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MANUFACTURING CONSENT: THE IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY AND SENATORIAL REPRESENTATION IN THE MAXENTIAN PERIOD (306–312 CE)

Abstract

The role of senatorial elites under the tetrarchic and Maxentian rule has received modest attention from historians. The exclusion from military service and government of provinces and the abandonment by emperors of the ideology of 'republican monarchy' destabilized the place of the senate in the structures of the empire. This article aims to investigate aristocratic involvement in the political change in Rome under Maxentius. It assesses the self-image of the senatorial aristocracy juxtaposed with that of the emperor in honorific inscriptions which reveal the shifting role of leading resident families of Rome in imperial power structures, challenged by the rapid advancement and consolidation of equestrian imperial elites. This article seeks to engage aristocratic self-representation together with the imperial one reinstated in the same historical context.

Keywords: late antiquity, tetrarchy, epigraphy, senate, aristocracy, government, statues, Maxentius, *damnatio memoriae*

Scholars tend to treat the episode of Constantine's refusal to ascend the Roman Capitol offering sacrifices to Jupiter as a defining moment, pointing not only to a subsequent religious conflict between pagans and Christians, but also to a senatorial 'opposition' to the Christian emperor. Since the debate on Constantine's religion occupied the foreground in the scholarship, the imperial (self-)representation(s) has also attracted most of scholarly interest. The role of the imperial elites swiftly rising to prominence from the early fourth century onwards, however, remains understudied. The late antique aristocratic self-representation, especially in the eastern part of the empire, is still scarcely scrutinized. This article

seeks to reconstruct aristocratic involvement in the political and cultural change in the early fourth century CE, in particular in the part of the empire under the rule of Maxentius (r. 306-312). Concentrating on epigraphic and visual sources, I argue that the shift of focus to the senatorial aristocracy suggests a fresh view on the communication between imperial and elite ideological representation.

This article, first, outlines the historical context and the current state of the field with regard to the period and the topic of senatorial representation. It provides an overview of primary sources and of scholarly debates. It deals with issues of methodology and provides a broad characterization of the main groups of primary sources. The article also proposes a case study on the aristocratic representation in the Maxentian period. This case study deals with a comparison between Maxentian self-representation and that of the senatorial aristocracy under his rule, at the intersection of art, politics, and ideology. First, I examine epigraphic monuments set up by senatorial aristocrats, to trace imperial representation. Second, I turn to the senatorial self-representation revealed by the honorific dedications erected under the brief reign of Maxentius. Correspondingly, my research focuses on the early fourth-century western part of the Roman Empire, revisiting social and cultural innovations from the time of tetrarchy. The empire, albeit divided among the tetrarchs, was perceived as an ideological unity in the imaginary representations and legal formulations of the time, which was one of the constitutive principles of imperial and elite imagery.

My objective is to engage elite representation through artistic and epigraphic media in an interdisciplinary approach combining visual with narrative sources in order to achieve an understanding of how imperial ideology shaped the production of distinctions among diversified groups of the senatorial elite in the early fourth-century Roman Empire. It is beyond doubt that imperial elite representation, whether civilian or military, mediated in multiple forms of imagery, was designed to convey inextricably aestheticized political messages through visual and material media to various audiences, primarily including competing members of the aristocracy themselves. Either as a projection, or a counterpart, or even an opposition to the self-representation of the emperors, the image(s) of various members of the whole range of senatorial elites accommodated diverse purposes vis-à-vis the people and the emperor, but most importantly other competing members of the resident senatorial aristocracy of Rome. They are means through which the senatorial order would contribute to the development of new representational patterns

available for its members. My contention is that without scrutinizing the economical, political, and ideological context of elite image production and appropriation, particularly that emerging in the early fourth-century in the Roman Empire, the role of the senatorial aristocracy as a social stratum will remain only partially appreciated.

Methodological Considerations

As the case study of the aristocratic representation under Maxentius will demonstrate, much attention has to be paid to the historical context of the fourth-century Roman Empire in order to arrive at an understanding of the social uses of art and culture by imperial elites. Primary sources for this time comprise various types of literary documents, archeological materials, epigraphy, numismatics, and legislation. The prosopography of the period has already received due attention and is invaluable for contextualization (*PLRE* I). Epigraphy is a rich and less explored source which details social and cultural activities of the late antique elites. Equally important are the numismatic experiments and innovations of the mints initiated by fourth-century emperors and 'usurpers' who came mainly from the military circles, but appealed to the conservative elites (*RIC* VI-X). Literary documents supply the most significant information on the senatorial self-representation, such as, for instance, the public orations and private correspondence of Symmachus. The now-larger corpus of visual material includes honorific sculpture and dedicatory inscriptions, building and restoration projects, mosaics and paintings, sarcophagi and funerary dedications, etc.

The mode of expression characteristic of a cultural production depends on the context in which it is offered and relates the representations of the elite to their social conditions. The fourth-century Roman imperial ideology structured the perception of the social world and designated objects of distinction. Sociology endeavors to establish the conditions under which the consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced, striving at the same time to describe the different ways of appropriating those objects that are regarded at particular moments as works of art, and the social conditions constituting the mode of appropriation that is considered legitimate (Bourdieu 1984).

