



Summary :

Diocletian introduced a series of reforms that affected the Empire as a whole. He established the *tetrarchy* and reorganised the provinces, introducing the system of the *dioceses*. He increased bureaucracy; he also attempted to contain inflation by issuing new coins and imposing new limits to the price of products; he also imposed limitations to the ability of professional advancement or of changing one's place of residence.

Date

284-305

Geographical Location

1.Introduction

When Diocles, a military commander of the cavalry and leader of Numerian's personal guard, was proclaimed emperor after his predecessor's sudden death and renamed [Diocletian](#), he received an empire in the verge of disaster. The administrative system that had been established by [Octavian Augustus](#) was based in the collaboration between the emperor and the [senate](#).¹ However, it had proved unable to be put to practice after [Caracalla's](#) edict (Constitutio Antoniniana), which granted Roman citizenship to all free people of the Empire. Conflicts and civil strife heightened, as the senators rightly felt pushed aside, even in military administration, by a [New Order](#) of professional state employees; they belonged to lower levels of the society, but had received better education. People's living conditions worsened dramatically during this crisis; many provinces resembled battle fields, while in others the prices of products kept increasing, due to the devaluation of coins.

Diocletian quickly realised that he needed to reorganise the administrative system, providing solutions to problems such as the division of power, as well as the economic downfall of the Empire, leaving behind Augustus' outdated financial and administrative system.

2. Administrative reforms

2.1. Tetrarchy

Probably Diocletian's first act was to separate military and political power, an action that was only completed after his death, during the reign of [Constantine](#). In the traditional roman state, administrative duties fell under the jurisdiction of military officials. Diocletian gradually separated military administration, exerted by the [duces](#), from civil offices, which were the responsibility of a specially formed and trained class, the [iudices](#). His final goal was to improve the Empire's defence, and that required a more effective administration system, which would facilitate the collection of taxes and the replenishment of the army. He based his system in the concept of the division of power and official responsibilities, even applying this system to the highest power: Instead of remaining sole emperor, he kept the eastern provinces for himself, while making Maximian co-emperor and giving him the control of the western part of the empire.

Soon afterward, in 293, the two emperors appointed two [praetorian prefects](#) as [caesars](#), thus making them their assistants and heirs: Maximian appointed Constantius Chlorus, while Diocletian appointed [Galerius](#). The four rulers were in charge of the military administration of the provinces, based in their new imperial seats, where they built their palaces: Maximian in *Augusta Treverorum* (mod. Trier), Diocletian in [Nicomedia](#), Galerius in Thessalonike and Constantius in Milan. Each had their own guard and officials. However, only the two co-emperors could issue edicts, mentioning also their caesars' names.

2.2. Administrative restructure – Division of provinces

The provinces of the Empire were divided into smaller ones and their governors answered directly to the emperor. They were the members of a professional class of state employees, specially trained and educated for their position and part of the court bureaucracy



and hierarchy; they practically formed a new social class.

Each of the old provinces was divided into two parts: an external or border part, which was heavily guarded by the army, and the inner part, which was protected by the external but also had the obligation to replenish the soldiers' supplies. Fully aware of the problems that could arise from the increased number of provinces, Diocletian introduced an organisation based in administrative units, the *dioceses*; they were twelve in total: the diocese of the East, Asia, Pontos, Thrace, Moisia, Pannonia, Italy, Gaul, Vienna, Britain, Spain and Africa, each of them including several provinces.² A new official was assigned the government of these dioceses, the *vicarius*, from the equestrian order.

The most significant renovation took place in Italy, which was transformed into a diocese, with twelve provinces and Milan as a seat; thus it lost its privilege to avoid taxation, because it was the administrative centre of the Empire.³ The city of Rome and its immediate environs retained this privilege (since they did not produce any agricultural products), but Rome was no longer the centre of the Empire. A full reform of the role of the governors of these dioceses also followed, as Diocletian believed that they should uphold the law and have a large number of responsibilities, but not much space to improvise. The *vicarii* of the dioceses and the law itself greatly limited the governors' powers. Their main duty was military administration, but they were also in charge of supervising each town's *boule*, of conducting trials for civil matters, reviewing applications, battling crime, restoring the roads, public buildings and ports, running the postal service and collecting the province's taxes; the last duty previously belonged to the *procuratores*.

