



## [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).14](#)

Trier, the imperial residence competing with Rome

**Name of the author:** ?

**Date:** 289 CE

**Place:** Trier

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Eulogy / Panegyric

**Title of work:** Latin Panegyric

**Reference:** II (10).14

**Commentary:**

For a general presentation of the group of speeches, known as the “Gallic corpus,” or the XII *panegyrici latini*, from which this text is extracted, see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#).

The extract presented here comes from the panegyric of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus (later called Maximian) that was delivered on the 21<sup>st</sup> April, probably 289 CE, on the occasion of Rome’s birthday, *natalis Romae* (the dating is established thanks to events narrated in the speech; see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 42-43; on Rome’s *natalis* see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#)). It is commonly agreed that this speech had been delivered in the city of Trier, in the presence of the emperor. The main argument that proves this point is that Trier was the place of Maximian’s usual residence when he was not in Italy (for other arguments, see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 42, 62 n. 27, 73 n. 44; *contra* Barnes, *The New Empire*, p. 57, n. 48). Some manuscripts present the author of this panegyric as being a Gallic rhetor named Mamertinus, however, Roger Rees has presented solid arguments to discredit this identification (Rees, *Layers*, p. 193-204; *contra* Stella de Trizio, *Panegirico*, p. 11-13).

With regards to some important moments in Maximian’s reign, let us recall that he was a military man, originally from Pannonia Inferior, and that Diocletian nominated him Caesar to take care of and to defend the Western regions of the Empire. The dating of this nomination has been debated between April 285 CE and March 286 CE (see Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 24), however it is probable that it occurred in 285 CE (the 21<sup>th</sup> July 285 proposed in Barnes, “Imperial Campaigns,” p. 177; the 13<sup>th</sup> December 285 in Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 28-31). Then, Diocletian promoted him to Augustus between December 285 CE and September 286 CE (see Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 24; on this debated point see the good synthesis made by Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 47-50). The question of whether, after his proclamation as Augustus, Maximian was inferior in status to Diocletian remains debated (in favour of the hypothesis that they were equal, see Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 88-114; for a different perspective see Bowman, “Diocletian,” p. 70-71; Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*, p. 33). All that remains certain is that Maximian had been entrusted with the affairs of the Western provinces of the Empire, a mission which, in the period 285-289 CE, mainly consisted of organising and leading military operations against barbarian peoples and taming social unrest inside the provinces.

From a rhetorical point of view, this panegyric - pronounced in 289 CE at Trier, the city where Maximian’s court had been established - follows the most important rules of the epideictic oratory (on this subject, see Stella de Trizio, *Panegirico*, p. 8-9, 25-31). The main aims of the speech are to confirm Maximian’s stature as a great military commander and as a good ruler, but also to justify the legitimacy of the diarchy he formed with Diocletian, symbolizing the *concordia* within the Empire. To do so, the panegyrist organizes the speech as follows. In the *exordium* (§ 1), the orator justifies the fact that he celebrates Maximian on the day of Rome’s birthday, because as he is the restorer (*restitutor*) of the peace inside the Empire, he can be also considered as its founder (*conditor*) (on this passage see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#)). Following the usual rule of the *basilikos logos*, he then deals with the Pannonian origins of Maximian, his education, and his military achievements before he became Caesar (§ 2). The orator then makes explicit his goal while pronouncing this speech: to show the services rendered by Maximian to the Roman *res publica* (§ 3). The rest of the speech is thus an enumeration of his military achievements: his repression of the Bagaudae (§ 4), whose date remains debated between late 285 CE and the summer 286 CE; his operations against the Germans in 286 CE (§ 5), or against a sudden barbarian raid against Trier, probably the 1<sup>st</sup> January 287 CE (§ 6); his victorious campaign across Germany in 287-288 CE (§ 7-8). The panegyrist then deals with Maximian’s meeting with Diocletian in 288 CE symbolizing the *concordia* existing between the two rulers of the



