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## THE ATTITUDE OF THE ROMAN AUTHORITIES TO CHRISTIANITY DURING THE REIGN OF THE SEVERAN DYNASTY

### СТАВЛЕННЯ РИМСЬКОЇ ВЛАДИ ДО ХРИСТІЯНСТВА ЗА ДИНАСТІЇ СЕВЕРІВ

*Стаття присвячена ставленню римської влади до християнства за династії Северів. Визначено, що за Северів правовий статус християн не змінився. Християнство залишалося забороненою релігією. Переслідування християн у 197 році було обмеженим, і, ймовірно, було ініційоване натовпом. Каталізатором переслідувань у 203 році був едикт Септімія Севера, який забороняв навернення в іудаїзм та християнство, але був спрямований переважно проти християн. Головними причинами публікації цього едикту були, по-перше, різке збільшення кількості християн та активізація серед них прихильників Монтанізму; по-друге – зростання частки неєвреїв серед прозелітів; по-третє – ідентифікація християн як прихильників магії та віщування. Особливістю цієї хвилі переслідувань було те, що вони, мабуть, відбувалися на всій території імперії, а серед численних мучеників було багато неофітів. Ще однією відмінною особливістю переслідувань 203 було те, що їх ініціатива виходила від імператора. Едикт Септімія Севера згадував одночасно євреїв та християн, але це був останній акт римського уряду, який був спрямований проти євреїв та християн одночасно. Тривалість та інтенсивність переслідувань в різних провінціях були неоднаковою. Є багато свідчень про толерантність Олександра Севера до християн. Але правління Олександра Севера не принесло жодного покращення правового статусу християн. З другої половини II століття можна говорити про зростання серед християн настроїв до більш*

активної участі в офіційних установах римської держави, включаючи армію. Можна констатувати, що християни пішли на компроміс з римським урядом. Саме це сприяло тому, що у відносинах між християнами та владою у другому – третьому століттях існували довгі неконфліктні періоди.

**Ключові слова:** християнство, переслідування, династія Северів, Септімій Север, Олександр Север.

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### ОТНОШЕНИЕ РИМСКОЙ ВЛАСТИ К ХРИСТИАНСТВУ ВО ВРЕМЯ ПРАВЛЕНИЯ ДИНАСТИИ СЕВЕРОВ

Статья посвящена отношению римской власти к христианству во время правления династии Северов. Определено, что во время правления династии Северов правовой статус христиан не изменился. Христианство оставалось запрещённой религией. Преследования христиан в 197 году были ограниченными, и, вероятно, были инициированы толпой. Катализатором преследований в 203 году стал эдикт Септимия Севера, который запрещал обращения в иудаизм и христианство, но был направлен преимущественно против христиан. Правление Александра Севера не улучшило правовой статус христиан.

**Ключевые слова:** христианство, преследования, династия Северов, Септимий Север, Александр Север.

**Overview.** The formation of Christianity and its early history are closely linked to ancient Rome. Christian communities arose both in Rome itself and in provincial cities; Christian texts were written in Latin and in Greek, which ensured the widest possible spread of Christian doctrine, both in the West and in the Eastern Provinces. The Roman Empire provided a broad political, social and religious environment for the emergence of early Christianity [24, 69]. Actually, Christianity transformed into a world culture phenomenon due to the realities of existence within the Roman Empire, where religious life was not private, but a state affair. However, the process of Christianization of the

Roman Empire was complex and ambiguous. In the first three centuries Christians were persecuted by the Roman authorities. The study of the interaction between the Christianity and the authorities is extremely important both to understand the internal policies of the Roman government and to understand the essence of Christianization. In historiography, we even can find the identification of Christianization with the process of interaction between Christianity and various secular institutions [5, 196 – 197]. Ambrogio Donini believes that Christianization of the empire was actually a merger of Christianity with the new state institutions [4, 171].

