





# KOINON

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διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ (ξυνῷ, τουτέστι τῷ) κοινῷ·  
ξυνὸς γὰρ ὁ κοινός. τοῦ λόγου δὲ ἐόντος ξυνοῦ  
ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὥς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν

Heraclitus, via Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos*, VII 133



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# Redating Nepotian's Usurpation and the Coinage of Magnentius

SHAWN CAZA

## Summary

A re-examination of the historical sources, based on an idea put forward in April 2010 by Curtis Clay, supports the possibility that the date of the brief rebellion of Nepotian at Rome should be changed from the traditionally accepted June 350 to May-June 351.<sup>1</sup> Such a change appears to provide for a closer match with many historical sources, better fits the sequence of other historical events, and better explains the distribution and layout of the coinage of Magnentius. Such a change necessitates a redating of most of the phases of Magnentius' coinage, from those outlined by Pierre Bastien in his *opus magnum* *Le monnayage de Magnence*, and a revision of several other numismatic assumptions. This article lays out the justification for changing the date of Nepotian's rebellion and provides a revised dating for Magnentius' bronze coinage.

## Historical Introduction

On 18 January 350, Flavius Magnus Magnentius, a Roman army commander in Gaul, declared himself Emperor of the western part of the Empire and had the legitimate western Emperor Constans hunted down and murdered.

While Magnentius exercised immediate control over the Prefecture of Gaul, comprising modern France, Britain and Spain, a power vacuum was left in the rest of Constans' territories. Italy found itself effectively under self-administration for the month or so until Magnentius' forces moved in to take control at the end of February 350. The Balkans, which had also been part of Constans' territory, fell under the control of Constans' *magister peditum* (commander of infantry) Vetranio.

Magnentius displayed no intention of wanting to conquer the entire Empire but instead hoped to gain recognition as the legitimate Emperor of the West from Constans' surviving brother Constantius II, who ruled the East. While Magnentius replaced Constans with himself on the coinage, he continued to also strike coins in the name of Constantius II, at the mints of Arelate, Aquileia and Rome.

Meanwhile, Vetranio, with the help of Constantina, sister of Constantius II, proclaimed himself Emperor in the Balkans in order to resist Magnentius. Magnentius tried to lure Vetranio to his side with offers of cooperation but was not successful. Vetranio remained in control of the Balkans throughout 350, and then turned over all power to Constantius and retired when the latter arrived from the East on 25 December 350.

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis Clay posting on 15 April 2010, on the Forum Ancient Coins website: <http://www.forumancientcoins.com/board/index.php?topic=62201.0>. My work has benefitted from frequent correspondence and commentary by Curtis Clay over the last several years. The argument for redating Nepotian's rebellion originates with Clay.

Faced with the prospect of war on two fronts, Constantius promoted his nephew Constantius Gallus to the rank of Caesar on 15 March 351.<sup>2</sup> Gallus was then sent by Constantius to Antioch to lead the defence against the Persians, while Constantius remained in the Balkans to deal with Magnentius.

By the middle of 351 Magnentius gave up all hope of gaining acceptance from Constantius and moved his army eastwards, taking Siscia (Sisak, Croatia) in August 351. The Battle of Mursa (Osijek, Croatia) on 28 September 351, between the forces of Magnentius and Constantius, was one of the bloodiest civil war battles in Roman history, leaving an estimated 50,000 dead. The battle was effectively a draw, but Magnentius decided to retreat westwards, back to Italy. Constantius followed him westwards and re-took Siscia. Magnentius retreated from Italy over the Alps into Gaul in September 352. Constantius remained in northern Italy for some time until finally crossing into Gaul in July 353 and defeating Magnentius in August.

## Nepotian and His Rebellion

Sometime during this period a short lived rebellion against Magnentius, led by an usurper named Nepotian, occurred at Rome. Relatively little is known about Nepotian. His full name was Flavius Popilius Nepotianus. He was a relative of Constantius II - reportedly the son of Eutropia, who was the daughter of Constantius II's grandfather Constantius I Chlorus. A certain Virius Nepotianus, believed to be Nepotian's father, served as Consul under Constantine I in 336.<sup>3</sup>

The dating almost universally accepted among historians and numismatists today is that Nepotian's rebellion occurred between 3 and 30 June 350. This is the dating found, for example, in AHM Jones' *The Late Roman Empire*, Paul Stephenson's *Constantine, The Cambridge Ancient History* (volume XIII), Stevenson's 1889 *Dictionary of Roman Coins*, Carson, Hill and Kent's *Late Roman Bronze Coinage*, Kent's *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (volume VIII), Carson's *Coins of the Roman Empire*, and Bastien's *Le monayage de Magnence*.

