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This is the author version of an article published as:

Davenport, Caillan (2016) Fashioning a Soldier Emperor: Maximian, Pannonia, and the Panegyrics of 289 and 291. *Phoenix*, 70(3-4), 381-400.

Access to the published version: <http://doi.org/10.7834/phoenix.70.3-4.0381>

FASHIONING A SOLDIER EMPEROR: MAXIMIAN, PANNONIA AND THE
PANEGYRICS OF 289 AND 291

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the techniques used to praise the emperor Maximian, a former soldier of low birth, in two speeches delivered in 289 and 291. The panegyrics transform Maximian's Pannonian origin, which was not publicised in official media at the time, into a statement of his imperial suitability.

I. INTRODUCTION

The third century A.D. witnessed a significant change in the type of men who became Roman emperor, as the imperial office ceased to be the exclusive preserve of the senatorial aristocracy.¹ The purple was claimed by men from the echelons of the equestrian administration and the army officer corps, such as Macrinus (217-218), Maximinus (235-238), and Philip (244-249). These new claimants did not automatically displace senatorial aristocrats as viable candidates for the throne; instead, there was a period of transition in which emperors (or would-be emperors) came from a range of different backgrounds. This is illustrated by the dramatic events of the 260s, which saw the regime of the emperor Gallienus challenged by senatorial governors such as P. Cassius Regalianus and equestrian officials like T. Fulvius Macrianus, only to be finally toppled by a cabal of his senior generals, including the

future emperors Claudius II Gothicus (268-270) and Aurelian (270-275). A similar contest can be observed in the “Gallic empire,” which during its turbulent fourteen-year existence (260-274) was ruled by senators (Postumus and Tetricus), a praetorian tribune (Victorinus), and a soldier of undistinguished background (Marius).² Yet the tide soon turned in favour of the non-aristocratic claimants, as a series of military reforms altered pre-existing equestrian and senatorial career paths, placing the legions in the hands of officers promoted from the ranks of the army itself.³ When an emperor died – usually in battle or by assassination – these officers became the most viable candidates for the purple. After the reigns of Tetricus (271-274, in the Gallic empire) and Tacitus (275-276), Rome would not have an emperor from the senatorial order until the ill-fated Priscus Attalus in the early fifth century (409-410, 414-415).⁴ “Soldier emperors” were the order of the day.⁵

This paper examines the portrayal of the emperor Maximian (285-305) in two speeches delivered in his honour at Trier in 289 and 291, respectively (*Pan. Lat.* 10[2] and 11[3]). The emperor Maximian was a Pannonian of undistinguished background who served in the army before becoming the colleague of the emperor Diocletian, another former military officer. The orations, both of which are preserved in the late antique collection known as the *XII Panegyrici Latini*, are the earliest complete surviving speeches addressed to a third-century soldier emperor.⁶ I will explore how Gallic authors of these speeches fashioned the image of the soldier emperor Maximian for their provincial audience by drawing attention to his Pannonian origin. Although the emperor’s provincial background was not emphasised in official media, such as coinage, the orators skilfully integrated this theme with two ideals that were promoted by the imperial administration: Maximian’s *virtus* and his divine

association with Hercules. Taken together, the two speeches show how Romans of the late third century made the case for soldiers, rather than senators, wearing the imperial purple.

II. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to understand the composition of *Pan. Lat.* 10[2] and 11[3], and the manner in which their authors decided to depict Maximian, some preliminary remarks on the genre of imperial panegyric are necessary. Roman panegyrists were required to produce grandiloquent pieces of epideictic rhetoric praising the emperor, his career, and his achievements. These speeches were tailored to meet the needs of different ceremonial occasions and audiences.⁷ The extent to which individual orators were “briefed” by the imperial administration and provided with specific pieces of information to announce varied enormously depending on the context. For example, Antoninus Pius seems to have been unsurprised by the conventional content of the *gratiarum actio* delivered by M. Cornelius Fronto as thanks for his consulship in 142, though the emperor praised the orator for his personal style and eloquence.⁸ On other occasions, speakers were clearly provided with new information to announce publicly. The most famous example of this is the speech in praise of Constantine delivered in 310 (*Pan. Lat.* 6[7]), in which the panegyrist proclaims the emperor’s descent from Claudius II Gothicus.⁹ We can imagine briefing also taking place even prior to speeches which did not contain such dramatic revelations, as has been plausibly argued in the case of Themistius’ orations.¹⁰ Some speakers actively sought out details to include in their panegyrics, as evidenced by the example of the Antiochene orator Libanius, who wrote to the emperor and to members of his

administration to ask for new information for his speeches.¹¹ Regardless of whether specific details were provided by the imperial government, or obtained from other sources, the task of integrating this information into a persuasive piece of display rhetoric was the sole responsibility of the orator himself. That was the true test of their talent.

In composing their speeches, the panegyrists of 289 and 291 would have been influenced by the political discourse of their day and crafted their speeches to reflect the ideology of the imperial administration, as represented on media produced by the state. The government of Diocletian and Maximian was responsible for minting coins, issuing letters and edicts with imperial titles and pronouncements, and commissioning portrait types.¹² Even though there was a range of agents involved in the production of these images and texts, such as moneyers, sculptors, and bureaucrats in the imperial chancellery, we would still consider them “official” or “central” media authorised by the state, to use the terminology of Noreña (2011: 15-17) and Hekster (2015: 30-34). But there were also many “unofficial” agents involved in shaping the emperor’s physical and textual image for public consumption.¹³ These might include provincial communities or individuals who erected statues or arches in honour of the emperors, the authors of the inscriptions carved onto statue bases or buildings, and the painters and artisans involved in creating such monuments.¹⁴ The orators who delivered imperial panegyrics should be included among the agents involved in interpreting and shaping political ideology. Indeed, Mayer (2002: 5-6; 2006: 144) has coined the evocative term “panegyric milieu” to describe the thematic connections between Roman panegyrics and imperial monuments, both of which formed part of a wider discourse of imperial praise and veneration. We must also consider the ideological

influences on our panegyrists that did not originate in contemporary political discourse. Hekster (2015: 319-320) has persuasively argued that provincial interpretations of imperial authority did not always replicate contemporary messages on official media, but often drew upon other, parallel ideas and themes, which might date back generations or even centuries, or which could be unique to specific regions or audiences. This is a conclusion of utmost importance to the interpretation of the panegyrics: the orators were certainly inspired by contemporary ideological messages appearing in “official” media, but they were not constrained by them.