These measures reorganised the whole empire, but also intended to push aside the senators, who were gradually being stripped from their jurisdiction; their former privileges were now given to officials of lower origins, especially from the equestrian order. The latter had entered court bureaucracy and hierarchy, viewing them as the only means for social advancement, and desired to preserve this system.

3. Economic reforms

Diocletian introduced a closed and controlled administrative system, which could only succeed if the economic base of the Empire was also controlled and the replenishment of army supplies was guaranteed. Therefore, he proceeded to an economic reform of the Empire.

3.1. Cencus

During the period 296-297, Diocletian ordered a systematic inventory of land, cultivated areas, animals, people and productive sources of the Empire, aiming to control these sources. He was the first emperor with a clear understanding of economic issues, connecting the cultivated land with the people who lived and worked in it, thus managing to calculate the productivity of the area. His new taxation system was based on two basic taxes: the *capitatio*⁴ was a tax based on heads, which included all the people of the Empire and was paid in money or kind, according to the state's needs; the *jugatio*⁵ was the taxation of agricultural production, which replaced an older land tax. Its difference lay on the fact that it the sum of the tax did not apply only to the extent of the land, but also to the quality of the soil and the type of the cultivated product.⁶ There were also smaller scale taxes on commercial production, trade products, exports and imports.

3.2 Taxation system

Diocletianos did not aim to reduce taxation or remove the *annona*, the taxation in kind, which covered the needs of the army; he aspired to distribute the burden of taxation with logic and consistency, balancing out the injustices of the previous periods. Each September, the state issued a financial plan according to its needs, the *indictio*; it was announced to the *vicarii* of the dioceses and they, in turn, announced it to the provinces. Then, the governors of the provinces collected the necessary funds, according to the lists, and presented them to the state in three instalments. The state retained the right to issue a supplementary financial plan (*superindictio*) if the need arose.



The weak point of this system lay on the fact that the collection of taxes and the necessary sum fell under the jurisdiction of the **curiales** and the higher class of a town, who were often held responsible and faced legal charges, or were forced to collaborate with the people, withholding evidence, in order to be able to procure the necessary funds. State finances suffered greatly from this practice, since the initial calculations for the taxes were proved unrealistic, not having taken into account the human factor and the will to avoid taxation. Administrative institutions in the cities also suffered, since their members, the ruling class, began to feel insecure and attempted to avoid public offices in local government. However, a positive aspect of this system was that payment was accepted either in money or in kind, according to the Empire's needs; this greatly helped economy recover from the devaluation of the coin at a much quicker rate.

3.3. Measures against inflation

The emperor greatly cared for price control, issuing an edict (Edictum de maximis pretiis), which aimed to control the unreasonable inflation in the prices of products. It was a very detailed and thorough edict, which was publicly posted in all the cities of the Empire: it set firm limits on the prices of products as well as the salaries.⁷

3.4. Numismatic and social changes

Diocletian also attempted to control inflation by issuing new coins. He increased the gold content in the gold coins (from 70-72 gold per roman pound to 60 per roman pound), at the same time issuing a new coin called multiplus. The previous silver coin, the antoninianus, was replaced with a solid silver coin, the **denarius**; the denarii were already in existence, but they had lost their original value (approximately 96 coins per pound). However, the most important aspect of the reform was the introduction of a new copper coin, called follis. A follis weighed approximately 10 grams. Another radical aspect of the reform was that the coins were now issued by all 'state' mints, making this the first attempt for the issuing of a common state coin for the whole of the empire. These transformations in the coin system took place toward the end of the 280s until the middle of the 290s.⁸

Finally, Diocletian put an end to people often moving from place to place and constantly changing profession; this reform stemmed from economic motives, but soon had an important social impact. People started entering professions that they kept for life, sometimes even passed on to their children, while peasants were bonded to the land they were cultivating. It was the foundation of the medieval economic and social structures, characterised by traders' and merchant's guild and by the increasing attachment of farmers to a particular piece of land.⁹

