



[Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#)

Celebration of Rome's birthday under Maximian and Diocletian

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).1

Commentary:

What scholars call the "Gallic corpus," or the XII *panegyrici latini*, correspond to a group of speeches that consist of Pliny's *Panegyricus* and eleven other speeches that were discovered in 1433 in a manuscript in Mainz by Johannes Aurispa (for a global presentation of the work see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 1-37). This manuscript is now lost, but some copies have been preserved. At the head of this collection appears the *gratiarum actio*, or speech of thanksgiving, which Pliny the Younger addressed in 100 CE to the emperor Trajan in order to thank him for his appointment (on the fact that this *gratiarum actio* had been later reworked in order to produce a much longer version, see [Pliny the Younger, Panegyric of Trajan 37](#)). Next appear eleven other orations composed between 289 CE and 389 CE for various emperors. The majority of the authors are anonymous, but most of them must have been of Gallic origin and teachers of rhetoric. It has to be remembered that the original manuscript did not present these orations in chronological order. If we sum up the order of the presentation of the texts, they appear like this:

- 1/ Pliny the Younger's *gratiarum actio* for his consulship (100 CE)
- 2/ Latinus Pacatus Drepanius's panegyric to Theodosius to celebrate his victory over the usurper Maximus (delivered at Rome in 389 CE)
- 3/ Mamertinus's *gratiarum actio* for his consulship (delivered at Constantinople in 362 CE)
- 4/ Nazarius's speech addressed to Constantine for the *quinquennalia* of his sons (delivered at Rome in 321 CE)
- 5/ *Gratiarum actio* to Constantine on behalf of the city of Autun for tax exemptions (delivered at Trier in 311 CE)
- 6/ Panegyric to Constantine on his Quinquennalia (delivered at Trier in 310 CE)
- 7/ Epithalamium for the marriage of Constantine to Fausta (delivered at Trier in 307 CE)
- 8/ Speech addressed to Constantius I to celebrate his recovery of Britain (delivered at Trier in 297 CE)
- 9/ Speech of the rhetor Eumenius to ask for the authorisation to restore the schools at Autun (delivered at Autun in 298 CE)
- 10/ Speech addressed to Maximian on the occasion of Rome's birthday (delivered at Trier in 289 CE)
- 11/ Speech addressed to Maximian for his birthday (delivered at Milan in 291 CE)
- 12/ Panegyric to Constantine on his victory over Maxentius (delivered at Trier in 313 CE)

The fact that these various works were not presented chronologically in the manuscript explains why, when scholars quote one of them, they often refer to two numbers, one of them being the number of the modern edition established following the chronological order, and a second being the one in the original manuscript.

Concerning the identity of the man who was responsible for the collection of the various speeches, C. E. V. Nixon and Barbara Rodgers suggest that the most plausible candidate is the author of the latest panegyric, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, who was a professor of rhetoric at Bordeaux. As a consequence, this collection was "a product of the late Gallic schools of rhetoric" (see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 6-7). This collection was thus not composed for historical or political reasons, but rather to serve as some kind of rhetorical handbook whose aim was to present some of the best literary masterpieces of the epideictic genre.

Two important points have to be recalled. First, all the panegyrics of the Gallic corpus were composed for official occasions at court. However, although the panegyric of Trajan is a re-worked and more elaborate version than the *gratiarum actio* pronounced by Pliny in front of the Senate, most of the Gallic panegyrics are quite short and do not present elements showing that they had been extensively polished after their recital (see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 27). Second, while the Gallic panegyrics have often been qualified solely as instruments of political propaganda or official vectors of imperial programmes, some scholars have warned that this interpretation of the work may be too simplistic. Actually, the authors of the speeches had of course to comply with the prerequisites of the genre, yet, when they pronounced the speeches, not all of them were part of the imperial administration, a detail thus indicating that their speeches were "not *formally* official pronouncement on imperial



policies or events of the day” (following the later perspective, see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 29).

