# THE TETRARCHY AS IDEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

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'The tetrarchy', as the first chapter in this collection eloquently puts it, 'was a language, not a system'.[1] This basic understanding of the re-arranging of Roman imperial government under Diocletian is the fundamental starting point for the present volume, which includes 14 contributions to the study of this period of Roman imperial history and the form of imperial government established by Diocletian in successive steps from 285.[2]

The tetrarchy is commonly seen as lasting, in some form or other and depending on what is understood by 'tetrarchic' rule, either to ca. 312, when Constantine I, son of one former tetrarchic *Augustus*, vanquished Maxentius, the son of another former tetrarchic *Augustus* in a battle near Rome, or to 324, when the same Constantine eventually defeated Licinius, who had been made an Augustus in 308 by Diocletian and Galerius.[3] It has been the object of extensive study. Diocletian has variously been interpreted as the last barracks-emperor or (more often, under the powerful influence of Edward Gibbon) as the first late antique emperor; as an original thinker and subtle innovator or as a naïve military man given to fanciful ideas; as a decisive military commander or a grandiose tyrant. Traditionally, and particularly in 19th century and early 20th century scholarship, his name has been associated with a clear break in the history of the Roman Empire, marking the end of the 'classic' principate and the coming of something simultaneously new and lesser, the 'dominate'.[4] More generally, scholars have been near-unanimous in seeing his rule as one of significant, even radical change.[5] His opposition to the spread of Christianity and (less so) his persecution of Christians launched in the waning years of his rule has earned him high marks from scholars such as Voltaire or Gibbon, sympathetic attempts at explanation by some, and the opprobrium of others.[6]

This drastic view has abated somewhat over the years, as our view of Diocletian himself and of the form of government associated with his name has changed in the context of a still relatively recent re-evaluation of the period now known as Late Antiquity. No longer simply the harbinger of decadence and decay, his attempts at reform have attracted the attention of significant scholars and resulted in many articles, biographies and monographs devoted to analysing the minutiae of his all-

1 CARLÀ-UHINK, this volume, 46. The chapters in this volume use UK spelling and single quotation marks for direct quotes.
2 Unless otherwise indicated, all dates throughout this volume are CE.
3 On the story of the use of this word to define this historical period, see VOLLMER 1991.
4 For a decisive debunking of this notion, see MEIER 2003b.
5 CARLÀ-UHINK 2019, 9–11.
6 LEPPIN 2004; see also CARLÀ-UHINK 2019, 185–196.

encompassing activity. Various monographs and edited collections, as well as a veritable flood of articles and smaller works, have been devoted to Diocletian's and other tetrarchs' biographies,[7] as well as to individual aspects of their rule and reforms, from an analysis of tetrarchic representations in various official state media, to palace architecture and legal innovations.[8] The astonishing recent discovery of a series of monumental reliefs and statues from what has been interpreted as the imperial cult complex in Diocletian's residence of Nicomedia (modern İzmit) shows how our understanding of tetrarchic imperial representation and ideology can still be augmented and how much more remains to be analysed and interpreted.[9]

The present volume, we hope, is a step in this direction, as the papers collected herein illustrate a new approach to the thorny issues of Diocletian's twenty-year rule. Much of previous scholarship has been singularly devoted to understanding the precise nature of Diocletian's reforms, particularly his innovations in Roman monarchic rule, whereby he first selected a single colleague to serve as his co-*Augustus* and then selected two more colleagues to serve as 'junior' emperors or *Caesares*. While neither joint rule between two equal *Augusti* nor the appointment of *Caesares*, with an understanding that this title circumscribed potential heirs designate, were new phenomena in themselves, the specific configuration of what has been called the 'tetrarchic system' was, indeed, unprecedented. The core question that 20th century scholarship on the tetrarchy has been trying to answer is that as to the nature of this 'system'. Were Diocletian's innovations, as, e.g., William Seston and Stephen Williams maintained, mere reactions of external circumstances, a collection of ad-hoc measures introduced to alleviate the most significant stresses on an empire that had been tottering near the abyss in the decades immediately preceding his rule?[10] (An abyss, it must be noted, in the guise of the so-called 'crisis of the third century', whose catastrophic aspects have been intensely revised in the past three decades.)[11] Or were the years between 286–305 witness to the systematic and planned introduction of a well thought-out, previously conceived new imperial 'system', as Frank Kolb and Wolfgang Kuhoff have alleged, 'ein tatsächliches "System", das sich im Laufe weniger Jahre verfestigte und in hohem Maße ideologisch

