

J. N. ADAMS – P. M. BRENNAN

THE TEXT AT LACTANTIUS, DE MORTIBUS PERSECUTORUM 44.2
AND SOME EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE FOR ITALIAN RECRUITS

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At Lact. Mort. 44.2 the transmitted text (C = Codex Colbertinus, BN 2627) runs: 'plus uirium Maxentio erat, quod et patris sui exercitum receperat a Seuero et suum proprium de Mauris atque Italis nuper extraxerat'. Modern editors (Brandt-Laubmann, Moreau, Creed) have accepted Heumann's conjecture *G(a)etulis* for *Italis* without discussion.¹ But is the change necessary? Much depends on the interpretation of *extraxerat*.

Creed translates... '... his own (army), which he had recently *brought over from* the Mauri and the Gaetuli' (our italics). In his note (p.118) he finds here an allusion to 'the rebellion against Maxentius of L. Domitius Alexander, *vicarius* of Africa, which probably began in 308 and was probably crushed by the end of 309'. On this view the troops will have been 'brought over' from Africa after the rebellion was put down. Creed's translation is along the same lines as that of Moreau... I, p.126 'il venait de *faire revenir* la sienne propre du pays des Maures et des Gétules'.²

In their eagerness to find a reference to L. Domitius Alexander, Moreau and Creed have mistranslated *extraxerat*. Neither editor attempts to explain how a verb basically meaning 'drag out of' could acquire the sense 'bring over, cause to return'. What the Latin says is that Maxentius had 'dragged, drawn out his own army', not from a country, but from two peoples.

In fact *extraho* was a technical term of the levying of troops: these were 'drawn from' a population or place. See TLL V 2.2063.72f. '*milites legere, exercitum, copias evocare, exciere*', citing this passage (but with *Italis / Getulis* omitted), among others: e.g. Livy 5.10.7 'in quattuor deinde bella uno dilectu exercitus scriptos et pueros quoque ac senes extractos', Frontin. Strat. 2.3.16 'plerosque eorum (sc. *Italicorum*) ab Italia inuitos extraxerat'.

The text differentiates two parts of the numerically superior force available to Maxentius in his war against Constantine in 312 A.D.: his father's army, gained from Severus, and his

¹See C.A.Heumann, Lucii Caecilii Lactantii Firmiani Opera Omnia emendata et illustrata, Göttingen 1736, 999. Heumann printed *Italis* in the text, but commented: 'Rescribendum enim de Mauris et Getulis. Vicinae hae erant gentes'. His only reason for suggesting *Getulis* was that the Moors and Gaetuli were neighbours. Cf. S.Brandt and G.Laubmann, L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti Opera Omnia II.2, Vienna-Prague-Leipzig 1897, J.Moreau, Lactance, De la Mort des Persécuteurs, Paris 1954, J.L.Creed, Lactantius, De Mortibus Persecutorum, Oxford 1984. Creed (p.118) describes Heumann's conjecture as 'very convincing', but does not say why.

²T.D.Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, Cambridge Ma. 1981, 33 goes even further, without citing this text: 'Alexander was enrolling Gaetulians and Moors in his army' and later 'as for the rebel army, it swore allegiance to Maxentius and went to reinforce the defense of Italy'. Our only sources to give any details of these events (Victor Caes. 40.18; Zosimus 2.12-14) support none of these assertions.

own. *Suum proprium* is strongly emphatic: he had recently levied 'his very own' army, as distinct from the one he had acquired from someone else.

Moreau (II 430), discussing the composition of Maxentius' army, cites Zosimus 2.15.2 as evidence that the army contained contingents recruited in Italy: 'Ρωμαίων καὶ Ἰταλῶν καὶ Τυρρηνῶν ὅσοι τὴν παραλίαν ὄκουν ... καὶ Cικελιῶται. It is odd that Moreau should have quoted and commented on this passage ('L'armée de Maxence se composait ... *des contingents recrutés en Italie*', our italics), without observing its relevance to the text of Lactantius. *Italīs* should obviously be retained. Maxentius had recruited both in Italy and Africa. It is not necessary or right to see an allusion to the rebellion of L. Domitius Alexander.

There is nothing surprising about the sources of this recent levy. The areas whose manpower resources were available to Maxentius for recruitment were Italy, the islands and the African provinces. Recognition of that lies behind the passage of Zosimus cited above (2.15), which describes the forces as comprising Romans, Italians, Tyrrhenians, Carchedonians and Siceliots. Where Zosimus is suspiciously detailed in numbers and archaising names, Lactantius is succinct and realistic. Mauri had long provided the Roman army with renowned and much-feared soldiers, culminating in the *Equites Mauri*, a major part of the third century field cavalry.³ Maxentius may well have complemented the Moorish cavalry which deserted to him from Severus' army (Zosimus 2.10) with an additional force of his own when their recruiting grounds became available to him after the defeat of Alexander.

