising isolated titles to construct historical narrative.<sup>22</sup>

Can external reasons for confidence be sought? Unfortunately, the answer to this is a fairly firm no. Four sets of victory titles for Galerius, postdating 306, survive that might offer confirmation. Two of these, both epigraphic testaments to an imperial edict found in Asia Minor and dating from 310, are sufficiently fragmentary that it is impossible to know whether the *Britannicus maximus* title was included with an iteration.<sup>23</sup> The third is the list of titles

<sup>19</sup> For the text of and commentary on the diploma, see Bizzarri and Forni 1960 (the text was later reprinted in *AE* 1961.240, which tends to be the reference one finds in secondary literature).

<sup>20</sup> For the 304/5 diploma, see *AE* 1958.190.

<sup>21</sup> Bizzarri and Forni 1960, 16-17: ‘it is unclear what confidence and what historical significance may be placed in the iteration of the epithet *Britannicus maximus* in the diploma of 306...’

<sup>22</sup> Lippold 1981, 362-3.

<sup>23</sup> *CIL* III.6979 = *ILS* 660 and III.12133.

attached by Eusebius to his report of the Edict of Toleration posted by Galerius in April 311. Here, the title *Britannicus maximus* (or rather its Greek equivalent Βρεττανῶν μέγιστος) is utterly absent, and though Dessau emended this apparent error in 1892, supplying Περσῶν μέγιστος [τρίς Βρεττανῶν μέγιστος] δῖς (*Pers max. [III Brit max] II*) for Eusebius's actual Περσῶν μέγιστος δῖς (*Pers max II*), the point remains that Eusebius gives us no direct confirmation of this title.<sup>24</sup> The final piece of evidence, the most significant, was published in *Année épigraphique* in 2002 and is the epigraphic record of a letter from Galerius granting civic status to Heraclea Sintica in Macedonia and dating from between 10<sup>th</sup> December 307 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 308. Galerius is here recorded simply as *Br(i)t(annicus) m(aximus)* without any iteration, which means that the only other concrete witness to this title states that it did not exist.<sup>25</sup>

Is it possible, therefore, that the 306 diploma erred, and added a bogus title? Here the answer must be a firm yes, for errors concerning victory titles and their iteration are common in tetrarchic sources.<sup>26</sup> In Rome, where this diploma will have been prepared, Diocletian had been styled *Britannicus maximus* in 284/5 when there is no possibility at all that he could have won this title.<sup>27</sup> At Durostorum, an inscription perhaps dating from the period 292-4 commemorates the tetrarchs as *Gothicus*, a title attested nowhere else.<sup>28</sup> In his 2008 article 'I soprannomi trionfali di Costantino', Maurizio Colombo catalogues a list of several inscriptional errors concerning titulature.<sup>29</sup> Finally, and perhaps most instructive of all, precisely this kind of insertion of an erroneous iteration into a military diploma can be demonstrated to have occurred in the diploma of 304, issued (like that of 306) to a praetorian discharged from his service at Rome. Here Diocletian and Maximian are recorded as *Ar(menicus) m(aximus) II*, the impossibility of which is readily apparent, since the emperors won this title once only, in 298.<sup>30</sup> Precisely the administrative department responsible for producing the 306 diploma, therefore, was demonstrably capable of appending numerals onto titles that had no need for them.

There are thus compelling reasons – other errors within this same diploma, the total failure of later victory titulature to corroborate *Brit max II*, and a demonstrable propensity for bogus victory titles to enter the record – to believe that the title recorded in the 306 diploma is an error. In the following section, we will consider the evidence of the panegyrics, and will see that they lend considerable weight to the notion that nothing of note – certainly nothing

<sup>24</sup> Euseb. *HE* VIII.17.3, cf. *ILS* I 151-2. Admittedly, this insertion is sensical – Galerius was recorded as *Persicus maximus III* on the first of the Asia Minor inscriptions above and two African inscriptions of 312/3 and 315 give Constantine the title *Persicus*, implying an (albeit otherwise unknown and unexpected) victory over the Persians by Daia in 310. Galerius, 310: *CIL* III.6979 = *ILS* 660; Constantine 312/3: *ILAlg* 1.3956; Constantine 315: *CIL* VIII.23116 = *ILS* 8942. On Constantine's titles, see Barnes 1976b. On reasons for nervousness over Daia's otherwise unknown campaign in a pacified region of the frontier, see Corcoran 2006 238-9.

