Byron Waldron: Dynastic Politics in the Age of Diocletian AD 284–311. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2022. XXI, 273 p., 13 ill. £ 100.00/$ 130.00. ISBN: 978-1-4744-9865-4.

Waldron's book takes a much-needed multidisciplinary approach to the Tetrarchic era's dynastic politics, breathing new life into old debates about imperial biographies, chronologies, titles, and itineraries. Integrating material and textual sources, the book tangles with the complex evidence related to the multiple iterations of distinct ruling configurations generally shorthanded as the 'Tetrarchic era', and argues persuasively that the military backgrounds of the co-rulers played an outsized role in shaping their approach to dynasty and governance.

While acknowledging other political, social, and religious factors, Waldron asserts that military elements were particularly significant in shaping how the ruling colleagues managed power and the portrayal of their regime in a range of media. (p. 37) Waldron's work makes a valuable contribution in contextualizing the co-rulers of this era according to the precedents set by third century predecessors and drawing out the reference points Diocletian and his colleagues drew upon as leaders who rose through the military, while building upon recent scholarship that has demonstrated the ways the co-rulers manipulated familial references in service of legitimacy, examining the "network of blood-, marriage-, adoption- and metaphor-based familial relationships that surrounded the Tetrarchs, and, in some cases, bound them to one another." (p. 3) Drawing these two strands together, Waldron makes a compelling case that Diocletian and his colleagues intentionally presented their novel regime as a "dynasty of soldiers, a *domus militaris*." (p. 224)

The book is divided into five substantive chapters, with an introduction, and conclusion, as well as a valuable appendix that provides a prosopography of the imperial wives and daughters of the era. Following an introduction that sets up the dynamics of imperial succession in the years preceding Diocletian's rise to power, including discussion of elements of rank, military experience, and familial origin that characterize the backgrounds of third century emperors, chapter one is devoted to examining the fraternal references used to frame Diocletian and Maximian's relationship as Augusti. Departing from Olivier Hekster's contention that the frame of 'brotherhood' was conceived by rhetoricians to make sense of and flatter emperors attempting a novel imperial dynamic, Waldron draws on a range of sources in addition to the

panegyrics, including sculpture, epigraphy, and legal texts, to argue instead that the fraternal framework was intentionally cooked up within the court circle, and rooted in prevalent configurations of military fraternity.

In order to support the idea of imperial agency in this regard, Waldron suggests that Diocletian and Maximian symmetrically exchanged elements of their personal names in a display of camaraderie. He argues that this exchange of names would have been perceived as fraternal by many, particularly in the absence of an adoption or marriage alliance between the Augusti. (p. 53) Importantly, his consideration of legal sources leads him to conclude that Diocletian probably did not formally adopt Maximian since fraternal adoption would have gone against established norms. (p. 62) Through careful analysis of epigraphy and Roman law sources, Waldron builds a case for the importance of fraternal imagery and appellations in military contexts, including the use of fraternal framings to name an unrelated man as heir. (pp. 64–65)

Waldron's integration of material evidence throughout the book alongside his careful treatment of textual sources is to be commended. It is disappointing, however, that a volume that makes substantive use of visual evidence is limited by small and low-quality reproductions (e.g. Figure 1.4, p. 56, where iconographic details are central to the argument), and one could quibble further that the material evidence is sometimes treated rather cursorily. For example, Waldron insightfully connects a handful of references to the Dioscuri, a little-discussed element of imperial iconography in this era, to efforts to paint the imperial relationship in fraternal terms. He calls attention to the twins' inclusion in the famous enthronement panel on the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki, and to the depiction of the twins on sculpted based conventionally accepted as a portion of the dismantled *arcus novus Diocletiani*, but perhaps too credulously follows a speculative identification of two highly abraded heads in a secondary context as evidence for pairing of imperial imagery with representations of the Dioscuri at Split. (p. 57)

The latter example aside, Waldron makes the compelling observation that as sons of Jupiter where one (Pollux) chooses to share the privilege of his immortality with his brother, the mythological details of the Dioscuri's story make an evocative allegory for rulers who cast themselves as brothers and share their imperial position thanks to the grace of Diocletian. (p. 56) This observation adds important nuance to the understandings that educated viewers may have brought to their viewing of the Dioscuri on imperial mon-

uments, but it is important to note that this is an insight about possible viewer receptions rather than a clear indication of the propagandistic aims of the monuments' designers. What remains in the visual evidence evokes nothing of the twins' extended mythological narrative, emphasizing instead their equality and martial associations. Further, taking account of imagery featuring Romulus, Remus, and the she-wolf emblazoned across the cuirass of the mounted emperor in the scene directly above the enthroned rulers on the Arch of Galerius would surely have nuanced Waldron's estimation that the fraternity of Romulus and Remus served as a straightforward counter-example to the implied brotherhood of the Augusti. (p. 56)

Zooming out to takeaways, although the military resonance of the rulers' fraternal framing is surely correct, the chapter leaves unexplored the question of why such references were not more explicitly foregrounded on coinage. As the medium of payment to soldiers, it is a curious choice that fraternal messaging was not more explicitly mobilized in the Dyarchy and First Tetrarchy if the ideological framework was especially conceived with the military in mind.