The extract presented here comes from the panegyric of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus (later called Maximian) that was delivered on the 21st April, probably in 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 below). It is commonly agreed that this speech was delivered in the city of Trier, in the presence of the emperor. The main argument which 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, *Panegyrico*, p. 11-13). Just to recall some important moments of Maximian’s reign, he was a military man, originally from Pannonia Inferior, and Diocletian nominated him as Caesar to take care of and defend the Western regions of the Empire. The dating of this nomination has been debated, possibly between April 285 CE and March 286 CE (see Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 24), however it is probable that it occurred in 285 CE (the 21st July 285 is proposed in Barnes, “Imperial Campaigns,” p. 177; and the 13th December 285 in Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 28-31). Subsequently, 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 in Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 47-50). The question of whether, after his proclamation as Augustus, Maximian remained subordinate to Diocletian remains debated, even if it seems probable that Diocletian still enjoyed a superior position in respect to Maximian, and even if they both enjoyed the title of Augustus (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). 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.

The main aims of this speech pronounced in 289 CE at Trier, the city where Maximian’s court had been established, 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* inside the Empire. Actually, in April 289 CE, Maximian had been Augustus for four years and he had succeeded to tame most of the internal or external threats, except for the usurper Carausius who had taken refuge in Britain. The text presented here corresponds to the *exordium* (§ 1), that is the introductory part of the speech in which the orator justifies why he celebrates Maximian on the day of Rome’s birthday.

In the very first sentence of the speech presented here, the orator recalls the main subject of his speech: to praise Maximian and Diocletian at the occasion of the festival organised each year for Rome’s birthday (“the yearly cult paid to the sacred city,” *sollemni sacrae urbis religione*, § 1). Roger Rees has rightly remarked that while the speech was mainly addressed to the emperor who was hearing it (“most sacred emperor,” *sacratissime imperator*; “your divinity,” *numinis tui* § 1), the orator did not forget to also include in his praise the other Augustus, Diocletian, giving the impression that the latter was also present (“honour paid to you,” *honos vester*; “your principate,” *imperantibus vobis*, § 1). This alternation between modes thus creates the impression that even if Maximian was the main addressee of the praise, he took part in a unified and harmonious diarchy (Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*, p. 38-39). Originally, each 21st of April celebrated an ancient agricultural festival, the *Parilia* or *Palilia*, during which the deity of the sheep and shepherds, Pales, was honoured and purifications of flocks and herds were performed. In the *Fasti*, Ovid describes this festival and implies that it was older than the foundation of Rome (see Ovid, *Fasti* IV.721-862, see especially 807). Sources composed at the end of the Republican period show that the *Parilia* were very often associated with the celebration of the birthday of Rome’s founding, as they convey the tradition according to which Romulus founded Rome on this precise day. The festival evolved under Hadrian, when the emperor chose the date of the *Parilia* to inaugurate, on the 21st of April 135 CE, the new [Temple of Venus and Rome](#). This festival was then renamed the *Romaea*, a process embodying the transformation of this ancient and agricultural festival, itself progressively associated with the date of the founding of Rome, into a festival centred around the celebration of Rome (on this shift, see Beard, “A Complex,” p. 10-11). This festival was celebrated throughout the Empire; its goal was to express provincial loyalty towards Rome and the emperor. A festival for Rome’s *natalis* is, for instance, attested to have been held by the Roman garrison stationed at Doura Europos in the province of Syria (about this point, see *Feriale Duranum* 102-112; Graf, “Roman Festivals,” p. 447). The text presented here shows that, in 289 CE, the birthday of the foundation of Rome continued to be celebrated, and that in this very case, it was celebrated at Trier where the emperor had fixed his residence (see Barnes, *The New Empire*, p. 56; about Trier being the most frequented imperial residence at this time, see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).14](#)). So, even if Maximian had not yet visited Rome since his nomination as Augustus in 286 CE, the orator of this



speech, who pronounced it at Trier in front of the emperor, seems to be attentive to recall through classical terminology that Rome remained the symbolic centre of the Empire (Rome is qualified as being the “sacred city,” *sacra urbs*, § 1; or “eternal city,” *immortalis civitatis*, § 4).