<sup>25</sup> *AE* 2002.1293; cf. Corcoran 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, given that all emperors shared victory titles, that no fewer than four emperors were frantically scampering about winning titles on a fairly consistent basis, that titles were ordered based on the sequence that they had been won by the senior *Augustus*, and that emperors all numbered their titles differently, it is frankly impressive that errors are not more common. As an example of this complexity, in the Edict of Maximum Prices (*ILS* 642), Diocletian is listed as *Germ max VI*, Maximian as *Germ max V*, and Constantius and Galerius as *Germ max II*. All emperors have *Germ max* listed as their first title because it was the first title claimed by the tetrarchs in 285, despite the fact that the Caesars have no titles dating from this period and that, for Galerius, his first personally acquired titles were either the somewhat suspicious looking pair *Aegyptiacus maximus*, *Thebaicus maximus* (Euseb. *HE* 8.17.3) or the later *Persicus maximus*; cf. Barnes 1976a.

<sup>27</sup> *CIL* XIV.128 = *ILS* 615.

<sup>28</sup> *AE* 1936.10; Brennan 1984 argues that the title *may* be genuine, but that, if so, it was later dropped and that all other instances of the title *Gothicus* are certainly bogus.

<sup>29</sup> Colombo 2008, 49 n. 22.

<sup>30</sup> *CIL* XVI.157; cf. Barnes 1982 19-20.

worthy of a victory title – was achieved by Constantius in Britain after his proclamation as Augustus in May 305.

### III. The silences of *Pan. Lat. VII* and *VI* concerning the British victory

Given that the evidential grounds for the *Brit max II* seem so weak, we ought now to turn to the Pictish victory itself. According to the present orthodoxy, this victory (won in 305) must have been a significant one, for it forms one of only six others that Constantius won in his thirteen year imperial career important enough to justify a victory title.<sup>31</sup> Given that it was also Constantius's final military campaign before his death, and a campaign waged in the company (or at the very least the proximity) of Constantine, we would therefore expect that it would make quite an impression upon the panegyrists of Constantine's early reign. It does not. Indeed, across both speeches the British victory gets barely a mention, and this despite the veritable obsession of these two panegyrists with the military achievements of the emperor Constantius and their determination to connect those achievements to Constantine at every conceivable opportunity.

Before we proceed, it is important to understand the fraught political circumstances in which *Pan. Lat. VII* (summer/autumn 307) and *Pan. Lat. VI* (summer 310) were delivered, as these circumstances imprint themselves heavily on what follows.<sup>32</sup> Constantine had been declared Augustus by his father's soldiers in July 306 but demoted to Caesar (under Severus Augustus) by Galerius immediately afterwards.<sup>33</sup> Accepting this position, he was thus forced to shift the conceptual underpinnings of his right to rule onto the decision of Galerius. But that position would again be revised the following summer when Maximian, a fugitive from conflict with his son in Italy, came to Gaul and offered Constantine the hand of his daughter Fausta and the coveted title of Augustus. In accepting this offer, Constantine helped to add new weight to his own authority, but at the same time undermined the compromise that had been struck with Galerius. But for Maxentius in Italy, this decision might have meant war with the East, and it is evident that at this time Galerius ceased to recognise Constantine as emperor.<sup>34</sup> In these circumstances, at the joint celebration of Constantine's wedding and promotion, the orator of *Pan. Lat. VII* got up to speak. Three years later, when *Pan. Lat. VI* was delivered, the political situation had hardly grown less delicate. Maximian was now dead, either at Constantine's hand or by his own under Constantine's close supervision. Constantine, though still claiming the title of Augustus was, as far as the Eastern court was concerned, Caesar in the West subordinate to Licinius. To cap it all, Constantine's eyes were now turned southward, to Italy, a territory ruled by Maxentius but vouched to the care of Licinius at Carnuntum.<sup>35</sup>