III. IMPERIAL ORIGINS

The humble origins of Diocletian and his colleague Maximian were recognised both by their contemporaries and later writers. Diocletian had been born C. Valerius Diocles, the son of a freedman, in Dalmatia before entering the army and becoming the commander of the imperial bodyguard.¹⁵ Papyri from Egypt show that he was first recognised as emperor in the eastern provinces in November 284 under the name of Diocles, and only adopted the grander-sounding *cognomen* Diocletianus a few months later.¹⁶ When the Christian intellectual Lactantius came to write the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* in the 310s, he took particular pleasure in addressing the emperor as Diocles rather than Diocletian as a way of highlighting his low birth.¹⁷ Diocletian’s co-Augustus Maximian was born near Sirmium in Pannonia to a family that was no more distinguished: his parents plied their trade as shopkeepers or labourers.¹⁸ Maximian’s precise course from Pannonia to the imperial purple is difficult to trace; all we can say with certainty is that he was a military officer, like Diocletian himself.¹⁹ The rapid ascent of such men to the imperial throne left them open to

criticism, as is most clearly shown by Lactantius' scathing account of the Caesar Maximinus Daza, the shepherd who became an emperor.²⁰

Diocletian and Maximian were not the first non-senatorial soldier emperors, and their official public image, like that of their predecessors (such as Aurelian and Probus) was designed to direct attention away from their lowly origin. The lack of a senatorial pedigree could be hidden behind the trappings of an increasingly lavish court ceremonial that emphasised the distance between the ruler and the ruled.²¹ Imperial coinage trumpeted the *virtus* of the soldier emperors, their support from the army, and their ability to defend the frontiers.²² This underlined the superiority of military officers over aristocrats as imperial candidates, since senators who did not lead armies into battle as generals could not claim to do so as emperors. Soldier emperors, just like their senatorial predecessors, also celebrated their support from the gods, who were represented as divine companions.²³ Diocletian and Maximian went one step further, adopting the *signa* Jovius and Herculus, respectively, signalling their divine descent from Jupiter and Hercules.²⁴ This move appears to have taken place as early as 286, concurrent with, or soon after, Maximian's promotion to Augustus.²⁵ Although these *signa* were not used in official imperial titulature as far as we know, they do appear on building inscriptions and engraved on the *fibulae* worn by army officers.²⁶ Jupiter and Hercules likewise predominate on the coinage of both emperors issued in the 280s.²⁷ Individual representations of the deities featured on reverse coin designs, accompanied by legends such as IOVI CONSERVATORI AVGG(VSTORVM) ("to Jupiter, the protector of the Augusti"), IOVI TVTATORI AVGG(VSTORVM) ("to Jupiter, the defender of the Augusti"), HERCVLI INVICTO AVGG(VSTORVM) ("to the unconquered Hercules of the Augusti"), and

HERCVLI PACIFERO (“to Hercules the bringer of peace”).²⁸ *Antoniniani* minted at Lugdunum in Gaul featured representations of Jupiter and Hercules together on the reverse along with the legend VIRTVS AVGG(VSTORVM) (“the valour of the Augusti”).²⁹ These issues emphasised the divine favour shown to both emperors, demonstrating that their personal *virtus* and the ability to defend the empire’s frontiers was guaranteed by the gods. The coinage of the 280s does not feature any references to Diocletian’s origin in Dalmatia or to Maximian’s birth in Pannonia.

IV. THE PANNONIAN EMPEROR

Our first panegyric was delivered at Trier on April 21, 289, on the occasion of the festival of the *Parilia*, which celebrated the foundation of the city of Rome.³⁰ Maximian had been based in the Gallic provinces since mid-285, when Diocletian appointed him Caesar and entrusted him with the responsibility of suppressing the revolt of a group of disaffected rebels known as the Bagaudae.³¹ After the Bagaudae had been quashed, Maximian remained in the western provinces, campaigning against German tribes on the Rhine frontier.³² Trier, the capital of the province of Gallia Belgica, served as Maximian’s primary residence in Gaul, and it was there that he assumed his first consulship on January 1, 287.³³ The identity of the orator who gave the speech of 289 is unknown: all we can say is that he was from Gaul and that his speech reflects the concerns of the Gallic audience.³⁴ Although the panegyric was delivered on the *Parilia*, and thus had to glorify the city of Rome, the conventions of the genre, not to mention the presence of Maximian himself, dictated that the speech should also devote equal attention to the emperor.³⁵ It was generally expected that imperial orations would contain some reference to the place of origin and family of

the honorand, as indicated by Menander Rhetor, author of two contemporary treatises on epideictic oratory.³⁶ This must have posed a challenge to our Gallic speaker, given Maximian's undistinguished Pannonian birth and the occupation of his parents. Menander Rhetor advised orators who were faced with the predicament of praising an emperor of low birth to omit his family altogether and focus on the emperor's own deeds, referring his readers to the example of the *Great Imperial Oration* delivered by Callinicus of Petra.³⁷ Circumstantial evidence about Callinicus' career suggests that this speech may have been written in honour of the emperor Aurelian, the son of a Pannonian farmer.³⁸ Menander also advised that divine ancestry could be used to obscure the honorand's humble birth, a rhetorical technique that had the advantage of reflecting late third-century trends in imperial representation.³⁹

