



## [Inscription for Diocletian and Maximian in Egypt \(CIL III, 22\)](#) [1]

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Honorific.

**Original Location/Place:** Unknown, Hierakonopolis, Egypt.

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** Convent of Maria Boklé behind Benimhamed (Beni Mohammed) between Manfalut and Siout East bank.

**Date:** 288 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Marble (?) plaque, now built into the wall of a convent.

**Material:** Marble (?)

**Measurements:** Unknown.

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Publications:** *CIL* III, 22

**Commentary:** The above text records the dedication of a building inscription in Egypt; the camp of the *cohors I Augusta praetoria Lusitania* had been restored by the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, who are characterised here as ‘restorers’ of the Roman empire. The inscription is also interesting as it demonstrates the affiliation with Jupiter and Hercules that both emperors had formally adopted in the year before this inscription was set up.

Diocletian had assumed power four years earlier in 284 CE, following the deaths of the emperor Carus – for whom Diocletian served as a cavalry commander – and his son Numerian during campaigns against the Persians. Carus’s other son, Carinus, attempted to succeed him, but Diocletian defeated him at the Battle of Margus and the following spring he was killed by one of his own men, leaving the humble “Diocles”, a man of poor, Dalmatian origins, the sole Augustus (Aurelius Victor, *On the Caesars*, 39; Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy*, p. 5). In 285 CE he appointed another man of humble origins, Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximian, as his imperial colleague (for the debate as to whether or not he was promoted as Caesar or Augustus, see Kolb, *Diokletian und die erste Tetrarchie*, p. 22-67); although this in itself was not now unusual, the choice of someone completely unrelated to Diocletian must still have been somewhat surprising. Maximian had, however, an excellent military record and it was this that appeared to attract Diocletian’s attention, dispatching him almost immediately to Gaul to deal with the rebellion of the Bagaudae tribe (for these campaigns, see Seston, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie*, p. 57-81). Diocletian, meanwhile, directed his focus to the east, where Sarmatians and Persians required his attention, leading some scholars to propose that their shared rule was in part intended to allow different challenges to be met in different areas at the same time, “without compromising unity” (Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy*, p. 6). In 286 CE Maximian’s position as co-Augustus was confirmed, if it had not formally been so before, and the Dyarchy was formally established.

The inscription under discussion here appears to be a commemorative building dedication, which records this dyarchic reign of Diocletian and Maximian; originally set up in the camp of a military unit at Hierakonopolis, it recorded the construction (*extructa*) of new buildings there. The appearance of the imperial titles in the nominative case together with *dedicaverunt* (“they dedicated”) indicates that these were works undertaken by the imperial household on behalf of the unit, rather than having been initiated by the unit itself. The unit in question – the cohort *I Augusta praetoria Lusitania* – had been present in Egypt for almost two centuries by the time the inscription was erected; originally they had been stationed in Judaea, but had been moved to Egypt in 105 CE, with the epigraphic record attesting to their continued presence throughout the second and third centuries (Alston, *Soldier and Society*, p. 186-188). It is perhaps not surprising that the building work was provided and paid for by the emperors; Diocletian instituted a number of military reforms during his reign, which saw him pay particular attention to the forts, which began to change their appearance from the rigid linear order characteristic of the earlier empire, in order to adjust to their surroundings and circumstances. There is plenty of evidence for the addition of surveillance towers to forts, which Pat Southern has conjectured may have formed part of Diocletian’s general refurbishment of the frontiers. She suggests that the emperor – in this case emperors – were also likely responsible for the maintenance of roads, watch towers, and harbours, both repairing structures and building new ones, which would certainly fit with the content of the inscription given here (Southern, *Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, p. 154-155; for discussion of Diocletianic forts, see Lander, “Typology and late Roman fortification,” p. 105-160). These features had always formed part of the imperial defence and police system, and as such were both fiscally and physically maintained by the administration. That Diocletian and Maximian claimed to have done this was both a demonstration of imperial generosity, and also of their investment in this defensive aspect of Rome’s army; their



“providence” foresaw the benefit of strong, stable military camps, and supported them necessarily.