Next, characteristics that the fourth-century senatorial elites had in common should be examined in order to understand their cultural

practices as mainly connected to education and offices, when compared to the social background. Since art and cultural practices are to fulfill – consciously and deliberately or not – a social function of legitimating social differences, elites as social subjects, stratified by their classifications, differentiate themselves by distinctions they make based on social origin and educational capital (Bourdieu 1984). Their representation is inevitably defined by social importance. For example, elites, as every group, tend to set up the means of perpetuating themselves, and in order to do so they establish a whole set of mechanisms, such as representation and symbolization, which ensure their proliferation. *Dignitas non moritur*: their means of escaping from disappearance include visual representation, a portrait statue which immortalizes the person represented (sometimes, by a sort of pleonasm, in their own lifetime); a tombstone or a sarcophagus, a written word and in particular historical writing, which gives a place in legitimate history, and commemorative ceremonies in which the group offers tributes of homage and gratitude to the dead, affirming social privileges.

Ultimately, to contextualize selected fourth-century architectural monuments within their local and imperial contexts is to recognize what these buildings were meant to convey about their *euergetai*, i.e. their builders (commissioners) or restorers. I will use established epigraphic databases as a supplement to their contemporary literary texts, extensive use of which has already been made. Consulting a large corpus of archeological and numismatic evidence of the fourth century, which provide the most important material remains from this period, is indispensable.

A series of questions may be posed regarding the topic of senatorial representation. What was the position of the senatorial aristocracy in the 'class' topography in early late antiquity? What were senators' resources beyond economic capital, and how did they influence the senatorial position within their stratum? What kinds of symbolic representation (or self-representation) were produced within elite culture? What kinds of representation did produce distinctions of variegated senatorial elites in the fourth-century Roman Empire? In what milieus did this imagery circulate and to what audience was it addressed? One needs to pay close attention to the extent this representation negotiated the ways in which the self-image was politically engaged by senatorial elites so as to distinguish themselves within the imperial socio-political order, and the extent to which fourth-century artistic changes present a break from the

previous cultural tradition or show a continuation of it. This article offers a glimpse of how the senatorial elite in the early fourth century publicized their status by means of honorific inscriptions. It searches for conceptual parallels that can be established between the elite representation by means of visual strategies and an imperial ideology, in their interaction. Was the former a reaction to the latter? Did the elite representation fully coalesce with an ideology of the tetrarchy?

The Historical Context

The so-called third-century crisis caused a rapid decline in the political influence of the old Roman and Italian elites, not least due to the successive militarization of the empire. The rise of *viri militares* challenged the civilian elites at a time when Roman senators were *de facto* or *de iure* gradually excluded from military command in favor of *novi homines* from the provinces. In the mid-third-century emperor Gallienus was the first to exclude senators from the military. Diocletian's reforms separated civilian and military expertise. This process was completed under Constantine.

The fourth century witnessed a revival of the civilian elites as a consequence of the enlargement of the government and its "greater intervention" in the lives of the subjects (Matthews 2000, 436). The Constantinian legislation aimed to remove restrictions applied to members of the Roman senatorial class and expand the *ordo* by cooptation of equestrians and members of municipal aristocracies. The central government's purpose was to broaden and consolidate the definition of the elites of the Roman Empire in response to the great political changes that had taken place, as well as to a new social situation that had emerged since the time of the early empire. Constantine sought an "overall redefinition of the Roman political elite" and "a reworking of the notion of imperial elite" (McGinn 1999, 60-1).

This opposition was not a mere renegotiation of the boundaries of privilege within a homogeneous imperial ruling class, but the appearance of a new elite and the emergence of a new system of values that defined it differently. The result of these and other changes is that 'elite society' – seen in the great number of elites encountered – became more complex, while the political power structure, being ever more centered on the emperor, became simpler (Matthews 2000, 439). Correspondingly, Roman political theology was defined by the essential view of the elites that the supreme

deity (or God) appoints the emperor. This structural relation between the emperor and the divine realm was mirrored on yet another level in the relationship between the emperor and his elites. On their side of this equilibrium, they must have trusted the emperor to ensure that justice is done in the state; they expected generosity and philanthropy from him, which in turn bound them with obligations of loyalty. In effect, these were constantly recreated hierarchical relations of a constitutive asymmetry of dominance and obedience.

These civilian and military elites should therefore be seen within the framework of the imperial ideology. I aim to discuss the senatorial elites in the context of ideological production and representation. With three thousand new senatorial positions bestowing the rank of *clarissimus* created in each part of the empire, and some ten thousand jobs *per generation* available to the inhabitants of each half, the 'already rich and powerful' of the Roman world found themselves locked into a system of politically determined status (Heather 1998, 196). Aristocracy and elite are defined as members of the senatorial order by virtue of having attained the lowest senatorial rank, the clarissimate, by holding an office that conferred senatorial rank, or by being born into the senatorial order (Salzman 2002, 23). The definition of 'what is an aristocrat' explicitly reveals an intrinsic social contradiction within the greater *ordo senatorius* re-established and enlarged through Constantine's reforms.

For the purposes of this study, the 'already rich and powerful' are classified in the early fourth century at the upper end of the scale as members of the political and civic elite of a definable sort: senators or *clarissimi/λαμπρότατοι, perfectissimi/διασημότατοι* (men of equestrian rank), but also *duumviri* (municipal magistrates), *quinquennales* (census officials, also magistrates), *flaminii* and *sacerdotes* (holders of civic priesthoods). Later in the fourth century, by the time of Valentinian I and Gratian three distinguishing ranks had been developed for senators: the highest being *illustris* (*ἰλλούστριος*), followed by *spectabilis* (*περίβλεπτος*) and the lowest *clarissimus* (*λαμπρότατος*), which had been added by aristocrats to their titles as early as the reign of Constantius II in order to publicize their distinguished status (Slootjes 2006: 23; Salzman 2002, 14, 38). Further, the substantial intermediate layers between the extremes of the top and the bottom strata of civic society were ordinary free men below curial rank. Below senators and equestrians, the inner elite of the curial order were the *principales viri*, local men who held office and performed significant public functions (Matthews 2000, 434).

