

EVAN W. HALEY

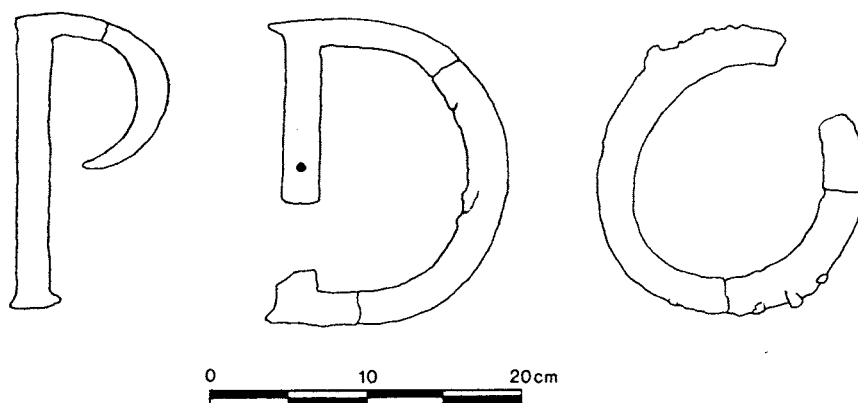
A PALACE OF MAXIMIANUS HERCULIUS AT CORDUBA?

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 101 (1994) 208–214

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

## A PALACE OF MAXIMIANUS HERCULIUS AT CORDUBA?\*

The discovery of the following gilded bronze letters in the cryptoporticus of the Roman palace at Cercadilla, a district of the north-western outskirts of Córdoba, inevitably raises questions as to the origin, character and fate of the monument:



The purpose of this brief article is to suggest that the Corduba palace, discovered in April 1991, was constructed at the behest of Maximianus Herculus, Augustus of the West (12.285 or 1.4.286 to 1.5.305), for his use as a temporary residence and administrative seat during his Spanish and North African campaigns of 296 to 298.<sup>1</sup> First notice of the monument dates back to 1922 when Navascués discovered a portion of the cryptoporticus and interpreted the remains as belonging to a Roman mausoleum, unaware of the true dimensions of the complex.<sup>2</sup> The complex rested on land owned by the Spanish national railway since the 19th century and, therefore, was never built over save for rail lines. It was only in the course of construction of the Córdoba section of the high-speed rail link ("AVE") between Sevilla and Madrid that it became evident that a Roman monumental complex of vast

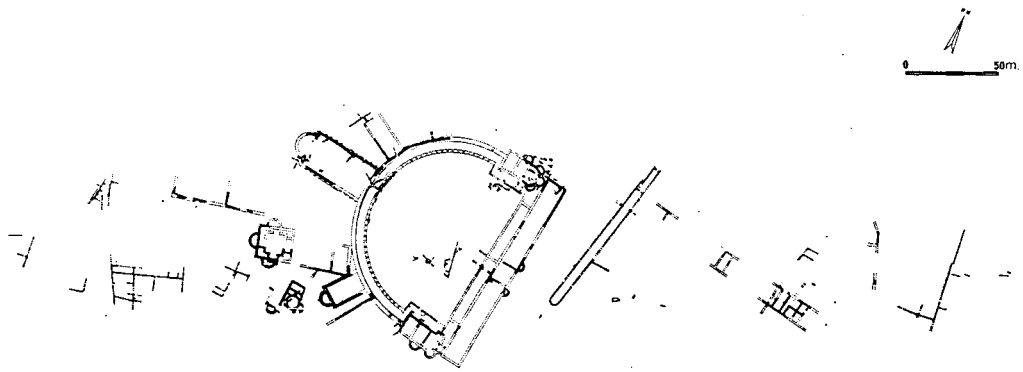
\* This article was conceived and written in late May/early June 1993. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. H.Schubart, Dr. M.Blech, L. de Frutos and other members of the DAI-Madrid for their hospitable facilitation of my research. Dr. Blech, Dr. S.Schröder and Dr. A.Arbeiter kindly read and criticized a previous draft of this article. I am also grateful to the Fundación Pastor (Madrid) for the use of its library. Part of the research costs were supported by an Arts Research Board grant of McMaster University. All the ideas and opinions in this article are mine, and I am exclusively responsible for any remaining errors or defects.