4. Evaluation of Diocletian's reforms: The beginning of medieval society

Diocletian's reforms affected the Empire as a whole: Administrative restructuring set the premises for the later medieval and modern states. The tetrarchy was an administrative experiment which facilitated in the Empire's defence. It proved successful as long as Diocletian himself held the highest power. After his retirement, however, dynastic strife began again in the Empire, mainly due to the ambition of the son of Constantius Chlorus; he destroyed the system of the tetrarchy and reintroduced monarchy, founding the dynasty of the Neo-flavii. On the level of everyday life, the restrictions imposed on moving to a different place and changing professions contributed to the creation of feudal medieval society. Diocletian's attempts against inflation, such as the edict concerning product prices, brought about positive results. Diocletian's opponents, such as the rhetor Lactantius, rejected the edict, claiming that it brought the opposite results, emptying the markets. However, the numismatic reforms and the acceptance of taxes both in kind and money helped the economy survive for many centuries. The issuing of a common coin helped in bettering the image of the common, unified state that Diocletian aspired to create.

1. According to this system provinces were of two types: imperial, where officials were appointed by the emperor and he received the revenues, and senatorial, where the officials came from the class of senators. In all the provinces, the *procuratores*, members of the equestrian order, reported directly to the emperor.

2. Up to a point, especially in the European territories, these dioceses correspond to the modern European countries.



3. It was at that time when the division of Italy began, a division that continued throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Italy was reunited only in 1861.
4. For further information see *NPauty* (1997), pp. 970-971, s.v. "Capitatio-iugatio, Verfahren zur Ermittlung der Steuerlast" (E. Pack), and *NPauty* (1997), pp. 970-972, s.v. "Capitatio, die Kopfsteuer der späten römischen Kaiserzeit" and "Kapitatio, der Kopfsteuer der späten Kaiserzeit" (G. Schieman). The calculating unit for the *capitatio* was the *caput*. Each adult man within a family counted as one *caput*, each woman as half, while slaves as well as visitors counted toward the final sum. People over 65 years of age were exempt from this tax. A very poor household could join another in order to form one *caput*, while wealthier capitals included a larger number of *capita*. See Williams, S., *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery* (New York – London 1996), p. 110. However, local traditions required differentiations according to region; in Dalmatia women were counted as one full *caput*, while in Egypt they were not included in the household.
5. For further information see *NPauty* (1997), pp. 970-971, s.v. "Capitatio-iugatio, Verfahren zur Ermittlung der Steuerlast" (E. Pack).
6. The work *jugatio* derives from *jugerum*, which measured land area and corresponded to 1/8 of an acre. The measuring unit, under Diocletian, was the *jugum*, which measured land in connection to the quality of the soil and the type of production. In Syria, a *jugum* corresponded to 5 *jugera* of vineyards, 20 *jugera* of fertile land, 40 or 60 *jugera* of less fertile land and 450 *perticae* of low production olive groves or 225 *perticae* of high production olive groves.
7. The edict of 301 was the first public document attempting to make prices the same for the whole empire. Similar edicts had been issued by previous emperors, such as Hadrian, but the mostly had a more limited and local nature. For more information on the edict see Frank, T., *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore 1940)· Michell, H., "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* (1947, reprint)· Giacchero, M., *Edictum Diocletiani ei collegarum de pretiis rerum venalium* (Genoa 1974).
8. For the coins of Diocletian see Cahn, H.A., *Monnaies de l'epoque de Diocletien* (Bale 1954)· Depeyrot, G., *Le Bas-Empire romain: economie et numismatique* (Collection des Hesperides, Paris 1987). A very well founded study on the gold coins, as well as the historical background, can be found in Lukanc, I., *Diocletianus: der römische Kaiser aus Dalmatien* (Wetteren 1991).
9. The term 'feudal system' or 'feudalism' cannot be really applied in this case. It is being used for Western Europe but it is not always acceptable by the scholars studying Byzantium and other eastern organisation forms. The main difference lies on the landowner's power over his subjects; this power was much larger in the west than in the east, where the peasants still retained some financial and administrative independence.