Our Gallic orator deploys Maximian's "Herculean" ancestry effectively in the speech, as Rees (2002: 36-52) has explored in detail. Hercules' role in the foundation of Rome connects the subject of Rome's birthday with the emperor himself,⁴⁰ and the panegyrist shows himself to be aware of the ideological messages promoted by the imperial administration, as images of Hercules were particularly prevalent on coins of Maximian and Diocletian minted in the late 280s within Gaul itself.⁴¹ However, he also pursues a second, related theme about the emperor's earthly origin in Pannonia, which we will focus on here. Our panegyrist does closely adhere to Menander Rhetor's outline for an imperial oration,⁴² but referencing Pannonia was a particularly bold endeavour in a speech dealing with the glory and antiquity of the city of Rome. Provincial, rural, or non-urban origin was very much a double-edged sword in Roman rhetoric.⁴³ On the one hand, there was the Roman myth of the "farmer-soldier," a long-cherished ideal that it was men from the countryside, rather than the city, who

were the best soldiers to defend the state.⁴⁴ This ideal was not restricted to the famous story of Cincinnatus summoned from his plough, but suffused Roman literature and thought.⁴⁵ Caesar, for example, exploited the conceit in the portrayal of his own troops in the *Bellum Civile*, in which they were compared favourably with the Pompeians.⁴⁶ The myth of the farmer-soldier continued to have great resonance in late antiquity, as expressed in panegyrics and the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* of Vegetius.⁴⁷ Pannonians certainly had a reputation throughout the Roman imperial period as hardened military men;⁴⁸ at the same time, however, a rural or provincial background could be used as a basis for personal criticism, as it symbolized a lack of eloquence, culture, and sophistication. Such formulations featured prominently in republican rhetoric, especially the speeches of Cicero, with which the Gallic orators would have been intimately familiar,⁴⁹ and Pannonians were particularly subject to criticism as wild and deceitful individuals.⁵⁰ The panegyrist therefore needed to tread carefully in fashioning Maximian's Pannonian origin as a positive quality for his audience.

The crucial passage occurs early in the speech, following the orator's opening discussion of Rome's birthday and Hercules' connections to the *sacra urbs*:

Where, then, shall I begin? Shall I recall, indeed, the services of your native land to the State? For who doubts that for many centuries now, ever since its strength was added to the Roman name, while Italy indeed may have been the mistress of nations by virtue of the antiquity of her glory, Pannonia has been in valour? Or shall I recount the divine origin of your family, which you have attested not only by your immortal deeds, but also by the name which you have inherited? Or shall I proclaim how you have been raised and taught on

that frontier, in that seat of the bravest of legions, midst the manoeuvres of a vigorous youth and the clash of arms echoing your infant cries? Such things are invented about Jupiter, but in your case, Emperor, are true.⁵¹

The panegyrist paints Pannonia as the reservoir of Roman military manpower, a bulwark in the defence of the empire. Maximian's birth makes him more qualified than any Italian of his day, for although Italy can offer "antiquity" (*vetustas*), this is not sufficient to wear the purple: it is Pannonia that now instils the "valour" (*virtus*) necessary to defend the frontiers.⁵² This formulation ensures that due respect is paid to Italy on the occasion of Rome's birthday, but emphasises that imperial qualities are now fostered elsewhere;⁵³ it also reveals a fundamental difference between the Gallic orator's comments and Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus* to the emperor Trajan, delivered in 100. Pliny praised Trajan's background by emphasising his consular ancestry, as well as his *virtus* displayed by the alleged ten years spent in the army as a tribune (recalling republican traditions), but not the Spanish origin of the family.⁵⁴ This was a deliberate omission by Pliny to emphasise Trajan's *romanitas* and emphasise Rome as his *patria*, as Rees (2014: 107-109, 120-122) has argued.⁵⁵ The orator of 289, by contrast, did not need to hide or obfuscate on the issue of Maximian's natural birthplace, arguing that the emperor's *virtus* stemmed from his Pannonian origin. The panegyrist expertly draws upon long-standing positive cultural preconceptions about the courage and valour of rural soldiers, adapting pre-existing Roman ideals for a new political reality. In the second century, when Pliny delivered his *Panegyricus*, senatorial status was a necessary prerequisite for the purple, but the third century required different arguments. Our orator does not even need to raise the issue of Maximian's actual Pannonian parents, as they have been supplanted by his

divine, Herculean origin;⁵⁶ the final line of the passage emphasises that in Maximian's case, this was not a myth, but reality.⁵⁷ He was born to be emperor.

V. SHAPING IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY

The orator's decision to mention explicitly Maximian's Pannonian background is the first extant reference to the origin of a soldier emperor in imperial panegyric, as several scholars have noted.⁵⁸ It certainly did not feature in official media disseminated by the Dyarchic or Tetrarchic imperial administration. The only allusion to the birthplace of Diocletian and Maximian occurs on *aurei* with the reverse legend VIRTVS ILLVRICI ("the valour of Illyricum") minted at Trier between 293/305, as part of an issue produced to commemorate the recapture of Britain from the forces of Allectus.⁵⁹ These *aurei* represented the brief revival of the promotion of Illyricum on central coinage, which had begun in the reign of Trajan Decius. Decius was born in the village of Budalia, near Sirmium in Pannonia Inferior, but embarked on a senatorial career, unlike Maximian.⁶⁰ After he became emperor, Decius issued a series of new and unprecedented coins with legends honouring his home province (PANNONIAE: "the Pannonias") and the legions that had brought him to power (GENIVS EXERC(ITVS) ILLVRICIANI: "the spirit of the Illyrian army"; EXERCITVS INLVRICVS: "the Illyrian army").⁶¹ Later third-century emperors who came from the Illyrian provinces, but who lacked the senatorial pedigree of Decius, subsequently adopted these ideas for their own public image.⁶² Aurelian's coinage featured several of Decius' legends, as well as a new one, VIRTVS ILLVRICI ("the valour of Illyricum").⁶³ The fact that there are no Illyrian references on the coinage minted in 285-293 during the joint rule of Diocletian and Maximian suggests that our

orator was not directly propagating a set ideological message imposed by the imperial administration.⁶⁴