7 To name but the most important biographies and monographs: SESTON 1946. WILLIAMS 1985. KOLB 1987a. KUHOFF 2001a. REES 2004. ROBERTO 2014. RÉMY 2016. CARLÀ-UHINK 2019. WALDRON 2022. DEMANDT 2022. Diocletian's imperial colleagues and successors (apart from Constantine) have received less attention, with some significant exceptions: FELD 1960. PASQUALINI 1979. CULLHED 1994. LEADBETTER 2009. CASELLA 2017. The papers collected in DEMANDT, GOLTZ & SCHLANGE-SCHÖNINGEN 2004 still serve as a valuable introduction to the *status quaestionis*.

8 CORCORAN 2000. BOSCHUNG & ECK 2006. CAMBI, BELAMARIĆ & MARASOVIĆ 2009. CAMBI 2017. ECK & PULIATTI 2018.

9 ŞARE AĞTÜRK 2018. 2021.

10 SESTON 1946. WILLIAMS 1985. The alternative proposed by KÖNIG 1974, that Maximian had in fact usurped against Diocletian and was then recognised by the latter, thus creating an 'involuntary' college of emperors, was original but has found few followers. For KÖNIG, this college was not founded on concord and harmony, but rather on rivalry and bitter opposition. Cf. ROUSSELLE 1976. KÖNIG 1986.

11 See e.g. WITSCHEL 1999.

untermauert wurde'?[12] Kuhoff, for example, speaks of the 'tetrarchy' as a 'true system' ('einem wirklichen System'), identifying as its main elements the

> ideologische Überhöhung des Kaisertums und der sie ausübenden Personen, die nach und nach vollzogene Zuweisung territorialer Zuständigkeitsgebiete mit zugehörigen Münzstätten, die Verteilung der Jahreskonsulate unter die Mitglieder des Kaiserkollegiums und schließlich die freiwilligen Abdankungen der beiden Augusti und die Weitergabe an die bisherigen Caesares mitsamt deren Eintritt in den höheren Rang.[13]

Each of the individual points he makes is disputable: the 'superelevation' of the imperial power, is most decidedly not specific (and even less exclusive) to the tetrarchy; the division of territorial competences was never formal;[14] the (more or less) even distribution of consulates among co-emperors is well-known for previous situations in which a college of emperors existed; finally, the 'voluntary abdication' of the *Augusti* is neither as simple nor as clear-cut as Kuhoff would have it.[15]

Determining whether we are dealing with a 'true system' depends on minute and, at times, highly speculative interpretations of fragmentary and complex sources. In turn, adherence to one or the other of these two great 'schools' of scholarship influences how the available evidence is interpreted. Understanding the tetrarchy as a system of government, as a significant, systematic overhaul not only of how the administration and defense of the Roman Empire functioned, but of the nature of emperorship as such, independent of the forms and reasons for its genesis, also inevitably generates further research questions: why did this tetrarchic 'system' collapse? Could it have endured without its *spiritus rector*? How? Why did some notable aspects of tetrarchic rule survive, while others did not? This applies particularly to the realm of imperial representation and performance, which followed and adapted the path laid out (allegedly) by Diocletian, but also to the question of co-emperorship, which remained the norm with Constantine (who was never sole ruler, but always 'shared' his emperorship with *Augusti* and/or *Caesares*) and afterwards. Wolfgang Kuhoff attributed the demise of the tetrarchy to an inherent lack of flexibility in its systemic configuration, but how are we to explain that a fundamental reform touching on all aspects and facets of imperial administration should then result in an inflexible, monolithic new 'system', which, in the end, is simply postulated by Kuhoff?[16] And how are we to reconcile the image of Diocletian as a methodical thinker and thorough reformer with the facts of his troubled succession? Adopting the position that he 'invented' a new system of government out of whole cloth forces us to assume that he somehow seems to have then overlooked or ignored the importance of familial relationship in the Roman succession and the contingencies of life as a military emperor.[17]

12 Kolb 1987a. Kuhoff 2001a. 2001b. 2004 (quote: 18–19).
13 Kuhoff 2001b, 149.
14 Bleckmann 2004.
15 Carlà-Uhink 2019, 151–164.
16 Kuhoff 2004, 19.
17 On the importance of familial and/or dynastic templates for Roman rulers, see Hekster 2015.