I define the senatorial elite as a 'stratum', in Weberian terms, within the broader social 'class' of (normally) landowning aristocracy. The idea that the aristocracy abandoned the cities for the countryside is untenable, since it is challenged by the archaeological evidence of continued urban vitality (Banaji 2002, 16). Jairus Banaji has classified 'social types' and 'social groups' of Roman landholders (Banaji 2002, 101-2). On the upper scale these were senators and equestrians who had held magistracies and priesthoods and had been distinguished by public office, by insignia that would identify them in their cities, but also wealthy members of the municipal elites – all co-opted to the *ordo senatorius* by Constantine. Senators, equestrians, *curiales*, court-based nobles as well as the Christian ecclesiastical elite (including aristocratic bishops) and the military elite emerging in the last decades of the fourth century, rewarded with a senatorial rank, constituted the diverse groups of imperial elite and distinct bodies of senators. In contrast to the neighboring polities of Armenia or Iran, whose aristocrats claimed to depend on blood alone, the late Roman order deliberately imposed upon its civilian elites "a double disjuncture between the quasi-automatic claims of birth and inherited wealth, and the 'true' nobility associated with education and office" (Brown 2000, 331-2).

Chronologically, my proposed research runs from the so-called Constantinian to the Theodosian 'turn': the period from the third tetrarchy and the accession to power of both Constantine and Maxentius in 306 to the death of Theodosius I, and the division of the Roman state in 395. Comparable to the political changes, a new period in art history starts at the same time as the tetrarchic experiments, when some portraitists and their customers began to object to lifelike representations (Veyne 2005, 821). By no means, however, does it manifest a distinction between 'pagan' and Christian art (Cameron 2011, 691-742). In the fourth century Christianity had not yet consolidated its content or its modes of expression. It was only toward the end of the fifth century that symbolism surrounding the imperial power was definitely and comprehensively Christianized. Art, as the elite classes of the Roman Empire understood it, aimed at promoting imperial power, and it remains a fundamental part of the picture in this period, overshadowing what is called religious art (Lazaridou 2011, 18). Imperial ideology as exemplified by the emperor's face on the coin obverse comprises a reverse side occasionally featuring the representation of the Roman Senate. The variegated images of the senatorial elites at their intersection with the emperor's likeness as involved in the orbit of imperial ideology are precisely the subject of my study. This imperial ideology, the

dream of a unified empire, is such insofar as it produces the 'empire' as an ideal, and I will examine how images of the senatorial elites became involved in its orbit, and the new empire of elites was constituted at the end of the fourth century.

With the division of the Roman Empire begun by Diocletian, the West, dominated by a seemingly immobile traditional aristocracy, and the Greek East, with the more vigorous world of the new elite, will be considered together. A generation of scholars attempted to analyze the Western aristocracies by region, career, social position, resources, and other characteristics, yet only a few have been interested in considering the imperial elites as a cohesive unified (not least ideologically) stratum, looking at both eastern and western parts of the Roman Mediterranean *oikumene*. Similarly to the well-studied western counterpart, the imperial elites in the East, largely ignored by scholars, exercised tremendous impact on political, social, and cultural life in the later empire and thus deserve equal attention.

Historiographical Debates

Following the inspiration of Sir Ronald Syme among historians of ancient history, modern scholarship on elites in the later Roman state has been primarily an application of insights that were initially developed in the historiography of the early empire. With Syme's compelling narrative of the Augustan reign, and since Augustus was a significant presence during the fourth century, modern research on late Roman emperors and aristocrats followed the lead of Augustus' most powerful modern interpreter (Van Dam 2007, 5).

Werner Eck's fundamental study on the self-representation of the senatorial elite in Rome of the Augustan period (Eck 1984, 129-67) extended to the later empire. Only recently did scholarship assess the changing interrelation between the senatorial aristocracies and the centers of political power reflected in changing patterns of the representation (Niquet 2000; Gehn 2012; Machado 2019), and gradually became perceptive to the wider economical and social contexts of the transformation of elites in late antiquity (Banaji 2002; Haldon 2004; Sarris 2009). What is on the other hand abundantly clear regarding the financial position of Rome's senatorial aristocracy is that the immense wealth they managed to accumulate in their hands appears simply unparalleled by

possessions of the relatively unpretentious Augustan elites. The wealth of the resident senatorial families exceedingly increased at the beginning of the fourth century as they profited during the period of the so-called third-century crisis. Comparative studies juxtaposing senatorial elites of the early, high, and late Roman Empire are yet to be written.

A. H. M. Jones in his monumental *The Later Roman Empire* suggested that while Roman society was static in the second and early third centuries, this stable society was profoundly shaken by the impact of the prolonged crisis of the mid-third century. For a variety of reasons, all classes became dissatisfied with their hereditary social positions, and the conditions of the time gave opportunities for change and the rise of *novi homines* (Jones 1964), e.g., the newly formed senate of Constantinople. When Jones wrote this, 'upward mobility' was positively charged in Britain, as was the continuity between Classical culture and Christianity in earlier, 'more conservative', decades. Similarly, Keith Hopkins emphasized the social dimension, providing evidence for extensive upward mobility through education in terms of conflict among the emperor, the bureaucracy, and the traditional landholding elites (Hopkins 1965). Obviously a modern projection, it was 'trendy' to observe that this process had happened in late antiquity as well (Brown 2000, 326-31).

