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DAVID WOODS

Valerius Victorinus Again

In a recent paper Prof. M. P. SPEIDEL proposed a number of amendments to an earlier edition of an important inscription which records the death of the *biarchus* Valerius Victorinus at the battle of Chalcedon on 18 September 324.¹ While these amendments are extremely welcome in themselves, SPEIDEL's interpretation of the significance of this inscription, and his attempt to set it in its full historical context, are much less convincing. His text runs as follows:

D(is) M(anibus).
Val(erius) Victorinus,
biarc(h)us, qui militavi[t]
in sacro palatio ann(os) VII[- - -],
5 *vix(it) ann(os) XL, qui in proe[li]-*
o Roamnorum Calced[o]-
nia contra aversarios
decessit. Honoris grati[a]
sanxit ut perpetuo se ho-
10 *norari sive honesta re-*
liquiaru[m] sepultur[a]
consecr[ar]i videatu[r].
Huhic Ma[t]r̄ona, coni[ux]
pietissima, viva s[e]
15 *[sibi] et bene meren-*
[ti] conpari suo mem-
oriam posuit.

On the basis of the statement that Victorinus served 'in the holy palace' (*in sacro palatio*), SPEIDEL claims that 'Being a palace soldier, Victorinus served in a *schola palatina* of the imperial guard and, in the absence of any further specification, among the *scutarii*.' Strictly speaking, though, the army lists within the Notitia Dignitatum reveal that there were 4 different types of palatine unit – *scholae pala-*

¹ M. P. SPEIDEL, A Horse Guardsman in the War between Licinius and Constantine, *Chiron* 25, 1995, 83–87.

tinae, *vexillationes palatinae*, *legiones palatinae*, and *auxilia palatina* – and it is not at all clear why a description of service in the holy palace could not denote membership of any of these 4 types of units. In this particular instance, Victorinus' rank, *biarchus*, and his depiction as a 'Thracian Rider' on the sculpted panel above the inscription, both point to his membership of a cavalry unit. Yet the *scholae palatinae* and *vexillationes palatinae* were both cavalry units, and there is no firm evidence to support the claim that Victorinus served in one type of unit rather than the other. In so far as the origin of the *scholae palatinae* as such, that is, as a distinct type of military unit rather than as clubs within older existing formations, is itself a contentious issue, it may be seriously misleading simply to assume that Victorinus must have been a member of such a unit. Our earliest firm evidence for the existence of the *scholae palatinae* as such is provided by a law which reveals that Constantine I had conferred the right of *annona civica* at Constantinople on members of the *scholae scutariorum et scutariorum clibanariorum*, which probably occurred in 330 when Constantine formally inaugurated his new capital.² There is a tendency, however, to associate the creation of the *scholae palatinae* as such with the disbandment by Constantine in 312 of both the praetorian guard and the *equites singulares Augusti*.³ In contrast to this, there is strong evidence that the *vexillationes palatinae* existed as early as 293 even.⁴ The Notitia records the existence of two *vexillationes palatinae* entitled *equites promoti seniores* and two entitled *comites seniores*.⁵ The former seem to be descended from the *equites promoti dominorum nostrorum* who accompanied Galerius Maximianus to Egypt in 293, the latter from the *comites dominorum nostrorum* who also accompanied him there.⁶ SPEIDEL has argued that in 307 the *comites dominorum nostrorum* accompanied Galerius to Italy, where an inscription attests the presence of two *vexillationes* of *comites*, and that some of their number may have defected to Maxentius at that time.⁷ As Maxentius came to possess some *equites promoti domini nostri* also, it seems equally possible that he acquired these by the same means, that they had defected to his side along with the *comites*.⁸ This, then, is one route by which even Constantine may have acquired some *vexillationes palatinae*, from Ga-

² CTh 14.17.9 (26 July 389).

³ R. I. FRANK, *Scholae Palatinae: The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 23, Rome 1969, 47–49.

⁴ M. P. SPEIDEL, *The Later Roman Field Army and the Guard of the High Empire*, *Latomus* 46, 1987, 375–79 (= *Roman Army Studies* II, 379–84).

