



Περίληψη :

Diocletian was born in 244 in Dalmatia of a humble family and died in 316. He belonged to the ranks of the cavalry and he raised in hierarchy rapidly. In 284 he was proclaimed Emperor by part of the army. He established the administrative system of the 'tetrarchy', with Maximian as emperor and Galerius and Constantius as Caesars. He limited the role of the Senate and took important financial and administrative measures for the recovery of the Empire. In 305 he became the first emperor to abdicate, along with Maximian.

Τόπος και Χρόνος Γέννησης

22 December 244 AD- Salona, Dalmatia

Τόπος και Χρόνος Θανάτου

3 December 316 AD-Split, Dalmatia

Κύρια Ιδιότητα

Emperor

1. Introduction

Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus was born on the 22nd of December in 244¹ in Dalmatia, probably in Salona, and died at his imperial palace in Spalatum, modern Split, near Salona. Although many contemporary or even later ancient writers, such as Lactantius, Aurelius Victor, [Libanius](#), Eutropius, [Malalas](#) and Theophanes provide information about Diocletian, their views often conflict and are rather confusing. Almost nothing is known about his childhood and origin. He was certainly of a poor and humble family. His father might have been a clerk. Many historians claim that he was called Diocles in his early years, thus having a common Greek name.²

Not many things are known about his wife Prisca but for the fact that she was the mother of his only natural child, Valeria. Valeria later married [Galerius](#), caesar and subsequently Diocletian's heir. Even though Prisca was never nominated Augusta, Valeria was raised to the title of Augusta and Mater castrorum. Since she gave no children to Galerius, she adopted his illegitimate son Candidianus. After Galerius' death, usurper Maximinus Daia exiled both mother and daughter to Syria. In 315, during the rivalry over succession, Licinius executed both women and Candidianus.³ Diocletian had also adopted his officer Maximian, so that he could proclaimed him as co-emperor.

2. Action

Diocletian pursued his career in the army from an early age. According to *Historia Augusta* he enrolled after the military reforms of [Gallienus](#), when the cavalry, manned basically by Dalmatians, was upgraded. He was one of the distinctive generals of [Probus](#). He became [Dux Moesiae](#), in the region of Danube, later commander of the imperial bodyguard and perhaps he had participated in the Persian expedition of Carus, his successor. When Carus was killed, his son Numerianus acclaimed the authority with his brother Carinus. Numerianus led the troops to withdraw but he was found dead in his coach in November 284.⁴ Diocletian accused Aper, Numerianus' father-in-law for the assassination and killed him immediately.⁵

On the 20th of the same month the troops proclaimed Diocletian as emperor. However, there were suspicions about Diocletian's involvement in Numerianus' death. For that reason Egypt, faithful to Numerianus, resisted Diocletian, while Asia Minor and Syria immediately accepted the new emperor. Diocletian did not go to Rome to have an official coronation by the Senate but remained in Illyricum to face the Germanic threat. By this action he underlined the fact that he shifted the focus of the administration from the palace courts to the battlefields. During the following year, Diocletian crushed Carinus, Carus' son and Numerianus' brother, at Margus in Pannonia. He then directly proclaimed his comrade-in-arms Maximian as co-emperor and sent him to Britain and Gaul to suppress the Baccaude revolt. Thus, a division of the Empire into western and eastern part continued, with Maximian being responsible



for the west and Diocletian for the east. Nevertheless, the faults of the defensive system which would collapse in case of simultaneous wars at the two main frontiers, the Persian and the Germanic, urged Diocletian and Maximian to proceed to initiate important institutional reforms, establishing a new administrative system, known as 'Tetrarchy'.

Hence, in 293 they proclaimed as Caesars two **praetorian prefects**, Maximian appointed M. Flavius Valerius Constantius, also known as Constantius Chlorus, and Diocletian appointed Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus, also known as Galerius. Diocletian hoped that by dividing the power he would ensure the stability of the Roman government. In addition, the problem of constant successions of the emperors, which had deplored the empire during the past decades, would be solved. The 'Tetrarchy' proved to be rather effective, at least for as long as the authority laid at the hands of the two powerful men Diocletian and Maximian. However, in 303 Diocletian, after having been a successful emperor for twenty years, decided to resign from his office as Augustus and convinced Maximian to do the same. This was an unprecedented decision, since the title of Augustus was given for life and was usually hereditary. Nevertheless, the two Augusti retired on the 1st May 305 and their positions were occupied by the two former Caesars, Constantius and Galerius, who appointed their sons [Constantine](#) and [Licinius](#) as Caesars respectively. Diocletian retired to the palace he had built for himself at Spalatum in Dalmatia.