In chapter two, Waldron grapples with the question of why, in 293 CE, "Diocletian and Maximian expand[ed] the imperial college in such an unprecedented manner." (p. 70) He weighs in on the improvisational side of the scale in the debate over whether the Tetrarchic arrangement was carefully masterminded or the result of expedient responses to emergent threats. He deals here with the thorny issue of dating the appointments of Constantius and Galerius, a biographical detail with bearing on whether the imperial expansion was planned versus improvised, arguing that Constantius was appointed first and Galerius slightly later in 293. To ground this claim, Waldron looks to the cities from which Diocletian issued imperial pronouncements to argue that Galerius' acclamation in Nicomedia on March 1 of 293 as recorded in the Paschal Chronicle is not possible, since Diocletian was in Sirmium between 1 January and 26 February and thus too far away to arrive in Nicomedia for the appointment by March 1. He reasons that the staggered appointments explain the seniority of Constantius as implied by the significant placement of his name before that of Galerius in imperial pronouncements, and accounts for the March 1 date as a later synchronization of the Caesars' *dies imperii*. He concludes that this implies there "was a degree of improvisation at play." (p. 72)

There is much of value in Waldron's review in this chapter of the evidence pertaining to the relative severity of threats facing the Northern European, Eastern, and North African fronts in the early 290s, but his framing that "military rebellion, and regional interests and identity more broadly, rather than foreign threats, were major influencing factors in the decision to expand the imperial college" (p. 70), is perhaps overly-oppositional. The author's reconstruction of events in the Northwest part of the empire deftly draws out an important facet of the myriad simultaneous pressures impinging on the empire in the early 290s. But rather than pointing to primarily internal pressures as the catalyst for the expansion to four co-rulers, the carefully laid out evidence seems to demonstrate competing considerations or at least potential pressures in various geographically spread-out quadrants of the empire that could benefit from the attention and close proximity of more imperial hands.

Given that Diocletian and Maximian served on campaigns against the Persians under previous rulers, it is hard to believe that emperors who leaned especially on their military backgrounds made policy decisions without consideration of the Persians, even at a lower ebb in the relative power of their Sasanian rivals. Competing powers do not stop making policy decisions with a rival in mind just because the other is momentarily weaker, and it is perhaps shortsighted to underestimate the staying-power of the embarrassing events of Valerian's capture in 260, an episode commemorated on monuments within Persian territory that visually broadcast the defeat to shared trade partners. Further, no matter the historicity of the details described, Lactantius' extended recounting of Valerian's treatment while in Sasanian captivity and the claims about the display of his tanned hide to visiting dignitaries is evidence that the events of 260 and their aftermath were still a vivid specter in the early fourth century. (mort. pers. 5.6) Waldron makes an important contribution to the debate over the reasons for the expanded ruling college in ensuring that internal motivations are not lost alongside consideration of external threats, but both internal and external threats could, and probably did, play a role in the decision, and one need not entirely discount the other.

Waldron's third chapter explores the novelty of Diocletian and his co-rulers' choice to prioritize non-biologically-related adult military professionals as co-rulers and heirs, and questions why hereditary norms were repeatedly ignored in planning for succession, even when the rulers had sons of adult age available for appointment as successors. In reviewing what is known of the

biological sons of the rulers of the first Tetrarchy (Constantine, Maxentius, and Candidianus; pp. 117–122), Waldron weighs into debates around Constantine's birthdate (pp. 117–118) and legitimacy (p. 119), ultimately concluding that all the sources that allege Constantine's illegitimacy are either themselves demonstrably hostile or reliant on a hostile source, and that by 305 Constantine was of viable adulthood for reasonable consideration as a candidate for Caesar. He goes on to skillfully demonstrate key elements that undermine the credibility of Lactantius' account of the 305 abdication and succession: the incongruence of Constantine's and Maxentius' marriages (p. 133); the author's Christian identity as a barrier to intimate knowledge within court politics in the eastern part of the empire (p. 137); Diocletian's return to influence after retirement running counter to claims of his descent into madness (p. 143). As the only source to attempt an explanation for Maxentius and Constantine's passing over, Waldron points out how Lactantius' less-than-credible account of the events has played a weighty role in shaping scholarly understandings of the succession in 305.