⁵ ND Or. 5.28, Oc. 6.44 (= 7.160); Or. 6.28, Oc. 6.43 (= 7.159).

⁶ P. Grenfell 2.110 (293); P. Oxy. 43 recto (295). Pace SPEIDEL, art. cit. (n.4), 375, these units accompanied Galerius, not Diocletian.

⁷ M. P. SPEIDEL, *Riding for Caesar: The Roman Emperors' Horse Guard*, London 1994, 154, 199, on CIL 11.6168. On the defections, Lact. De Mort. Pers. 27.3–4.

⁸ M. P. SPEIDEL, *Maxentius' Praetorians*, *MEFR* 100, 1988, 183–86 (= *Roman Army Studies* II, 385–89), on AE 1946.127.

lerius Maximianus via the defeated forces of Maxentius. He may also have raised such units straight from scratch. Whatever the case, there can be little doubt that the *vexillationes palatinae* were in widespread existence long before the creation of the *scholae palatinae* as such. On the whole, therefore, it seems more probable that Victorinus served in a *vexillatio palatina* than in a *schola palatina*, whoever it was for whom he actually fought.

SPEIDEL states next that Victorinus' gravestone calls for a 'new understanding of the Romans and their foes in the battle at Kalchedon or Chrysopolis'. In particular, he claims that Victorinus fought on the side of the loser, the pagan Licinius I, rather than on that of the victor, the Christian Constantine I. This is not a novel claim on his part,⁹ but his explicit statement of the arguments in support of this position does afford a good opportunity to reexamine this matter once more. These arguments run as follows:

(1) 'Victorinus seems to have fought on the losing side, for he bears Licinius' family name Valerius while Constantine's soldiers bore the name Flavius.' Strictly speaking, though, Valerius was not the true *gentilicium* of Licinius, merely a dynastic name.¹⁰ Used in this fashion, the name Valerius had originated as the *gentilicium* of the emperor Diocletian, or to call him by his full name, C. Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, the originator of the Tetrarchic system of government. His fellow emperors, and their successors, all bore this name at one point or other in time as a sign of their relationship to his dynasty. In 306, for example, the full nomenclature of Constantine himself was M. Flavius Valerius Constantinus. So there is nothing intrinsically Licinian about the name Valerius. In support of his argument here SPEIDEL refers us to an important paper by J. G. KEENAN who proved that Flavius, the original *gentilicium* of Constantine, developed into an indicator of status so that 'anyone who held an imperial *dignitas*, *honor*, or *administratio*, or who had been approved for service in an imperial *militia* ... was entitled to the name Flavius.'¹¹ In this it replaced the name Valerius which had come to be used in a similar fashion earlier. But KEENAN's conclusions are based for the most part on the

⁹ E. g. A. ARICESCU, *The Army in Roman Dobrudja*, BAR Int. Ser. 86, Oxford 1980, 64, 67, 91, repeatedly asserts that Victorinus had served Licinius.

¹⁰ B. SALWAY, *What's in a Name? A Survey of Roman Onomastic Practice from c.700 BC to AD 700*, JRS 84, 1994, 124–45, esp. 137–40.

¹¹ J. C. KEENAN, *The Names Flavius and Aurelius as Status Designations in Later Roman Egypt*, ZPE 11, 1973, 33–63, at 63. We are also referred to M. P. SPEIDEL, *Catafractarii Clibanarii and the Rise of the Later Roman Mailed Cavalry*, Epigraphica Anatolica 4, 1984, 151–56 (= *Roman Army Studies II*, 406–11), a discussion of the gravestone of the *ducenarius* Valerius Fuscianus which was found at Claudiopolis in Bithynia. This contributes nothing to the present discussion because it is dated on the same basis. One could argue that Fuscianus was one of Constantine's *catafractarii* (Paneg. Lat. 4.22), that his unit participated in the final defeat of Licinius in Bithynia (Zos. HN 2.27–28), and that it remained stationed there for a short while thereafter, that is, that Fuscianus participated in the same campaign as Victorinus, both Valerii and Constantinians.

