

DIOCLETIAN

(244-311 C.E.)



**BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK SERIES
FOR HIGH SCHOOL**

DIOCLETIAN
(245-313 C.E.)

Gaius Valerius Diocletianus (Diocletian), one of the most famous of the Roman emperors, was, as the writer De Quincey says, "doubtless that man of iron whom the times demanded." Diocletian was born at Dioclea, in Dalmatia, some say at Salona (now Solin, Croatia), about 245 C.E. according to some, but others make him ten years older. His original name was Diocles, which he afterward changed into Diocletianus. He is said by some to have been the son of a notary, by others the freedman of a senator named Anulinus.

1. When was Diocletian born?

Diocletian entered the army at an early age, and rose gradually to rank. He served in Gaul, in Mœsia, under Probus, and was present at the campaign against the Persians, in which Carus, then emperor, perished in a mysterious manner. Diocletian commanded the household or imperial bodyguards when young Numerianus, the son of Carus, was secretly put to death by Aper his father-in-law, while

traveling in a close litter on account of illness, on the return of the army from Persia. The death of Emperor Numerianus (also known as Numerian) being discovered after several days by the soldiers near Calchedon, they arrested Aper and proclaimed Diocletian emperor. Diocletian, addressing the soldiers from his tribunal in the camp, protested his innocence of the death of Numerianus, and then upbraiding Aper for the crime, plunged his sword into the traitor's body.

2. Who was Diocletian's predecessor as Roman emperor?

The new emperor observed to a friend that "he had now killed the boar," punning on the word Aper, which means a boar, and alluding to the prediction of a soothsayer in Gaul, who had told him that he would become emperor after having killed a boar (Vopiscus, in "Hist. Aug."). Diocletian, self-composed and strong-minded in other respects, was all his life an anxious believer in divination,

Diocletian

which superstition led him probably to inflict summary punishment upon Aper with his own hands. Diocletian made his solemn entrance into Nicomedia in September, 284, which town he afterward chose for his favorite residence.

3. What town became Diocletian's favorite residence?

4. Conjecture what it meant for the Roman Empire to have the emperor live in a city other than Rome.

Carinus, the other son of Carus, who had remained in Italy, collected a force to attack Diocletian. The two armies met at Margum, in Mœsia, where the soldiers of Carinus had the advantage at first. But Carinus

himself being killed during the battle by his officers, who detested him for his cruelty and debauchery, both armies joined in acknowledging Diocletian emperor in 285. Diocletian was generous after his victory, and, contrary to the common practice, there were no executions, proscriptions, or confiscations of property. Diocletian even retained most of the officers of Carinus in their places.

5. Who gathered forces to attack Diocletian?

Diocletian, on assuming the imperial power, found the Empire assailed by enemies in various quarters—on the Persian frontiers, on the side of Germany and of Illyricum, and in Britain. Besides which, a serious revolt had broken out in Gaul among the rural population, under two leaders who had assumed the title of emperor. To quell the disturbance in Gaul, Diocletian sent his old friend Maximianus, a native of Pannonia, and a brave but rude, uncultivated soldier. Maximianus defeated the Bagaudi, for such was the name the rustic insurgents had assumed.

In the year 286, Diocletian chose Maximianus as his colleague in the Empire, under the name of Marcus

Diocletian

Valerius Maximianus Augustus, and it is to the credit of both that the latter continued ever after faithful to Diocletian and willing to follow his advice. Maximianus was stationed in Gaul and on the German frontier to repel invasion. Diocletian resided chiefly in the East to watch the Persians, though he appears to have visited Rome in the early part of his reign.

6. Beginning in 286 C.E., Diocletian shared power with Maximian (Maximinianus), who ruled in the west, while Diocletian ruled in the east.
- True
 - False

About 287 C.E., the revolt of Carausius took place. Carausius was a provincial (born in Belgic Gaul) who, while serving as a Roman military commander, declared himself emperor of Britannia (Britain) and northern Gaul (France). In the following year, Maximianus defeated the Germans near Treviri, and Diocletian himself marched against other tribes on the Rhætian frontier. The year after, Diocletian defeated the Sarmatians on the lower Danube. In the same year, 289, peace was made between Carausius and the two emperors. Carausius was allowed to retain possession of Britain.

7. Conjecture why Diocletian and Maximianus allowed Carausius to retain power in Britannia (Britain).

In 290, Maximianus and Diocletian met at Milan to confer together on the state of the Empire, after which Diocletian returned to Nicomedia. The Persians, soon after, again invaded Mesopotamia and threatened Syria. The Quinquegentiani, a federation of tribes in the Mauritania Cæsariensis, revolted. Another revolt under one Achillæus broke out in Egypt; another in Italy under a certain Julianus.