After having first recalled that Rome’s birthday and the celebration of Maximian are the main topics of the speech, the orator then moves to some ornamental narrative by coming back to Rome’s mythological origins, especially by recalling that Hercules had taken part in the very origins of Rome (§ 2-3). Actually, according to the legend, coming back from the Western fringes where he defeated Gerion, Hercules was hosted by the king of *Pallantium* located at the place of the future city of Rome. The orator’s allusions to the fact that “the great altar of Hercules” was still visible at Rome, that the Pinarian family was the “guardian of the cult of Hercules,” and finally that Hercules “arrived victorious to the walls of Pallanteum” are passages which directly echo Virgil’s account of the myth of Hercules at Rome exposed in *Aeneid* VIII.184-275 (see especially *Aeneid* VIII.203, 268-272, about the Virgilian echoes, see Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*, p. 40-42 and n. 62).

Moreover, this reference to the participation of Hercules in the very beginnings of Rome’s history must have been introduced on purpose to echo a contemporary reality, the fact that the emperor Maximian was himself officially associated with this god (this association is even highlighted in **Jerusalem Talmud Avodah Zarah 1:4, 39d**). Actually, at a time that remains debated, between 285 CE and 289 CE, Diocletian and Maximian adopted theophoric “appellations” (*signa*), respectively *Iovius* for Diocletian and *Herculius* for Maximian (Seston has defended the dating of 287 or 288 CE; see Seston, *Dioclétien*, p. 77; see the reconsideration of the debate in Kolb, *Diocletian*, p. 63-66, who defends the dating of spring/summer 286 CE; for a general presentation of the debate related to the moment of the adoption of these *signa*, see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 48-51; Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*, p. 32). According to the words of Roger Rees, the main goal of the adoption of these *signa* was to advertise “a divine agency or at least patronage for the emperors,” and it could be explained by the fact that Diocletian and Maximian wanted to demark their power and authority from the usurper Carausius, who in 287-288 CE produced coins on which he presented himself as being the brother of the ruling emperors, or as being the third Augustus (Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*, p. 32-33). By then, one could note that the orator of this panegyric deals with this special connection between Hercules and Maximian when he presents the god as “that founder of your family and name” (*principem illum tui generis ac nominis*, § 3). The two characters are thus depicted as sharing similar qualities. Both of them are depicted as victorious and sacred leaders (see, for instance, Hercules *victor* § 3 and Maximian *imperator invicte*, § 4), and, most importantly, both of them cannot be considered as the real founders (*conditores*) of Rome, but rather as its restorers (*restitutores*) (this last idea is developed throughout § 4 and 5). Actually, the orator has previously insisted on the fact that Rome was founded by a “foreign king,” Evander, but he clearly presents Hercules as the deity who thanks to his presence “consecrated” (*consecrasse*, § 3) it, with the consequence that Rome later became the seat of the future Roman emperors. In a similar way, Maximian and Diocletian were of course not the actual founders of Rome, yet their recent victories against inner and external threats are judged to be so important for the *salus* (safeguarding) of Rome that they are praised as the restorers of Rome’s grandeur and strength. As stated by Roger Rees: “The transfer to Maximian of the qualities associated with Hercules is a subtle but powerful technique, as it authenticated a genetic relationship between emperor and god and establishes for Maximian an intermediate *divinitas* (‘divinity’)” (Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*, p. 43).