papyrological evidence from Egypt, a part of Licinius' domain before 324, and he makes no claims at all concerning the uses of the names Valerius and Flavius under Constantine before his victory over Licinius in 324. This is hardly surprising because there simply is not enough evidence to reach any conclusion in this matter. For not a single example exists of a Constantinian soldier who is known to have borne the dynastic name Flavius before 324.¹² The most we may assume at present is that the last years of Constantine's shared rule with Licinius probably marked a period of transition which saw the gradual replacement of the name Valerius by that of Flavius. Certainly, there was no sudden change in nomenclature even when Constantine was sole Augustus. So, for example, Valerius Victorinianus, the *praeses Thebaidos* from March 322 to November 326 at least, retained the name Valerius throughout his period in office, that is, under both Licinius and Constantine himself.¹³ In fact, many civilian officials had continued to use the name Valerius long after Constantine's rise to sole power in the West, as some did even after the unification of the whole empire under his rule, and there seems no clear reason why the same should not have been true of military officers also.¹⁴ Perhaps the best indicator that the continued use of the name Valerius during this period of transition cannot be interpreted in simple fashion as a sign of pro-Licinian or anti-Constantinian tendencies is that the mint at Rome continued to issue coins in the name of Constantine's son, the future Constantius II, as Fl(a-vius) Val(erius) Constantius as late as 330 even.¹⁵ In the case of Valerius Victorinus, so, his use of the name Valerius reveals nothing more than that he had entered upon his military service when the emperors bore this name still. Assuming that he entered military service c.20 years of age, as was normal then, the fact that he was 40 at his death in 324, a rounded figure surely, suggests that he entered military service c.304. It seems hardly surprising, therefore, that he should have adopted the name Valerius at a time when Diocletian, whose *gentilicium* it was, was the senior Augustus still. In brief, the name Valerius serves only as a rough chronological guide to the period during which the bearer performed his military service, sometime during the late 3rd- or early 4th-centuries, and is a useful tool in the ab-

¹² KEENAN, art. cit. (n.11) 49–50, notes P.Thead. 4, dated 22 January 328, as our earliest papyrological source for military Flavii, although P.Oxy. 1261 reveals a civilian official with this title by 13 January 325.

¹³ P.Oxy. 3123 (29 March 322); P.Panopolis 27 (323); P.Strasbourg 296 (19 Nov. 326).

¹⁴ A glance through T.D.BARNES, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge Mass. 1982, 123–74, produces the following examples: Valerius Maximus, praetorian prefect c.327–28, 332–33, 337; Aur. Valerius Tullianus Symmachus Phosphorius, *proconsul Achaiae* c.318–20 (CTh 2.4.1, 15.1); Valerius Catullinus, *praeses Pannoniae Superioris* 316/324 (ILS 704); Valerius Julianus, *praeses Hispaniae Tarraconensis* 312 (CIL 2.4105); L. Atradius Valerius Proculus, *proconsul Africae* 332–33 (ILS 1240, 41); Valerius Paulus, *praeses Numidiae* 314 (CIL 8.18905; ILS 688); M.Aur. Valerius Valentinus, *consularis Numidiae* 330 (CTh 16.2.7).

¹⁵ RIC VII, Rome nos. 258, 268–69, 290, 324, 326.

sence of any other information by which to date the individuals concerned, but it does not prove anything concerning their military allegiances during this period.