Thus, the discussion as it stands now has exhausted its possibilities and the dichotomy of two opposing 'schools' has lost its usefulness. Definitively concluding whether the tetrarchy was a carefully planned system imposed 'top-down' by Diocletian or rather a 'bottom-up' institutional arrangement deriving from circumstance, is impossible. The former idea requires a significant amount of speculation and unprovable postulates, and encounters difficulties in explaining the delay in the realisation of the individual parts of an alleged 'master plan'. The latter does not account for the undeniable novelty of the forms of (self-)representation and legitimation of 'tetrarchic' political power.

It is our contention that this avenue of research has reached an impasse and become intellectually sterile. In the light of our fragmentary and selective source traditions, it is impossible to further advance the discussion centred on the question of pre-planning and implementation of reforms. Even if new papyrological, numismatic or epigraphic material should come to light which could conceivably lead to revisions of individual datings or interpretations, it is unlikely that this would significantly impact the wider discussion – the incredible discoveries at İzmit have advanced our knowledge of imperial representation and art in the 280s and early 290s but have not radically changed the discussion on the 'tetrarchy'. Even the discovery of Gamzigrad – or, rather, the discovery of the inscription clearly identifying those ruins with Romuliana, in 1984 – did not significantly shift the terms of the debate on the tetrarchy as 'political system'.[18] Even if we were able to definitively answer the question as to whether or not Maximinian was adopted by Diocletian; or able to conclude whether or not Constantius Chlorus and Galerius both were related by marriage to Diocletian and Maximian prior to their appointments as Caesars; or even capable of ascertaining the role that Diocletian envisioned for Constantine and Maxentius, two adult sons of *Augusti*, the larger picture would only be slightly modified. It is with this conviction in mind that this book has been conceived, with the firm intention of shifting the terms of the question and thus hopefully arriving at answers through an approach that might throw new light on the formation, development, and end of the 'tetrarchy'.

## A 'TETRARCHIC IDEOLOGY'?

'Historical explanations are inevitably shaped by the ontological commitment of the historians who frame them'.[19] Indeed, the impasse in scholarship about the tetrarchy which we have described can be conceptualized as deriving from being framed into dichotomic oppositions – such as 'individual' vs. 'society' or 'agency' vs. 'structure':

> Taking the side of the first terms in these dichotomies yields narratives in which the actions or ideas of persons, typically 'great men', are the main factors shaping events, situations, or the outcomes of particular struggles. […] Taking the side of the second terms, on the other hand,

18 SREJOVIĆ 1985.
19 DE LANDA 2016, 13.

> yields narratives framed in terms of the transformations that enduring social structures have undergone.[20]

'Individual' and 'agency' lead us to Diocletian the creator, 'structure' and 'society' to the interpretation of his activity as imperial reaction to historical contingency. One possible way to overcome this dichotomy is by looking at societies as assemblages, in which 'persons are featured too but not as great men, while larger entities, like kingdoms, empires, world economies, are treated not as abstract social structures but as concrete historical individuals'.[21] This is not in itself a particularly new thought; Braudel was already moving in the same direction. And yet, combining his approach with assemblage theory, as proposed by Manuel De Landa, can lead to a different, more complex understanding of the tetrarchic empire in its political, cultural, social context and thus to overcome, in our turn, the scholarly dichotomy presented above.

One crucial consequence of this is the possibility of re-thinking and thus deploying in a different way the concept of 'ideology' when referring to the tetrarchy. Going back to the elements that, according to Wolfgang Kuhoff, compose the 'tetrarchic system', he first names the 'ideologische Überhöhung des Kaisertums und der sie ausübenden Personen'. Such a 'superelevation' of the imperial function and of the emperors is defined by Kuhoff as 'ideological', without much discussion about the use of this word. It is probably intended here to mean simply that such 'superelevation' did not correspond to any 'factual' increase in power, but rather consisted in a discursive exaltation of the members of the imperial college and of their 'superhuman' faculties; it is therefore probably mostly meant in reference to the adoption by the 'tetrarchs' of the *nomina* Iovius and Herculius, which have been re-explored for this volume by Anne Hunnell Chen.