Unlike Moors, Italians did not give their names to specific military units in the third and later centuries (unless they originally formed the curiously named *Latini* and *Sabini* in the *Notitia*).⁴ Nor are many soldiers with known origins Italian. Yet that gives no warrant for denying that Maxentius conscribed Italians, deprived as he was of the now normal Illyrian and Gallic recruiting areas. Although the normal processes of conscription bypassed Italy from the time of Tiberius, the obligation to conscription had never been abrogated, and Italian conscription continued in times of mass mobilisation. It was used to create new legions (*II* and *III Italica* under M. Aurelius, and perhaps the three *legiones Parthicae* under Septimius); Maximinus' Italian conscription (ILS 487 '*tirones iuventut. nouae Italicae suae dilectus posterior.*') may hint at a more regular process of Italian conscription. Italian conscription was used to supplement expeditionary armies (Herodian 6.3.1 on Alexander Severus' army for the east is the latest attested instance, but later sources simply do not give this sort of detail). Most significantly, it was used to form civil war forces by the senatorial

³ See M.Speidel, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Berlin 1975, II 3.208-221.

⁴ *Occ.* 5.194-5 = 7.46 and 22. D.Hoffmann, *Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum*, Düsseldorf 1969-70, I 168 rejects such an origin and assigns their creation to Valentinian I, but his criteria are arguable. Maxentius may have formed such units modelled on the barbarian *auxilia* first created under his father, according to Hoffmann (I 155ff.).

usurpers in 238 in a situation in many ways comparable to that of Maxentius (Herodian 7.12.1; CIL XIII 6763).⁵ Maxentius too would be expected to reactivate the conscription processes, if, indeed, they had not been in operation already in the emergencies of the mid and later third centuries.

In any case the small numbers of Italians known in the third century army may underestimate the Italian contribution, even as volunteers, especially in the later period when more units were based in Italy. The reluctance of Italians (as of other peoples from areas away from the garrison sites of the military units) to serve in normal circumstances has to be seen in the context of their unwillingness to be posted far from their homelands and the trend, even preference, for recruiting in frontier zones. Where units were based in Italy, Italians did serve; third century epigraphy reveals Italians in the praetorians (CIL VI 32628.8; XVI 147 and 153; AE 1961 240 - a military diploma in A.D. 306 of Valerius Clemens *natione Italus*), in the urban cohorts (CIL VI 32526), in *legio II Parthica* (AE 1964,14) and in the Italian Fleets (CIL XVI 152; 154). There were also military units based in north Italian cities in the later third century. The soldiers serving in them often give no clear indication of their origins; those who do so are mostly from Danubian areas, but some are Italian, including three who may have served under Maxentius. They all carry the name Valerius, which was a status indicator given to soldiers amongst others in the period c.300-324.⁶ Valerius Ienuarius, *circitor de uexillatione catafractariorum*, was commemorated at Eporedia by his *ciuis* Aur. Exuperius (CIL V 6784). Since Exuperius is not a soldier (in which case one would expect him to have the name Valerius), their common citizenship was of Eporedia, not of some other place from which they were recruited together. Ienuarius may be one of the Italians recruited by Maxentius, whose army featured *clibanarii* (Pan. Lat. IV[X].22.4; cf. 23.4, where they are called *catafracti*).⁷ Another Italian, the Aquileian Val. Ursianus (CIL VI 37207), served for five years in *legio X Gemina* (probably recruited at Aquileia, where this and other legionary detachments are recorded in the late third century), and died after another four years in the praetorians, by 312 when the praetorians were disbanded. Since the name Valerius dates his death c.300/312, he may have deserted Severus with his legion and been promoted to the praetorians by Maxentius. Val. Ursinus *miles lanciarius nat(ione) Italus* (CIL VI 2787) is another who served in the praetorians around this time, also for four years, perhaps recruited by Maxentius. Many more of the soldiers without clear origins in north Italian towns in the third century may also have been of Italian origin (e.g. CIL V 894; 895; 899; 944, 1881; 6511). Italians were not unwilling to

⁵ On recruitment in general, see P.Brunt, *Scripta classica Israelica* 1 1974, 90-115, esp. 97-99, reprinted as ch.9 of his *Roman Imperial Themes*, Oxford 1990); J.C.Mann, *Recruitment and Veteran Settlement during the Principate*, London 1983, 63-68. The best text of CIL XIII 6763 is in G.Alföldy, *Die Legionslegaten der römischen Rheinarmeen*, Cologne 1967, 61-3.

⁶ See J.Keenan, *ZPE* 11, 1973, 44-6.

⁷ M.Speidel, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 4, 1984, 151-6, esp. 152 n.4 discussing this unit and a contemporary, eastern unit of *catafractarii clibanarii*.

serve, in the right conditions. And it should not be forgotten that it was Galerius' attempt to restrict the privileges of Rome and Italy that contributed to the usurpation of Maxentius (Victor, Caes. 39.31; Lact., Mort. 23; 26.2). If he posed as the defender of Rome and Italy (as is likely, though the anti-Maxentian nature of our sources does not allow us to assert it), Italians may willingly have rallied to his, and their, cause; even more so after his success against the forces of Severus, of Galerius and of Alexander.

University of Manchester
University of Sydney

J.N.Adams
P.M.Brennan