<sup>1</sup> Letters: R.Hidalgo Prieto and P.Marfil Ruiz, 'El yacimiento arqueológico de Cercadilla: avance de resultados,' *Anales de arqueología Cordobesa* 3,1992,277-308 (hereafter Hidalgo and Marfil), at 283 n.10 and pl.4 (photo with scale), from which my drawing of the letters derives. The letter heights are 18,2; 19,1 and 17,9 cm, respectively. For the circumstances of the letters' find, see below. Maximian's regnal dates: D.Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt, 1990,268-69.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. de Navascués, 'Interesantísimo hallazgo de una bóveda romana en el camino de Sevilla,' *Boletín de la Real Academia de Córdoba* 1,1922,87-92.

dimensions had been discovered.<sup>3</sup> It was the good fortune of the author of this article to visit the site on June 6, 1992 when a considerable portion of the complex had been revealed through emergency excavation and still existed. Since that date most of the monument has perished, replaced by bedding for new rail lines and the foundations of the future station associated with the high-velocity train.<sup>4</sup>

A brief description of one of the most extensive Roman palaces ever discovered is in order. The following plan will aid in the comprehension of the complex:



The palatium at Cercadilla from: R.Hidalgo and P.Marfil, *Anales de arqueología Cordobesa* 3,1992,299 fig.3

The complex lies 700 m to the north-west of the line of walls of the colonia Patricia Corduba and 750 m to the nearest gate. The heart of the complex consists of a semi-circular exedra formed by a cryptoporticus with an outer diameter of 109 m and possessing an eastern orientation. At each end of the cryptoporticus are triconch halls. After the general abandonment of the complex as a whole between ca. 450-500, the northern triconch hall served as a funerary church first for the Visigothic inhabitants of Corduba and, subsequently, under Islamic rule, for the Mozarabic community.<sup>5</sup> Above the cryptoporticus

<sup>3</sup> For an initial notice, see 'Destruído el teatro romano de Córdoba,' in *Revista de arqueología* 123, Julio 1991, 6-9, whose authors - the Seminario de Arqueología de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Córdoba - took the remains, as the title of their article obviously suggests, to be those of a large theater with portico (p.9).

<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank Rafael Hidalgo Prieto for showing me the complex, as well as a balloon photo of the site.

<sup>5</sup> For the identification of the Cercadilla complex as a palatium and its subsequent history, see C.Márquez, R.Hidalgo and P.Marfil, 'El complejo monumental tardorromano de Cercadilla en 'colonia patricia Corduba', *L'Africa romana. Atti del IX convegno di studio. Nuoro, 13-15 dicembre 1991*. A.Mastino ed., Sassari 1992, 1039-1047 (hereafter Márquez, Hidalgo and Marfil) and Hidalgo and Marfil at n.1 above.

and resting on a bed of 'opus caementicium' was most likely a colonnaded portico off of and accessible from which were constructed a series of symmetrically disposed buildings, including pavilions and aulae or reception halls. The largest of these structures is an 'aula basilica' which lies on the main E-W axis of symmetry of the exedra and which is 48,5 m long, 22,5 m wide and possessing a single apse 16,2 m in diameter. The central aula was supported by buttresses 2,4 m apart which are reminiscent of those of the 'aula palatina' of Trier.<sup>6</sup>

The semi-circular, unpaved piazza formed by the cryptoporticus and associated portico was fronted and screened from the viewer in antiquity by a rectangular building with an entrance passage 10,5 m wide flanked by two semi-circular towers "reminiscent of military architecture."<sup>7</sup> The distance from the entrance of the central complex to the westernmost extremity of one of the structures radiating from the cryptoporticus is just under 200 m. Moreover, an integral portion of the monument, in this writer's judgement, are two elongated structures which are parallel with the main E-W axis of symmetry of the exedra and which flanked the approach to the exedral, central complex. These two lateral wings - of unknown function - are 10 m wide and only their foundations of 'opus caementicium' survived. The distance from the westernmost extremity of the exedral complex to the easternmost portion of the north hall uncovered by the end of 1991 is just over 360 m.<sup>8</sup>

The overall plan of the central complex is similar in its essentials to that proposed for the imperial palace of Maximian at Mediolanum (modern Milan) of which the structure discovered in the 1950s on the via Brisa "si affacciasse in origine - con altri ambienti ancora ignoti - su un'ampia esedra a emiciclo...."<sup>9</sup> To be sure, its excavators underscore the public-administrative character of the Cercadilla palace.<sup>10</sup> Based on the pottery evidence the excavators suggest a date range of the final third of the third to the beginning of the fourth century and, from comparative examples of aulic basilicae with one apse, assign an absolute date of the beginning of the fourth century for the construction of the Corduba palace.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Hidalgo and Marfil 283-84.