Kuhoff is not the only author who has used the concept of 'ideology' in reference to the tetrarchy. Oliver Hekster had done the same two years before and in a similar fashion, identifying the idea of the joint rulership as the main aspect of 'tetrarchic ideology' and defining the usage of the *nomina* Iovius and Herculius as one of the 'modes of representation' that contributed to pinpoint such an 'ideology'. His aim was mostly to contrast 'tetrarchic' ideology with that of Maxentius, which was based on sole rulership and on the centrality of Rome. In this case as well, the word 'ideology' seems to have been used to simply indicate a principle orienting government and encompassing a variety of legitimation strategies, without much discussion of the concept itself.[22] Almost simultaneously, Roger Rees similarly used the expression 'imperial ideology' to define the messages of unity and agreement in the imperial collegium as they are deployed and reproduced by Eumenius in his speech *For the Restoration of Schools* (*Pan. Lat.* IX(5)) in 297/298 CE.[23]

And yet, 'ideology' is a famously complex and disputed concept. In his introductory work to it, Terry Eagleton singles out sixteen definitions which were in use

20 De Landa 2016, 13.
21 De Landa 2016, 14.
22 Hekster 1999, particularly 718.
23 Rees 2002, 150–151.

at the time of his writing and which are at least in part in contradiction with each other.[24] Eagleton distinguishes between two main approaches to ideology, an epistemological and a sociological one, with the latter 'concerned more with the function of ideas within social life than with their reality or unreality'.[25] If we consider it a necessary attribute of ideologies that they must mould and shape an entire society, it is quite difficult to identify any 'ideology' before the 20th century with its rise of systems of mass communication and their use by totalitarian regimes.[26] This is not strictly necessary though, and many different scholars have understood 'ideology' as being a broad, diverse, and comprehensive set of beliefs shared by a group in its interpretation and communication of the world – and thus successfully applied this concept to antiquity.[27]

In the context of the ancient world, 'ideology' has for example been used by Nicolas Wiater to

> refer to the discursive practices through which a 'group [establishes] an all-encompassing comprehensive view not only of itself, but of history and, finally, of the whole world,' as a community's specific 'ideology.' Thus understood, the term 'ideology' describes not, as in its Marxist use, the conscious manipulation of the lower classes by the ruling elite; rather, it describes a characteristic of human perception in general, the selective perception and concomitant shaping of the world according to a set of rules or norms which are provided by the social worlds in which we are organized – 'something out of which we think, rather than something that we think.'[28]

Following Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological approach, we can thus posit as a working definition that ideology 'expresses the necessity for any social group to make and to give itself an image, to "represent" itself, in the theatrical sense of the word'[29] – and is therefore deeply connected to shared historical narratives, the deployment of symbols, and collective memory. At a second level, Ricoeur adds, 'authority raises a claim to legitimacy, and ideology serves as the code of interpretation which secures integration by justifying the system of authority as it is. Inasmuch as the systems of authority and domination differ according to their basis of legitimacy, the typology of these systems of legitimacy tend to coincide with the typology of ideologies'.[30] As formulated by Ivan Jordović and Uwe Walter, ideology thus absolves to two crucial functions: founding and reinforcing identity and orienting choices and actions.[31]

The role of ideology in the survival and stability of the Roman empire has been the specific study of a seminal study by Clifford Ando, which attempts to answer a deceptively simple question: what ensured that Roman emperors – of the Principate

24 EAGLETON 1991, 1–2.
25 EAGLETON 1991, 3.
26 ANDO 2000, 20.
27 JORDOVIĆ & WALTER 2018, 21–25, in specific reference to democratic Athens.
28 WIATER 2011, 21–22, quoting RICOEUR 1978, 47. For the traditional Marxist view of ideology see ALTHUSSER 1970, particularly 172–173.
29 RICOEUR 1978, 45.
30 RICOEUR 1978, 48.
31 JORDOVIĆ & WALTER 2018, 22.