In fact, this traditional dating is based on an entry in the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*.<sup>4</sup> As will be demonstrated, this date makes little sense when other ancient sources and the numismatic evidence are examined and when the other historical events are considered. It is much more likely that the surviving version of the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* contains an error, not an uncommon occurrence in ancient manuscripts, and that this date has simply been accepted by historians and numismatists since.

## What the Ancient Sources Say

Many other ancient sources discuss Nepotian's rebellion. However, none of these other sources give a specific date. Instead they simply describe the events of the time in sequence.

All of these ancient sources agree on two key facts about the rebellion; that it followed Vetrano's taking of the purple on 1 March 350, and that it occurred prior to the battle of Mursa on 28 September 351. The sources also agree that Nepotian had a very short reign and was defeated

<sup>2</sup> R.W. Burgess, ed, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 237.

<sup>3</sup> "The Chronography of 354. Part 8: Consular feasts from the fall of the kings to AD 354. MGH Chronica Minora I (1892), pp.50-61.", accessed 18 November 2017, [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography\\_of\\_354\\_08\\_fasti.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography_of_354_08_fasti.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, 237.

by forces commanded by Magnentius' general Marcellinus before the rebellion had spread beyond Rome. Where the ancient sources differ is on whether Nepotian's rebellion occurs before or after Vetranio's retirement on 25 December 350.

Two ancient historians, Zosimus and Socrates Scholasticus, outline events in a sequence that matches the currently accepted chronological order.<sup>5</sup> In Zosimus' *Historia Nova* (II.43.2-4) the description of Vetranio's rise is followed by that of Nepotian's short-lived rebellion, which is followed by the end of Vetranio's power. Socrates' *Historia Ecclesiastica* follows the same order (II.25) but then adds Constantius' appointment of Gallus Caesar (II.28) and the Battle of Mursa (II.32).

In other words, both of these sources describe Nepotian's rebellion between Vetranio's accession on 1 March 350 and his abdication on 25 December 350. However, it should be noted that neither of these sources provide the 3 June date adopted by modern historians for Nepotian's rebellion as found in the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*.

Other ancient historians outline events in an order which differs from that of Zosimus and Socrates. In Aurelius Victor's *Liber de Caesaribus* the entry on Nepotian (42.6) follows that on Vetranio's rise and fall (41.26).<sup>6</sup> Victor then goes on (42.9) to state that Magnentius made Decentius Caesar, and Constantius made Gallus Caesar, *before* Nepotian's rebellion.

The *Epitome de Caesaribus*, sometimes ascribed to Aurelius Victor, but likely not written by him, provides a similar outline.<sup>7</sup> Its entry on Nepotian (42.3) comes after the description of Vetranio's reign, including his abdication to Constantius II (41.25), Constantius naming Gallus Caesar (42.1), and Magnentius naming Decentius Caesar (42.2). However, the *Epitome* does not state explicitly that the events occur in the order described. The entry on Nepotian begins with the words "In these days", as does the entry describing the battle of Mursa (42.4).

Eutropius' *Breviarum ab urbe condita* follows the same general pattern.<sup>8</sup> Vetranio is made Emperor (X.10.3) and then hands over power to Constantius (X.11.1). Nepotian's rebellion is then described with the words, "at the same time" (X.11.2). Magnentius is then defeated at the Battle of Mursa "not long afterwards" (X.12.1).

Orosius' *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri* once again follows the same pattern.<sup>9</sup> Vetranio's rise and fall is detailed (VII.29.9-10), followed by Nepotian's rebellion (VII.29.11), followed by Magnentius' loss at Mursa (VII.29.12).

In other words, Aurelius Victor, the *Epitome*, Eutropius and Orosius all describe Nepotian's rebellion after they describe Vetranio's abdication (25 December 350). Though Aurelius Victor is the only one who explicitly states that event occurred in this order, there does not seem to be any reason for the other three sources to describe the events out of chronological order.