At the same time, Ramsay MacMullen drew attention to elements in the elite culture of Late Antiquity that grew out of 'popular' cultures long suppressed by classical Rome, namely, non-Greek and non-Roman elements (MacMullen 1964). For him, they did much to explain the decay of the late Roman governing class in the course of the fourth century. In the same decade Peter Brown's early articles and *World of Late Antiquity* (1971) pioneered in treating the rise and establishment of Christianity in the Mediterranean world as a central aspect. Holy men were, for him, the spiritual analogs of the vigorous *novi homines*, and in a series of studies he revealed further aspects of the flexibility and staying power of the eastern Roman world (Brown 1961, 1971). Through the eyes of Symmachus, a representative of the traditional aristocracy of Rome whose economic capital came before the Constantinian monetary reform, Brown has recently investigated transmission of patrimonial property through senatorial strategies of marriages as well as the patronage system necessary to maintain the glory of the most ancient state offices. Ambrose is yet another model of senatorial strategies of wealth conversion, serving to consolidate the bishop's leadership in a new 'Christian capital' of the

empire, and taking inspiration from an ideology that would long endure (Brown 2012, 93-119, 120-34).

John Matthews, comprehensively analyzing the world of the later Roman governing classes in his suggestive *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court* (1975), further differed not only from his predecessors, but also from such contemporary scholars as M. T. W. Arnheim, in that he was not primarily concerned to account for the 'decline and fall' of the Western Roman Empire (Arnheim 1972). In contrast, in that decade the study of western senatorial aristocracy, although excluding the East, was closely linked to the problem of the continuity between late antique and medieval Western Europe (Wormald 1976).

In contrast, Peter Heather has examined the proliferation of the less researched senatorial order in the Eastern Roman Empire in a manner that significantly balances the impression of unexpected mobility first conveyed in Jones, whose image was that of an eastern Roman society that had lost traditional restraints. Heather saw it not as an expansion of 'new men', but as mobilizing the loyalties of those already wealthy and dominant. The aristocracy grew over the course of the fourth century and turned out to be increasingly differentiated (Heather 1994, 1998). For recent studies of the same process in the West, one might cite Michele Salzman, who envisaged it not as the end of the senate as such, but as the decline of pagan aristocracy in relation to their rising Christian counterparts. These aristocrats exercised multiple elitist strategies; abandoning the pagan, they retained the aristocratic, and in due course, acquired a new designation as a Christian senatorial elite (Salzman 1989, 2000, 2002).

In general, accounts of the relations between the emperor and the senatorial aristocracy in late antique Rome started from an implicit assumption. According to this assumption the senatorial elite and the emperor with his entourage form two discrete groups which, although interacting with each other in various ways, exist as two separate and often antagonistic 'entities'. Scholars have tended to treat the Constantinian change as a defining moment in a religious conflict between Christians and pagans (Alföldi 1948, 1952) and exaggerated the velocity of Christianization of the senatorial elite (Barnes 1994, 1995). The most recent contributions to the debate on Christianization of the senatorial aristocracy and so-called 'pagan resistance' were Alan Cameron's *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011) and Stéphane Ratti's *Polémiques entre païens et chrétiens* (2012). With the reassessment of a more complex political and social landscape of the fourth-century Roman Empire than has been

previously recognized, examining aristocratic representation jointly with the imperial image, which my study intends to reinstate in the same historical and ideological context, one can witness the dynamic social world of Rome and Constantinople as well as that of the provinces, and approach questioning the authority of the 'pagan/Christian' model. A new scholarly discourse that is not based on religious categories may thereby emerge on the imperial elites of later Roman Empire.

Apart from the abovementioned Anglo-American scholarship, German (Haehling 1978; Näf 1995; Witschel 2007, 2012), French (Chastagnol 1960, 1962), and Italian (Lizzi Testa 2004, 2006, 2011) researchers contributed to an investigation of particular aspects of the senatorial elites in early late antiquity. The recent decade saw increasing attention paid especially to the epigraphic and archaeological evidence of the senatorial representation. A young generation (Machado 2010, 2012, 2019; Chenault 2008, 2012) of scholars has recently attempted a reconstruction of the aristocratic representation in the Roman Fora in late antiquity, analyzing ideological motivations expressed in the commemorative senatorial monuments.

While it appears that the published works devoted to imperial elites have a tendency to be purely historical, the best treatments of the appropriate art historical and archaeological/epigraphical sources frequently come out without connection to this topic, mainly in books dedicated to Roman art and architecture, articles and entries to exhibition catalogs. Textual studies on late Roman aristocracies appear to be mostly detached from similar works based on inscriptions or archaeological material as primary sources. A few studies on late antique economy and the role of senatorial elites in it equally follow their special direction of research. This historiographical survey draws attention to the fact that both historians' and arthistorians' insights are not mutually exclusive and that each of them might portray different possible aspects in the study of elites. Almost no correlation of this sort has been made, and some scattered articles only scratch the surface of the issue due to the fact that the link between the social stratification of elites, imperial ideology, and artistic industry in the late antique context has remained virtually disregarded.

I propose to consider both archaeological and historical evidence. Not many serious endeavors have been devoted to bringing together these two types of evidence, visual and narrative, which are seldom discussed side by side, and to combining them with an analysis of complementary epigraphic and numismatic sources that are of equal importance in a

study of the imperial elite's representation and ideology. I am convinced that such juxtapositions will add a new dimension to the most polemical issues – such as the scale of Christianization of the aristocracy in the different parts of the fourth century – and that it would equally benefit both sides. Apart from the comprehensive yet separate treatment of these two related types of evidence, little attention has also been paid to the common background of their emergence, which is supposed to be within a field shared between cultural history and the sociology of art. I propose to examine the self-representation of the imperial elite within the relations between the universe of social conditions and the universe of culture and the way of life which was put forward there.