**Analysis of recent research and publications** reveals that the problem of the relationship between Christianity and Roman authorities is largely considered in the context of the persecutions of Christians. This seems justified, given that the study of the causes of these persecutions allows us to understand the logic of the integration of Christianity into Roman society and the evolution of its relationship with the Roman authorities. By carefully examining the legal, political and religious aspects of the attitude of the Romans towards Christians, scientists are trying to find an acceptable solution to the problem of persecution of Christians [21, 131]. There's a lot of talk with regard to the possibility of existence of a general law adopted during the reign of Nero or Domitian, in force in the entire empire, prohibiting the Christianity. Proponents of the theory of *coercitio* believe that Christians were punished by Roman officials without resorting to special legislation, founded on their authority based on their *imperium*. It is also stated that the persecution of Christians took place on the basis of existing laws against specific crimes: infanticide, incest, magic, etc. In addition, there was expressed an opinion that the government policy on Christianity depended on the wishes and views of the incumbent emperor [7, 5 – 36; 13, 116; 14, 25; 31, 209; 33, 199]. Obviously John Crake was right to call this controversy «endless» [16, 62]. Adrian Sherwin-White thoroughly looked into the aforementioned theories in the appendix to his comments on the letters of Pliny the Younger [34, 772 – 787].

The problem of the government's policy on Christianity during the period of the Severan dynasty remains obscure. A vivid example of controversy is the Septimius Severus edict concerning Jews and Christians. There is no consensus on the time of its publication and the

influence on the development of Christianity it had [7, 231 – 237; 9, 15; 29, 154], whether this was an edict, as we also think, or a rescript [18, 511; 23, 573 – 574; 30, 123], there even are expressed doubts regarding the very fact of the existence of this edict [6, 345; 12, 41; 36, 261].

**The aim** of the research is to define the attitude of the Roman authorities to Christianity during the reign of the Severan dynasty as well as to clarify the reasons for the persecution of Christians.

At the end of the first century BC there were formed necessary prerequisites for the successful establishment of Christian ideology in Roman society. In this context, it should be mentioned that the Roman, who was a true follower of traditional Roman beliefs, was, more likely, ready to accept the basic postulates of the Christian religion. It was quite common to believe in the immortality of the soul [26, 41]. The veneration of the souls (*manes*) of their ancestors was a commonplace for the Romans. The emperor, as a rule, during his lifetime was awarded the title *pater patriae* – father of the Fatherland. Naturally, the deceased emperor had the divine honors. John Kenrick reasonably good guessed that almost universal introduction of epitaphs *Diis Manibus*, or abbreviation *D.M.* indicates general belief that the spiritual component of human nature continues to exist after death [22, 52]. There is reason to believe that in the minds of the Romans, the souls of dead relatives became younger deities – *manes*. The Roman writers told about the existence of the soul after death, such information we also find on the epitaphs [27]. So, for the Romans, the idea of the existence of the soul after the death of the body was not new. It was new that Christianity told not only about the existence of the soul after the death of the body, but also about the salvation of the soul. However, this fact, obviously, should not have caused a negative reaction in Roman society. Not surprisingly, at the end of the second century, the number of Christians increased significantly.

There was an opinion about the tendency towards a certain religious tolerance during the reign of the Severan dynasty [10, 62]. Tertullian told us about the goodwill of Septimius Severus towards Christians (Tert. ad Scap. 4). Indeed, the beginning of the reign of Septimius Severus was peaceful for Christians. They joined the ranks of the Roman military forces more actively, and even baptized Christians enlisted in the army [19, 291]. In all regions of the Roman Empire,

there is much evidence of the enrolment of Christians in military service, at least since the middle of the second century [20, 156]. This trend, in part, can be explained by the increase in the attraction of the military service due to the reforms of Septimius Severus. He increased the fee to the soldiers and, apart from other privileges, gave them the right to marry «to live with their wives» (*γυναιξί τε συνοιχεῖν*) (Herodian 3.8.5). However, we should not exaggerate the mercantile motives in the desire of Christians to join the army. The previous increase in salaries to legionnaires was carried out by Emperor Domitian. The reform of Septimius Severus only made up for the inflation that had taken place since that time [35, 492]. In any case, there is a reason to believe that there was a tendency for more active participation of Christians in the official institutions of the Roman state, including the army.