Weighing a careful consideration of the source material, Waldron draws from his analysis that Diocletian intentionally steered the abdication and the succession: "Clearly, links of kinship were attributed less importance during the First Tetrarchy than during previous regimes. When we combine this with the fact that the biological sons were passed over in three different succession events (293, 305 and 308) and the impression that Galerius did not attempt to replace himself with Candidianus, it is best to conclude that both Diocletian and Galerius attached less importance to hereditary succession and norms, and that a fairly consistent non-dynastic idea governed all the succession events in question." (p. 148) The author estimates that events of the mid-third century must have eroded Diocletian's confidence in hereditary succession and left him open to alternatives. He cites Aurelian and Probus as examples in recent memory whose profiles – military professionals neither of whom ventured to raise a son or brother as a co-ruler or heir apparent (p. 154) – established precedents for non-hereditary approaches to rulership. He reads the Augusti's adoption of their junior colleagues and shared nomenclature as an innovation upon established precedent that "clarified the eventual succession of the Caesars and demonstrated to their subjects that this college of experienced generals was a unified dynasty of emperors." (p. 159)

Waldron rounds out the chapter with the observation that despite Diocletian's intentions, by 306, biological claims to legitimacy had reemerged around the families of the Tetrarchs. He highlights how familial ties became prominent in Constantine's dynasty, particularly through his claim of ancestry to Claudius II and the elevation of Fausta and Helena as Augustae who began to appear on coins and inscriptions. Ultimately, Waldron concludes that while biological dynasty regained importance under Constantine, military credentials still held significant weight. (p. 163)

The penultimate chapter focuses on Constantine and Maxentius before 306, examining how the imperial sons were subdued by Diocletian, whether they were treated differently from one another, and what their treatment suggests about how the ruling college functioned. From Maxentius' presence on a state-owned villa outside Rome, Waldron estimates that the emperors intentionally kept him near Rome as an informal representative meant to reassure the Senate and city that they mattered to the co-rulers, despite their residence far away. (p. 183) He provides a compelling observation about how this role starkly contrasts with Diocletian's treatment of Constantine as a court hostage. (pp. 195–196)

In assessing the early lives of the passed-over sons, Waldron also takes a stand on the question of whether the intended betrothal between Constantine and Fausta, as mentioned by a panegyrist in the presence of Maximian and Constantine in 307, should be considered historical or merely a convenient fiction. Finding support for the betrothal claim in Julian's panegyric to Constantius II, Waldron ultimately accepts its historicity: "Indeed, the betrothal plan may suggest that the western rulers had viewed Constantine as a potential heir." (p. 192) However, that the claim is true is difficult to believe, given the timing and bias of the sources that reference it. Constantine's fabrication of his ancestry, tracing it back to Claudius II for legitimating effect, reveals his willingness to manipulate history. Notably, there is no mention of the betrothal until after Constantine had already usurped power and needed to enhance the impression of his legitimacy as a rightfully intended heir. Furthermore, in a panegyric delivered by and for descendants of the Constantinian line, it would have been advantageous to maintain a fiction that helped to paper over Constantine's contested rise to power.

Ultimately, Waldron interprets the episode of the broken betrothal as evidence that the ruling partners in the west and east were not on the same page regarding succession plans in the early years of their co-rule. He concludes

that "for a time, Diocletian may not have been sufficiently transparent about the prospects of the sons" (p. 195) and further, that the eventual arrangements for succession "so favoured Galerius that it seems likely that, as Lactantius believed, Diocletian and his Caesar initially devised the plan without input from their western colleagues." (ibid.) His comparative assessment of Constantine and Maxentius' treatment by the ruling college prior to the abdication event concludes that "the emperors apparently showed Maximian's son more favour and trust" (ibid.), an incongruence Waldron explains with reference to the possibility of Constantine's illegitimate birth and his status as the son of Constantius, a Caesar whose alliance with Diocletian was weaker than that with his long-time ally, Maximian. (pp. 195–196)

The book's final substantive chapter focuses on the imperial women of the Tetrarchic era. Waldron reviews the evidence for imperial women's role in public media in the First Tetrarchy and notes a reduction in their celebration toward ideological ends, but ties the reduction to trends already starting in the decades preceding Diocletian. He shows that while the practice of creating Augustae and honoring them on coinage continued into the 270s and 280s, "There are no attested Augustae during the six-year reign of Probus, nor during the admittedly very brief reigns of Claudius, Quintillus, Tacitus and Florian. Carinus minted for Urbica, but Carus and Numerian did nothing similar. The Gallic emperors did not use imperial media to promote Augustae and *diuae* either" (p. 199). He ultimately argues that by 260 it was no longer guaranteed that an Augustus would pair himself with an Augusta (p. 200) and that the sidelining of imperial women in the era between 280 and 306 was tied to Diocletian's wishes to exclude biological sons from succession events. (p. 207) This choice to make the imperial wives less visible helped to suggest that the membership of the imperial college was not to be determined solely by blood. (ibid.)