The Imperial Representation: A Case Study of Maxentius

The year 306 marked the beginning of the third tetrarchy and the accession to power of both Maxentius and Constantine. Maxentius was a popular ruler supported in central and southern Italy, Sicily, and Africa, yet declared an enemy of the Roman state (*hostis*) at the council of Carnuntum in 308. After Constantine had defeated his army in the battle at the Milvian bridge in 312, the corpse of his foe was recovered from the Tiber and the head of the 'usurper' was paraded through the streets of Rome in an act of punishment after death (*poena post mortem*) (Omissi 2014). The senatorial aristocracy denounced Maxentius as a tyrant (*tyrannus*)[1] and hailed Constantine. Yet, although Maxentius' memory suffered a *damnatio*, he was posthumously deified.

I begin with the imperial representation juxtaposed with the senatorial one. Maxentius is known to have erected a statue of Mars and the founders of the city (Romulus and Remus) in the Roman Forum sometime during the six years of his reign. The inscription in six lines reads as follows:

> To unconquered Mars, [our] father, and the founders of his eternal City, our lord, the em[[peror Maxentius, pious, fortunate]], unconquered Augustus. Dedicated on the eleventh day before the Kalends of May by Furius Octavianus, of *clarissimus* rank, the curator of the sacred temples (trans. C. Machado).[2]

The name of Maxentius, in line 5, was erased when his memory suffered the *damnatio* in 312. The text records a dedication to the god Mars and

the founders of Rome. The statue was dedicated on the birthday of the city (*natalis urbis*), the 21st of April. The celebration of the founders of Rome was part of the Maxentian ideological program focusing on the eternal city (Cullhed 1994, 55). While the early fourth-century imperial court was continually itinerant, chiefly due to the military campaigns of the tetrarchic emperors, Maxentius, who was bound to Rome, constitutes a significant exception.

In defiance of the tetrarchic ideology, Maxentius overtly pursued a dynastic policy. His son Valerius Romulus, who bore the title *clarissimus puer* in his youth, became consul in 308 and 309 and had been titled *nobilissimus vir* by the time he died and was deified, in 309.[3] No longer a member as a new emperor in the tetrarchy when Maximian had already abdicated, but simply a private citizen, Maxentius appears to have identified himself with the senate at Rome (Van Dam 2011). As an emperor residing at Rome, Maxentius claimed priority over the other emperors, benefiting from the symbolic capital of the city (Leppin 2007). The dedication honoring Mars and his sons, Romulus and Remus, precisely on the anniversary of Rome's foundation, was set up at the west end of the Forum Romanum, adjacent to the Black Stone marking the legendary site of Romulus' grave.

While the emperor acted as an awarder, the dedication of the statue was carried out by the *curator* of the sacred temples (*curator aedium sacrarum*) Furius Octavianus, who was of the highest senatorial rank (*clarissimus*).[4] Statues formed a remarkable cultural heritage, and they were therefore placed under the supervision of officials: *curator aedium sacrarum*, later *curator* of statues (*curator statuarum*) (*ND* Occ. IV. 14). *Curatores* were responsible for setting up statues for both emperors and high senatorial office-holders. *Curatelae* in Rome whose holders bore the senatorial rank are attested epigraphically in the tetrarchic and Constantinian period. The office of *curator aedium sacrarum* would be abolished by imperial decision in 331. When Constantine eliminated the position of *curator* of the sacred temples, some of the responsibilities of the latter shifted to the newly formed office of *curator statuarum*.

Emperor Maxentius is celebrated in the inscription as "our master" (*DN, dominus noster*), a new honorific title sanctioned by imperial courts that used to be previously avoided by commissioners of honorific dedications (Weisweiler 2016, 194-95). He is rendered as "pious, fortunate, unvanquished Augustus" (*p(ius), f(elix), invictus Aug(ustus)*), values reinforced here by the dedication to the god of war. The new

honorific language renders Maxentius an invincible ruler (Alföldi 1970). Notably, it does not contain any elements of the traditional titulature, which used to exhibit an array of Republican offices held by the emperor as conferred on him by the senate.

Importantly, the base was found in front of the senate house. The new Curia Senatus, rebuilt and integrated within the Forum of Caesar around 300, signified the power of Rome's aristocracy in late antiquity. The senate-house stood for the longevity of senatorial traditions providing "ample space to foster cohesion among the members of Rome's elite" (Kalas 2015, 141-65). It embodied the authority of the senate in the city of Rome, but primarily in the Roman Forum, where a cluster of statue dedications was set up by the resident senatorial aristocracy (Kalas 2015, 141). The area around the Curia Senatus specifically epitomized the senatorial authority, in which imperial statues were erected commemorating the relationship between senators and emperors.

Senators acted as statue awarders both in their official and non-official roles. They dedicated statues to deities *ex officio*, as in the case of Furius Octavianus and other *curatores aedium sacrarum*. Ordinarily, in cases of imperial functionaries acting in office, little can be inferred about their religious beliefs. In their non-official role, senators could showcase personal religious allegiances, however. Thus, Aradius Rufinus, consul of Maxentius in Rome from September 311, is possibly identical with, or a descendant of consul Q. Aradius Rufinus, who made two votive dedications to Sol and Luna.[5]

A lost inscription, possibly recording a statue of an emperor, was dedicated in Rome by Hierocles Perpetuus, *vir clarissimus*, perhaps *curator operum publicorum* or *aedium sacrarum* in the early fourth century.[6] *Curatores operum* (*ND* Occ. IV 12, 13) are also called *curatores operum publicorum, consulares operum publicorum, and curatores operum maximorum*. The inscription records works carried out, possibly at the Sacra Via, in the Roman Forum, on the command of an unknown emperor (ll.1-2). Although it is not explicitly a dedication, since the imperial titles do not appear in the dative case, the fragmentary state of the text and the presence of an imperial official in the nominative case suggests that this was associated with a statue monument of an emperor. If so, Maxentius and Constantine are the best candidates for the inscription, with *CIL* favoring Constantine.[7] In line 6, '*cur[ator operum publicorum]*' is the most likely supplement,[8] but it might also refer to '*cur[ator aedium sacrarum]*'.[9] Perpetuus apparently carried out renovations in, or near the Via Sacra as

curator in the early fourth century, as it accords with the titles used for the emperor.