8. Imagine that you are Diocletian. You have split rule of the empire with Maximianus in order to reign more effectively. What might you

Diocletian

do in the face of more external and internal threats?

Diocletian thought it necessary to increase the number of his colleagues in order to face the attacks in the various quarters. On the 1st of March, 292, or 291, according to some chronologists, he appointed Galerius as Cæsar, and presented him to the troops at Nicomedia. At the same time, Maximianus adopted on his part Constantius called Chlorus. The two Cæsars repudiated their respective wives. Galerius married Valeria, Diocletian's daughter, adding to his name that of Valerianus. Constantius married Theodora, daughter of Maximianus.

9. Galerius and Constantius (Chlorus) each divorced his wife, then married the daughter of the man who had appointed him Cæsar (essentially, second in command). Can you imagine such blatantly political marriages being made today by modern leaders? Why or why not?

Galerius was a native of Dacia, and a good soldier, but violent and cruel. Galerius had been a herdsman in his youth, for which he has been styled, in derision, Armentarius. The two Cæsars remained subordinate to the two Augusti, though each of the four was entrusted with the administration of a part of the

Diocletian

Empire. Diocletian kept to himself Asia and Egypt; Maximianus had Italy and Africa; Galerius, Thrace and Illyricum; and Constantius had Gaul and Spain. But it was rather an

administrative than a political division. At the head of the edicts of each prince were put the names of all the four, beginning with that of Diocletian.

10. Complete the chart with the names of the Roman rulers and their administrative territories.

| Augusti | Territory |
|---------|-----------|
| | |
| | |
| Cæsars | Territory |
| | |
| | |

Diocletian resorted to this arrangement probably as much for reasons of internal as of external policy. For nearly a hundred years before, ever since the death of Commodus, the soldiers had been in the habit of giving or selling the imperial crown, to which any general might aspire. Between thirty and forty emperors had been thus successively made and unmade, many of whom only reigned a few months. By fixing upon four colleagues, one in each of the great divisions of the Empire, each having his army, and all mutually checking one another, Diocletian put a

stop to military insolence and anarchy.

11. Why did Diocletian fear military insolence and anarchy?

The Empire was no longer put up to sale. The immediate and intolerable evil was effectually cured, though another danger remained, that

Diocletian

of disputes and wars between the various sharers of the imperial power. Still, it was a smaller danger, and one which did not manifest itself so long as Diocletian remained at the helm.

Writers have been very free of their censure upon this emperor for parceling, as they call it, the Empire. But this was the only chance there was of preventing its crumbling to pieces. Italy, and Rome in particular, lost by the change—they no longer monopolized the wealth and power of the world, but the other provinces gained. The Empire was much too large for one single man or a single central administration, under the dwindled influence of the Roman name, and amidst the numerous causes of local dissension and discontent, private ambition, social corruption, and foreign hostility, that had accumulated for three centuries, since the time of Augustus.

12. Weigh the pros and cons of Diocletian's parceling of the Roman Empire.



The new Cæsars justified Diocletian's expectations. Constantius defeated the Franks and the Alamanni, and soon after reconquered Britain. Galerius subjugated the Carpi, and transported the whole tribe into Pannonia. In the year 296, the Persians, under their king Narses, again invaded Mesopotamia and part of Syria. Galerius marched against them, but being too confident, he was defeated by superior numbers, and obliged to retire. On his meeting Diocletian, the emperor showed his dissatisfaction by letting Galerius walk for a mile, clad in purple as he was, by the side of his car.

13. Who was king of the Persians in 296?

The following year, Galerius again attacked the Persians, and completely defeated them, taking an immense booty. The wives and

Diocletian

children of Narses, who were among the prisoners, were treated by Galerius with humanity and respect. Narses sued for peace, which was granted by Diocletian on condition of the Persians giving up all the territory on the right or western bank of the Tigris. This peace was concluded in 297, and lasted forty years.

At the same time Diocletian marched into Egypt against Achillæus, whom he besieged in Alexandria. Diocletian took Alexandria after a siege of eight months, when the usurper and his chief adherents were put to death. Diocletian is said to have behaved on this occasion with unusual sternness. Several towns of Egypt, among others Busiris and Coptos, were destroyed. Constantine, the son of Constantius, who was educated at Nicomedia, accompanied the emperor in this expedition.