Constantine's position vis a vis the tetrarchy in both speeches was thus an exceptionally delicate one, with the emperor wanting neither an open breach with Galerius and the East, nor particularly willing to fit himself into the subordinate position that had been reluctantly conceded to him. For this reason, we find that these panegyrics have virtually nothing to say about the Eastern emperors (on which more in the next section). The significance for our considerations here, however, was that Constantine's isolation from (and indeed, disinterest in) the other tetrarchs meant that his propagandists had firmly to situate his power in relation

<sup>31</sup> Barnes 1976a, 192-3.

<sup>32</sup> On their date of *Pan. Lat. VII*, see Nixon-Rodgers 1994, 179-85. On the date of *Pan. Lat. VI*, see Galletier 1949-55, II 34-35, Müller-Rettig 1990, 10-11, and Nixon-Rodgers 1994, 212-14.

<sup>33</sup> *Pan. Lat. VII.5.3, VI.8.2.*

<sup>34</sup> Humphries 2007, 90-1.

<sup>35</sup> Humphries 2007, 91-2.



to his father, Constantius, and the dynastic connection that he provided Constantine to power.<sup>36</sup> Given this, it is little surprise that praise of Constantius takes a very central (indeed, in *Pan. Lat. VII*, overwhelming) place in the narrative. *Pan. Lat. VII* was a double panegyric, with sections 3-6 dedicated to Constantine and sections 9-12 to Maximian. Of those Constantinian sections, fully half of what the orator has to say is not in fact about Constantine, but rather about Constantius.<sup>37</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI* is less monomaniacal, but nonetheless of its roughly 400 lines, some 70-80 (a sixth of the speech) are devoted to Constantine's departed father.<sup>38</sup>

In both of these accounts – and not unsurprisingly given the preoccupations of panegyric and the nature of tetrarchic emperorship – the elucidation of Constantius's military victories is writ large. The British victory of 305, the last of Constantius's campaigns, seems hardly to merit notice however. *Pan. Lat. VII* recalls his victories over the Franks in Batavia in 293 – Franks 'slaughtered, driven out, captured, or deported' – and his 'liberation' of Britain from Allectus's slavery in 296, but of the Pictish campaign in Britain it makes not even the most passing mention.<sup>39</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI* speaks of his victory over the Alemanni at Vindonissa (perhaps won in 303), and describes in careful detail the long war against first Carausius and later Allectus from 293-6: the siege of Boulogne, the victory in 293, victory in Batavia and subsequent settlement of Frankish captives on Roman soil, and the recovery (*receptio*) of Britain. This done, he mentions a victory over the Alemanni at Langres (302?) and then returns again to Vindonissa – 'the fields of Vindonissa, strewn with the corpses of the enemy and still covered with bones' – and a final great victory over Germanic invaders lured into Gaul by the frozen Rhine, perhaps in 304.<sup>40</sup> Finally (and unlike *Pan. Lat. VII*), he actually comes to Constantius's victory in northern Britain. Yet his account is a curious one, for he seems determined to tell his audience that there is no need to worry too much about the Pictish victory. Absent are the delighted recollections of battles and slaughters; rather he focusses on how this campaign brought Constantius, in his final days, close to the Isles of the Blest:

The day would end before my speech, if I were to recapitulate all the deeds of your father, albeit in this brief fashion. Even in that final expedition of his he did not seek out British trophies, as commonly believed, but when the gods were already calling him approached the very threshold of the earth. For it was not that he who had accomplished so many great feats thought it worthwhile to acquire – I won't mention the forests and swamps of the Caledonians and the other Picts – either nearby Hibernia or Farthest Thule, or the Isles of the Blest themselves if they exist but rather-something he did not wish to speak of to anyone when he was about to join the gods, he gazed upon the Ocean, that father of the gods, who rekindles the fiery stars of heaven, so that when about to enjoy thereafter perpetual light, he might now see there almost continuous daylight. For in truth immediately the temples of the gods

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Cameron 2006.