(2) <As a Thracian Rider hero, Victorinus was a heathen; Constantine's guardsmen were Christians.> In support of this statement, SPEIDEL refers us to several passages in Eusebius' account of the life of Constantine, the first (VC 1.37) describing how Constantine set the *labarum* at the head of his soldiers and bodyguard when he marched against Maxentius in 312, the rest (VC 2.7–9) describing how the *labarum* was used in similar fashion against Licinius again and, in particular, how its 50 chosen escorts, the *praepositi labarum*, were selected from amongst Constantine's bodyguard for personal strength, valour, and piety. But none of these passages prove, or even claim to prove, that all of Constantine's guardsmen were Christians, even if we could be sure that Eusebius has not misunderstood, or deliberately misrepresented perhaps, the true import of Constantine's original remarks in these matters. It is not inconceivable that he has exaggerated the success enjoyed by Constantine in his gradual Christianization of the army, including his bodyguard.¹⁶ More importantly, his description of Constantine's commands concerning the observance of Sunday seems to require the very opposite, that a significant number of his guardsmen remained pagan still. For he describes first (VC 4.18) how Constantine's guardsmen found in their emperor a model in the practice of piety, performing the same devotions on a Sunday as he did, but he has then to concede that there remained pagans among the soldiers still. These were treated differently. They were given a special prayer to recite, and were instructed to assemble each Sunday on a plain near the city in order to recite this (VC 4.19–20). The context suggests that the city outside which they used to assemble was Constantinople itself, and that these men were members of Constantine's bodyguard also. For Eusebius follows his description of the manner in which these pagan soldiers used to recite their prayer with a claim that Constantine also ordered the chi-rho sign to be inscribed on the shields of his soldiers (VC 4.21), so that it appears that he is still describing the same group of men. Yet this sign, a large chi-rho, was the shield-emblem of Constantine's most senior bodyguard unit, the *schola scutariorum prima*, one of those whose members were entitled to *annona civica* at Constantinople as already noted above.¹⁷ It would seem, therefore, that throughout VC 4.18–21 Eusebius describes the behaviour of the *scholae*

¹⁶ In general, see T.G. ELLIOTT, *Eusebian Frauds in the Vita Constantini*, Phoenix 45, 1991, 162–71. A good example of Eusebius' tendency to exaggerate Christian influence, in his own mind at least, is his interpretation of the coins issued at the death of Constantine in 337 (VC 4.73), on which see P. BRUUN, *The Consecration Coins of Constantine the Great*, Arctos 1, 1954, 19–31.

¹⁷ D. WOODS, *Eusebius, VC 4.21, and the Notitia Dignitatum*, in: E. LIVINGSTONE (ed.), *Studia Patristica 29: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Patristic Studies*, Louvain 1996, 195–202; also, M.P. SPEIDEL, *Die Garde des Maximus auf der Theodosius-säule*, MDAI(I) 45, 1995, 131–36.

palatinae stationed in Constantinople whose members he witnessed during one of his visits to that city, most probably during his prolonged stay there from July 336 until the following summer.¹⁸

(3) ‹Ulmetum, where the gravestone was found, belonged to the lands of Licinius and may have been the hometown of Victorinus or Matrona, yet Constantine brought his guardsmen from the West.› But that Constantine brought his guardsmen from the West tells us no more about their origin than it does about his own. In fact, Constantine had been born and reared at Naissus,¹⁹ in territory which he did not acquire until his advance eastwards against Licinius in 316–17. If Victorinus were recruited into the army c.304, then it is probable that he served first Galerius Maximianus, the Caesar resident in the Balkans at that time.²⁰ He may have continued in Galerius' service until the latter's death in 311, or he may have been assigned instead to the service of one of Galerius' junior- or co-emperors active in the same region, either Severus, his Caesar for the period 305-7, or Licinius, whom Galerius appointed as his fellow Augustus in 308, to inherit the whole of his European possessions following his death in 311. However, all three of these emperors suffered defeat at the hands of their western rivals, on any of which occasions Victorinus may have passed into the service of the same, as a captive or defector. Severus and Galerius both invaded Italy in 307, and on each occasion they were forced to retreat because of heavy defections to their opponent, Maxentius, whose forces were inherited by Constantine in turn in 312. As for Licinius, he suffered a heavy defeat by Constantine during their first war of 316/17,²¹ following which he was forced to concede a large amount of territory, and many captives also, one presumes. Indeed, one wonders whether this has influenced the fact that Matrona refers only to the last 7 or 8 years of her husband's service, that this was the only period which he had spent in the service of the ‹legitimate› emperor Constantine I, having been captured by Constantine during this war of 316/17. In brief, the failure of Constantine's army to include men from a province such as Scythia would have been far more surprising than its inclusion of the same.