<sup>7</sup> Hidalgo and Marfil 277 and 282.

<sup>8</sup> Entrance-extremity distance: Hidalgo and Marfil 285, who mention but do not discuss the lateral wings. The figures for the wings' width and total E-W extension of the complex are derived from Hidalgo and Marfil 299 fig. 3.

<sup>9</sup> S.Lusuardi Siena in: *Milano capitale dell'impero romano 286-402 d.c.*, Milano 1990, 99, with bibliography. The first mention of the palace at Milan comes in Mamertinus' description of the meeting of Diocletian and Maximian in late Dec. 290 or Jan. 291: *Pan. Lat.* III 11 (I have used A.Baehren's Teubner edition of *XII Panegyrici Latini* for this and subsequent citations of *Pan. Lat.*). For the meeting's date, see T.D.Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge Mass. 1982 (hereafter Barnes), 52 and 58. I take it, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that Maximian was the builder of the palace mentioned by the panegyrist.

<sup>10</sup> Márquez, Hidalgo and Marfil 1047; Hidalgo and Marfil 277 and 289.

<sup>11</sup> Márquez, Hidalgo and Marfil 1047; Hidalgo and Marfil 280, 286 and 288 ("principios del s. IV"). The pottery is mostly sigillata chiara C with a predominance of form Hayes 50 (Hidalgo and Marfil 286 n. 15).

The palace's excavators hypothesize that Corduba's urban political center moved at the beginning of the fourth century from the provincial forum to the Cercadilla complex.<sup>12</sup> But their argument in support of this theory is contradictory because they note the continued use of the civic forum of the colonia Patricia well into the fourth century as is evidenced by a series of honorific pedestals set up there by provincial governors to reigning Augusti.<sup>13</sup> The Cercadilla palace complex, by way of contrast, is epigraphically silent save for an unpublished funerary inscription of 549 of the bishop Lampadius, found in the vicinity of the northern triconch, and the three gilded letters illustrated above and discussed below.<sup>14</sup>

More attractive is their suggestion that the palace served as the administrative seat of the praeses and consularis Provinciae Baeticae with his associated officium.<sup>15</sup> But if this were the case, then the central question remains: who built a palatium of such monumentality and size? Could it have been a praeses of Baetica - possibly even Octavius Rufus?<sup>16</sup> That a provincial governor in the tetrarchic period would have built a palatium whose dimensions approximate or even exceed those of the palace of Galerius in Thessaloniki or the palace of Maxentius on the Via Appia outside Rome seems implausible.<sup>17</sup> And that the palace's builder

<sup>12</sup> Hidalgo and Marfil 290. For the construction of private dwellings within the space occupied by the provincial forum at the beginning of the fourth century, see A.Ventura, 'Resultados del seguimiento arqueológico en el solar de c/ Angel de Saavedra nº 10, Córdoba,' *Anales de arqueología Cordobesa* 2, 1991, 253-90, at 264.

<sup>13</sup> Hidalgo and Marfil l.c. Pedestals: see *CIL* II 2204 to Constantine I by the praeses provinciae Baeticae Octavius Rufus whose tenure Barnes 167, dates to 306/312. Cf. *PLRE* I. 785, Rufus 9, for the date ?312/324. A pedestal of Constantine II was dedicated by the vir perfectissimus and praeses of Baetica Egnatius Faustinus: *CIL* II 2205 and ibidem for Constantine II as the dedicatee, but cf. *PLRE* I. 328, Faustinus 9, for a reference to Constantine I here from the formula 'invictus Augustus.' See *CIL* II 2206 for a pedestal of Constantius II dedicated by Decimius Germanianus vir clarissimus consularis provinciae Baeticae, on whom *PLRE* I.392, Germanianus 4, and ibidem for a date of "probably a. 353/60." On Corduba's civic or colonial forum, see A.U.Stylow, 'Apuntes sobre el urbanismo de la Corduba romana,' in *Stadt und Ideologie. Die Monumentalisierung hispanischer Städte zwischen Republik und Kaiserzeit.* W.Trillmich and P.Zanker eds., München 1990, 272-73.