<sup>37</sup> The sections directly concerned with Constantine are 3-6. Section 3 extols Maximian's virtues in picking Constantine (3.1-2) before transitioning to explaining how Constantine mirrors his father in virtue and appearance (3.3-4). We are then told how Constantine mirrors his father's temperance (4.1) and his victories (4.2-4), his justice (5.1) and his wisdom (5.2) before the briefest account of Constantine's career (5.3) yields to the much more lengthy description of the painting at Aquileia (6.1-5).

<sup>38</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI*.4.1-8.2.

<sup>39</sup> *Pan. Lat. VII*.4.2-4. On the Frankish campaign, see Kolendo 1970, 199; Barnes 1982, 60. On the war with Carausius and Allectus, see: Shiel 1977; Casey 1994; Omissi 2018, 75-101.

<sup>40</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI*.4.2-6.4. On Langres and Vindonissa, see Kolendo 1970, 200; Barnes 1982, 61. On the war with Carausius and Allectus, see previous note. For the putative 304 conflict, see Barnes 1982, 61.

were opened for him, and he was received by the divine conclave, and Jupiter himself extended his right hand to him.<sup>41</sup>

This passage hardly reads like the evocation of a stunning victory (and there are so many other such evocations even in this panegyric with which to compare it), but rather an apology for the failure to achieve one. It is very hard to believe that this was how a panegyrist would choose to recall a victory by an imperial father so great that it was recognised Empire-wide by the bestowal of a victory title.

Were we simply expecting an account of Constantius's career from the panegyrists, this omission would be odd. It looks frankly bizarre, however, given that in both speeches the panegyrists positively contort themselves in their efforts to associate Constantine with his father in every conceivable fashion. The orator of 307 unites Constantius' Frankish victories in Batavia with Constantine's recent execution of the Frankish kings, Ascaric and Merogaisus, and explicitly connects the pair via their association with Britain: 'He liberated Britain from slavery (*servitus*); you ennobled it as well by emerging from there.'<sup>42</sup> This reference to slavery can only be the period during which the Britain were ruled by Carausius and Allectus, and so though the orator avails himself of a British connection for father and son, he has nothing to say (or nothing he wishes to say) of the northern campaign. The orator of 310, as we have seen, has Constantine with his father in Gaul and at his father's deathbed in worrying proximity.<sup>43</sup> Both also stress the considerable similarities of character and appearance that father and son possessed. One would assume, therefore, that a victory won by Constantius when Constantine was at his side would be welcome grist to the mill of orators keen to united father and son firmly together (particularly given as the author of *Pan. Lat. VII* seems so very stuck for actual things to say about Constantine).

We do not need to hypothesise either a defeat against the Picts or to suggest that the entire Pictish campaign is a fabrication to take account of this fact. Clearly, given that warfare with the Picts merits passing notice in *Pan. Lat. VI*, and given that later historical accounts are unanimous (when they say anything) on warfare with this people, it seems reasonable to assume that some kind of fighting must have taken place between Constantius's armies and Pictish tribesmen in northern Britain. This fighting, however, was clearly so insignificant that not even a panegyrist could work it up into an honourable vignette (and panegyrists, remember, could praise the emperor for doing *nothing*), and the panegyrist of 307 actually preferred to witter on for nearly twenty lines about a painting of Constantine he once saw in Aquileia than to attempt to draw for Constantine any rhetorical cachet from this episode.<sup>44</sup> Fighting in Britain there must have been, but it cannot have been important enough to justify Constantius' assumption of a second *Britannicus maximus* title, nor is a period of more than a few weeks needed to account for the journey of Constantine from Boulogne to York, this scuffle with the Picts, and Constantius's subsequent death.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI.7.1-3.*

<sup>42</sup> *Pan. Lat. VII.4.2-4.* On the Frankish kings (not named in the speech), see also *Pan. Lat. VI.10.2-7* and *IV.16.5-6*, *Eutr. X.3.2*, Drinkwater 2007, 191-2.