14. Why do you imagine that Diocletian was so harsh in Egypt, while Galerius was humane in Persia?

Diocletian fixed the limits of the Empire on that side at the island of Elephantina, where he built a castle, and made peace with the neighboring tribes, called by some Nubæ and by others Nabatæ (Nubians). To the Nubæ, Diocletian gave up the strip of territory which the Romans had conquered, of seven days' march above the first cataract, on condition that they should prevent the Blemmyes and Ethiopians from attacking Egypt. Maximianus in the meantime was engaged in putting down the revolt in Mauritania, which he effected with full success.

15. What group was given land in southern Egypt to protect Egypt from the Blemmyes and Ethiopians?

For several years after this the empire enjoyed peace, and Diocletian and his colleagues were chiefly employed in framing laws and administrative regulations, and in constructing forts on the frontiers. Diocletian kept a splendid court at Nicomedia, which town he embellished with numerous structures. He, or rather Maximianus by his order, caused the magnificent Thermæ at Rome to be built, the remains of which

Diocletian

still bear Diocletian's name, and which contained, besides the baths, a library, a museum, public walks, and other establishments.

16. What did Diocletian have Maximianus build at Rome?

In February, 303, Diocletian issued an edict against the Christians, ordering their churches to be pulled down, their sacred books to be burnt, and all Christians to be dismissed from offices civil or military, with other penalties, exclusive however of death. Various causes have been assigned for this measure. It is known that Galerius had always been hostile to the Christians, while Diocletian had openly favored them, had employed them in his armies and about his person.

The historian Eusebius speaks of the prosperity, security, and protection which the Christians enjoyed under Diocletian's reign. They had churches in most towns, and one at Nicomedia in particular under the eye of the emperor. Just before the edict was issued, Galerius had repaired to Nicomedia to induce Diocletian to proscribe the Christians. Galerius filled the emperor's mind with reports of conspiracies and seditions. The imperial palace took

fire, Constantine ("Oratio ad Coetum Sanctorum") says, from lightning, and Galerius suggested to the emperor that it was a Christian plot.

17. Who convinced Diocletian to persecute Christians?

The Roman pagan priests, on their part, exerted themselves for the same purpose. It happened that on the occasion of a solemn sacrifice in presence of the emperor, while priests were consulting the entrails of the victims, the Christian officers in the imperial retinue crossed themselves. Upon this, the priests declared that the presence of profane men prevented them from discovering the auspices. Diocletian, who was very anxious to pry into futurity, became irritated, and ordered all his Christian officers to sacrifice to the gods under pain of flagellation and dismissal, which many of them underwent. Several oracles which Diocletian consulted gave answers unfavorable to the Christians.

18. Why, do you think, Roman pagan priests were opposed to Christianity?

Diocletian

Lactantius's (an early Christian author) acknowledgment.

19. What was the first Christian church to be destroyed during the Diocletianic Persecution?

The church of Nicomedia was the first pulled down by order of the emperor. The rashness of a Christian who publicly tore down the imperial edict exasperated Diocletian still more, and the culprit was put to a cruel death. Then came a second edict, ordering all magistrates to arrest the Christian bishops and presbyters, and compel them to sacrifice to the gods. This was giving to their enemies power over their lives, and it proved, in fact, the beginning of a cruel persecution. The ravages of this persecution were the more extensive in proportion to the great diffusion of Christianity during a long period of toleration. This was the last persecution under the Roman Empire, and it has been called by the name of Diocletian (the Diocletianic Persecution). But that emperor issued the two edicts reluctantly and after long hesitation, according to

Diocletian fell ill a few months after, and on recovering from his long illness he abdicated. Galerius, who had instigated the persecution, was the most zealous minister of it. The persecution raged with most fury in the provinces subject to his rule, and he continued it for several years after Diocletian's abdication, so that it might with more propriety be called the Galerian persecution. Legend says that Galerius died of a horrible disease, filled with remorse and imagining himself haunted by the martyred spirits. The countries under the government of Constantius suffered the least from it.

In November of that year (303) Diocletian repaired to Rome, where he and Maximianus enjoyed the honor of a triumph, followed by festive games. This was the last triumph that Rome saw. The populace of that city complained of the economy of Diocletian on the occasion, who replied that moderation and temperance were most required when the censor was

Diocletian

present. The people vented their displeasure in jibes and sarcasms. This behavior so hurt Diocletian that he left Rome abruptly in the month of December for Ravenna, in very cold weather. In this journey, Diocletian was seized by an illness which affected him the whole of the following year, which he spent at Nicomedia. At one time he was reported to be dead. He rallied, however, in the spring of 305, and showed himself in public, but greatly altered in appearance. Galerius soon after came to Nicomedia, and it is said that he persuaded Diocletian to abdicate. Others say that Diocletian did it spontaneously.