– were obeyed? With extensive reference to the works of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, among others, and making use of Max Weber's sociological typologies of rule and domination, Ando understands Roman 'imperial ideology' as a system of beliefs making 'explicit the particular principles of legitimation to which it appeals, and to the extent that the regime is successful the ideology gives voice to the foundational beliefs on which an individual subject's normative commitment to the social order is based.'[32] As for its means of operation, in his study of provincial reception of and interaction with this ideology, Ando has shown that ideology, in this sense, is better understood as a multidirectional communication (instead of a top-down imposition) by means of 'symbolic phenomena' generated both by the state and by individuals, 'in order to represent their imagined relationship' to each other.[33]

When it comes to the rule of Diocletian and his imperial colleagues, therefore, the question to be asked is whether they shifted these communicative mechanisms of legitimation up to a point where we can say that they developed a new and different typology when compared to earlier and later forms of legitimation of the Roman imperial power. As the individual contributions to this volume show from a range of different perspectives, the answer is both yes and no. 'No', if we look at communicative contexts and individual symbols and representations deployed within these, which are to a significant degree conventional and traditional; 'yes', if we look at the new ways in which these symbols are connected and made functional. Many of the relevant aspects of 'ideologies', indeed, fit the 'tetrarchic' system of symbols particularly well, for instance their heterogeneity, as 'ideologies are usually internally complex, differentiated formations, with conflicts between their various elements which need to be continually renegotiated and resolved'.[34]

We will see throughout this volume that this applies very well to the different forms and means of communication of imperial power during the 'tetrarchy': the continuous communication as well as aspects that, from an external perspective, appear contradictory or at least inconsistent, are explained by the multiplicity of configurations and interpretations that could be (and were) ascribed to the same symbols, and thus by the necessity of a differentiation.[35] Additionally, ideologies often deploy mechanisms of universalisation and naturalisation that make their contents appear eternal, responding to the needs of each society and individual, and innate to human nature – and thus present themselves as a-historical or de-historicized (or omnihistorical, in the Marxist view).[36] Once again, this perfectly fits the kind of political communication developed during the 'tetrarchy', which strongly insisted on imperial rule as unavoidable, eternal, and universal.

32 Ando 2000, 24
33 *Ibid*.
34 Eagleton 1991, 45.
35 Eagleton 1991, 45–46.
36 Eagleton 1991, 56–61. Cf. Ando 2000, 20–21. Jordović & Walter 2018, 23.

It is in this sense, understanding 'ideology' mainly as a 'discursive or semiotic phenomenon', 'a particular set of effects *within* discourses',[37] contributing to the legitimation of the social and political order, that we understand the tetrarchic system of symbols and representations as a 'tetrarchic ideology'. Indeed, the crucial aspect in this approach is the role played by the symbol which cannot be separated from the overarching concept of the 'ideology'. As Eagleton puts it, 'if ideology cannot be divorced from the sign, then neither can the sign be isolated from concrete forms of social intercourse. It is within these alone that the sign "lives"'.[38] This implies that the same symbol can be used, interpreted and mobilized in service of different forms of legitimation and of 'ideology'. At the same time, this definition also posits that 'ideology should not be seen as a univocal entity, but as a constantly negotiated position which could encompass several competing and conflicting ideas, justifying and reconciling them to each other and to the history of their development'.[39]

This in turn implies that individual symbols which play a role within specific ideological structures can be detached from these and re-signified in a new context, in which they then express a new meaning. In this sense, 'ideologies' should be conceived of not as 'organic totalities', but rather as

> what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls *assemblages*, wholes characterized by *relations of exteriority*. These relations imply, first of all, that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different.[40]

This perspective allows us to recognize that the 'tetrarchy' did not need to develop completely new symbols and signs – the re-deployment, re-signification and re-contextualization of existing and established symbols of imperial power, of ideologemes (the fundamental units of ideology) such as the divine protection of the emperors, the *nomina triumphalia*, the creation of fictive family relations, can be re-configured to create a new 'ideology', a new 'assemblage',[41] that is a whole 'whose properties emerge from the interaction between parts', which eventually shifts the forms of political (self-)representation and of legitimation as well as the normative definition of the imperial power and the expectations connected to the imperial role.[42]

37 EAGLETON 1991, 194; italics in the original.
38 EAGLETON 1991, 195.
39 MITCHELL 1997, 179.
40 DE LANDA 2006, 10–11; italics in the original.
41 It is important to stress here that the English word 'assemblage' is different from the original French *agencement*, as it gives 'the impression that the concept refers to a product not a process'. On the contrary, *agencement* relates 'to the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as to the result of such an action' (DE LANDA 2016, 1); this is also the meaning intended in our usage of 'assemblage'.
42 DE LANDA 2006, 5. On ideologemes, see BAKHTIN 1981, 429 and LYLO 2017, 19: 'The ideologeme is a unit of ideology and its explication. It can not only form an individual's attitude to reality, but primarily it can construct this reality on the axiological level and even replace it.'