(4) ‹Finally, the widow of a Constantinian guardsman would hardly have ended up in far away Ulmetum, while worsted Licinian guards, living down the past by patrolling far frontiers, may have brought Matrona there as one of their dependents.› This argument is not entirely consistent with the last where it was admitted

¹⁸ On this stay in Constantinople, and the manner in which it influenced the contents of book 4 of the VC in particular, see H. A. DRAKE, *What Eusebius Knew: The Genesis of the Vita Constantini*, CPh 83, 1988, 20–38.

¹⁹ Firm. Mat. Math. 1.10.13; Origo 2.

²⁰ On imperial residences and journeys during this period, see BARNES, *op. cit.* (n. 14) 47–87.

²¹ See, most recently, C. EHRHARDT, *Monumental Evidence for the Date of Constantine's First War against Licinius*, *Ancient World* 23, 1992, 87–94.

that Ulmetum may have been the hometown of Victorinus or Matrona. For this would suffice to explain how the widow Matrona ended up in far away Ulmetum, regardless of the military status of her deceased husband, or the fate of his ex-comrades, that it was her hometown or that of her husband. More importantly, though, there is no evidence whatsoever that worsted Licinian guards were actually set patrolling far frontiers. In support of this claim we are referred to a statement by the anonymous author of a panegyric delivered at Trier c.313, that those soldiers who had enjoyed the delights of the Circus Maximus, the theatre of Pompey, and Rome's famous baths, were stationed by Constantine along the Rhine and Danube instead.²² Yet this describes Constantine's treatment not of Licinius' forces in 324, but of Maxentius' forces in 312. Nor is it clear that this passage refers to Maxentius' bodyguard as such, the praetorians and the *equites singulares Augusti*, rather than the remainder of all his different forces which he had been forced to concentrate at Rome in anticipation of his final stand there. Indeed, according to the same author, those who had first supported Maxentius in his rise to power, by which he seems to refer to the praetorians and the *equites singulares*, had despaired of receiving a pardon, and fought to the death instead.²³ It is important to note also that the claim that Constantine transferred Maxentius' guard from Rome to far away frontiers remains totally unsupported by other sources. These record the disbandment of the praetorians and their *subsidia*, the *equites singulares* probably, and the destruction of their forts even, but do not record their transfer elsewhere, which must cause doubt concerning the reality of this alleged transfer.²⁴ Finally, the whole passage in question is a blatant piece of rhetorical exaggeration which was not meant to be interpreted literally anyway. Its purpose was simply to contrast the benign rule of Constantine, who used Rome's soldiers against her enemies, to the evil reign of Maxentius, who set Rome's soldiers against one another in civil war. It is a literary commonplace rather than an accurate historical description.²⁵ So there is no firm evidence that Constantine ever sent any guards to patrol far away frontiers, least of all those of Licinius.

²² Paneg. Lat. 12.21: *Iam obliti deliciarum Circi maximi et Pompeiani theatri et nobilium lavacrorum, Rheno Danubioque praetendunt, excubias agunt, latrocinia comescunt.*

²³ Paneg. Lat. 17.1. On the role of the praetorians in the accession of Maxentius, Zos. HN 2.9.3.

²⁴ Aur. Vict. De Caes. 40.25; Zos. HN 2.17.2. See M.P.SPEIDEL, Maxentius and his *Equites Singulares* in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge, *Classical Antiquity* 5, 1986, 253–62 (= Roman Army Studies II, 279–89), at 256 where he had accepted that the surviving praetorians and *equites singulares Augusti* were cashiered and forbidden any further military service.

²⁵ On this passage C. E. V. NIXON and B. S. RODGERS, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 21, Berkeley 1994, 326, state: 'That the most common way for an army to cleanse itself of the stain of civil strife or mutiny was to bathe, figuratively, in an external enemy's blood became a commonplace of historical writing. There is a good example at Tac. Ann. 1.49.'