A perceptible increase in the number of Christians inevitably increased the risk of conflict situations between them and the rest of society. This was facilitated by the intensification among the Christians of factions with extremist views, in particular, Montanists, who called themselves *πνευματικοί*. These were extreme rigorists who opposed military service, urged their followers to become voluntary martyrs and did not approve of escape by flight, as opposed to the policy of the official Church. The follower of this faction, at a certain stage of his life, was a prominent Christian writer Tertullian. Montanists, who expressed extreme views in Christianity, gave enough reasons for association with the most dangerous forms of superstition, such as magic and divination. The typical terminology of Montanism (*χάρις, δύναμις, πνεῦμα*) is constantly found in magical papyri [38, 277]. Among Christians there were also those, who personally engaged in magic and astrology (Tert. De idololat. 9). Legislation, however, severely punished those engaged in magic and divination. This is referred to by legal experts at the time of Severan dynasty: the soothsayers (*vaticinatores*), after being beaten with sticks, were expelled from the city (*primum fustibus caesi civitate pelluntur*). Particularly malicious were put into fetters or sent «to the island» (*in insulam*). Anyone who introduced new, unknown religious doctrines could be exiled if he was of noble origin (*honestiores*) or executed if he was from commoners (*humiliores*) (Paulus. Sententiae. 5.21.1 – 2).

In our opinion, the hypothesis that precisely «Montanism was a prelude and cause of local persecution» [28, 201] is sufficiently sub-

stantiated. Perhaps it was Montanists who were the catalyst for persecutions that began in 197 in the Proconsul province of Africa. Paulus Orosius points out that Septimius Severus subjected Christians to the fifth, after Nero, persecution (*quinta post Neronem persecutione Christianos excruciauit*) and many of them suffered martyrdom (Oros. 7.17.4). Sources do not give us too much information about these events. Our knowledge is based on the works of Tertullian: «To the Martyrs» (*Ad martyras*), «To the Nations» (*Ad nationes*) and «Apologeticus» (*Apologeticum*). All of them were written in 197, or a little later. According to the sources, those who were revealed in the practice of Christianity were thrown into jail. The prisoners were supported by the brothers in faith. Among them was Tertullian, who cheered prisoners with the words: «the prison gives the Christians what the desert gives the prophets» (*Hoc praestat carcer Christiano, quod eremus prophetis*). Tertullian listed «positive» sides of arrest: prisoners did not see strange gods, did not encounter their images etc. (Tert. *Ad martyras*. 2). The arguments cited by Tertullian should have prevented the apostasy, which was an inevitable companion for any persecution. Paul Keresztes rightly noted the anxiety of Tertullian about apostasy [23, 568]. Probably the initiator of the persecution of 197, as it often happened, was not the government, but the crowd. This is evidenced by the words of Tertullian. Shortly after the aforementioned events, he uses the phrase «an uneducated crowd» (*indoctum vulgus*), «a stupefied crowd» (*caecum vulgus*) (Tert. *Apol.* 22; 49). The hostility of the crowd was largely caused by the lack of reliable information about the essence of Christian doctrine and the distorted perceptions of the relationship between Christians. Tertullian says: «Some of you have dreamed that the donkey's head is our god» (*Nam et, ut quidam, somniastis caput asininum esse deum nostrum*) (Tert. *Apol.* 1). But if such concoction, as well as rumors of Thyestean feasts and Oedipal relations between Christians, had no real basis, the denial of the traditional gods was a reality. And it required a proper reaction from the rulers. Roman religion did not envisage the ban of other cults. Starting under the Flavian dynasty, the Roman coins testify the emergence of eastern cults that get an official character. But even under the Severan dynasty, which was favorable towards the Eastern cults, coins are devoted mainly to Roman gods [1, 421 – 430]. The Romans perceived their religion as part of the state system. During the Principate period, emperors relied on traditional Roman religion

and imperial cult. Therefore, the fact that Christians neglected traditional Roman religion was perceived as an encroachment on the basis of a state organization.

Another aspect of the conflict between Rome and Christians was the disrespect of the latter to the ancestral custom – *mos maiorum* (as it was treated by the Romans). In Rome, the observance of ancient customs was considered to be an inherent part of the duties of each individual citizen and the community as a whole. The introduction of the Principate was accompanied by a struggle for the revival of ancient traditions, which was supposed to reduce foreign influences. At the same time, the Romans endorsed the respect for strict adherence to tradition by other peoples, as can be seen from the example of the assessment given by Valerius Maximus to Massilians: «*Inde Massilienses quoque ad hoc tempus usurpant disciplinae gravitatem, prisca moris observantia, caritate populi Romani praecipue conspicui*» (also Massilians in terms of careful observance of obligations, following the customs of their ancestors, remarkably remind the Roman people) (Val. Max. 2.6.7). Therefore, it is not surprising that those emperors who have taken the greatest care of the interests of the state persecuted Christians the most consistently, and those are, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Leaving the activities of Christians without proper reaction meant to encourage them and others to neglect their duties towards the state. Joseph Plescia believes it should be spoken not of the struggle between Christians and pagans, but between Christianity and *Romanitas*, i.e. «the Roman way of life» [30, 121 – 123].