Diocletian and Maximian are both awarded a series of honorific epithets in the inscription; they both receive the – by now traditional – titles *Pius*, *Felix* and *Invictus*, with their military success against Carausius in 286 CE reflected in *Germanicus Maximus*. Military prowess is again celebrated in *invictissimi principes* (“unconquered princes”), although the title may have had more resonance given the attempted usurpation of power by the aforementioned Carausius. “Restorers of the whole world” (*totius orbis restitutores*) was, by now, a familiar epithet in imperial titles; *restitutor* had appeared on imperial coinage from the Flavian period onwards, and had enjoyed a particular prominence under the Antonine emperors, with Hadrian in particular heralded as the “restorer” of several provinces (see [Hadrian, Roman soldiers and Asia](#) [2]). It had several associations: emperors might be acclaimed *restitutor* on account of the peace and prosperity that they had brought to a particular province, or it could refer more specifically to the capital itself, where it symbolised the restitution of order after civic strife (see e.g. RIC IV/1, Septimius Severus, no. 140 and 140a, p. 108; the same message is included in the dedicatory inscription of the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome). *Restitutor* could also refer to the restoration of particular virtues, such as *pietas* (“piety”), *libertas* (“liberty”) or *securitas publica* (“public safety”), whereby the emperor’s own personal connection with these qualities extended them beyond his person and into the populace of the empire as a whole. Restorers of “*totius orbis*,” however, appeared only in the third century CE with its first attestations attributed to Gordian III; it equated the human population of the world with Roman citizens, on the basis that the world, the *orbis terrarum*, was the same as the Roman world, the *orbis Romanum*, or the Roman empire. Although Diocletian and Maximian had not actually “restored” any part of a lost empire to Rome, the title here was perhaps aimed at celebrating the different threats that they had deflected, particularly from Carausius, whose attempt to annex Britain was ominously reminiscent of its earlier separation as part of the Gallic empire under Postumus.

The most interesting part of this inscription appears in the first line, however, in which the dedication is offered to Jupiter, Hercules and Victory (*Iovi Herculi Victoriae*). Although dedications to these deities were common, particularly in military settings, they are especially relevant here because of the way their importance was formalised by the dual emperors just one year earlier in 287 CE. Diocletian and Maximian had adopted Jupiter and Hercules respectively, as *signa*, or appellations that signified a relationship between the individual and the named second party. Diocletian became “Jovius” and Maximian “Herculius,” creating an “earthly association of the two men [that] was equated with a partnership of the gods” (Southern, *Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, p. 136; see also Rees, “The Emperors’ New Names,” p. 223-239). Much scholarship has interpreted this relationship as a definition of the hierarchical arrangement of the dyarchy, with Diocletian taking on a symbolic but superior ‘father’ role as Jupiter, to Maximian’s junior position as Hercules, but the ancient sources appear to have understood it rather as a “brotherhood” between the men, which was devoid of status beyond their joint divine attributes (e.g. Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* VIII; see also DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius & Rome*, p. 36-39). The same association with the gods was also reflected in Diocletian’s coinage; from as early as 286 CE – probably due to Maximian’s confirmation as Augustus – coins began to appear with obverses almost all referring to Jupiter, and with reverses that depicted the god standing alongside the emperor. The legends that accompanied such images included IOVI AVG and IOVI CONS, but from 289 CE obverses were minted with the legend IOVI ET HERCVLI CONS AVG, demonstrating the unilateral acceptance of this association (see e.g. [Aureus depicting the head of Diocletian and Jupiter standing and holding a thunderbolt \(294 CE\)](#) [3]). Although the *signa* are not given so explicitly in this inscription, the dedication to the gods was an acknowledgment and assertion of that relationship; in the military context of the camp, this acknowledgement was even more significant, particularly in the case of Jupiter. It emphasised the loyalty between the emperors and their soldiers, which was demonstrated physically here by their rebuilding of the camp and their investment in Rome’s defence.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Iuppiter](#) [4]
- [Hercules](#) [5]
- [victoria](#) [6]
- [Diocletianus](#) [7]
- [Maximianus](#) [8]
- [pater patriae](#) [9]
- [invictus](#) [10]
- [princeps](#) [11]



- [orbis](#) [12]
- [restitutor](#) [13]
- [castra](#) [14]
- [cohors I Augusta praetoria Lusitania](#) [15]
- [providentia](#) [16]
- [maiestas](#) [17]

Thematic keywords:

- [Diocletian](#) [18]
- [Maximian](#) [19]
- [tetrarchy](#) [20]
- [dyarchy](#) [21]
- [Egypt](#) [22]
- [Roman army](#) [23]
- [military camp](#) [24]
- [dedication](#) [25]
- [panegyric](#) [26]
- [Jupiter](#) [27]
- [Hercules](#) [28]
- [restoration of empire](#) [29]
- [oikoumenè](#) [30]
- [universalism](#) [31]
- [Roman power](#) [32]

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**Other sources connected with this document:** Numismatic item

## [Aureus depicting the head of Diocletian and Jupiter standing and holding a thunderbolt \(294 CE\) \[42\]](#)

- [Read more about Aureus depicting the head of Diocletian and Jupiter standing and holding a thunderbolt \(294 CE\) \[42\]](#)

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- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aureus-depicting-head-diocletian-and-jupiter-standing-and-holding-thunderbolt-294-ce>
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