When studying organizations and governments as assemblages, Manuel De Landa suggests for simplicity's sake to separate elements playing a 'material role', i.e. which ensure the '*enforcement* of obedience', from those playing 'an expressive role, that is those components that express the *legitimacy* of the authority', the latter including slogans and mottos, images, rituals and performances.[43] However, the two roles must be conceived as ideal types in the Weberian sense, as hermeneutic tools, since they cannot be strictly separated: the symbols expressing legitimacy and the discourses they produce are precisely among the elements ensuring obedience through consensus, as Ando has demonstrated.[44] The representation and performance of obedience and its enforcement, for example in the display of punishment, are clear examples of how most elements, to various degrees, serve both functions.[45] The way in which such practices and ideologemes thus combine into an assemblage which legitimates, reinforces and attempts to perpetuate political structures is what we understand, from a sociologically inspired perspective, as 'ideology'.

## THE 'TETRARCHY' AS A 'DISCOURSE'

Such a definition of 'ideology' is undeniably closely related to the concept of 'discourse' as defined by Michel Foucault – as a system of communications that constructs and shapes what is understood as truth, and thus constructs and legitimates power relations. But the two concepts do not completely overlap, neither are they interchangeable. Even if Foucault recognized the role of practices as parts of discourse containing enouncements, the very concept of discourse and the methods of discourse analysis mostly concentrate on verbal communication, and less on the role of rituals and performances that we have already identified as crucial to the 'assemblage ideology'. On the other hand, while Foucault's discourse highlights rather the structures of exclusion and the negotiation of power implicit in each human interaction, 'assemblage ideology' as a heuristic category as we understand it, is more focused on the categories of inclusion, of identity creation, and of homologation of systems of belief. However, Foucault ascribes to discourse not only the function of communicating, but also the function of creating and shaping the very realities that are defined and described. This is also crucial to our understanding of the 'tetrarchic ideology'. It would be quite simply wrong to understand imperial ideologemes, the set of symbols, signs and messages that represented and legitimated tetrarchic power, merely as a premodern and abstract form of propaganda, deployed to 'mould the masses', and/or cynically elaborated at the highest echelons

43 De Landa 2006, 68; italics in the original.

44 Ando 2000, 73–276.

45 De Landa 2006, 71; cf. also 2016, 31–32. The role of punishment as performance of power and authority, especially in reference to the public forms of torture and execution of the premodern and early modern states, is of course based on Foucault's analyses in *Surveiller et punir* (Foucault 1975).

of the empire to reinforce their own position.[46] Ideology, to again quote Clifford Ando, 'is a system of belief that channels rather than stifles creativity; [it] is generative'.[47]

Understanding this 'assemblage' analogously to discourse allows us to clearly see that those who use and manipulate it are deeply entangled in it. This signifies then further that the development of a specifically 'tetrarchic' ideology, as any other, continuously shifted instances of legitimacy and normative values. From this point of view, the question of whether the 'tetrarchy' was a thought-out system of government, planned in advance and implemented step-by-step, or whether it was rather an *ad hoc* reaction to circumstances beyond the control of its 'founder', loses much of its significance. We propose instead to understand the tetrarchy not as a system of government, but as an assemblage of symbols, a system of communication, a language, which, through constant redeploying in new fashions and new functionalisations of the same elements that were available to their predecessors, reformed and reshaped imperial political communication and (self-)representation.

Thus, this new language of empire created (or contributed to creating) a new sense of what imperial power should be, how it should work, how it should look and feel, and what should determine its legitimacy. In this sense, it was generative, as it established new configurations of empire, some of which lasted longer than others. To put it provocatively: it is very likely that no Roman before 305 would have had a notion in mind that *Augusti* should (or even could) become *seniores Augusti* after 10 or 20 years in that role.[48] And yet, the fact that this did happen and that this decision was communicated, explained and legitimated through various communicative and representational means, might have generated, at least in some circles, an expectation that the next *Augusti* would do the same. In other words, a new imperial ideologeme might have been generated. As Oliver Hekster writes, one can only stress 'how important ideological messages of a predecessor are if one is to understand the ideology of a new ruler'.[49]

Setting out from this approach, it is in our view irrelevant for the 'big picture' of the tetrarchy – and in any case impossible to determine with certainty, even though much effort has been expended on it – whether an imperial 'college' of four members with two *Augusti* and two *Caesares* was intentionally planned, when it