<sup>43</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI.7.5-8.2.*

<sup>44</sup> On the painting: *Pan. Lat. VII.6.* On the ability of panegyrists to praise an emperor for doing nothing: in 286 an army of Burgundians and Alamanni that invaded Gaul was destroyed by plague and famine, which stroke of luck the panegyrist of 289 attributed to the emperor Maximian's genius (*Pan. Lat. X.5.1-2*), and in 370 Symmachus could build the core of an entire speech around an assault upon an Alemannic settlement in the previous year which modern commentators believe was largely staged for his eyes and seems to have involved little to no bloodshed (*Symm. Or. II.2-13* with Drinkwater 2007, 290-3).

<sup>45</sup> The distance from Boulogne to York was 335 miles (according to the *Peutinger Table*) via the main highways, and an emperor travelling with his army could be expected to cover this distance in four weeks, and might well do so significantly faster: a cluster of imperial laws from 290, 293, 294, and 326 make clear that in

#### IV. Constantine's flight to his father in *Pan. Lat. VII*, *Pan. Lat. VI*, and the *Origo Constantini imperatoris*

The two preceding sections were designed to show that there seems little grounds for believing the revised chronology of a major British victory in 305; the evidence of the 306 diploma is circumspect and the panegyrics make it abundantly clear that what took place in northern Britain was not worth recalling, let alone worth the awarding of a victory title. Accepting this allows us to toss out the need to place Constantine in Britain in 305, and the Lactantian account begins to look far more plausible. Should we be concerned, however, that no trace of it is discernible in the two earliest sources for Constantine's accession, the panegyrics of 307 and 310?

Simply put, we should not. Constantine's extremely delicate position relative to the other emperors ruling in both 307 and 310 is writ large upon these panegyrics, and is told largely through their silences. Both speeches almost totally avoid mention of any other emperors then ruling. *Pan. Lat. VII*'s only admission within its 250 or so lines that any emperors existed bar Maximian and Constantine is a dismissive reference to *omnes principes* at the midpoint of the speech, introduced only to create favourable comparison with Maximian, and a casually uttered *idem* that the audience would probably recognise was a reference to Galerius.<sup>46</sup> Even these are allusive, however, and an unformed listener would not have been able to derive from them the certain knowledge that Constantine and Maximian were but two of the five emperors then ruling.

The unwillingness of the orator to speak of or engage with the East also puts him in an interesting double bind as regards Constantine. Constantine was, in 307, perhaps thirty five years old, and had clearly enjoyed a long and successful career in the East within the military staffs of first Diocletian and then Galerius. Eusebius, in the 330s, could enjoy the image of Constantine passing through Palestine in company of Diocletian.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, the Lactantius and the *Origo* included colourful stories about the physical dangers that Constantine endured in the East, and the great bravery he displayed (in the *Origo*'s account, he personally captured and threw captive at Galerius's feet a Sarmatian warrior during a particularly fierce battle).<sup>48</sup> Yet for the orator of *Pan. Lat. VII*, there was clearly nothing to be said, and he dismisses Constantine's eastern apprenticeship with a single sentence: 'For while you accomplished many things bravely, many things wisely, when you were completing your first campaigns in those important tribunates of yours, you must perceive these, youthful Emperor, as only the portents of great good fortune.'<sup>49</sup> If the orator had taken this tack in order to get to what he considered more important material, it would not be worthy of comment. But given, as we have seen, that about half of his consideration of Constantine was in fact devoted to Constantius and most of the remainder given to the account of this painting, it seems fair to say that the orator is struggling for material. Whilst it is true, therefore, that we do not find the story of the post horses in this speech, that is thanks in no little part to the fact that its author veered away from any mention whatsoever of the Eastern emperors. No account of any kind is given of Constantine's arrival in the West, his long and successful military career

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these years Diocletian and Constantine (respectively) were travelling their territory at speeds of twenty to thirty miles a day: Burgess 2008 49.

