

Diocletian

c. 245–316



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Diocletian was the Roman emperor who, after a period of chaos in the Roman Empire, reorganized the empire and restored efficiency to the government.



As you read the biography below, think about how Diocletian's administrative ability helped him reorganize the empire.

Not much is known about Diocletian's early life. He probably served in military camps or was part of the Roman emperor's bodyguard. Diocletian became a military commander in the campaign against the Persians. During this campaign, both the emperor and the emperor's brother, who ruled the Empire together, were killed. Diocletian's troops then named Diocletian emperor in 284.

Soon after becoming emperor, Diocletian realized that the defending and administering the empire was too large a job for one man. Diocletian appointed his trusted friend, Maximian, to share power with him. Diocletian divided his power into east and west sectors. Diocletian kept control of the east and Maximian controlled the west.

Eight years later, Diocletian realized that more focus was needed on both civic and military problems. He further divided power by naming two "Junior Emperors," or *Caesari*, under each "Senior Emperor," or *Augustus*. He chose two more companions, Galerius and Constantius I, as the junior emperors. Diocletian had created a four-man rule, called the *Tetrarchy*. Diocletian also broke administrative work into specializations.



VOCABULARY

bureaucracy government divided into groups of officials each with its own chief

technocracy management of government by technical experts

mint place where coins are made

He assigned chiefs for each specialization. This was the beginning of our concepts of **bureaucracy** and **technocracy**.

Diocletian reformed the army. He allowed soldiers to retire after 20 years of service and lowered the price of goods and services to soldiers, which reduced their cost of living. He strengthened the army by increasing the number of soldiers.

Diocletian made economic reforms. He supported agricultural and building programs, and collected taxes on individuals and on cultivated land. Diocletian also created coins that were easy to use and he almost doubled the number of **mints**.

On the negative side, Diocletian harshly persecuted Christians. Although he had promised that there would be no bloodshed, the persecution was violent and resulted in many martyrs. This was the last main persecution of Christians.

In 305, Diocletian passed his throne to younger rulers and retired to his castle. Eventually, the new generation of rulers fought among themselves. The system that Diocletian had so carefully set up failed, and the Roman Empire declined.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Describe** What did Diocletian do to make the administration of the Roman Empire easier and more efficient?

- 2. Make Judgments** Which of Diocletian's reforms was the most important? Do you think that any of his reforms are needed today? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Imagine that you are a Roman citizen about to meet with Diocletian, but you will only have five minutes to speak with him. Write down the issue you would discuss.