46 The use of the concept of 'propaganda' for the study of the ancient world has been widely discussed, and sometimes rejected, especially by German-speaking scholars (see WEBER & ZIMMERMANN 2003, 14–31. EICH 2003). This is not the place to reopen this discussion; yet it must be highlighted that the concept of propaganda can also be used with a broader definition, as 'the deliberate attempt to influence public opinion through the transmission of ideas and values for a specific purpose, not through violence and bribery' (CULL, CULBERT & WELCH 2003, 318). In this more general sense, it is applicable to antiquity: see CARLÀ & CASTELLO 2010, 31–36.

47 ANDO 2000, 21. Ando is specifically referring to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which he equates with ideology.

48 The concept of 'abdication', frequently used to refer to the political act of 305, is highly problematic: see CARLÀ-UHINK 2019, 151–164.

49 HEKSTER 1999, 718.

was conceived and what the specific modalities of its appointment were. Once it had come into existence and a specific language of symbols across different media had been developed to legitimate the number four as the correct, normative number of rulers, this language then suggested and furthered the expectation that the imperial college would go on being formed by four members in the future. In this sense, the numerological justifications of both the 'dyarchy' of 286-293 and of the 'tetrarchy' after 293, as revealed by the *Panegyrici Latini*, are significative: they give us glimpses into these processes and they reveal precisely by what means the ideological 'construction' of the current number of emperors as the only normatively correct number acceptable was undertaken.[50]

The analysis of those elements constituting the 'ideology' of the imperial college and its legitimacy informs the first section of this volume, with individual chapters undertaking a revision of some of the best-known aspects of 'tetrarchic' representations of imperial power. In the first chapter, Filippo Carlà-Uhink investigates the role of real and fictive families and family representations, comparing the use of such elements during the 'tetrarchy' with the practice of the 3rd and of the early 4th century. Following this, Byron Waldron focuses on the concept of brotherhood, the one specific family relationship that played a crucial role in 'tetrarchic ideology'; he demonstrates its connections to military language and shows the deep interlocking of the various aspects of imperial (self-)representation, in this case the familial metaphor and the role of the emperor as military commander. In the third and last chapter of this section, Anne Hunnell Chen reconsiders the *nomina* Iovius and Herculius, highlighting that 'tetrarchic ideology', as assemblage, was also subject to regional variations and hues, a point on which we will come back later.

Hunnell Chen's chapter likewise stresses that any analysis of the 'assemblage tetrarchy' cannot be exclusively limited to literary sources; as mentioned above, the spoken and written word are part of all ideological constructs, but these also include and are informed by visual representations, by performances and rituals, whose importance in establishing and reinforcing the legitimacy of (imperial) power cannot be underestimated. The second section of the volume is thus dedicated to such tetrarchic performances and manifestations of power. This is not a completely new approach: a collective volume edited in 2006 by Dietrich Boschung and Werner Eck has been seminal in showing the necessity of studying in greater depth the different forms of mediatic presentation of tetrarchy – yet the authors of that volume still started from the assumption that the tetrarchy represented a new 'political system', as explicitly stated in the very title of the book.[51] This collection of studies was additionally structured according to the different media deployed in representing the tetrarchy – from inscriptions to laws, from papyri to coins. What we have tried to pursue here is a different approach, aiming rather at reconstructing the complex interaction of different media in composing the political language developed in individual contexts or aimed at specific target publics.

50 Cf. Carlà-Uhink 2019, 47–58.
51 Boschung & Eck 2006.

Christian Rollinger thus proposes a new perspective on the changes in aulic imperial ceremonies and political rituals that have been traditionally ascribed, by both our sources and modern scholarship, but for different reasons, to Diocletian. Fabio Guidetti's chapter is also centred on political rituals, but of a more 'public' nature, as he specifically analyses ceremonies occurring outside the palace and court, particularly the 'new' tetrarchic *adventus*, which he understands as a 'staging of tetrarchic ideology'. In this section's final chapter, Monica Hellström investigates the role of statues in representing both the members of the imperial collegium and the local officials, thus shaping an articulated representation of power, from the 'abstract presentation' of the *Augusti* to the very concrete depiction of the local authorities in charge. This shows the potentiality of investigating the imperial representation next to and together with the representation of other elites and interest groups within the empire, to highlight the convergence into the new tetrarchic assemblage of different levels of political (self-)representation and discourse.