The senate of Rome acted as an awarder of honorific statuary to emperors and the imperial family as proof of loyalty. A symbolic language of imperial dedications was part of political communication between the senate and the emperors. Thus, one dedication to Constantine and to another emperor, probably on a statue base, was made by the senate and people in the Roman Forum in 313.[10] The inscription celebrates imperial victories over tyrants, perhaps by Constantine and Licinius, who enjoyed a short period of peace after having defeated Maxentius and Maximinus Daia respectively. The monument was discovered in the Forum, between the Curia and the Basilica Aemilia.

Besides the iconographic program, in all the inscriptions on the arch the senate and people of Rome claim responsibility for the dedication of the monument to Emperor Constantine. The same text is displayed on both sides of the arch (Grünewald 1990, 63-92),[11] on the attic. The reference to '*instinctu divinitatis*' is a senatorial interpretation of the battle at the Milvian bridge (Lenski 2014). The inscription refers explicitly to the victory over Maxentius (*tyrannus*, l.5) and his faction, perhaps his supporters in Rome. Besides the attic inscriptions, two other inscriptions (Chastagnol 1988, 13-26)[12] refer to the *decennalia* being celebrated and the *vicennalia* that was then expected, and for which a vow was taken. Two more short inscriptions on the central archway, '*liberatori urbis*' and '*fundatori quietis*', celebrate Constantine as presented by the Roman senate (Bardill 2012, 222-37). The arch was placed on the triumphal procession route, highlighting its celebratory function. It is firmly dated on grounds of the inscriptions referring to the celebration of the *decennalia* and the vows for the *vicennalia* (Chastagnol 1988, 22 n.26).

Almost concurrently with the arch, Constantine dedicated his own statue to the senate and people of Rome as a symbol of his power, by which he overcame the 'usurper' (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 9.9.11) (Lenski 2014, 196; Bardill 2012, 203-17). The colossal marble statue of Constantine from the Basilica of Maxentius in the Forum Romanum conveys a sense of great antipathy towards Maxentius, stigmatized as a tyrant. Born of a political disappointment, the Conservatori statue could be a re-used portrait of Maxentius. Its wide-open spiritual eyes seem to have been directly borrowed from the Maxentian representational vocabulary. Maxentius' portraits are characterized by the large, emphatically marked eyes outlined by the lower lids (Evers 1992).[13]

If so, the portrait of Maxentius-Constantine suggests not merely a resurgence of the political practice of intentional mutilation that provided an ideologically distinct alternative to re-carving, in which images of 'bad emperors' were defaced and thus transformed from celebratory monuments into graphic reminders of the overthrow and posthumous disgrace. They functioned also as a warning for the senators who had chosen the wrong side, reminding them of the punishment for disgraced officials. Yet it also signaled the specific nature of Constantine's appropriation of Maxentius' portrait as an extension of the emperor's power over his major buildings – the Basilica, the circus complex on the Via Appia, and the imperial Baths on the Quirinal. The portrait of Constantine in sculpture and on coins, which is introduced after his triumph over Maxentius, is an emulation of that of the first emperor Augustus (Bodnaruk 2013), albeit bearing fresh traces of appropriation of the Maxentian face.

The Senatorial Representation under Maxentius

Now I turn to the senatorial representation proper as revealed in the honorific dedications. Under the tetrarchy, praetorian prefects did not reside in Rome, so it was common to make the prefect of the *annona* a representative of the prefects in the city (Porena 2003, 142-43; *contra* Chastagnol 1987, 333). Prefects of this period seem to be close to the Augusti, especially during the wars. Therefore, as far as statue dedications are concerned, prefects awarded individually only monuments that celebrated their respective Augustus (or Caesar) in cities in the part of the empire controlled by their emperor.

Caius Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, praetorian prefect of Maxentius in 310, when he participated in the expedition against the African 'usurper' L. Domitius Alexander, was the first senatorial prefect (Porena 2003, 268-70).[14] Although several honorific inscriptions dedicated to and by him survived, his prefecture is not recorded epigraphically, as he was interested in deliberately silencing it (Porena 2003, 265-67).[15] Volusianus, consul in 314, features as an awarder of the statue to Emperor Constantine as his city prefect and consul.[16] The mention of Constantine's father, the deified (*divus*) Constantius I in the dedicatory inscription, acknowledges the legitimacy of his rule. Volusianus held the offices of urban prefect and consul on two occasions. Under Maxentius, he was urban prefect in 310, and consul in 311. The statue to Constantine was set up during his

second term as urban prefect, from December 313 to August 315, more specifically, in the year of his second consulship. The inscription does not mention that Volusianus was holding these offices for the second time, as they had been held under an emperor denounced as a tyrant by the new Constantinian regime.