Not only are the arguments that Victorinus fought for Licinius rather than Constantine entirely unconvincing in themselves, but they lead to an even more doubtful conclusion, that when Matrona had the cenotaph engraved in honour of her husband, she referred to the supporters of Licinius as *Romani* and their Constantinian opponents as *aversarii*, in open defiance of the existing regime. As SPEIDEL admits, 'Matrona skirted danger in choosing these words.' His explanation of her success in this, that 'she got away with her slight since Ulmetum lay in far away Scythia, halfway between the Danube and the Black Sea', assumes a great deal concerning the perceived isolation of Ulmetum. Even so, it is difficult to believe that some personal enemy, or an ambitious local administrator perhaps, would not have jumped at the opportunity to inform on Matrona's conduct, and raise his or her own profile, had it been at all possible to interpret this inscription in the manner suggested. The claim that her husband's unit of former Licinians may have been stationed there, and that they may have helped to conceal Matrona's crime, does not convince either, for it seems hardly probable that any local garrison would have consisted entirely of former Licinians, not one of whom would have repented enough of his former allegiance to try and use this local scandal to advance his career once more.

An important assumption underlying much of SPEIDEL's argumentation concerning Victorinus' allegiance at Chalcedon in 324, or the identities of those whom his wife describes as *Romani* and *aversarii*, is revealed by his final claim that 'In her defiance she [Matrona] breathes the steadfast loyalty of guards on whom the late emperors came to rely for winning their wars.' A strong admiration for the imperial guard, their strength, courage and loyalty, has been a characteristic feature of much of SPEIDEL's fine work. Yet the violent deaths of many emperors throughout the 3rd and 4th centuries suggests that any admiration of their 'steadfast loyalty' is probably misplaced. Tales of treachery abound. Gomoarius, tribune of a *schola scutariorum*, betrayed the usurper Vetrano in 350.²⁶ Silvanus, tribune of the *schola armaturarum*, led his men from Magnentius to Constantius II just before the battle of Mursa in 351.²⁷ Successful palace revolts against Constans in 350, and Gratian in 383, as well as the controversy surrounding the death of Valentinian II in 392,²⁸ all prove that the loyalty of the imperial guard was less than steadfast, even in the case of these legitimate heirs of two most respected dynasties. The emperor Julian's problems with his guard proved legendary also.²⁹ As for the 3rd century, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Diocletian, for example, had

²⁶ Amm. 21.8.1.

²⁷ Amm. 15.5.33; Aur. Vict. De Caes. 42.15.

²⁸ B. CROKE, Arbogast and the Death of Valentinian II, *Historia* 25, 1976, 235–44.

²⁹ N. H. BAYNES, The Death of Julian the Apostate in a Christian Legend, *JRS* 27, 1937, 22–29; W. E. KÆGI, Domestic Military Problems of Julian the Apostate, *ByzF* 2, 1967, 247–64.

played more than a little part in the deaths of his predecessors Carus and Numerian, despite his position as commander of their guard.³⁰ It does not convince, so, to assume that Matrona felt so strong an allegiance to a deposed and/or deceased emperor,³¹ that she dared to refer to his supporters as the true *Romani* and the Constantinians as the enemies of the state, *aversarii*.

In conclusion, therefore, the inscription commemorating the death of Valerius Victorinus at the battle of Chalcedon in 324 remains frustratingly vague as to the exact nature of his military service (in the sacred palace), so that it is unsafe to assume that he served in a *schola* rather than a *vexillatio palatina*. As for the side on which he fought at that battle, the least problematic interpretation of the text seems to be that he fought for Constantine I, not Licinius. For the name Valerius serves only as a rough chronological indicator concerning the period of any individual's service, not as a guide to his military or political allegiance, and it seems scarcely credible that Matrona would have dared to insult the current ruler in the manner assumed.

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³⁰ H. W. BIRD, *Diocletian, and the Deaths of Carus, Numerian and Carinus*, *Latomus* 35, 1976, 123–32.

³¹ As Licinius lived for a short time in exile at Thessalonica (*Epit. de Caes.* 41.7; *Zos HN* 2.28;), he may have been alive still when Matrona had the inscription engraved.