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	Sutherland C.H.V. , "Diocletian's Reform on the Coinage: A Chronological Note", <i>JRS</i> , 45 , 1955, 116-119

Webliography :

	Diocletian http://www.roman-empire.net/decline/diocletian.html
	Diocletian http://www.roman-emperors.org/dioclet.htm

Glossary :

	annona A tax on land property; the proceeds were used towards the provisioning of cities (<i>annona civica</i>) or payment of the soldiers (<i>annona militaris</i>).
	caesar In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.
	curiales Curiales were the members of the city councils (gr.: <i>boule</i>) in the late Roman Empire. They belonged to the local aristocracy and were officials of the municipal administration, responsible for the normal functioning of the city's institutions as well as for local tax-collecting. A city's <i>boule</i> could count from 100 to 200 curiales, depending on the city's population.
	denarius Roman silver coin equal to two silver attic drachmas
	doukas (lat. dux) Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Buzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military comander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.
	praetorian prefect (praefectus praetorio) Commander of the emperor's bodyguard under the principate. During the regne of Constantine I the praetorian prefect becomes a dignitary responsible for the administrative unit called the prefecture, which was subdivided into dioceses. In 400 A.D. there were four such praetorian prefectures, of Oriens, of Illyricum, of Italia and Africa and of Gallia. The praetorian prefects were second only to the emperor. The praetorian prefect of Oriens was the mightiest among prefects. His office is for the last time mentioned in 680.
	procurator Administrator of a roman Province deriving from the class of equites. He was controlled directly by the Emperor and his legati Augusti pro praetore.
	senate, the The top political body of the Roman state. During the early Republic, it was represented by the council of the consuls, the top archons of the roman state. Later on, its power and responsibilities increased. As a result, it became the main governmental body of Rome. However, during the Imperial period, the responsibilities of the senate were restricted.
	vicarius



The term refers to the substitute of various officials. Since the 3rd century, the vicarius replaced mostly procuratores from the equestrian class. The most important vicarii were those who replaced the Praetorian eparchs in the dioceses set up by Diocletian. In addition, the vicarii could have military (like the command of the garrison in Egypt) or even judicial responsibilities.

Auxiliary Catalogues

The new dioceses and provinces under Diocletian

Diocese of the East (Dioecesis Orientis)

Libya Superior

Libya Inferior

Thebais

Iobia Egypt (ca. 314-315)

Herculia Egypt (ca. 314-315)

New Arabia

Arabia

Augustia of Lebanon

Palestine

Phoenice

Coele-Syria

Augusta Euphratensis

Cilicia

Cyprus

Mesopotamia

Osroene

Diocese of Pontus (Dioecesis Pontica)

Bithynia

Cappadocia

Galatia

Paphlagonia



Diospontus

Pontus Polemoniacus

Armenia

Diocese of Asia (Dioecesis Asiana)

Lycia and Pamphylia

Phrygia I

Phrygia II

Asia

Lydia

Caria

Pisidia

Hellespont

Diocese of Thrace (Dioecesis Thraciae)

Europe

Rhodope

Thrace

Haemimontus

Scythia

Diocese of Moesia

Dacia

Dacia Paraktia

Moesia Superior

Dardania

Macedonia

Thessaly

Achaea



Probitalina

New Epirus

Diocese of Panonia

Pannonia Superior

Pannonia Inferior

Sabike

Dalmatia

Baleria

Noricum Ripensis

Noricum Mediterraneum

Diocese of Italy

Venice and Istria

Emilia and Ligouria

Flaminia and Picenum

Tuscia and Umbria

Campania

Apulia and Calabria

Lucania and Brutio

Sicily

Sardinia

Corsica

Alpes Coticiae

Raitike

Diocese of France

Belgica I

Belgica II



Germania I

Germania II

Sequanorum

Gallia Lugdunensis I

Gallia Lugdunensis II

Alpes Poeninae et Graiae

Diocese of Vienna

Vienna

Narbonica I

Narbonica II

Novem Populi

Acquitaine I

Acquitaine II

Alpes

Diocese of Brittania

Brittania I

Brittania II

Caesaria Maxima

Caesaria Flavia

Diocese of Spain

Baetica

Loucitania

Carthagenia

Gallicia

Tarraconensis



Mauritania Tingitana

Diocese of Africa

Africa proconsularis

Byzacena

Tripolitania

Numidia of Syrte

Numidia of Militiane

Mauretania Caesariensis

Mauretania Sitifensis