<sup>14</sup> Lampadius inscription: Hidalgo and Marfil 281.

<sup>15</sup> Hidalgo and Marfil 290-91.

<sup>16</sup> On Rufus, see above, n. 13. We can fairly exclude the vicarius of the diocesis Hispaniarum as the builder of the palace as Augusta Emerita (Mérida) was the capital of the diocesis and residence of the vicarius: so J.Arce, 'Mérida tardorromana (284-409 d.C.),' *Homenaje a Sáenz de Buruaga*, Madrid 1982, 209-226 at 209-10, on the basis of the Laterculus Polemii Silvii.

<sup>17</sup> The apsidal hall of the Galerius palace at Thessaloniki measures ca. 53 by 25 m, with an apse 12 m deep having a radius of 9,25 m: K.-P.Goethert in *Trier. Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz*, Mainz 1984, 143 and fig. 52c (after G.Knithakis) with scale. The overall dimensions of the Galerius palace proper are ca. 125 by 120 m. The aula palatina of the palace of Maxentius is 39 m long and 19,5 m wide, with an apse diameter of 11,25 m. The structures associable with Maxentius' palace define an area c.. 230 by 160 m: see G.Pisani Sartorio and R.Calza, *La villa di Massenzio sulla via Appia: I. Il palazzo. II. Le opere d'arte della villa*, Roma 1976, pls. LVI-LVII with scale. The Cercadilla palace is considerably larger than the II-III century palace at Aquincum of the governor of Pannonia Inferior; the dimensions of the latter are ca. 82 by 95 m, for which see J.Szilágyi, *RE Suppl.* XI, 1968, 88-90 and plan I with scale, and N.Duval, 'Les maisons d'Apamée et l'architecture "palatiale" de l'antiquité tardive,' in *Apamée de Syrie.* J.Balty ed., Bruxelles 1984, 464. It also

had resources and pretensions greater than those of a praeses - of whom there were roughly 100 serving simultaneously in the Diocletianic scheme - is suggested by the discovery of the gilded bronze letters "P", "D" and "O" in the reoccupation levels of the cryptoporticus; according to the plausible suggestion of the excavators, the letters belonged to the foundation or dedicatory inscription of the palace.<sup>18</sup> In the earlier Principate, litterae aureae have a clear connection with the emperor, the imperial cult, and the Augustan ideology of the aureum saeculum.<sup>19</sup>

I see the Spanish and African campaigns, and their prelude, of Maximian in 296-298 as the likeliest context for the construction and initial use of the palatium at Cercadilla. Papyrological, epigraphical and literary sources in the form of the tetrarchic panegyrists permit us to follow, in rough outline at least, the course of Maximian's operations in Hispania and North Africa. It is my contention, as stated above, that the palace at Cercadilla served as a temporary residence and administrative center for Maximian during the period 296-298.<sup>20</sup>

Maximian's activity in Spain is revealed by P.Argent. 480, 1, vv. 2-4, a fragment of an epic poem celebrating the military exploits of the tetrarchs and which dates to the late third or beginning of the fourth century.<sup>21</sup> Recording the beginning of the campaigns of Diocletian and Galerius against the Persians, the poet alludes to the Augustus and Caesar of the West:

... καὶ ἄλλοι

κοίρανοι, εἰ μὴ τὸν μὲν [Ἴ]βηρικὸς εἴρυνεν Ἄρης,  
τῷ δὲ μόθος νήσοιο β[ρ]εταννίδος ἀμφιδεδήει.

The other rulers [would have assisted Diocletian and Galerius] if the Iberian war had not detained the one [sc. Maximian] and if around the other one had not blazed the battle din of the island of Britain. While Constantius I was reimposing central control over Britain, Maximian was freeing the Spanish and western North African litorals and hinterlands from

dwarfs the III century palace of the Dux Ripae (ca. 87 by 65 m) at Dura Europos, for which, see M.Rostovtzeff et al., *The Palace of the 'Dux Ripae' and the Dolichenum = The Excavations at Dura Europos. Preliminary Report IX 3*, New Haven 1952, Fig. 7 with scale.