There were other factors that caused hostility towards Christians, in particular, the presence in the Christian communities of a large number of foreigners, who came from the eastern provinces. Negative reaction was also caused by the attempts of Christians to dissociate themselves from all others in a society where the life of a private person was traditionally public. Of all the «superstitions» of that time only Christianity preached an idea about its own exclusiveness [3, 90].

Thus, the first persecution of Christians during the reign of the Severan dynasty, which took place in Africa in 197, was limited in scope and was probably committed on the initiative of the crowd.

According to Eusebius, in the tenth year of the reign of Septimius Severus (*δέκατον μὲν γὰρ ἐπεῖχε Σευήρος τῆς βασιλείας ἔτος*) (Euseb. Hist. eccl. 6.2), i.e. 203, the second persecution of Christians

began, which lasted for several years. We have a lot more information about these events. The most important sources are «Church History» (*Historia Ecclesiastica*) of Eusebius; biography of Septimius Severus (*Vita Severi*), written by Aelius Spartianus; and the Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas (*Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*), which is some kind of report on the suffering and death of Christian martyrs [32, 60 – 95]. The catalyst for this persecution of Christians was the edict of Septimius Severus against the Jews and Christians (201 – 202). According to the testimony of Aelius Spartianus, the emperor, under penalty of punishment, forbade to convert people to Judaism (*Iudaeos fieri*), he also declared the same for Christians (*Idem etiam de Christianis sanxit*) (HA. Sev. 17.1). This testimony of Aelius Spartianus forces to reject Paul Allard's assumption that the prohibition of Septimius Severus meant only the material act of circumcision. Neither can one support the assertion that Septimius Severus tried to persecute only individual Christians, and not Christianity as a whole [2, 71 – 74]. Apparently, Joseph Plescia is right, arguing that this edict «was directed against Christianity, not against the Christians» [30, 124]. Aleksej Lebedev rightly considers this edict as an attempt by the government to put an end the propaganda of Christianity without encroaching on the rights of Christians. Thus, Christianity was to a certain extent recognized as an authorized religion. The law rather protected the *status quo* of pagan religion, especially Roman, than attacked religions that contradicted the dominant cult [7, 228 – 231]. Andrzej Wypustek allows for the possibility that the key to understanding the edict of Septimius Severus must be sought first of all in the struggle against magic and divination. The researcher believes that this was the basis for the behavior of Septimius Severus and his officials [38, 285].

The peculiarity of this wave of persecution was that they probably occurred throughout the Empire, or, as Paulus Orosius said, in different provinces (*per diversas provincias*) (Oros. 7.17.4), and among numerous martyrs there were many neophytes. According to Eusebius, a particularly large number of martyrs were in Alexandria, where they were brought from all over Egypt. Among the executed in Alexandria was Leonidas, who was known as the father of Origen (*Λεωνίδης, ὁ λεγόμενος Ὁριγένους πατήρ*). Another distinguishing feature of the persecution of 203 was that its initiative came from the emperor, as the Eusebius clearly says (Euseb. Hist. eccl. 6.1; 2.2). Of course, the em-



peror did not prepare the decrees (*constitutiones principum*) personally. Such issues were dealt with by the personal secretary of the emperor – *ab epistulis*. The department headed by him practically administered the entire administration: it prepared instructions for officials, rescript and edicts that were issued on behalf of the emperor and sent throughout the entire Empire (*magnum late dimittere in orbem Romulei mandata ducis*), controlled troops and state borders (*viresque modosque imperii tractare manu*) (Stat. Silv. 5.1.86 – 88).