<sup>5</sup> "Zosimus. *New History*, Translated from the original Greek, with the notes of the Oxford Edition. London: W. Green & T. Chaplin (1814)." Accessed 18 November 2017. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/New\\_History](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/New_History), and "Socrates Scholasticus. *The Historia Ecclesiastica*. Translated by A.C. Zenos. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight." Accessed 18 November 2017. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2601.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> "Aurelius Victor. *Liber de caesaribus*, alternately titled *Historiae abbreviatae*. Ed. Franz Pichlmayr. Teubner 1911." Accessed 18 November 2017. [http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/victor\\_caes.html](http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/victor_caes.html).

<sup>7</sup> "Epitome de Caesaribus. Translated by Thomas M. Banchich. *Canisius College Translated Texts*. 2009, 2nd edition." Accessed 18 November 2017. <https://www.roman-emperors.org/epitome.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> "Eutropius. *Breviarium ab urbe condita*. Translated, with notes, by the Rev. John Selby Watson. London, 1853." Accessed 18 November 2017. <http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/eutropius/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Paulus Orosius. *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*. As edited by C. Zangemeister." Accessed 18 November 2017. <http://www.attalus.org/latin/orosius.html>.

## REDATING NEPOTIAN'S USURPATION AND THE COINAGE OF MAGNENTIUS

The phrase “in these days” in the Epitome offers no clarity either way. It is used for both Nepotian's rebellion and the later Battle of Mursa (28 September 351). Eutropius' phrase “at the same time” likewise offers little clarity. It follows a sentence which describes Vetrano's complete tenure (March to December 350). He describes the Battle of Mursa (28 September 351) as occurring “not long after” Nepotian's rebellion.

### The Prefects of Rome

An important piece of evidence for untangling this issue is found in the terms of office of the Prefects of Rome during this period. The attested terms are as follows.<sup>10</sup>

Prefect of Rome	Term of Office	Duration
Hermogenes	20 May 349 - 27 February 350	9 months, 7 days
Fabius Titianus	27 February 350 - 1 March 351	12 months, 2 days
Aurelius Celsinus	1 March 351 - 12 May 351	2 months, 11 days
Caelius Probatus	12 May 351 - 7 June 351	26 days
Clodius Adelfius	7 June 351 - 18 December 351	6 months, 11 days
Valerius Proculus	18 December 351 - 9 September 352	8 months, 22 days
Septimius Mnaesa	9 September 352 - 26 September 352	17 days
Naeratius Cerealis	26 September 352 - 8 December 353	14 months, 12 days

Hermogenes was Constans' last prefect and was ousted when Magnentius' forces took control of Rome and installed Fabius Titianus, who had previously worked for Constans but had joined with Magnentius in January 350. Naeratius Cerealis was Constantius' first appointee after Magnentius was ousted from Italy. Thus the prefects from Fabius Titianus to Septimius Mnaesa cover the period of Magnentius' control over Rome and Italy, including the brief rebellion of Nepotian.

An examination of the terms of the Prefects of Rome shows that if the rebellion occurred on the traditionally accepted dates of 3 - 30 June 350, then Fabius Titianus, a prefect loyal to, and appointed by, Magnentius held his position throughout the rebellion and, indeed, for eight months afterwards. This contrasts with the version of events outlined by Aurelius Victor who reports (42.6) that the Prefect of Rome was killed defending the city against Nepotian's rebellion. In order to reconcile these two facts, some scholars have therefore posited a complicated scenario in which Victor was mistaken when he reported that the official who was killed was the Prefect of Rome. These scholars posit that the official who was killed must actually have been the Praetorian Prefect, and that the Prefect of Rome, Titianus, simply left Rome during Nepotian's rebellion only to return after Nepotian's defeat.<sup>11</sup> However, none of these elements are reported in any ancient source. It is much simpler for us to

<sup>10</sup> “*The Chronography of 354. Part 8: Consular feasts from the fall of the kings to AD 354. MGH Chronica Minora I (1892), pp.50-61.*” Accessed 18 November 2017. [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography\\_of\\_354\\_08\\_fasti.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography_of_354_08_fasti.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Bastien notes Lenain de Tillemont and Andre Chastagnol as key proponents of this theory. Pierre Bastien, *Le monnayage de Magnence (350-353)*, 2nd ed, (Wettern: Éditions Numismatique Romaine, 1983), 12.

accept Victor's assertion at face value. Victor's narrative is internally consistent given that, as noted above, Victor did not assign a date of 350 to Nepotian's rebellion. The problem in accepting Victor's version of events only arises for those who are wedded, despite the evidence to the contrary, to the June 350 dating found in the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*.

