

For much of the history of the Roman Empire, we are dependent for the public image of usurpers almost entirely upon one type of evidence: coinage. In the fourth century CE, however, usurpers were often able to control a region for a period of years and we consequently have more abundant epigraphic material erected in the name of such men – almost always in the form of milestones. As with the production of coinage, much about the extent to which a regime controlling an area was involved in the erection and content of milestones is obscure – to what extent did the regime dictate what titulature was presented on a milestone? To what extent can we consider milestones ‘propaganda’ for that regime? (For a summary of the debate, see Rathmann 2006). This paper will focus on a particularly interesting group of milestones erected in the name of the mid-fourth century usurper Magnentius, who controlled Gaul, Italy and Africa over the period 350-353. These milestones make tantalising suggestions about the extent of the role that could be played by the ruling regime in the representation of the imperial claimant. Milestones for Magnentius have been found in those areas where he was acknowledged: Gaul, Spain, Italy and Africa. For the most part, in Transalpine Gaul, Spain and Africa these milestones carry a divergent, but usually simple, array of titles for Magnentius. A good example is:

D(omino) n(ostro) | Imp(eratori) | Magnentio | Augusto (Africa, *AE* 1987, no. 1014b).

However, in Cisalpine Gaul and Northern Italy, a much more complex group of titles is consistently used:

Liberatori | orbis Romani, | resitutori libertatis et r(ei) p(ublicae), | conservatori militum et provin|cialium, domino nos|tro Magnentio, invic|to victo (sic) principi, victori et triumphato(ri), | semper Augusto (Cisalpine Gaul, *CIL* 5.8066). See also Cisalpine Gaul (*CIL* 5.8061a); North-central Italy (*CIL* 11.6640a, 11.6643, 11.6647); *Regiones* II, IV and V (*CIL* 9.5397, 9.5940, 9.5951, *AE* 1951 no. 17, 1992 no. 379a); *Regio* VIII (*AE* 1993 no. 712b); *Regio* X (*AE* 1987 no. 443, 1992 no. 741), *Regio* XI (*AE* 1992 no. 783).

This consistent complexity in titulature, in contrast to the chaos elsewhere, and its use in a limited geographic area is striking and seems to represent an instance of a more direct role by Magnentius’ regime in disseminating a coherent public image of the usurper. The relatively confined geographical area in which these milestones are found suggests a connection with the location of the Magnentius’ court in Aquileia. The conclusion that these milestones represent a more direct role for Magnentius’ regime is strengthened by the parallel between the use of the theme of *libertas* in these inscriptions and a similar emphasis in Magnentius’ coinage (see, e.g., *RIC VIII*, pp. 260-4 and Kellner 1969). A similar theme is also found in literary descriptions of Magnentius’ usurpation as a response to the ‘tyranny’ of Constans (Orosius 7.29.7; Zos. 2.42.1, Aur. Vict. 41.23).