3. Military operations

Diocletian's immediate and basic concern was to reinforce the defence of the empire. For that reason he did not promote a drastic reform of the army but maintained the military system as it had been organised since the Severan period. However, he introduced some necessary innovations.

The most important was the establishment of a state industry for producing arms. It is believed that towards the end of the 'Tetrarchy' there were about forty workshops in the empire.⁶ The army was expanded and exceeded 350,000 men. New legions were formed, which were called Jovian, Herculia, Diocletiana, Maximiana.⁷ Diocletian also introduced the institution of limitanei, that is men who lived in the frontiers and carried arms to participate in the defence of the state in a war, while they cultivated the land and had other activities in times of peace.⁸

Initially Diocletian remained on the Danube frontier to fight the [Sarmatians](#). In 286 he became interested in the East and the Persian frontier. He was successful in concluding a peace treaty with Vahram, a Sasanid, who allotted the control of northern Mesopotamia to the Romans and the right to decide on the king of [Armenia](#). In 288 he campaigned with Maximian against the Alamanni in Raetia and expelled them, but the following year the Sarmatian threat was revived and dealt with successfully. In 289 a new danger appeared in Syria, the Saracens, but Diocletian fought them off. Diocletian was obliged to stay almost permanently in the East, living in his imperial residences in Sirmium and [Nicomedia](#), to meet the demands of the defence of the empire. The four men struggled during the early years to suppress revolts in Gaul, Britain and Egypt. In 293 the Persian danger was revived, when Narses, a dynamic king ascended to the throne of the Sasanids, leading to a clash in 298. Narses was defeated by Galerius, general of the campaign, who seized the Persian capital Ctesiphon. The Persians capitulated, yielding Mesopotamia and losing their control over Armenia. After the defeat of the Persians and the final suppression of the internal revolts, the empire could enjoy once more a peaceful period.

4. Diocletian's administrative and economic reforms

Diocletian, apart from his victories on the battlefield, wanted to introduce administrative and economic reforms in order to relieve the population of the whole empire, promote financial recovery and restrain the internal rebellions, which tantalised the empire. His administrative reforms included the new system of the 'Tetrarchy' and the confinement of the traditional role of the aristocracy by reinforcing a new category of court bureaucracy comprised by officials. Moreover, he reorganised the system of provinces.

As far as economy is concerned, Diocletian conducted a census and an inventory of the land of the empire (in the years 296-297). Then, in 301 he issued an edict attempting to curb inflation. Further, he introduced a new coin, more stable than the former devaluated ones. He also imposed strict restrictions, especially for the economically lower classes. Professionals were not allowed to change their occupation while farmers could not abandon their land. These measures were quite effective, although temporarily.



5. Religious policy

Diocletian, having spent all his life in the army, was a conservative man and could perceive the unity of the empire only in terms of a traditional religion. Although his wife and daughter were Christians, he remained a heathen. He adopted the old Roman practice of being connected to a god, which had actually little distance from being deified. Thus, Diocletian adopted the title Jovius, meaning of Zeus, while Maximian that of Herculus, meaning of Hercules, associating them with [Zeus](#) and [Heracles](#) respectively. It seems that Diocletian himself favoured divinities who symbolised values, such as Nemesis or military-ruling gods, like [Ares](#) (Mars) or [Helios](#) (Sol).⁹

During the greatest part of his reign he was not particularly bothered by the issue of the other religions practised in the empire. Nevertheless, in 303, after a fire in Nicomedia, which was probably caused by arson, his rage exploded against the Christians. He enacted laws against Christianity and in favour of the traditional cults and he ordered the persecution of Christians, known as the persecution of Diocletian.