Although Callinicus of Petra's *Great Imperial Oration* omitted to mention the origin of its imperial honorand, we cannot exclude the possibility that other panegyrists did raise the issue of Danubian birth. In his advice to orators about praising the qualities of an emperor's birthplace, Menander Rhetor specifically referred to the bravery of Gauls and Pannonians as a topic of praise.⁶⁵ Rome had certainly seen leaders from both regions come to prominence in the mid-third century, and it is plausible that orators drew attention to their provincial origin.⁶⁶ Although Menander Rhetor was writing in the reign of Diocletian, we cannot be certain that our panegyrist had read him, or vice versa.⁶⁷ The orator may have drawn upon his own independent knowledge and expectations of how Pannonian origin could be refashioned into a virtue, either from rhetorical handbooks and treatises, or from earlier speeches delivered in honour of soldier emperors, which no longer survive.⁶⁸ He may also have been thinking about the perspective of his own Gallic audience when composing the speech. The argument that a provincial was the most suitable candidate for the purple must have been particularly gratifying to the notables gathered at Trier in April, 289. Although it was the birthday of Rome that was being celebrated, the audience would have been pleased to hear that *romanitas* extended far beyond the *pomerium* of the *sacra urbs*.⁶⁹

The sentiments expressed about Maximian's Pannonian origin in 289 were probably well received, given that they feature in a second speech delivered in Trier two years' later, this time on the occasion of the emperor's birthday.⁷⁰ It is difficult to ascertain

whether the same orator was responsible for both speeches, since there are similarities and differences in expression between the two works;⁷¹ however, it is very likely that the second orator had at least read the previous speech and was familiar with its themes.⁷² In the 291 panegyric, the emperor's Herculean ancestry is given pride of place: indeed, Hercules and Jupiter are described as Diocletian and Maximian's parents, in response to the divine connections emphasised by the imperial administration itself.⁷³ Yet, just like his predecessor, the second orator takes the opportunity to develop an argument about the emperor's origin, which draws attention to his Pannonian birth:

For you were not born and raised in some quiet part of the world, a land enfeebled by luxury, but in those provinces whose border, exposed to the enemy (although a beaten one) and always arrayed in arms, has taught them the tireless habit of toil and patience, in provinces where all of life is military service, whose women even are braver than the men of other lands.⁷⁴

This formulation exploits the Roman conceit that men from rural backgrounds were uncorrupted by the pleasures that tempted and seduced residents of the cities.⁷⁵ Vegetius would later lament that this was a vice into which even the inhabitants of Rome had fallen.⁷⁶ He reminisced about the halcyon days of the republic when a Cincinnatus could be summoned from the fields to save the state.⁷⁷ Our orator therefore makes Maximian more Roman than the Romans of his day by positioning him as part of the mythology of the city's past greatness. As with the previous speech, no mention needs to be made of Maximian's real, earthly parents; instead, when the orator speaks of "your ancestry and native education" (*stirpis uestrae patriorumque*

institutorum), he means Hercules and Pannonia.⁷⁸ He binds the two together to create a new rendering of Maximian's rise to power, a narrative which MacCormack (1981: 171) has appropriately called a "sacred tale". The speaker must have hoped that such sentiments would meet with Maximian's approval: in the oration, he reveals that he had previously received an "honour" (*honor*) from Maximian – perhaps a post in the imperial administration – and states that he had spoken in the emperor's presence before, and hoped to do so again.⁷⁹ Several scholars have shown that the speeches of 289 and 291 describe the divine ancestry and the kinship of Diocletian and Maximian by adapting imperial ideology in original ways.⁸⁰ The treatment of Maximian's Pannonian homeland, which was absent from imperial coinage or other "official" media at the time, reveals similar initiative on the part of these Gallic orators speaking at Trier.

VI. SENATORS AND SOLDIERS

The panegyrics explicitly draw a link between Maximian's Pannonian origin, his *virtus*, and his ability to defend the frontiers as emperor. The orator of 289 moves from Maximian's birth to his military exploits, victories, and campaigns across the length and breadth of the empire – all of which are beyond recall because they are so numerous.⁸¹ In the speech of 291, the striking description of Pannonia as a place where "all of life is military service" (*omnis vita militia est*) leads into an excursus on Maximian's constant toil and activity as emperor on behalf of the state, together with his colleague Diocletian. The people of the empire may not always be able to catch sight of their ever-vigilant emperors, "yet they do know that you have conquered everywhere" (*sciunt tamen vos ubique vicisse*).⁸² By implication, this expression of

imperial suitability excludes senators as viable candidates or rivals for the throne. Senators had still been emperors within living memory, notably Gallienus (260-268), Tetricus (271-274), and Tacitus (275-276).⁸³ However, as discussed above, they had been replaced as legionary legates by the reign of Gallienus, and senatorial provincial governors likewise ceased to command troops in battle, though they retained logistical and administrative responsibilities related to the army.⁸⁴ The last generation of senatorial generals can be found occupying high civilian political offices into the 280s and 290s,⁸⁵ but the up-and-coming senators of the Diocletianic period did not hold army posts as *tribunus militum* and *legatus legionis*. They did not serve the state *domi militiaeque* (“at home and on campaign”), in both civil and military offices, as their ancestors had done.⁸⁶

The orator of 289 appropriates this traditional senatorial ideal of service to the Roman senate, and applies it to Maximian instead. He achieves this through a dramatization of Maximian’s assumption of the consulship in Trier on January 1, 287, when the emperor was required to take to the field on the very same day as his inauguration:⁸⁷

I should say, with apologies to the gods, that not even Jupiter himself changes the face of his own heavens, O Emperor, as swiftly and easily as you doffed the *toga praetexta* and put on the cuirass, laying down staff and seizing a spear, transporting yourself from the tribunal to the field of battle, from the curule seat to horseback...⁸⁸