<sup>46</sup> *omnes principes*: *Pan. Lat. VII.7.2*; *idem*: *Pan. Lat. VII.5.3*. Passing reference (and not a kind one) may perhaps be detected to Maxentius at 12.3-5. Daia is not mentioned once.

<sup>47</sup> Euseb. *VC* 19.

<sup>48</sup> Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 24.4-5; *Origo* ii.3.

<sup>49</sup> *Pan. Lat. VII.5.3*.

under not one but two Eastern Augusti is dismissed at a stroke, and the existence of the Eastern emperors largely ignored. We should hardly be surprised there are no post horses to be found here.

For the author of *Pan. Lat. VI*, just as for the orator of *Pan. Lat. VII*, the East was a delicate subject. This orator evidently cannot stand the tension of *Pan. Lat. VII*'s dance, and he cuts the Gordian knot of this problem directly in his introduction: 'And so I shall make my first abridgment in that, although I esteem you all, invincible rulers, whose majesty is harmonious and united, with the respect that is your due, I shall dedicate this address, trifling as it may be, to your divinity alone, o Constantine.'<sup>50</sup> In this, he stays broadly true to his word, and no other emperor features in this speech, bar a single mention of the *seniores principes*, consulted only to confirm the manifest justice of the soldiers' acclamation of Constantine.<sup>51</sup> Like *Pan. Lat. VI*, and for much the same reasons, there was no political capital to be gained from outlining the indecorous circumstances that brought Constantine to the West; thus, again, the East is entirely filed away from the story, and the emphasis is on the circumstances of Constantine's arrival, rather than his departure. Nonetheless, it is important to see that the outlines of the Lactantian story are easily detectable behind the more sanitised version that the orator *does* give of Constantine's arrival in the West:

For you were summoned even then to the rescue of the State by the votes of the immortals at the very time when your father was crossing the sea to Britain, and your sudden arrival illuminated the fleet which was already making sail, so that you seemed not to have been conveyed by the public post, but to have flown in some divine chariot.

For no Persian or Cydonian weapons ever hit their targets with such sure blows as you, when you reached your father's side as he was about to depart this earth, a most timely companion, and assuaged by the security of your presence all those cares which preoccupied his silent, foreboding mind. Good gods, what felicity you bestowed upon Constantius Pius even on his deathbed! The Emperor, about to make his journey to heaven, gazed upon him whom he was leaving as his heir. For no sooner had he been snatched from earth than the whole army agreed upon you, and the minds and eyes of all marked you out, and although you referred to the senior rulers the question of what they thought should be done in the interests of the State, the soldiers anticipated in their eagerness what those leaders soon approved by their decision.<sup>52</sup>

Firstly, it is important to notice that the chronology that the orator here expresses is utterly incompatible with Constantine's being in Britain with his father for any great length of time, for the orator is clear that Constantine both met his father in Gaul and came to him as he was dying. If we are determined to imagine an enormous Pictish expedition in 305, these two assertions are impossible and one or other must be false; if, however, we accept that the Pictish 'campaign' was more likely some minor skirmishing around York (*vel sim.*), then this chronology is perfectly acceptable. Secondly, it is likewise important to see that there are in fact echoes of the Lactantian story to be detected in this account. It is striking that the orator explicitly mentions that Constantine had arrived upon the Channel coast at the conveyance of the public post: *ut non advectus cursu publico sed divino quodam advolasse curriculo*

<sup>50</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI.1.4.*

<sup>51</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI.8.2.* Maximian, it should be noted, features heavily in the speech (14-20), but he was by this point a dead usurper; Müller-Rettig 1990, 327-9; Omissi 2018, 111-2.

<sup>52</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI.7.5-8.2.* Unless otherwise stated, translations of the panegyrics are from Nixon and Rodgers 1994.