6. Buildings

Diocletian not only played a major role in the economical, administrative and religious renaissance of the empire, but he was also responsible for constructing or repairing important public buildings, a tradition followed by previous emperors which had become obsolete due to the dynastic crisis of the middle 3rd century. The cities favoured the most by the emperor's building programmes were Nicomedia,¹⁰ the imperial capital, where the palace was erected, Salona, where the emperor's house was built, and Rome, where Diocletian had the famous Diocletian baths constructed and had the almost ruined Julian [Basilica](#) repaired.¹¹

The most meticulously studied building is probably the emperor's residence near Salona, at Spalatum on the sea (the modern sea-side resort of Split in the Dalmatian coast). It is a fortified complex, combining the features of a villa with those of a castle. Next to the residence, Diocletian's mausoleum was built. Parts of the building are still preserved, as three Christian basilicas, on of them being the Cathedral of Spalatum, incorporated the biggest part of the complex.¹²

7. Evaluation

Since he became emperor, Diocletian made it clear that he wished to impose a new model of a ruler, who would be based on justice and generosity and thus he would be effective. The role of the army was upgraded, while the Senate was marginalized. The system of the 'Tetrarchy' proved the necessity of divided and effective authority. In addition, his economic measures showed that the empire required a robust economy and a policy of austerity to survive. Generally speaking, and despite the hatred Christian writers like Lactantius had for him, Diocletian succeeded in saving the empire from the crisis of the 3rd century and to restore the army, the economy and the administration. His policy built a new model of empire, which survived intact for another century, bequeathing many of its characteristics to the early Byzantine Empire.

Simultaneously, he created a new type of monarchy, setting the foundations for despotism. He was particularly fond of the title dominus noster (our master) for himself and not of princeps or imperator like previous emperors. However, the establishment of a strict bureaucracy with specialized staff but restricted responsibilities and even narrower intellectual culture, combined with the prohibitions he imposed in order to restore economy, were actually the corner-stone for the social and economic framework of the Middle Ages, which was defined by conservatism, lack of originality and oppression of the common man.

1. Some scholars, like Seston, W., *Diocletien et la Tetrarchie* (Paris 1946) had previously suggested 241 as a possible birth date for Diocletian. However, modern bibliography, particularly of the Anglo-Saxon countries, had suggested 245 as well. According to the papyrus of Panopolis P. Beatty Panopolis 2.162, the most correct date is 244. See Cameron, A., *The Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge-Mass 1987), pp. 30-47; Williams, S., *Diocletian and the Roman recovery* (NY-London 1996).



2. Diocletian's full name C. Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus is recorded by the Latin inscription *CIL* III, 22. The confusion of the historians regarding his origin and childhood has been created by the different aspects presented by his contemporary and later authors. See Lactant., *De mort. pers.*, Libanius, *Logoi* 19, 45, Malalas I. 311, *Aur. Vict. Epit. Caes.* 39.1, Theophanes 10.13.
3. Information about Diocletian's family comes from Martindale, J. M., PLRE, see 'Galeria Valeria', 'Prisca', 'Candidianus'. The best source is Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 15, 39, 50-51 and Eutr. 9.22.
4. The views about Diocletian's nomination differ. Historical research tends to accept the 20th November 284 as the most valid date, as delivered by Lactant., *De mort. pers.*, 17.1 and is also supported by Eus., *Mart. Pal.* 1.5, 2.4. The most convincing evidence for that date is the papyrus *P. Beatty Panopolis* 2.162.
5. *Hist. Aug., Vita Cari.*
6. MacMullen, R., *Soldier and civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge Mass, 1963), pp. 25-26.
7. Cameron, A., *The Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge-Mass 1987), p. 33.
8. This institution evolved in the Byzantine Period into acritai.
9. The preference for Zeus and Hercules, as well as for Ares and Helios, are also testified by coins. See Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G., *Continuity and change in Roman Religion* (Oxford 1979), pp. 236-237. About the erection of a sanctuary dedicated to Nemesis in Antioch we are informed by Malalas.
10. According to a practice common in the Late Roman Empire, every emperor could select one more city in the empire, apart from Rome, to establish the imperial capital for the period of time he had to spend away from the official capital. The choice depended on military or other administrative demands. Diocletian had chosen Nicomedia, which was situated close to the eastern border and Danube.
11. For Diocletian's building programme see *RE* 7.2, col. 2419-2496, see entry 'Valerius Diocletianus' (Ensslin, W.).
12. For the imperial residence at Spalatum see Marasovic, J.-McNally, S.- Marasovic, T., *Diocletian's palace: report on joint excavations in Southeast Quarter* (Split 1972-1990). For an overall view see Marasovic, T., *Diocletian's palace: the world Cultural Heritage* (Zagreb-Split 1994). For an antiquary aspect see Brown, I.G., *Monumental reputation: Robert Adam & the Emperor's Palace* (Edinburgh 1992).