The symbolic movement from *curia* to *castra* not only portrays Maximian as an active emperor, but also demonstrates his complete command over civil and military

affairs in a manner that eclipses the abilities of contemporary senators.⁸⁹ Most importantly, Maximian's consular investiture and his vigorous military actions are located not in the city of Rome, but on the Gallic frontiers, where his presence is most needed, and certainly appreciated by the panegyrist's audience.⁹⁰ Over the course of the third century, the increasing pressure of warfare on multiple frontiers, and the inability of a single emperor to handle this challenge effectively, had led to provincial armies proclaiming their own emperor who could deal effectively with invasions in their region. This is a phenomenon which Hartmann (1982: 140-141) has aptly characterised as a desire for *Kaisernähe*, a term best rendered in English as "imperial presence". Imperial colleges composed of multiple Augusti allowed a regime to manage the regional demands for their own emperor to protect the frontiers, and the usurpations in Gaul and Germany during the 260s-280s had made clear that there needed to be an emperor based in these provinces.⁹¹ Yet insurrections against the current regime were not revolts against the idea of Roman rule, as shown by the so-called "Gallic" empire of Postumus and his successors, which was presented as Roman both in its administrative structures and political ideology.⁹² One must imagine that in this period, members of the Gallic aristocracy had become accustomed to hosting consular inaugurations and other events patterned after ceremonies in Rome in their own cities.⁹³ The imperial presence was beneficial not only for military reasons, but also because it allowed closer interactions between provincials and the imperial court.⁹⁴ When viewed from this perspective, the orator's account of Maximian's movement from curule chair to horseback, while clearly the product of rhetorical embellishment, is grounded in realities both familiar to and welcomed by the local Gallic audience.

The importance of Maximian's imperial presence in Trier is magnified by the fact that senators do not feature, either as peers or rivals, in the panegyrist's vision. Although the *curia* included countless provincial senators by the late third century,⁹⁵ the only reference to senators in the panegyric of 289 places them in Rome, where they, like the city's population, have to imagine Maximian's presence in the *sacra urbs* during its birthday celebrations.⁹⁶ They are remote and distant figures who, in much the same way as Italy itself, are to be respected for their traditional status. The senate appears equally submissive in the speech of 291, in which its leading members travel to Milan to pay court to Diocletian and Maximian, thus playing a ceremonial, rather than a practical, role in the administration of the state;⁹⁷ it is only an emperor who now possesses the necessary control over civil and military affairs, as both *consul* and *imperator*.⁹⁸ Army officers and generals, who could potentially constitute the most viable challenge to Maximian's authority, are likewise presented as ciphers. The orator of 289 refers twice to Roman generals acting as representatives for the emperor; the second of these instances emphasises their role in securing a victory against the Franks when the emperor could not be personally present.⁹⁹ The generals are not portrayed as rivals to Maximian, but as close supporters, whom "you have bound to you by ties of friendship and marriage" (*necessitudine tibi et adfinitate devinxeris*).¹⁰⁰ Their successes redound to Maximian's credit, for, as the orator says, "even what is carried out by others originates with you" (*a uobis proficiscitur etiam quod per alios administratur*).¹⁰¹ The generals are faceless individuals; they are not even named, in contrast with the attention lavished by the panegyrist on Maximian himself. Their loyalty means that they are not presented as rivals for the purple. The panegyrist here elides the well-known fact that Carausius, who had established himself as a rival emperor in Britain, was one of Maximian's former generals.¹⁰²

This idea was developed further in a later speech delivered in honour of the Caesar Constantius in 297 following the recovery of Britain (*Pan. Lat.* 8[5]). In this panegyric, a third orator pays tribute to Constantius' command of the British campaign. The emperor is contrasted favourably with his predecessors who, "while spending their days at Rome, had triumphs and *cognomina* of nations conquered by their generals accrue to them" (*quibus Romae degentibus triumphi et cognomina devictarum a ducibus suis gentium proveniebant*).¹⁰³ The second-century emperor Antoninus Pius, famous for never leaving Italy in the course of his twenty-three year reign, is cited as a point of comparison, given that his own British victory was achieved through his senatorial legate Q. Lollius Urbicus.¹⁰⁴ The contrast is well chosen and effective, even though it is ultimately unfair to most of Constantius' predecessors, since one would be hard-pressed to find many other emperors of the second and third centuries who remained in Italy throughout their principate. Crucially, the orator suppresses the fact that most of the campaign to retake Britain was actually conducted by Iulius Asclepiodotus, Constantius' praetorian prefect.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, it seems to have been the case that Constantius himself was entirely absent until after the fighting was over, probably on account of the poor weather that prevented his fleet from crossing the English Channel in time.¹⁰⁶ To admit Asclepiodotus' role in the expedition would have contradicted one of the prevailing themes of imperial ideology: the emperor was an active figure, always on the move, ready to deal with threats in any place, at any time.¹⁰⁷ Imperial *exempla* in the late Roman panegyrics are rare, and are chosen for specific purposes. The panegyrist's mention of Antoninus Pius is designed to highlight the enervation of past *principes* in contrast with the activity of the present emperors. The general sentiment of these

speeches is that no rivals to the emperors can be found among the senatorial order or the officer corps.

VII. CONCLUSION

The speeches of 289 and 291 address the problem of praising a humbly born soldier emperor in two key ways. The first is the use of Maximian's divine, Herculean ancestry, an idea adapted from the emperor's contemporary public image, as demonstrated by the numismatic evidence. This paper has focused on the second theme, Maximian's Pannonian background, which could potentially have been damaging or compromising, but instead became a statement of Maximian's *virtus* and imperial suitability. This method of adapting Maximian's birthplace differs from the official public image of the regime, since Diocletian and Maximian did not promote their Illyrian background on their coinage or other media (in contrast with their predecessors Decius and Aurelian). Both orators justified Maximian's qualifications for the purple by drawing on the Roman ideal that the best soldiers came from a rural, rather than an urban background, thus adapting a traditional conceit to serve a new ideological purpose. The theme of a provincial emperor embodying truly Roman qualities was probably designed to appeal to the Gallic audience the orators were addressing. The speeches also position Maximian as a leader with full control over the civilian and military competencies of his position, as he excels *domi militiaeque*. This makes him more qualified for the purple than the senators, who no longer command the armies as they had done in the past, and who are represented in the speeches in a passive, ceremonial role. This creates the impression that only those men who had served Rome as soldiers could now rule it as emperors. The two speeches demonstrate

how accomplished orators could take inspiration both from official media and pre-existing Roman ideals, combining them into a new and engaging narrative fit for the public presentation of a soldier emperor to their Gallic audience.¹⁰⁸

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¹ Henceforth all dates are A.D. This paper uses Mynors' 1964 edition of the *Panegyrici Latini* and the translations of Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994.