With regard to senators as honorands, most of the honorific inscriptions for senatorial officials were set up for consuls. The consulship, a source of great pride, sometimes features even in the inscriptions erected for family members. It increased the prestige of male descendants, sons or grandsons of the former consul. Thus, Volusianus, consul of 311 under Maxentius and again in 314 under Constantine is styled *bis ordinarius consul*, as recorded in the public honorific inscription for his son set up on the Capitoline Hill,[17] but not in the *fasti*, evidently to make it clear that he was not counting a devalued suffect consulship. Volusianus received another statue in Rome in the year of his second consulship, while in office as prefect of the city.[18]

Volusianus was *proconsul Africae* before Maxentius acquired Africa. His *cursus honorum*, in so far as it was recognized in the early years of Constantine I, is given in an inscription dated 314.[19] Porena hypothesizes that when Maxentius' usurpation surprised Volusianus at Carthage where he had been appointed proconsul of Africa by Maximian or Constantius I, he accepted – as also did the urban prefect Annius Anullinus – the accession of the new emperor (Porena 2003, 263 n.167).[20] Another fragmentary inscription contains his *cursus* including perhaps the African proconsulship.[21] In the West, Constantine's *clementia* after his victory in 312 meant an amnesty to Maxentius' former supporters, and it is thus that the former praetorian prefect Volusianus received again both his urban prefecture and his consulship under the new regime.

However, minor offices held during the rule of the 'usurper' could still be mentioned in the public inscriptions under Constantine. A dedication to Caius Vettius Cossinius Rufinus was erected at Atina in Campania in 315, recording his office as *curator alvei Tiberis et cloacarum Sacrae Urbis*, possibly held under Maxentius, at any rate before 312.[22] The precise provenance of the base is uncertain. The offices are probably given in descending order in the inscription: Rufinus was thus *curator alvei Tiberis et cloacarum Sacrae Urbis* after serving as *curator viae Flaminiae*. Rufinus was *curator viarum* before 312, possibly under Maxentius. This is one of the last such collections of *curatelae*. The inscription honors Rufinus as prefect of Rome, former governor of Campania and patron of Atina. This

is a unique instance of the proconsulship of Achaea occurring before *curatelae* and provincial governorships.

Other dedications for senatorial honorands come from the semi-public or domestic space. A bronze statue of Attius Insteius Tertullus, prefect of the city, was erected in Rome in 307-310.[23] The statue was erected to its patron by the guild of wholesale dealers (*magnarii*). The inscription reads:

> To a distinguished man who surpassed the diligence of all earlier prefects, Attius Insteius Tertullus, quaestor (*quaestor kandidatus*), praetor (*praetor kandidatus*), suffect consul, governor (*corrector*) of Venetia et Histria, supervisor of the workshops (?), governor (*proconsul*) of Africa (?), prefect of the City of Rome. On account of the care which he took, with attention to their misery and with incomparable diligence, when they had brought the danger into the open, so that their fortunes, struck by grave poverty, might grow strong, restored and fostered to their former force, and might receive eternal vigour; and [on account] of his outstanding deeds and singular munificence towards it, the guild of wholesale dealers (*corpus magnariorum*), freed from fear and crisis, has set up [this] fine statue in bronze to him, under the supervision of Flavius Respectus Panckarius Sabinianus Palassius and Flavius Florentius, men of *perfectissimus* rank, supervisors of the guild of wholesale dealers, to a deserving patron (trans. C. Machado).[24]

Tertullus had a successful career during the tetrarchy and the reign of Maxentius. He was prefect of the city in 307-308, which is the most likely date for this dedication. It was probably a private dedication erected by his clients. The base was found in the gardens behind the Basilica of Maxentius. Another base, dedicated to a relative of the city prefect, was found in the same location, suggesting that this could be the site of the *domus* of Tertullus (Guidobaldi 1995, 186-87).[25] The guild as a commissioner of the statue suggests that it was put up in a domestic space.

Statue dedications to senatorial patrons of the guilds in Rome are not uncommon. In the early fourth century *cursus* inscriptions still recorded quaestorship (*quaestor kandidatus*), praetorship (*praetor kandidatus*), suffect consulship, all of which became rarely mentioned in epigraphy after the mid-century. Senators by birth, who needed to hold specific magistracies to confirm their status, pursue the office of quaestor, which conferred actual participatory membership in the senate. Tertullus then served as governor (*corrector*) of Venetia and Histria, governor (*proconsul*) of Africa, and urban prefect of Rome. Both his entry magistracies of the

senate and top posts of the imperial state define Tertullus' *nobilitas* by virtue of office-holding, and not of the antiquity claimed by resident senatorial families.

Prefects were praised for specific deeds and for their munificence towards corporations. Tertullus is honored as 'a distinguished man who surpassed in diligence all earlier prefects' (*i[nlu]stri viro et omnium retro praefecto[rum i]ndustriam supergresso*) and a 'deserving patron' (*digno pat(rono)*) of the guild of wholesale dealers, for 'the care which he took' (*[ob curam quam egit]*), 'with incomparable diligence' (*incomparabili [industria]*), when he restored the guild to its former strength, and for 'his outstanding deeds and singular munificence towards it' (*eius aegregia (sic) facta et in se munificentiam singularem*).[26] The prefect is thus lauded for his *cura*, *industria*, and *munificentia* towards the city guild.

To conclude, few correspondences can be established between the imperial and senatorial representation. The honorific inscriptions of the Maxentian period commissioned by the senatorial office-holders for the emperor reveal a change in the public image of the ruler. He is no longer presented as a magistrate of the Republic elected by the Roman senate and people, but as a *dominus*, "master," glorified as such by the highest stratum of the imperial aristocracy. The new honorific language employed by the senatorial awarders titles him "unvanquished Augustus," alluding to his military achievements, upon which imperial legitimation rests. However, Maxentius, just like Constantine, derived his legitimacy primarily from the dynastic principle, discarding the tetrarchic ideology. In dedications to his son and to Romulus, the dynastic legitimacy and the ties to the city of Rome and its traditional institutions, such as the senate, are highlighted as pillars of Maxentius' self-presentation, in blatant disregard of the tetrarchic ideology.