Indeed, the need to reject any image of an ideology as 'organic totality' and the necessity of thinking of them as 'assemblages', become even clearer when one considers the flexibility of ideology – and also of 'tetrarchic ideology': individual elements could be deployed in a more or less present way, or in different functional combinations, according to the specific public that was addressed and its forms of understanding and constructing legitimacy and obedience. The third section of the volume is dedicated to the investigation of a series of case studies revealing these individual forms that 'tetrarchic language' assumed when addressing specific social groups or localities of the empire. Mark Hebblewhite thus investigates tetrarchic messages aimed at the military and the construction of a common ideology of victory; Nikolas Hächler concentrates on the relationships between the imperial college and the Senate, traditionally described as difficult or even hostile; finally, Nicola Barbagli analyses the forms adopted by 'tetrarchic language' in a very peculiar local context: the city of Hermonthis in Egypt.

A crucial element in the construction of any 'ideology', which, as we have seen, shapes identities and notions of belonging through (inter alia) the definition of a recognisable set of normative values, is the representation of those deviating from the acknowledged norm. As mentioned above, their identification, portrayal and punishment are crucial aspects both for their material and their expressive role within the 'assemblage'. For this reason, a separate section is dedicated to two case studies analysing the role of the 'Others', that is of those who are perceived and identified as the 'outsiders' and 'enemies' of the 'tetrarchic order'. Adrastos Omissi thus devotes his chapter to the representation of 'barbarians', usurpers and dissidents within the language of the 'tetrarchy', particularly in the context of imperial panegyric. Marc Tipold, on the other hand, investigates the discursive construction of the Sāsānian empire as an enemy power and thus the role of the military actions against it in defining aims and legitimation of the imperial power of Diocletian and Galerius.

The chapters of a final section look at the discursive and ideological presentation of former emperors. Javier Arce investigates the imperial mausolea and the forms that have been developed to memorialise the 'tetrarchic emperors' after their

death, while Rebecca Usherwood considers the practices of *damnatio memoriae* exercised against individual 'tetrarchs'. This again leads us to the point of stressing the continuous change, the dynamic nature of 'ideology' conceived as assemblage. Famously, the 'tetrarchic ideology' did not survive long enough to allow for a true embedding of the previous generation of emperors within it. Or, better put: the death, memorialisation, and disgrace of the 'tetrarchs' took place mostly at a time, when forms of legitimation and enforcement had already changed noticeably.

## THE 'END' OF THE 'TETRARCHY'

Yet the approach developed here allows us indeed to reopen the discussion about the 'end' of the 'tetrarchy'. In literature, this has been too often conceived as the narrative of a clash between the 'defenders' of the 'system' created by Diocletian (i.e. Galerius) and the 'opponents' (i.e. Constantine), whose aim was to destroy that institutional setting.[52] This narrative cannot be accepted in this rather simple form.[53] It has been shown repeatedly that neither can Galerius be considered as a sheepish epigone of Diocletian, struggling to keep the 'tetrarchic dream' alive, nor should Constantine be thought of as someone who, from the very beginning, subverted the existing institutional arrangement while dreaming of becoming sole emperor (for instance, it has been convincingly argued that Constantine's accession to the imperial college in 306 was not an usurpation and that he immediately received the title of a *Caesar*, rather than settling for it in order to avoid a civil war.)[54]

Assemblage theory – which stresses that every assemblage has 'a fully contingent historical identity',[55] and is thus completely unique – comes to our help again, as it recognizes the existence of

> variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of *territorialization* and the latter as processes of *deterritorialization*. One and the same assemblage can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming it into a different assemblage. In fact, one and the same component may participate in both processes by exercising different sets of capacities.[56]

And furthermore:

> The identity of any assemblage at any level of scale is always the product of a process (territorialization and, in some cases, coding) and it is always precarious, since other processes (deterritorialization and decoding) can destabilize it. For this reason, the ontological status of assemblages, large or small, is always that of unique, singular individuals.[57]

52 For Galerius as faithful successor to Diocletian see particularly Leadbetter 2009.
53 See Carlà 2012.
54 Kuhoff 2001a, 796–799; Wienand 2012, 119–127.
55 De Landa 2016, 19.
56 De Landa 2006, 12 (italics in the original).
57 De Landa 2006, 28.