² For a summary of these events, see Drinkwater 2005: 44-53.

³ On the Gallienic transformation of the military hierarchy, see Pflaum 1976; Christol 1986: 35-44; Le Bohec 2004.

⁴ The acclamation of senatorial emperors in the fifth century is partially the result of changing court dynamics, as the emperors returned to Rome in this period. This has

been the subject of a number of recent articles (Gillett 2001; McEvoy 2010; Humphries 2012).

⁵ For reflections on the suitability of the terms “soldier emperor” and “age of the soldier emperors”, see Heil 2006. In this article, “soldier emperor” is used to refer to a former soldier or officer who became emperor, not emperors of senatorial origin who campaigned regularly during their reigns, or promoted their military ability as part of their public image.

⁶ The authenticity, date, and addressee of (Ps.) Aelius Aristides’ *Eis Basileia* remain a matter of scholarly debate. Jones (1972) argues that the speech is a genuine work of Aristides delivered in honour of Antoninus Pius, while Swift (1966) and de Blois (1986) propose that Philip the Arab (a former praetorian prefect) was the addressee. No arguments have been made, to my knowledge, that the honorand was a Danubian soldier emperor.

⁷ This has been extensively discussed in recent years by a number of scholars: MacCormack 1981: 1-14; Nixon 1983: 90-95; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 26-31; Mayer 2002: 6-15; Rees 2002: 25-26; Stella de Trizio 2009: 8, 15.

⁸ Fronto, *Ad Ant. Pium* 2 (van den Hout², pp. 161-2) = Davenport and Manley 2004: 63-66 (no. 14).

⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).2.2; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 29, 219.

¹⁰ Heather and Moncur 2001: 27-29.

¹¹ Ando 2000: 127-128.

¹² Ando 2000: 109-117 (imperial letters and legislation), 215-232 (coins and portraits).

¹³ Noreña 2011: 214-218.

¹⁴ See Davenport 2014a: 46-53 for case studies applying this argument to images and inscriptions of the Tetrarchic period.

¹⁵ Aur. Vic. *Caes.* 39.1; *Epit.* 39.1; Eutrop. 9.19.2.

¹⁶ Stefan 2015; *P. Oxy.* 42.3055.

¹⁷ Lact. *DMP* 9.11, 52.3.

¹⁸ Aur. Vic. *Caes.* 39.17. *Epit.* 40.10 says they performed *opera mercenaria*. Barnes (1982: 32) interprets this as a reference to shopkeepers, while Nixon and Saylor Rodgers (1994: 55-6) suggest they were labourers.

¹⁹ Victor, *Caes.* 39.28. Barnes (1982: 32-3) argues on the basis of *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).2.6 that he may have served alongside Diocletian under the emperor Carus in Mesopotamia.

²⁰ Lact. *DMP* 19.6.

²¹ MacCormack 1981: 22-33; Kolb 2001: 38-46, 171-175; Smith 2011: 137-139.

²² Note especially the prominence of *virtus* on the coinage of Probus (López Sánchez 2007; Hedlund 2008: 63-64). For *virtus* on the coins of Diocletian and Maximian, see Hedlund 2008: 66-67, 72-73.

²³ Nock 1947; Manders 2012: 99-102; Hekster 2015: 256-261.

²⁴ Rees 2005: 224-225; Hekster 2015: 297-300.

²⁵ See Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 48-50, reviewing scholarly interpretations of the numismatic evidence.

²⁶ See Hekster 2015: 297-298 on inscriptions and Johanson 1994: 227-229 on *fibulae*. The *fibulae* featured legends such as HERCVLI AVGVSTE – SEMPER VINCAS (“Hercules Augustus, may you always be victorious”).

²⁷ Rees 2005: 225; Hekster 2015: 299.

²⁸ *RIC V.2* Diocletian nos. 49, 134, 162-166, 319, Maximian nos. 491-496, 620 (IOVI CONSERVATORI AVGG), Diocletian nos. 50-57, Maximian nos. 390-394 (IOVI TVTATORI AVGG), Diocletian no. 21, Maximian nos. 363-370 (HERCVLI INVICTO AVGG), Diocletian nos. 23, 159, 186, Maximian nos. 371-380, 502 (HERCVLI PACIFERO). This is not an exhaustive list of legends or types.

²⁹ *RIC V.2* Diocletian nos. 93-96, Maximian nos. 432-436 (VIRTVS AVGG). These coin types first appeared in the second issue from the mint of Lugdunum in 286 and reappeared in the fourth issue in 287 (Bastien 1972: 34-39, 40-42). Other coins featured this legend with only one of the gods: Diocletian nos. 93-96 (Jupiter alone), Diocletian nos. 97-98, 100-107, 184, 198, 201, Maximian nos. 342-343, 437-445, 450-453, 497-500, 535, 565-569 (Hercules alone).

³⁰ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).1.1-5. The date and context are discussed by Nixon and Saylor Rodgers (1994: 41-43), Rees (2002: 34-35), and Stella de Trizio (2009: 8, 10, 53).

³¹ Victor, *Caes.* 39.17; Eutrop. 9.20; Zon. 12.31. *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).4.3 refers to them as farmers, ploughmen and shepherds. Okamura (1988: 292) rightly points out that the leaders, Aelianus and Amandus, are never themselves characterised as peasants. *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).5.3 and 7(6).8.3 hint that Bagaudae were motivated by pre-existing social and economic problems in Gaul. They need to be distinguished from the Bagaudae found in the same region during the fifth century (Drinkwater 1984).

³² Barnes 1982: 57-58.

³³ Wightman 1970: 58; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 43.