<sup>18</sup> For the circumstances of the letters' find, see Hidalgo and Marfil at n. 1 above. The excavators found no evidence for the epigraphical support of the letters.

<sup>19</sup> See now M.A.Speidel, 'Goldene Lettern in Augst,' *ZPE* 95, 1993, 179-87, esp. 183-84, following G.Alföldy, *Der Obelisk auf dem Petersplatz in Rom*, Heidelberg 1990, 68-74.

<sup>20</sup> More specifically during 296-297: for Maximian's stay at Carthage during winter 297-298, see W.Ensslin, *RE* 14, 2, 1930, 2506. On Maximian's activities in Spain and Africa, in general, see J.Arce, *El último siglo de la España romana: 284-409*, Madrid 1982, 19-22, with bibliography.

<sup>21</sup> D.L.Page, *Select Papyri III. Literary Papyri, Poetry* 542-45 no. 135; E.Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* 1<sup>2</sup>, Göttingen 1963, 79-80 no. XXII. Barnes, 54 n. 35, suggests the fragment comes "from a panegyric composed for recitation before Diocletian while he was in Egypt in 298." Arce, *último siglo* 20, and Page, 542, for an early fourth century date.

piratical raids and incursions of peoples referred to as Franks and Mauri.<sup>22</sup> From *Pan. Lat.* III, 7, addressed to Maximian, we learn that Frankish piracy was already a problem in 290/291: '...et domitis oppressa Francis bella piratica....'<sup>23</sup> Maximian won a victory over marauding Franks in Mauretania Tingitana if we accept Seston's interpretation of a fragmentary inscription found at Tamuda and dedicated to VICTORIA AUGUSTA.<sup>24</sup> Victory over Allectus in Britain and the definitive suppression of piracy in the Atlantic and western Mediterranean may have occurred more or less contemporaneously in 297, events which *Pan. Lat.* V, 18, addressed to Constantius Caesar, celebrates on 1.3.298, on the assumption that Allectus' defeat and death happened in 297: 'Nunc securae est, ut de latere Gallico taceam, quamvis paene conspicuis litoribus Hispania, nunc Italia, nunc Africa.'<sup>25</sup>

With Britain reabsorbed into the empire and the Atlantic and western Mediterranean secure, Maximian could turn to the final pacification of North Africa and definitive implantation of the diocesan system in Hispania and Africa, activities which were crowned, though not necessarily terminated in their administrative aspects, by Maximian's triumphal entry into Carthage on 10.3.298.<sup>26</sup>

Corduba would have served admirably as a strategic center of Maximian's operations in the Iberian peninsula and western North Africa. The capital of Baetica enjoyed an

<sup>22</sup> For Maximian's adversaries, see Arce, *último siglo*, 21-2. Similarly, M. Racht, *Rome et les Berbères*, Bruxelles 1970, 254, for the emperor's operations in Spain against piratical Franks. Contra P. Romanelli, *Storia delle province romane dell'Africa*, Roma 1959, 502, who holds that Maximian fought Mauri in Spain.

<sup>23</sup> For a date of summer 291 of *Pan. Lat.* III, see Barnes 58 n. 52.

<sup>24</sup> *IAM* 2, 55 reads: '...g(...)? / [stati]m u[t] provinci / [am in]troivit, barbaros / [qui T]amudam inrupe / [rant] fugavit et in pacem / [re]stituit. / Vic(toriae) Aug(ustae) sacr(um).' W. Seston, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie* I, Paris 1946, 118 n. 2 restores Maximian's name in ll. 1-2. Contra H.-G. Pflaum, *Les procurateurs équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain*, Paris 1950, 160-63 (from which the reading above is taken), who proposes that the inscription refers to a victory near Tamuda at the end of the third century of a governor of Mauretania Tingitana over native attackers. But if this is so, then Maximian would still gain the credit for the victory, cf., in this sense, J. Arce, 'Un relieve triunfal de Maximiano Herculeo en Augusta Emerita y el Pap. Argent. inv. 480,' *MM* 23, 1982, 359-71, at 361 n. 13. For other views which see in the inscription a reference to a victory over Franks in the 250s or to policing action against natives under Gallienus or one of his immediate successors, see *IAM* 2, 55 ad loc.