The use of the epithet of *restitutor* to qualify Maximian and Diocletian fits in with an imperial discourse in use from the Flavian and Antonine periods, and which became even more present from the Tetrarchic period onwards, which consisted of presenting the emperors as being able to stop the ageing or degradation processes by working for their reversion and for the re-establishment of an ideal state and/or age. By assigning this epithet to the emperors, the orator re-asserted the extraordinary qualities and divine essence of these emperors (see Hostein, *La cité et l’empereur*, p. 293). It is important to recall that the *restitutor* label was associated with various motifs. For instance, an emperor could be praised for being the *restitutor* of a specific province of the empire, meaning thus that he is thanked for having brought prosperity and/or bringing back order in a specific area (Hadrian is famous for having been the *restitutor* of numerous provinces; this is also the case for Marcus Aurelius, who after the barbarian raids of the 160s is praised as the *restitutor Italiae*, see *RIC* III, Marcus Aurelius, no. 1077-1082). An emperor could also be praised for being the *restitutor* of a virtue, such as *pietas* (piety), *libertas* (freedom), or *securitas publica* (public security). Another variant of the *restitutor* category is when it is associated with the *Urbs*, that is, Rome. This is well attested with Septimius Severus. After the civil wars of the 190s, the use of this title was motivated by the restoration of order and above all by the will to commemorate the impressive rebuilding program Severus undertook in Rome (see *RIC* IV/1, Septimius Severus, no 140 and 140a, p. 108; no 167-168, p. 113; no 288-290, p. 127; on the issue of coins bearing the legend *restitutor urbis* under Caracalla’s joint reign with Severus, see Manders, *Coining Images*, p. 248-249). Under Diocletian and Maximian, no coin bears a legend mentioning the fact that they had been *restitutor* of Rome. By then, when the orator of the panegyric of 289 CE qualifies them as being “restorers,” *restitutores* (§ 5), we clearly understand from the rest of the speech that the orator implies that they



have worked for the preservation and restoration of the whole empire. This point leads us to consider when the epithet *restitutor* is used to refer to a more global spatial or temporal entity, such as, for instance, with the *restitutor saeculi* ("restorer of the time"), the *restitutor orbis* ("restorer of the world"), or *restitutor generis humani* ("restorer of humankind," see [Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\)](#)). As rightly recalled by Anthony Hostein, this title of *restitutor orbis* appeared very frequently on coins or inscriptions produced throughout the third century, especially from Aurelian's reign onwards (Hostein, *La cité et l'empereur*, p. 299; see [Antoninianus depicting the head of Aurelian and a woman presenting a wreath to Aurelian, restitutor orbis \(274-275 CE\)](#)). By then, it is interesting to note that while the legend *restitutor orbis* does not appear on coins of Diocletian or Maximian, it appears on inscriptions, such as the monumental inscription found at Hierakonpolis in Egypt. This inscription was dedicated in 288 CE in a military context, and interestingly for our purpose, Maximian and Diocletian were presented in it as being "our most invincible emperors, restorers of the entire world," *invictissimi principes nostri totius orbis restitutores* (CIL III, 22 = ILS 617). The title used in this inscription directly echoes the message spread in the text presented here: thanks to the military operations they led against barbarians, usurpers and social unrest inside the Empire between 285 and 288 CE, Maximian and Diocletian had worked for the reestablishment of Rome's power (for the correspondence between the two sources, see Christol, "Le me?tier d'empereur," p. 359, n. 16).

Keywords in the original language:

- [civitas](#)
- [conditor](#)
- [domina](#)
- [domus Caesarum](#)
- [festum](#)
- [gens](#)
- [Herculis](#)
- [honor](#)
- [hospes](#)
- [imperator](#)
- [imperium Romanum](#)
- [maiestas](#)
- [natalis](#)
- [nomen](#)
- [numen](#)
- [origo](#)
- [palatium](#)
- [pietas](#)
- [populus romanus](#)
- [religio](#)
- [restitutor](#)
- [rex](#)
- [Roma](#)
- [salus](#)
- [sedes](#)
- [urbs](#)
- [veneratio](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [birthday](#)
- [festival](#)
- [Hercules](#)
- [imperial capital](#)
- [imperial cult](#)
- [Maximian](#)



- [restoration](#)
- [Roman origins](#)
- [Roman people](#)
- [Roman power](#)
- [Rome \(city\)](#)
- [Rome \(foundation\)](#)

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