*videreris*. Did we not have later accounts to elucidate the significance of this admission, it would hardly catch our attention, and many an imperial traveller made use of the public post to get around the Empire. Yet given that we *do* know the later story, the inclusion of this detail, seemingly insignificant, is actually rather striking. Why is it that the orator chooses to draw special attention to Constantine's having made use of the postal system to effect his arrival? Were this a rhetorical commonplace, like the divine light that surrounds emperors or the fact that the weather always serves their will, we could dismiss it as a literary flourish. In fact, despite all the exciting and important journeys recounted in panegyrics across the fourth and fifth centuries, where speed and the occurrence of sudden and unexpected arrivals is made the focus, not once elsewhere in the surviving corpus of more than two dozen Latin panegyrics is the imperial postal system ever mentioned, outside this speech.<sup>53</sup> What is more, in his account of Maximian's attempts to secure southern Gaul against Constantine, the orator even details how that emperor moved 'consuming the supplies in the post stations (*consumptis copiis mansionum*) so that no army could follow.'<sup>54</sup> It seems our orator had post horses and the ravaging of imperial *mansiones* on his mind.

Neither panegyric, therefore, mentions a flight from the East, but they both had very good reason not to, and both speeches are resolute in their determination to avoid discussion of the Eastern Empire. It is important to see that this must be a conscious decision on the part of the orators, for the radical shift in tone that this represents from the panegyrics delivered under the first tetrarchy is hard to overstate. Here, emperors were praised collegiately, and a panegyric delivered to one emperor would nonetheless be carefully ornamented with praises to all rulers and with due acknowledgment of the gradations of seniority and inferiority in delineating of the roles and standing of each member of the college.<sup>55</sup> Constantine's panegyrics are a stark break with this practice, and his orators maintain a careful and – in the case of *Pan. Lat. VI* – explicitly framed silence regarding the emperors of the East. One should hardly wonder then that we find no narrative of escape or of years spent as a quasi-hostage.

The final piece of evidence that requires consideration is the testimony of the *Origo*. It has been demonstrated throughout this article that the account of a Gallic reunion (which the *Origo* is alone with *Pan. Lat. VI* among all surviving sources in explicitly recalling) is no obstacle to accepting the traditional narrative of a Constantinian escape. Furthermore, I think it is important to stress – since it is a point so often glossed over – that the *Origo* actually confirms the Constantine's status as a hostage (*obses*) under both Diocletian and Galerius and directly recounts the killing of the post horses, albeit with the details slightly different (Severus, not Galerius, is the emperor to be avoided in this account): 'Then at last Galerius sent him to his father. He crossed the Alps with the greatest speed, having maimed the post

<sup>53</sup> Numerous examples of speedy messengers can be found in other panegyrics, but none ever explicitly cites the *cursus publicus* as the mode of conveyance (despite the fact that it must certainly have been so in most if not all of these cases): the orator of 313 tells us that merely that Maxentius *litteras calamitatum suarum indices supprimebat* when news of Constantine's victories in the north of Italy reached Rome (*Pan. Lat. XII.15.1*); Nazarius drags in the gods to his explanation of how the news of Maxentius's downfall spread following the Battle of the Milvian bridge: *ubique iam quidem laetitiam gestae rei diffuderat Fama velox et ad celeritatem nuntii pinnata Victoria* (*Pan. Lat. IV.32.4*); Ausonius details at some length the miraculously swift and tireless journey that Gratian made from Thrace to Trier in order to attend the ceremonies that ended Ausonius's consular year *ut ipsam, quae auras praecedere solet, famam facias tardiores* (*Aus. Grat. Act. 18*); and Claudian states merely that a *velox nuntius* brings the news of Probinus and Olybrius's consulship to Rome (*Claud. Cons. Prob. et Olyb. 174*).

<sup>54</sup> *Pan. Lat. VI.16.1*; like the reference to the *cursus publicus* (above), this reference to the imperial *mansiones* is the only such occurrence within the Latin panegyrics, and the word *mansio* appears in no other speech (*cf.* Janson 1979, 412).