Of especial interest is an important discussion of two inscriptions dedicated to imperial wives: one to Prisca, the wife of Diocletian, and the other to Maximilla, wife of Maxentius, both honored according to the unprecedented title of *nobilissima femina*. (p. 202) Waldron reasons by analogy to *nobilissimus Caesar* that *nobilissima femina* was a lesser ranking title than Augusta, and argues that "alongside the near absence of women within media and the absence of the title Augusta, it is apparent that *nobilissima femina* was a substitute title that enabled the continued honouring of imperial women, as was customary, while the emperors withheld Augustan status from them. Indeed,

it may be the case that the Tetrarchs invented the title for this purpose" (p. 202).

Prisca's inscription is particularly interesting since it comes from a context near a temple of Jupiter in Salona, a fact that Waldron uses to interpret that it "was probably erected as part of the imperial cult to the Tetrarchic dynasty, the *gens Valeria aeterna*" (p. 201). He goes on to assert that "the new title, and indeed the association of Prisca's statue with the imperial cult, shows that women were not entirely excluded from the sacred imperial household, the *domus diuina*, as it was depicted in media." (p. 203) It should be noted, however, that Prisca's statue base is not precisely datable. Given both the find's proximity to the palace at Split, where Diocletian is said to have retired after abdication, and the reemergence of imperial women on coins with the rise of Constantine and Maxentius, it is unclear at what moment such a familial group was erected and whether the group may have been tied to the resurgent ideological capital of biological families following Constantius' death.

Waldron shows that emperors began putting their wives on coins once again from 307, with Fausta first appearing on a coin issued as a limited run using the new title of *nobilissima femina*, minted only at Trier and thus targeted at Northern Gaul. Galerius' wife, Diocletian's daughter Valeria, is honored shortly after (in 307 or 308). Significantly, she was honored as Augusta and her diademed image circulated broadly on both gold and silver coins that elevated her status compared to Fausta. Waldron rightly reads this, and Valeria's increased traces in the material footprint tied to Galerius' court ideology, as an answer to the dynastic self-promotion of the western colleagues/rivals that served to promote Galerius' ties to Diocletian. (pp. 209–211)

The author also contends that part of Galerius' strategy for bolstering the impression of his familial ties in the years between 305 and 308 included the strategic deification of his mother Romula. The palace at Romuliana, located in eastern Serbia, has been interpreted as an imperial residence built by the eastern Tetrarch for his mother. A nearby hilltop contains the remains of a mausoleum with an inhumation burial believed to be Romula's, and the claim of her deification relies on the presence of peacocks – birds associated with the apotheosis of royal women – depicted together with an ivy crown on a decorative archivolt inscribed "Felix Romuliana" from the palace's encircling walls.

However, the interpretation of Romula's deification on the grounds of this evidence alone warrants more caution. Textual sources do not make mention of Romula's deification, and previous imperial women honored as *diua* were commemorated on coins with '*diua*' and '*consecratio*' legends that make their divinization explicit, while, notably, no coin issues or inscriptions are known for Romula. Further, although peacocks are indeed associated with apotheosis, they are also, more generically, the bird sacred to Juno, the queen of the gods, and thus perhaps a fitting decorative motif in the context of a palace associated with a woman of imperial status. The question of Romula's deification aside, the presence of an imperial palace named for her does suggest Galerius made at least hyper-local use of association with his mother in the region of his birth. (p. 219) Waldron suggests that Romula's deification occurred after the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305, but before Valeria's elevation to Augusta in 308, reasoning, "Her divine status appears incompatible with the representation of women under Diocletian and Maximian, but it aligned with Galerius' promotion of Valeria. Just as Galerius wished to promote his marital ties through Valeria, he wished to strengthen his ancestry through Romula." (p. 218)

As a whole, this contribution thoughtfully perceives and draws out how ideological messaging evolved over the period between 284 and 311, vacillating among messages of equality and hierarchy, and inflected by expectations related to biological succession based on long-standing tradition (from imperial on-lookers, at least, and perhaps even on the parts of the western Tetrarchs, Maximian and Constantius). Waldron's central point, that "the increased threat of military rebellion, the increased militarisation of the upper echelons of power and the closely related fact of the military backgrounds of the emperors [...] go some way towards explaining the curious and unique aspects of the Tetrarchic dynasty" (p. 223), is spot-on. The intellectual quibbles raised here should not detract from the value of this very stimulating assessment of the evidence, but rather stand as evidence of the ways this book promises to keep multidisciplinary scholarly discussion on this fascinating era evolving.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Anne Hunnell Chen: Rezension zu: Byron Waldron: Dynastic Politics in the Age of Diocletian AD 284–311. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2022. In: Plekos 27, 2025, S. 275–284 (URL: https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2025/r-waldron.pdf).