20. Describe the events that led to Diocletian's abdication.

On the 1st of May, Diocletian repaired, with his guards, to a spot three miles out of Nicomedia. It was here where, thirteen years before, he had proclaimed Galerius as Cæsar.

Addressing his officers and court, Diocletian said that the infirmities of age warned him to retire from power, and to deliver the administration of the state into stronger hands. Diocletian then proclaimed Galerius as Augustus, and Maximinus Daza as the new Cæsar. Constantine, who has given an account of the ceremony, which is quoted by Eusebius in his life of that prince, was present, and the troops fully expected that he would be the new Cæsar. When the troops heard another mentioned, they asked each other whether Constantine had changed his name.

21. Constantine became the new Cæsar under Galerius.

- True
- False

But Galerius did not leave them long in suspense. Galerius pushed forward Maximinus and showed him to the assembly. Diocletian clothed him with the purple vest, after which the old emperor returned privately in his carriage to Nicomedia, and immediately after set off for Salona in Dalmatia. Near Salona, Diocletian built himself an extensive palace by the seashore, in which he lived for the rest of his life, respected by the other emperors, without cares and without regret.



Part of the external walls which enclosed the area belonging to his palace and other buildings still remain—three of the gates, as well as a temple. This temple is now a church at Spalatro, or Spalato, in Dalmatia, a comparatively modern town, grown out of the decay of the ancient Salona, and built in great part within the walls of Diocletian's residence, from the name of which, "Palatium," it is believed that "Spalato" is derived.

At the same time that Diocletian abdicated at Nicomedia, Maximianus, according to an agreement between them, performed a similar ceremony at Milan, proclaiming Constantius as Augustus, and Severus as Cæsar. Both Severus and Maximinus Daza were inferior persons, and creatures of Galerius, who insisted upon their

nomination in preference to that of Maxentius and Constantine, whom Diocletian had at first proposed. Maximianus retired to his seat in Lucania, but not being endowed with the firmness of Diocletian, he tried some time after to recover his former power, and wrote to his old colleague to induce him to do the same.

22. To where did Maximianus retire?

"Were you but to come to Salona," answered Diocletian, "and see the vegetables which I grow in my garden with my own hands, you would no longer talk to me of empire." In his retirement, Diocletian used to observe

Diocletian

to his associates how difficult it is, even for the best-intentioned man, to govern well, as he cannot see everything with his own eyes, but must trust to others, who often deceive him.

Once only, Diocletian left his retirement to meet Galerius in Pannonia for the purpose of appointing a new Cæsar, Licinius, in the place of Severus, who had died. Licinius, however, did not prove grateful, for after the death of Galerius, in 311, he ill-treated his widow, Valeria, Diocletian's daughter, who then, with her mother, Prisca, took refuge in the territories of Maximinus Daza. The latter offered to marry Valeria, but on her refusal exiled both her and her mother into the deserts of Syria, and put to death several of their attendants. Diocletian remonstrated in favor of his wife and daughter, but to no purpose. His grief on this occasion probably hastened his death, which took place at his residence at Aspalathos (now Split, Croatia) in July, 313. In the following year, Diocletian's wife and daughter were put to death by order of Licinius.

23. Diocletian was born and died in ancient Dalmatia, in the cities of what modern country?
- Croatia
 - Greece
 - Italy
 - Spain

Diocletian ranks among the most distinguished emperors of Rome. His reign of twenty-one years was upon the whole prosperous for the empire, and creditable to the Roman name. He was severe, but not wantonly cruel, and we ought to remember that mercy was not a Roman virtue. His conduct after his abdication shows that his was no common mind.

The chief charge against him is his haughtiness in introducing the Oriental ceremonial of prostration into the Roman court. The Christian writers, and especially Lactantius, have spoken unfavorably of him; but Lactantius cannot be implicitly trusted. Of the regular historians of his reign we have only the meager narratives of Eutropius and Aurelius Victor, the others being now lost. But notices of Diocletian's life are scattered about in various authors, Libanius, Vopiscus, Eusebius, Julian in his *Cæsars*, and the contemporary panegyrists, Eumenes and Mamertinus. His laws or edicts are in the "Code."

Among other useful reforms, Diocletian abolished the *frumentarii*, or licensed informers, who were stationed in every province to report any attempt at mutiny or rebellion, and who basely enriched themselves by working on the fears of the inhabitants. He also reformed and

Word Search Puzzle

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