<sup>25</sup> For a delivery date of 1.3.297 of *Pan. Lat.* V see Barnes, 12 n. 7, who puts Allectus' defeat and death in 296. Contra D. Kienast, 'Die Rückeroberung Britanniens im Jahre 297 und die frühe Trierer Follesprägung,' *JNG* 10, 1959-60, 71-8, who puts Allectus' defeat in 297, entailing a delivery date of 1.3.298, as notes Barnes 60 n. 66. For piracy in the Atlantic, which would have had the effect of aiding the British usurpers, see Arce, 'Un relieve triunfal,' 360.

<sup>26</sup> For Maximian's Carthaginian adventus, see Barnes 59 and Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle* 269. Racht (above n. 22), 255-56, collects the testimonia for Maximian's African operations, against the Quinquegentanei and others, of 297-98. Barnes' contention (224-25) that the diocesan system and division of provinces occurred in 293 remains to be demonstrated. See Arce (at n. 24 above) for a possible triumphal relief of Maximian on horseback subduing fallen barbarians, reflecting his Spanish and North African campaigns and erected at Augusta Emerita ca. 300 (p. 369). But Dr. W. Trillmich kindly reminds me that the emperor of the Mérida relief is beardless, and suggests that the relief may be Constantian.

agriculturally rich hinterland - an important consideration while the seas were still pirate-infested,<sup>27</sup> was situated at the uppermost navigable point of the Baetis (Guadalquivir) connecting interior Baetica with the Atlantic, possessed excellent overland links to the Mediterranean litoral of Baetica, communicated easily with Tarraconensis' litoral by means of the Via Augusta and other routes, and was equidistant, roughly speaking, from inland Tingitana and Mauretania Caesariensis, the Iberian peninsula's Atlantic coasts and the southern boundary of Gallia.<sup>28</sup>

Barnes convincingly dates the Spanish campaign of Maximian to autumn 296,<sup>29</sup> though its prolongation into 297, as suggested above, is conceivable.<sup>30</sup> Preparations for the Spanish and African campaigns could have begun several years earlier, possibly after, and as a consequence of, Maximian's investiture of Constantius Chlorus as Caesar at Milan (?) on 1.3.293.<sup>31</sup> The palatium at Corduba, accordingly, could have been begun in the bi- or triennium preceding Maximian's entry into Spain in 296, and have been largely complete by the time of his arrival. There are certainly signs of haste in the palace's construction such as the partial reutilization of bricks of differing size and variations in the alternation of square facing stones (*vittatum*) and bricks (*testaceum*).<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the attribution of the palace to Maximian involves a negligible upward adjustment of the palace's absolute date proposed by the excavators to one which still remains well within their date range.

To sum up, given the general and specific historical circumstances of the tetrarchic period and the prodigious monumentality and peculiar characteristics of the Roman palace at Cercadilla, I see at present no better explanation for its construction than to suggest that its builder and first occupant was Maximianus Herculius.

Madrid/Hamilton

Evan W. Haley

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Dio 60, 24, 5 (AD 44) for the expulsion from the senate of Umbonius Silio, governor of Baetica, for his failure to supply the troops in Mauretania Tingitana with adequate amounts of grain.

<sup>28</sup> For Corduba's links to Baetica's litoral, see A. Padilla Monge, *La provincia romana de la Bética* (253-422), Ecija 1989, 237-38. Its links to Tarraconensis and the Spanish Levant are discussed by P. Sillières, *Les voies de communication de l'Hispanie méridionale*, Paris 1990, 256 and 260-303.

<sup>29</sup> Barnes 59, on the basis of P. Argent. 480, 1, v. 3, who also notes Diocletian's title Ἰβηρικὸς μέγιστος in *IGGR* I, 1291 = *Sammelbuch* 8398 (Elephantine) which dates to summer 298 (*idem* 55).

<sup>30</sup> Arce (above n. 24) 360 certainly dates Maximian's Spanish activity to 296/297.

<sup>31</sup> Investiture: Barnes 58. Cf. Padilla (above n. 28) 66 for a particular interest of the tetrarchs in the Via Malaca-Astigi which joined the Via Augusta - and, therefore, Corduba - with Baetica's litoral.

<sup>32</sup> Hidalgo and Marfil 286 n. 14.