³⁴ The orator is referred to as Mamertinus in some manuscripts, but this is probably not the name of our speaker, following the arguments of Nixon and Saylor Rodgers (1994: 9-10, 42) and Rees (2002: 35, 193-196). On the other hand, Stella de Trizio

(2009: 11-13) has recently restated the case for the authenticity of the name Mamertinus. For his Gallic origin, see Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 42.

³⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).1.1. For the panegyrist's effort to praise Rome even though the emperor is not there, see Sinapi 2006: 376-378.

³⁶ Menander Rhetor II.369.18-371.14. For the Tetrarchic date of the work, see Russell and Wilson 1981: xxxviii-xl.

³⁷ Menander Rhetor II.370.11-14.

³⁸ Janiszewski 2006: 195-198, 211-213. For Aurelian's origin, see *Epit.* 35.1; *HA Aur.* 4.1.

³⁹ Menander Rhetor II.371.3-14; MacCormack 1981: 171; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 86.

⁴⁰ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).1.2-2.1; MacCormack 1981: 169-171; Rees 2002: 42. The orator exploits a range of Roman connections in the speech, including a comparison between the imperial 'brothers' Diocletian and Maximian and Rome's founders Romulus and Remus (Leadbetter 2004: 262).

⁴¹ Rees 2005: 227-228. The indices of Bastien (1976: 246-250) include a conspectus of types. Hercules had previously featured prominently on the coins of Postumus, Gallienus and Probus (Drinkwater 1987: 162-166; López Sánchez 2007: 571; Manders 2012: 113-114).

⁴² Stella de Trizio 2009: 25-26, 66.

⁴³ See Vasaly 1993: 157-179 on its appearance in the speeches of Cicero.

⁴⁴ Cato *De Agr.* pref. 4. For the role of Cato's work in establishing a model for the Roman Republican aristocracy at large, see Reay 2005.

⁴⁵ Livy 3.26. The reality behind this myth is discussed by Evans (2008: 176-179).

⁴⁶ Grillo 2012: 121-130.

⁴⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 2(12).9.4-6; *Veg. Epit.* 1.3.1-5; Brennan 1998: 194-195. For the use of the Republican past in the panegyrics, see the analysis of Nixon (1990: 6-7) and Nixon and Saylor Rodgers (1994: 24-25).

⁴⁸ Cassius Dio 49.36.3; Lenski 2002: 35-37.

⁴⁹ Connors 1997: 59-62; Corbeill 2002: 206-207. For the association between character and place in Cicero, see Vasaly 1993: 131-155.

⁵⁰ Stella de Trizio (2009: 66) collects the literary evidence.

⁵¹ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).2.2-4: *Unde igitur ordiar? Commemorabo nimirum patriae tuae in rem publicam merita? Quis enim dubitat quin multis iam saeculis, ex quo vires illius ad Romanum nomen accesserint, Italia quidem sit gentium domina gloriae vetustate, sed Pannonia virtute? An divinam generis tui originem recensebo, quam tu non modo factis immortalibus sed etiam nominis successione testaris? An quemadmodum educatus institutusque sis praedicabo in illo limite, illa fortissimarum sede legionum, inter discursus strenuae iuventutis et armorum sonitus tuis vagitibus obstrepentes? Finguntur haec de Iove, sed de te vera sunt, imperator.*

⁵² For *virtus* in imperial ideology, see Noreña 2011: 77-82.

⁵³ See the comments of Sinapi (2006: 373-374).

⁵⁴ Pliny the Younger, *Pan.* 9.2,15.2-3.

⁵⁵ In the same vein, Innes (2011: 81) points out that Spanish background ‘was no basis for praise’, highlighting Pliny’s focus on his adopted father Nerva, rather than M. Ulpius Traianus.

⁵⁶ Stella de Trizio 2009: 67. Indeed, the panegyrist was generally unwilling, or unable, to share private details about Maximian’s life (Rees 1998: 84).

⁵⁷ Saylor Rodgers (1986: 75) notes the originality of this remark. For the myth about Jupiter to which the orator refers, see Stella de Trizio 2009: 68.

⁵⁸ Syme 1971: 195; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 56; Russell 1998: 30. Pannonian origin would later serve as a way of praising the emperor Valentinian I and members of his family in the fourth century (Lenski 2002: 48).

⁵⁹ *RIC* VI Trier nos. 87a-d, 88-89. Sutherland (1973: 144) offers a prospectus of the medallions and coins produced in this issue.

⁶⁰ *Epit.* 29.1; Eutrop. 9.4. For Decius' family and senatorial career, see Syme 1971: 197-198, 222; Birley 1998: 71-72.

⁶¹ Manders 2012: 256-8; *RIC* IV.3 Trajan Decius nos. 3, 16-18, 39-40 (GENIVS EXERC ILLVRICIANI), 5, 20-26, 41 (PANNONIAE), 102 (EXERCITVS INLVRICVS S.C.).

⁶² Hedlund 2008: 102.

⁶³ *RIC* V.1 Aurelian nos. 378-379, 388. *RIC* lists these coins being produced at Antioch, but it is more probable that they were struck in Siscia and Tripoli (Estiot 2004 nos. 833, 1365-1366).

⁶⁴ Hedlund (2008: 102) notes that “imagery referring to the Balkans falls into disuse” after Aurelian, with only a few exceptions.

⁶⁵ Menander Rhetor II.369.31-32.

⁶⁶ The Gauls are less well known than the Pannonians, but it should be remembered that the emperor Carus came from Narbo (Eutrop. 9.18; *Epit.* 38.1). The origins of several rulers of the Gallic empire are unknown, but it is highly probable that men such as Laelianus, Marius, Victorinus, and Tetricus were locals judging by their careers and nomenclature. See Drinkwater 1987: 34-39 for the limited evidence.

⁶⁷ Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 10-14.

⁶⁸ Potter (2000: 468) suggests a possible connection between Aurelian's imperial epithets and panegyrics produced in his honour.

⁶⁹ For the Gallic perspectives of the orators, and the expectations of their audiences, see Lassandro 2000: 14-19; Rees 2002: 34-35.