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Δικτυογραφία :

	Baths of Diocletian
	http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas/rome/baths_diocletian/thumbnails_contents.html
	Diocletian's Palace
	http://w3.mrki.info/split/diokl.html

Γλωσσάριο :

	basilica
	In ancient Roman architecture a large oblong type building used as hall of justice and public meeting place. The roman basilica served as a model for early Christian churches.
	doukas (lat. dux)
	Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Buzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military commander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.
	praetorian prefect (praefectus praetorio)
	Commander of the emperor's bodyguard under the principate. During the regne of Constantine I the praetorian prefect becomes a dignitary responsible for the administrative unit called the prefecture, which was subdivided into dioceses. In 400 A.D. there were four such praetorian prefectures, of Oriens, of Illyricum, of Italia and Africa and of Gallia. The praetorian prefects were second only to the emperor. The praetorian prefect of Oriens was the mightiest among prefects. His office is for the last time mentioned in 680.



Πηγές

Χρονολόγιο

- 22 Dec. 244: Date of birth of Diocletian (Diocles) at Salona, near Spalatum.
- 265: He begins his military career under Gallienus.
- 270: He serves in Gaul in the reign of Aurelius.
- 282: He becomes Dux Moesiae under Carus.
- 283: He becomes commander of the imperial bodyguard under Numerianus.
- 20 November 284: He is proclaimed as emperor by the army and he is named Diocletian.
- 285: Battle at Margus. Carinus, Numerianus' brother and legitimate successor to the throne, is killed. Diocletian is acknowledged as emperor by the Senate.
- 286: Maximian is proclaimed as co-emperor; beginning of 'dyarchy' with the symbol of concord.
- 288: Diocletian's great victory against Vahram, a Sasanid.
- 289: War against the Sarmatians.
- 290: War against the Saracens in Syria.
- 291: Suppression of a revolt by natives in Egypt.
- 293: 'Tetrarchy': Constantius Chlorus is appointed Caesar of Maximian (marries his granddaughter Theodora) and Galerius is appointed Caesar of Diocletian (marries his daughter Valeria).
- 294/295: Diocletian begins his reforms in the East. Changes in administration and economy; division of the military and the political power.
- 296: Maximian succeeds in suppressing the rebellion in Britain, killing the pretender of the throne Carausius.
- 297: Diocletian quells another revolt in Egypt and Galerius defeats the Sasanids led by Narses.
- 301: Diocletian issues the Edict on Maximum Prices in an attempt to curb inflation.
- 303: Diocletian issues the edict for the persecution of the Christians of Nicomedia, which soon expands all over the East mainly by Galerius. His wife Prisca is obliged to make sacrifices to the Roman gods.
- 305: Diocletian and Maximian abdicated. The Caesars become Augusti and Flavius Valerius Severus and Maximinus Daia are appointed new Caesars.
- 311/312: Prisca and Valeria are exiled to Syria by Maximinus Daia.
- 315: Prisca and Valeria are executed by Licinius in Thessaloniki.



Συγγραφή : Καμάρα Αφροδίτη
Μετάφραση : Καλογεροπούλου Γεωργία, Καριώρης Παναγιώτης
Για παραπομπή : Καμάρα Αφροδίτη, "Diocletian", Εγκυκλοπαίδεια Μείζονος
Ελληνισμού, Μ. Ασία
URL: <<http://www.ehw.gr/L.aspx?id=7787>>

3rd December 316: Death of Diocletian, aged 71.