The fact that the edict of Septimius Severus mentioned simultaneously Jews and Christians testifies to the fact that at that time Christians were regarded as being related to the Jews. However, it was at that time that the percentage of non-Jews increased among newly converted Christians. Apparently, the number of Christians from the Gentiles surpassed the number of Christians from the Jews around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Saint Justin, who wrote the first Apology during the reign of Antoninus Pius, claimed that the Christians of the Gentiles were more numerous (*πλείονας*) as Christians of the Jews and Samaritans (Justin. Apol. 1.53.3). At that time, Latin became the language of the Western Church [17, 234]. The Jews were particularly in disgrace with Septimius Severus because of the uprising that they attempted to raise shortly after his rise to power (HA. Sev. 16.7; Oros. 7.17.3). But one may agree that it was the Christians who were the main target of Septimius Severus's decree [18, 511]. This is confirmed by Eusebius's testimony that during the persecution there were cases of conversion of Christians to Judaism (Euseb. Hist. eccl. 6.12). This edict was the last act of the Roman government, directed against Jews and Christians at the same time. Thus, increasing the share of non-Jews in newly converted Christians could be another motive for Septimius Severus's decree against Christians.

Saints Felicitas and Perpetua, probably, took a martyr's death at the Carthage amphitheater on March, 7 203, although the date is debatable, it might have been year 202 or 204 [15, 618]. Saint Perpetua recorded herself everything that happened to her, up till the moment of her martyr's death. Subsequently, these records were edited and published, perhaps by Tertullian [32, 56 – 57]. Saint Perpetua, like many other martyrs, had to endure not only the physical pain, but also the moral one. After all, by her martyrdom, she inflicted a terrible blow on her parents who did not share her desire for martyrdom. Thus, she

deprived herself of the opportunity to see her newborn son grow. Saint Perpetua's father, until the last minute, in vain persuaded his beloved daughter to retreat and save her life (Passio S. Perpetuae 2). Father's visit to the imprisoned showed that Saint Perpetua belonged to two different worlds. Although the Christian community was more important for her, she was still in another world – her family's one [37, 43].

The decree of Septimius Severus did not change the legal status of Christians. Christianity remained a forbidden religion; its followers were to be executed. But officially searched for and executed were only neophytes. Paul Keresztes rightly points out that the edict of Septimius Severus led to a single real, but really important, change. Unlike Trajan's prohibition to hunt for Christians: *Conquirendi non sunt* (Plin. Ep. 10.97), Septimius Severus authorized the search of proselytes. Although now the authorities did not have to wait for denunciations, the search for neophytes, as the historian observed, depended on the initiative of the provincial authorities [23, 573, 577 – 578]. Tertullian gives examples of the brutal persecution of Christians by the provincial administration, as well as of sympathetic attitude towards them (Tert. ad Scap. 3 – 5). At the same time, it should be kept in mind that there were the persecutions of Christians, which would have taken place without the edict of Septimius Severus, as they had happened earlier, and could have continued and probably did continue.

If Septimius Severus's tolerance to Christians gives rise to serious doubts, then the attitude of another representative of the same dynasty, Alexander Severus, may be determined with a greater degree of certainty. Like Antoninus Pius, he was called «pious» (*pius*) and «virtuous» (*sanctus*) (HA. Alex. Sev. 4.5). Aelius Lampridius states that, in the morning Alexander in the lararium (*in larario*), made oblations (*rem divinam faciebat*). At his lararium were the images of the ancestors, the very best, chosen (*optimos electos*) deified principes, as well as of some just people. Among those the historian names Apollonius, Abraham, Orpheus and Christ (HA. Alex. Sev. 29.2). There is no sufficient reason to object strongly the statement about the image of Christ. It echoes the information about Alexander's tolerance towards Christians, about his plan to build a temple for Christ and the support of Christians in the conflict regarding the land plot with the innkeepers (*popinari*) (HA. Alex. Sev. 22.4; 43.6; 49.6).

Perhaps something from the reports of Alexander Severus's attachment to Christians is not true. Doubtful is the story that he gave a command to write in the Palatine palace an utterance from the Gospel, which he heard from some of the Jews or Christians: «What you do not wish that a man should do to you, do not do to him» (Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris) (HA. Alex. Sev. 51.8). However, the tolerant attitude of this emperor to Christians is certainly undoubted. As Eusebius renders, Julia Mammea, the mother of Alexander Severus, was not only versed in Christian doctrine, she also met with Origen, a well-known Christian writer of that time (Euseb. Hist. eccl. 6.21.3). Paulus Orosius even calls her a Christian (Oros. 7.18.7). The emperor was under the strong influence of his mother (Eutr. 8.23). But the reign of Alexander Severus did not bring any improvement to the legal status of Christians.