⁷⁰ Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 76-79; Rees 2002: 70-71, 198.

⁷¹ Nixon and Saylor Rodgers (1994: 100) and Rees (2002: 198-204) point out similarities and differences between the two texts, and are reluctant to conclusively identify the two orators. Cf. Stella de Trizio (2009: 11-13), who emphasises the similarities, especially in structure.

⁷² Rees 2002: 71, 204.

⁷³ *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).3.3, 8; Rees 2005: 231-233.

⁷⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).3.9: *Non enim in otiosa aliqua deliciisque corrupta parte terrarum nati institutique estis, sed in his provinciis quas ad infatigabilem consuetudinem laboris atque patientiae fracto licet oppositus hosti, armis tamen semper instructus limes exercet, in quibus omnis vita militia est, quarum etiam feminae ceterarum gentium viris fortiores sunt.*

⁷⁵ For the idealization of the rural world, see Spencer 2010: 10-15. On the dichotomy between urban and rural in Roman literature, see Braund 1989; Connors 1997.

⁷⁶ *Veg. Epit.* 1.3.4.

⁷⁷ *Veg. Epit.* 1.3.4-5. For this theme in panegyric, see the treatment of Valens by Themistius (*Or.* 8.113d-114b) and Theodosius by Pacatus (*Pan. Lat.* 2(12).9.1-7).

⁷⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).4.1.

⁷⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).1.2, 5.1; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 81.

⁸⁰ Saylor Rodgers 1986: 77; Rees 2005: 227-233; Hekster 2015: 302-306.

⁸¹ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).5-6.

⁸² *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).4.1-4.

⁸³ The background of the emperor Tacitus, who is presented as a senator in the Latin historiographical tradition, has been the subject of scholarly debate. Syme (1971: 244-247) proposed that he was in fact a military man of Danubian origin, like Aurelian and Probus, and Migliorati (2013) has argued that he was a former *dux* and possibly even praetorian prefect of Aurelian. In contrast, Christol (1986: 183-184) suggested that Tacitus was a senator (possibly of equestrian or plebeian origin), a conclusion which is supported both by the literary sources and by career patterns of senators who commanded armies in the mid-third century (Davenport 2014b).

⁸⁴ Jones 1964: 43-44, 49; Tomlin 1976. See also the discussion of Davenport (2010: 353-356), showing how the new Udruh inscription of Tetrarchic date supports this model (*AE* 2008, 1569).

⁸⁵ Davenport 2014b: 182-183.

⁸⁶ On this senatorial ideal, see Campbell 1984: 325-33. Senators did not willingly abrogate their claims to the underlying ideology of service *domi militiaeque*, however (Davenport 2015: 283-285).

⁸⁷ For the date of the consulship, see Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 42-43.

⁸⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).6.4: *Bona venia deum dixerim, ne Iuppiter quidem ipse tanta celeritate faciem caeli sui variat quam facile tu, imperator, togam praetextam sumpto thorace mutasti, hastam posito scipione rapuisti, a tribunali temet in campum, a curuli in equum transtulisti...*

⁸⁹ Stella de Trizio (2009: 90) has noted the union of civilian and military competences in this passage, but did not connect it with contemporary rivalries with senators.

⁹⁰ For grateful references to Maximian's presence in Gaul, see *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).2.1, 5.1, 6.3-4, 14.3-5.

⁹¹ Hartmann 1982: 155-169. For the necessity of having an emperor based in Gaul in the fourth century as well, see Szidat 2014.

⁹² See Drinkwater 1987: 28-29, 125-131 on administration; Hedlund 2008: 164-167 on imperial ideology on coins.

⁹³ For coins minted to celebrate the consulships of the emperors in the “Gallic empire,” see Hedlund 2008: 167-169. Later emperors who campaigned along the Rhine would have been welcomed in the Gallic region through *adventus* ceremonies, as shown by coins minted at Lyon in 277 to mark the arrival of Probus prior to his German war (Bastien 1976: 54). Probus became consul for the second time in 278, when he was still waging this campaign, so he must have celebrated his inauguration in the region. The mint at Lyon struck coins with consular busts to mark the occasion (Bastien 1976: 54-55).

⁹⁴ Kulikowski 2014: 141-143.

⁹⁵ Duncan-Jones (2016: 61-72) provides the most thorough recent overview of the evidence.

⁹⁶ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).13.4.

⁹⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).12.2.

⁹⁸ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).6.2.

⁹⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).3.3, 11.4-6; Ando 2000: 294-295.

¹⁰⁰ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).11.4. Barnes (2011: 39-41) argued that these men would include Constantius, as a senior general (not praetorian prefect, as previously thought). This would fit with the statement of the orator of 297 about Constantius’ longstanding connection with Maximian (*Pan. Lat.* 8(5).1.5).

¹⁰¹ *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).11.5.

¹⁰² For Carausius’ career, see Casey 1994: 46-52.

¹⁰³ *Pan. Lat.* 8(5).14.1.

¹⁰⁴ *Pan. Lat.* 8(5).14.2; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 133; Rees 2002: 125-127.

¹⁰⁵ *Aur. Vic. Caes.* 39.42; *Eutrop.* 9.22.2; Rees 2002: 115-116; Birley 2005: 388-393.

¹⁰⁶ Eichholz 1953: 44-45; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 136, 138.

¹⁰⁷ See the elegant summation of Rees 2002: 1-5.

¹⁰⁸ This paper derives from work originally undertaken as part of a DPhil at the University of Oxford, supported by a John Crampton Travelling Scholarship and supervised by Alan Bowman, to whom I am grateful for his help and advice. Some of the arguments were originally presented at the 2008 conference of the Australasian Society for Classical Studies, and I would like to thank Peter Brennan for his feedback on that occasion. The present article has been supported by the Australian Research Council's *Discovery Early Career Researcher Award* funding scheme (project DE150101110). For their valuable comments, I extend my gratitude to Chris Mallan, Meaghan McEvoy, the anonymous referees for *Phoenix*, and the Editor, Michele George.