If, on the other hand, we examine the dates of the prefects that came after Titianus we see that one of them, Caelius Probatus, held his position for 26 days, from 12 May to 7 June 351. The similarity of Probatus' 26 day term of office to the 28 day reign of Nepotian, the period specifically mentioned in both the *Epitome* and Eutropius, is more than mere coincidence.<sup>12</sup> Dating Nepotian's rebellion to the period of Probatus' term of office places it after the retirement of Vetricianus on 25 December 350, thereby better matching the majority of ancient sources as noted above. Victor's version of events regarding the death of a Prefect can be fleshed out - Probatus' predecessor Aurelius Celsinus was the Prefect of Rome killed while defending the city gates from Nepotian's forces.

Clay posited a scenario whereby Nepotian began his rebellion on 10 May 351 and named the otherwise unknown Caelius Probatus as Prefect of Rome on 12 May, replacing Magnentius' second Prefect Aurelius Celsinus. In this scenario Probatus was replaced with Clodius Adelphus, presumably a Magnentius loyalist, when Nepotian was defeated by the general Marcellinus on 7 June.

### Magnentius' Medallions

Another piece of evidence regarding the dating of Nepotian's rebellion can be found in the titulature of Magnentius' early medallions. Clay has been able to show, from the imperial titles on second century bronze medallions, that virtually all of them were struck November to December of each year, but were dated ahead to 1 January for use as New Year's gifts. He believes that bronze medallions and contorniates were overwhelmingly produced at the same time of the year for the same purpose through the third and fourth centuries as well.<sup>13</sup> This means that Magnentius' early medallions are problematic if we assume the traditional dating of Nepotian's rebellion.

The obverse legend on Magnentius' regular coinage at Rome starts, in late February 350, as IMP CAES MAGNENTIVS AVG but changed with the introduction of his GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted emperor riding down captive* type, which the sequence of coinage makes clear was issued before and briefly after Nepotian's rebellion, to D N MAGNENTIVS P F AVG. The obverse legend of Magnentius' first medallions, however, is IMP CAES MAGNENTIVS AVG, matching that of the early coinage. So those medallions must have been struck some time before the rebellion of Nepotian as the legend had already changed to D N MAGNENTIVS P F AVG prior to the rebellion.

Using the traditional chronology, these medallions would have to have been struck during the late-February to early-June 350 timeframe, meaning that they broke the centuries-long pattern of medallion issuance. Using the new chronology, Nepotian didn't rebel until late May 351, so Magnentius' medallions with the IMP CAES MAGNENTIVS AVG obverse legend could easily have been struck in late 350 for a planned issuance in January 351 and thus matched the regular pattern of medallion issuance.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Curtis Clay posting on 15 April 2010, on the Forum Ancient Coins.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Curtis Clay, Email to the author, December 20, 2017.



### Decentius and The Sequence of Coinage at Rome

Yet another piece of evidence regarding the dating of Nepotian's rebellion can be found in Magnentius' elevation of his brother Decentius as Caesar. In order to understand this evidence it is necessary to review the sequence of the coinage immediately before and after Nepotian's rebellion.

Upon taking control of Rome, Magnentius struck two types, VICTORIA AVG LIB ROMANOR for himself and the FEL TEMP REPARATIO *Falling horseman* for Constantius. Then, sometime prior to Nepotian's rebellion, these were replaced by a new Magnentian type that was struck across his territory - GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted emperor riding down captive*.

Nepotian continued at first to strike Magnentius' GLORIA ROMANORVM type for himself and Constantius immediately after he seized power in Rome. This type is extremely rare for Nepotian and was likely struck for only a few days. Nepotian then introduced a new VRBS ROMA type for himself and Constantius. The type uses the traditional image of the Goddess Roma seated on a cuirass and was likely meant to display Nepotian's loyalty to the line of Constantine and to Constantius as the legitimate Emperor, and to rally support of the Roman citizens against the Gallic invader.

Nepotian's VRBS ROMA type was struck in two series. The first used the obverse legend FL POP NEPOTIANVS PF AVG and showed Nepotian with bare head. The second issue used the obverse legend FL NEP CONSTANTINVS AVG and showed Nepotian with a rosette diadem. This latter legend was clearly intended to emphasize Nepotian's familial links to Constantine.