Empire (§ 9), and having argued that Maximian is even greater than Alexander himself (§ 10), he praises again the benefits brought by the diarchy (§ 11.1-6). He ends his enumeration by recalling Maximian's success over Carausius, a former Roman officer who had been entrusted with the defence of the Gallic coastal region from the Frankish and Saxon pirates and who revolted probably during the autumn of 286 CE (§ 11.7-12.8). Carausius thus decided to go back to Britain, but he continued to control some parts of the channel coast in Gaul. In 288 CE Maximian succeeded in taking back the control of the Gallic coastal border, with the exception of Boulogne. In 289 CE, the panegyrist announced that Maximian had ordered the production of many ships in order to start the final assault on Carausius. The *peroratio* of the speech starts with the statement that Rome was happier under the united Diocletian and Maximian than under the divided Romulus and Remus. The panegyrist then expresses his wish that Rome could one day celebrate her birthday with the two Augusti present within her walls (§ 13). This idea is developed in the very last part (§ 14), corresponding to the text presented here. The panegyrist imagines the day when Maximian and his son, Maxentius, will arrive in Rome (§ 14.1-2). It is the rest of the text that requires our attention, as the panegyrist asks Rome not to be jealous of Trier for welcoming such a brilliant emperor, and finally asks Maximian not to forget Gaul when he will be at Rome. It is this last chapter that we are going to analyse here more precisely, because it deals with the questions of the evolution of the perception of the city of Rome as *caput imperii* at the end of the third century. Secondly, we will see that this short text is also interesting because it shows how, through the voice of their preeminent members, provincial communities asked the imperial power to remain present at their side.

First, this passage questions the evolution of the relationships between the city of Rome that remained the centre, *caput*, of the Empire, and the main imperial residences which, during the third century, had become the places in which the various emperors spent most of their time. In fact, from the advent of Maximinus Thrax in 235 CE to the beginning of Diocletian's reign in 284 CE, the imperial power had had to face an increasing number of barbarian attacks on the Rhenan border or in the Danubian regions, to lead various military campaigns against the Persians, and also had to fight against usurpations that affected various regions of the Empire. One of the most challenging usurpations in the West for this period was the one that affected Rhetia, Britain, *Germaniae*, and the Gallic provinces in 260 CE. Initially led by Postumus, this usurpation continued up to 274 CE, having later at its head Victorinus (269-271) and Tetricus (271-274). As a consequence, the emperors spent much more time away from Rome, living temporarily or more durably in imperial residences located more or less close to the military fronts. However, as demonstrated by Michel Christol, in spite of the increase of imperial movements during this period, Rome continued to be frequented by the emperors and its pre-eminence meant that it continued to be the place where the unity and the prosperity of the *res publica* were celebrated (see Christol, "Rome sedes imperii"). The situation evolved from Diocletian's reign onwards because of the intensification of the barbarian threats in frontier zones, but also because of the setting up of a diarchic and then a tetrarchic regime. These two phenomena led to the multiplication of the number of imperial residences throughout the Empire. Using the studies of Otto Seeck, Timothy Barnes, and Michel Christol, Jean-Pierre Reboul has proposed to estimate approximately the evolution of the length of the imperial stays in the most important cities of the Empire from the third to the end of the fifth century CE (on his method, see Reboul, "L'*Ordo urbium*," p. 110-112; using Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser*; Barnes, "Imperial residences"; Christol, *L'empire romain*). Thus, for the period 235 to 284 CE, in the Western provinces of the Empire, he has estimated that Cologne and Rome had been the two cities in which the emperors (including the "Gallic emperors") had cumulatively spent most of their time, as they welcomed 14 % of the imperial stays (note that the percentages are calculated from the global length of all the reigns for the considered period). Next comes Sirmium (between 5 and 10 %), and then Trier (between 2 and 5 %) (see Reboul, "Les capitales impériales," § 4-5). For the following period, that is 284-337 CE, which interests us particularly as it corresponds to the time this panegyric was composed, the situation changed considerably. The imperial presence at Cologne decreased impressively (1 %), and Trier became one of the three cities of the Empire in which the emperors spent most of their time: 9 % of the imperial stays for Trier, 8 % for Sirmium, and 6 % for Rome. Note that Milan, which permanently welcomed the imperial court from the very end of the fourth century CE, between 284 and 337 CE was not a city in which the emperors stayed (only 1 % of the imperial stays) (see Reboul, "L'*Ordo urbium*," p. 112-113). So, between 284 and 337 CE, Trier was the most frequented imperial residence in the Western Empire; a trend that strengthened in the following period (see Reboul, "L'*Ordo urbium*," p. 112-116).