As the military emperors of the third and early fourth centuries limited the economic and social privileges of the senatorial aristocracy, they also exerted an influence on its self-perception. The offspring of the noble families of the resident aristocrats of Rome began to present themselves as subjects to the absolute authority of the divine ruler. If the emperor appears as divine and the new imperial titulature spotlights the emperor's absolute power (*domino nostro*), the members of the later Roman aristocracy in turn exhibit their self-image as monarchical subjects, in accordance with the new style of the imperial representation. The traditional senatorial nobility of Rome took extreme pride in holding offices – glorified in the *cursus* inscriptions – viewing the late Roman senate as an institution

of the office-holding aristocracy. Since even the rank of the scions of ancient *nobilis* families was defined by the state offices they held, it was indispensable to partake in the imperial government by forming part of the aristocracy of service, where the status was defined by the offices conferred on the senators by the emperor. In return for the benefits of office-holding, the metropolitan senatorial aristocracy was consenting and conforming to the shifts in the late Roman imperial ideology.

NOTES

[1]   CIL 6 1139=ILS 694.

[2]   CIL 6 33856=LSA-1388: *Marti Invicto, patri, / et aeternae Urbis suae / conditoribus, / dominus noster / [[Imp(erator) Maxent[iu]s, p(ius), f(elix)]], / invictus Aug(ustus). // Dedicata die(s) XI kal(endas) Maias / per Furium Octavianum v(irum) c(larissimum) / cur(atorem) aed(ium) sacr(arum).* Maxentius adopted the appellation of *propagator* (extender) of the empire, introduced as a standard imperial title by Septimius Severus and revived by Diocletian, but extended it to Mars, see RIC VI 402 n.12: *MARTI PROPAG(atori) IMP(erii) AVG(usti) N(ostri).*

[3]   *PLRE* I, 772 Valerius Romulus 6. *ILS 672*; CIL 6 1138, cfr. pp. 3778, 4327=ILS 673.

[4]   *PLRE* I, 638 Octavianus 4.

[5]   CIL 8 14688=ILS 3937; CIL 8 14689=ILS 3938. *PIR*^{2} A 1017.

[6]   CIL 6 1223=LSA-1319. In line 1, '*conservator militum et provincialium*' is common in milestones, especially dedicated to Magnentius or later, see CIL 11 6643 to Magnentius and CIL 5 8061 to Julian. CIL 6, p. 4336 suggests '*conservator[em totius orbis]*', observing that it was used for Constantine, see LSA-2228. In l.3, CIL suggests '*sacram viam*'. The restoration of such an important street would have deserved a proper celebration, as in the grandiloquent language of the inscription. PLRE I, 689 (Hie)rocles Perpetuus 4.

[7]   CIL 6, p. 4336, suggesting Constantine.

[8]   Ibid.

[9]   PLRE I, 689 Perpetuus 4.

[10]   CIL 6 40768=LSA-1430.

[11]   CIL 6 1139=LSA-2669.

[12]   Above the lateral archway, on the western side.

[13]   LSA-2662, see also LSA-896.

[14]   PLRE I, 976-978 Volusianus 4.

[15]   AE 2003, 207=LSA-1573; CIL 6 1708=ILS 1222.

[16]   CIL 6 1140=ILS 692=LSA-837.

[17]   CIL 6 41318=ILS 1222=LSA-1416.

[18]   CIL 6 1707=LSA-1415.

[19]   CIL 6 1707=ILS 1213=LSA-1415. His next three offices were held under Maxentius and are omitted from the inscription.

[20]   Porena suggests that the proconsulship of Volusianus may have coincided with the critical passage of Africa Proconsularis from previous legitimate control to that of Maxentius. It is witnessed by the highly prestigious posts that Volusianus held under the 'usurper': praetorian and urban prefecture, and an ordinary consulship of 311. The fact that the proconsulship of Africa appears in the *cursus honorum* written after Constantine's victory at the

Milvian bridge, where the Maxentian offices are not mentioned, is explained by the appointment of Volusianus before the usurpation.

21   CIL 6 41319=LSA 1573.

22   CIL 10 5061=ILS 1217=AE 2005, 90=LSA-1978. PLRE I, 777 Rufinus 15.

23   PLRE I, 883-884 Tertullus 6.

24   CIL 6 1696=LSA-1401: *[Inlu]stri viro et omnium retro praefecto/[rum i] ndustriam supergresso, Attio Insteio Tertullo, / [quaestori k(andidato)], praetori k(andidato), consuli, correctori / [Venetiae et Hist]riae, praeposito fabri/[cas(?), proco(n)s(uli) Africae(?), praefecto ur]bis Romae, / [ob curam quam egit, ut fortunae eorum] / inopia ing[enti afflictae sollicitudine eius] / miseriae atque incomparabili [industria, cum in] / apertum periculum proruebant, recrea/tae atque confotae redditis pristinis / viribus, convalescerent et aeternum robur / acciperent, atque (ob) eius aegregia (!) facta et in se / munificentiam singularem, corpus magna/riorum gravi, metu et discrimine liberatum, / ei statuam aere insignem locavit, / curantibus / Flaviis Respecto Panckario Sabiniano Palass(io?) / et Florentino, v(iris) p(erfectissimis), p(rae)p(ositis) corp(oris) mag(nariorum), digno pat(rono).*

25   LSA-1402.

26   Franz Mithof in CIL 6, p. 4736, has inferred that the troubles alluded to in the inscription (ll.7-10) could refer to the crisis in the supply of Rome in 310.

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