In the conflict between the Empire and Christianity, one of the parties was to be destroyed or to give something in. According to Borys Łapicki, Christians settled for a compromise, the essence of which was formulated by Apostle Paul [25, 290]. In his epistle to the Romans, which can be dated year 59 [8, 391], he noted: Any soul (*πάσα ψυχή*) let it be submissive to the supreme authority ... not only because of the fear of punishment, but also through conscience (*οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργήν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν*) (Paul. Romans 13.1; 5). In the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy he emphasizes that we must pray for the kings (*ὑπερ βασιλέων*) and all who are in power (Paul. 1 Tm. 2.1 – 2). Tertullian notes: «A Christian knows that the emperor is set up by his God (sciens a Deo suo constitui) and one must love, fear and respect Him, and wish Him prosperity along with the welfare of the entire Roman Empire». Therefore, says Tertullian, «we make oblations for the health of the emperor, but to our God (*Itaque et sacrificamus pro salute imperatoris, sed Deo nostro*) and we pray for the health of the emperor (*oramus pro salute imperatoris*)» (Tert. Ad Scapul. 2.6; 8 – 9). It is this very practice that contributed to the fact that in the relations between Christians and authorities in the second – third centuries there were long non-conflict periods. During centuries, the confrontation between Rome and Christianity only rarely reached a high level [13, 115].

In sum, we shall state the following: under the Severan dynasty the legal status of Christians, in general, has not changed. Christianity remained a forbidden religion. The persecution of Christians in 197 was

limited in scope and was probably based on the initiative of the crowd. The catalyst of the persecutions in 203 was the edict of Septimius Severus, which forbade the conversion to Judaism and Christianity, but was directed primarily against Christians. The main reasons for the publication of this edict were probably: firstly – a sharp increase in the number of Christians and activation among them of the supporters of Montanism; secondly – the growth of the proportion of non-Jews among the proselytes; and thirdly – the identification of Christians as proponents of magic and divination. The duration and intensity of persecution was uneven in different provinces. From the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century one can speak of an increase among Christians of the spirits for more active participation in the official institutions of the Roman state, including the army. We can state that Christians came to a compromise with the Roman government.

The study of the Decian persecution is a promising line for further research of the problem.

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## THE ATTITUDE OF THE ROMAN AUTHORITIES TO CHRISTIANITY DURING THE REIGN OF THE SEVERAN DYNASTY

This article describes the attitude of the Roman authorities to Christianity during the reign of the Severan dynasty. It is well proved that under the Severan dynasty the legal status of Christians did not change. Christianity remained a forbidden religion. The persecution of Christians in 197 was limited in scope and was probably based on

the initiative of the crowd. The catalyst of the persecutions in 203 was the edict of Septimius Severus, which forbade the conversion to Judaism and Christianity, but in truth was directed primarily against Christians. The most likely reasons for the publication of that edict were: firstly – a sharp increase in the number of Christians and activation among them of the supporters of Montanism; secondly – the growth of the proportion of non-Jews among the proselytes; and thirdly – the identification of Christians as proponents of magic and divination. The peculiarity of this wave of persecution was that they probably occurred throughout the whole Empire and among numerous martyrs there were many neophytes. Another distinguishing feature of the persecution of 203 was that its initiative came from the emperor himself. The edict of Septimius Severus mentioned simultaneously Jews and Christians but it was the last act of the Roman government, directed against Jews and Christians at the same time. The duration and intensity of persecution was uneven in different provinces. There is much evidence about Alexander Severus' tolerance towards Christians. But the reign of Alexander Severus did not bring any improvement to the legal status of Christians.

From the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century one can speak of an increase among Christians for more active participation in the official institutions of the Roman state, including the army. We can state that Christians came to a compromise with the Roman government. It is this very practice that contributed to the fact that in the relations between Christians and authorities in the second – third centuries there were long non-conflict periods.

**Keywords:** Christianity, persecutions, Severan dynasty, Septimius Severus, Alexander Severus.

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