The facts underlined by the orator of the text presented here, namely that Maximian spent much time in Gaul and in the city of Trier, and that Trier could compete with Rome in terms of prestige and honour, confirm this trend according to which, from 286 CE onwards, Trier had become one major imperial residence in the whole Western Empire. In Timothy Barnes's study of imperial residences, it appears that Maximian stayed at Trier between 286 and around 293 CE, before going back to Northern Italy (see Barnes, *The New Empire*, p. 56). The fact that Maximian decided to establish his court in it for many years must have been perceived positively by the inhabitants of the region as it shows that the imperial power felt concerned by the defence of the Rhenan and of coastal



regions. In addition, the fact that the author of the panegyric asks Rome not to “be envious” of the city of Trier, and when immediately after he asserts that by his presence, the emperor conferred to Trier a *maiestas* (majesty) similar to that of Rome (14.3), may reflect the civic pride that must have been felt by many inhabitants of Trier considering the quick promotion of their city to the rank of long-term imperial residence.

Second, this passage is also interesting because it shows how some provincials, in this case the inhabitants of Gaul and especially those living in the eastern part of Gaul – that is, a region that had been durably challenged by many barbarian raids and usurpations throughout the century – perceived the role of Rome. The predominance of Rome is asserted at the beginning of the panegyric when the orator recalls that Rome is the place where the origin of the divine power of the emperor is located: “the first seat of your divinity,” *prima sedes numini vestri* (1.2). He also uses commonplaces to designate Rome as the “sacred city,” *sacra Urbs* (1.1), the “eternal city,” *immortalis civitas* (1.4), and in the passage presented here, the “mistress of the nations,” *gentium domina* (14.3), or the “mother of [Maximian’s] empire or power,” *illa imperii vestri mater* (14.4). The final two metaphors are particularly relevant as they could be interpreted as being representative of the semantic shift that occurred during the third and the beginning of the fourth century; a shift characterised by the increased use of maternal language to qualify Rome, at the expense of traditional terminology that insisted more on her dominant role (on Rome being the *parens*, *genitrix* or *mater* of the Empire, see [Claudian, \*On the Consulship of Stilicho\* III.152](#); [Rutilius, \*On His Return\* I.49](#), I.45 and II.60; on Rome being qualified as a *regina* or *domina*, see [Ammianus Marcellinus, \*Res Gestae\* XIV.6.6](#)). If, in the expression *illa imperii vestri mater*, we actually translate *imperium* as referring to the Roman Empire and the peoples living in it, it would be the first Latin text identifying Rome as the mother of all the peoples within the Empire (for this semantic evolution, see [Claudian, \*On the Consulship of Stilicho\* III.130-161](#); Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 208-210). As a consequence, the panegyrist would combine the traditional idea that Rome masters the whole empire with the fact that she also had a protective role for all the peoples of the empire, but also for the emperor himself, as shortly after Rome is depicted as embracing him (14.4). However, quoting other passages of this panegyric, and also a text of Herodian, Michel Christol has rightly suggested that the expression *illa imperii vestri mater* may not refer to Maximian’s empire but to his power (see the argumentation in Christol, “Le me?tier d’empereur,” p. 358-359). If this reading of the text is correct, it shows that the panegyrist would have implicitly reminded the emperor that he had to go to Rome – where he never went – if he wanted his investiture to be completed according to the usual religious and official rules, and thus to be a legitimate Augustus. However, the panegyrist cautiously makes explicit the fact that the emperor had the best excuse for not having gone to Rome more quickly: he was totally monopolised by the *ratio reipublicae*, that is the “matters of state,” which consisted of ensuring security in the Gallic provinces, and, more globally, in restoring the Roman power challenged by inner or external threats (Christol, “Le me?tier d’empereur,” p. 359).