<sup>55</sup> *Pan. Lat. X.3.1-4.1, 7.5, 8.6-11.7, 14.4, XI.passim, VIII.1.3, 3.1-5.3, 13.3-4, 20.1-21.1, IX.8.1, 10.2, 15.2, 16.2, 17.5, 21.1-3.*

horses behind him, and came to his father Constantius at Bononia, which the Gauls previously called Gesoriacum.<sup>56</sup> One might even be tempted to suggest that the very muddling of the details here could potentially be taken as evidence that the story had some truth to it. Officially sponsored lies tend to be clear and unequivocally understood (even if not believed). If the flight actually happened, however, and added to which if it was largely kept quiet in the years that followed, one could imagine that different versions of the story would easily circulate. Nor is the *Origo*'s account in the least incompatible with the Lactantian account – if Constantine was avoiding Galerius, it would seem reasonable to suggest he was also avoiding Severus, and Lactantius himself insinuates Severus into the scheme in a very similar fashion.<sup>57</sup>

Three sources can thus be mustered to generate and alternate narrative to the story of Constantine's escape from Galerius's court. In the case of the *Origo*, the fact that our source itself repeats this story makes it a rather hostile witness. As for the panegyrics, though it is true that neither mentions it, we can reasonably ask whether we would expect them to. Both speeches have good reason for avoiding the details of this exceptionally delicate period, and in the case of *Pan. Lat.* VI they seems nonetheless to have been on the mind of its author as he put his text together. Lactantius in 314/5 may be the first extant source to actually commit this story to paper (or papyrus), but there is no compelling reason to believe it was a story unknown before this.

## V. Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to demonstrate that we have been wrong to toss aside the account of Constantine's escape from the court of Galerius in 306. That we have done so has been natural, given that the inclination to mistrust a story which seems to find its origin in Lactantius. Lactantius's narrative certainly served a role in the formation of Constantine's identity as an emperor, and Lactantius was certainly a Constantinian partisan. Yet it must be remembered that partisan sources do not always lie, and narratives convenient to those in power are not *prima facie* false because of that. Lactantius's story is fundamentally plausible, and a case for its veracity – at least in outline – can be made without recourse to sources written after 311. Lactantian creativity can still be invoked (like the cantankerous Polybius nearly five centuries before, Constantine may well have been an honoured and well liked hostage), but a firm case for total rejection of his account must surely be based on more than a general awareness that Lactantius liked Constantine a great deal and took liberties in speaking of him.

The counter-narrative depends ultimately on a single piece of evidence in a single military diploma, a textual form prone to errors of precisely the sort that would render this evidence null. That the diploma in question can be shown demonstrably to contain multiple errors, some concerning imperial titulature, and that the editors of this same diploma expressed considerable reservations concerning the title *Britannicus maximus II* should be a fact far better known than it is. Thanks to the fragmentary nature of much inscriptional evidence, no corroboration of this title has ever been found. The testimony of Eusebius, albeit problematic in its own ways, fails to support the diploma and a new inscription unearthed in the last twenty years directly contradicts it. On the basis of titles alone, therefore, there is reason to be doubtful of a chronology that put Constantius in Britain in 305.

<sup>56</sup> *Origo* ii.2, 4; Barnes 2011, 54: 'So early and so prevalent was this false version of history that it is repeated in the *Origo Constantini imperatoris*...'.  
<sup>57</sup> *Lact. Mort. Pers.* 24.5.

As we have seen, however, it is not merely that the diploma is doubtful. To trust it we are required to deal in a very perverse way with the panegyric evidence of Constantine's early reign. If Constantine had been a hostage and had fled from Galerius, it is in no way difficult to explain why no panegyrist would draw attention to it. But if he had not, and if he had passed a long period in the company of his father, during which time Constantius effected one of the six greatest military victories of his reign, then it becomes very difficult to explain why the panegyrist of 307 has nothing to say of this victory and why the panegyrist of 310 seems able only to apologise for its feebleness. That the *Origo* reports a meeting in Gaul is neither here or there; *Pan. Lat.* VI does so as well, to an audience happy with the idea that this was very shortly before Constantius' death. The burden of probability and of the evidence would therefore suggest that the Lactantian story is the nearer of the two to the truth. Constantine left Galerius' court very late in his father's life, and Galerius tried (or would have tried) to stop him. While Galerius lived, tactful orators did not speak of it.

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