The last important point revealed by this passage is that through the voice of this rhetor, the inhabitants of Trier, and more generally the inhabitants of North-Eastern Gaul, openly expressed their desire to see the emperor stay in their *patria*, or at least visit them frequently. This idea is developed throughout § 4 and 5. Of course, the permanent settlement of the imperial court in a region was synonym of economic dynamism that some provincials could see positively – this idea may be present when the rhetor deals with the “divine benefits,” *caelestes beneficia* (§ 5). However, the fact that the Gauls asked the emperor to visit their land frequently could be surprising, especially if we consider that fifteen years before, the emperor Aurelian had put an end to a period of fifteen years during which the “Gallic empire” and its leaders had considerably challenged the authority of the “legitimate” Roman emperors. It is now commonly accepted that if many Gauls had rallied these Gallic usurpers, the reason was not necessarily “Gallicanism,” that is a will to establish a large Gallic political entity independent from the rest of the Roman Empire. Gauls, just as their leaders, did not imagine their future outside the Roman institutional model. However, this usurpation must have been perceived by them as the occasion to make their interests a priority; either in having access to more offices of a high rank, or in making the defence of their provinces a priority of the central power (on that subject see Drinkwater, *The Gallic Empire*; Drinkwater, “Gallic Attitudes,” p. 136-139). Coming back to the situation in 289 CE, the inhabitants of the North-Eastern quarter of Gaul were experiencing another usurpation, that of Carausius – even if it had been partly tamed by Maximian –, and they were also enduring frequent barbarian raids. However, the fact that Maximian had established permanently, for six or seven years, his court at Trier may have been perceived as an appropriate imperial response by the Gallic provincials. Thus, we would suggest that through this panegyric, one aim of the Gallic elites was also to remind the emperor that their defence should remain a priority, even if he went back to Rome. This idea may be implicitly expressed when the panegyrist proclaims: “And you yourself, emperor, we request that, when the security of the whole world will be settled by you and when this mother of your empire will have welcomed you...” In this case ensuring the *securitas* of the world – and probably of Gaul – appears as a priority before Maximian’s first visit to Rome.

To conclude, it is important to recall that the elites of Gaul remained largely concerned by this question of the



proximity of the imperial power and of the concern of the latter for ensuring their security. Indeed, in the panegyric that Latinus Pacatus Drepanius addressed to Theodosius in 389 CE to celebrate his victory over the usurper Magnus Maximus (the usurpation that started in Gaul in 383 and ended in 388 after Maximus controlled Italy), we can see that he reproached the emperor for being more concerned with leading Eastern campaigns than with ensuring the security of the Gauls ([Latin Panegyric XII \(2\).23](#)). In 381 CE, the seat of the imperial court had moved from Trier to Northern Italy. This move was definitive as, after this, Trier would never become again the permanent residence of the Western imperial court. The year after this transfer, the usurper Maximus gained much support in Gallic aristocratic circles, and he made his capital at Trier. So once again, in 389 CE, an argument quite similar to the one that appears in our panegyric, pronounced one century before, was used. In 389 CE, the rhetor presented the success of the usurper Maxim in Gaul as being a consequence of the fact that the *Galli* wanted the imperial power to consider more the Gallic affairs and security as a priority. So, in spite of the century that separates these two panegyrics, but also of the different contexts in which they were composed, it seems that the question of the proximity of the imperial power pervades both works, as does that of the responsibility of the imperial power to ensure the security of these provinces.

Keywords in the original language:

- [beneficium](#)
- [civitas](#)
- [dies natalis](#)
- [Diocletianus](#)
- [domina](#)
- [Gallia](#)
- [gens](#)
- [imperator](#)
- [imperium](#)
- [magnificentia](#)
- [maiestas](#)
- [mater](#)
- [numen](#)
- [orbis](#)
- [Oriens](#)
- [pax](#)
- [princeps](#)
- [provincia](#)
- [Roma](#)
- [securitas](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [birthday](#)
- [Gaul](#)
- [imperial capital](#)
- [imperial residence](#)
- [imperial visit](#)
- [Maximian](#)
- [peace](#)
- [provinces](#)
- [provincials](#)
- [Rome \(city\)](#)
- [security](#)
- [Trier](#)

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