Upon defeating Nepotian, Magnentius struck a brief continuation of Nepotian's VRBS ROMA type. These coins are very rare today and must constitute a very short-lived issue. While this type was not reported for Decentius in LRBC or RIC-VIII, a hitherto unknown example for Decentius was published in *Cahiers Numismatiques* by Daniel Gricourt.<sup>15</sup> This important coin gives us a *terminus ante quem* for Decentius' nomination as Caesar of the weeks after the end of Nepotian's rebellion, and raises the possibility that Magnentius made Decentius Caesar somewhat earlier. As noted above, Aurelius Victor stated (42.9) that Magnentius made Decentius Caesar before Nepotian's rebellion. The existence, therefore, of this coin makes it impossible to maintain that there was a nine-month gap between the end of Nepotian's coinage and the elevation of, and beginning of the coinage for, Decentius as argued by those who date Nepotian's rebellion to June 350 and Decentius elevation "in response to Constantius' proclamation of Gallus, 15 March 351".<sup>16</sup>

Magnentius quickly replaced Nepotian's VRBS ROMA type with a new type that maintained the same design but changed the legend to RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE. This type is also very rare and was likely not struck for very long. In RIC-VIII, Kent placed this type alongside the VICTORIA AVG LIB ROMANOR type and therefore well before Nepotian's revolt.<sup>17</sup> However, the type clearly fits much better as a continuation of Nepotian's VRBS ROMA type than as a part of a broken sequence of use, replacement by another design, and then re-use. In addition, the legend itself indicates a renewal of Rome, and well fits the re-assertion of control by Magnentius. It makes little sense to place the RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE type anywhere else.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Gricourt, "Une maiorina inédite et exceptionnelle ou nom de Décence (Rome, année 350)." *Cahiers Numismatiques*, no. 85 (1985): 72.

<sup>16</sup> J.P.C. Kent, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, volume VIII, The Family of Constantine I, 337-364* (London: Spink, 1981), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 13.



Coin type sequence in Kent's Roman Imperial Coinage VIII.



Coin type sequence with RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE in proposed new position.

The sequence of coinage at Rome as just outlined raises a problem concerning Decentius' first consulship. Decentius assumed the consulship in the West on 1 January 352.<sup>18</sup> The long established tradition was for newly appointed Caesars of mature age to be appointed to the consulship beginning the January after they were appointed Caesar. The dating of Decentius first consulship in 352 therefore implies that he was named Caesar sometime in 351 and not earlier.

As we have seen above, Decentius was named Caesar, at the latest, immediately after Nepotian's rebellion. The modified dating for Nepotian's rebellion (May to June 351) therefore offers a much better explanation for why Decentius was consul in 352 and not 351, than the traditional dating (June 350) does.

This revised dating also better matches the wording of Aurelius Victor and the *Epitome de caesaribus* which both report that Decentius became Caesar at around the same time that Constantius Gallus became Caesar. We have the date 15 March 351 for Gallus' accession. The new dating therefore has Decentius named Caesar a couple of months after Constantius Gallus, rather than as many as nine months before.

Finally, it should also be noted that no historical text details any activities by Decentius prior to him becoming Consul in January 352.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Bastien, *Le monnayage de Magnence*, 12, (especially footnote 114).

<sup>19</sup> Bastien, *Le monnayage de Magnence*, 21.

## Summary of Evidence

The re-examination of the historical sources and the terms of the Prefects of Rome, combined with evidence from Magnentius' medallions, and Decentius' coinage and consulship, leads to a high probability that we can date Nepotian's rebellion to 351 and not 350. Such a conclusion forces us to re-examine and re-date not only Nepotian's rare coinage but much of the Magnentian coinage.

## Bastien's Scheme for Magnentian Coinage

Before proposing changes to the currently accepted dating of Magnentius' coinage it is important to summarize this dating schema and how it is derived. To account for the distribution and structure of Magnentius' bronze coinage Bastien divided Magnentius' short rule into seven phases as follows.

Phase One: When Magnentius seized power he continued to strike two types of Constans and Constantius II (FEL TEMP REPARATIO *Galley* at Treveri and FEL TEMP REPARATIO *Falling horseman* at Arelate) and added a very rare third type based on these two types (the new FEL TEMP REPARATIO *Emperor with labarum* at Lugdunum). As these types were not struck at mints in Italy, with the exception of a *Falling horseman* issued later at Rome, Bastien dated this phase from Magnentius' usurpation on 18 January 350 to when he gained control of Italy on 27 February 350.<sup>20</sup>



Phase Two: Magnentius introduced new types, one at his Gallic mints (FELICITAS REIPVBLICE at Treveri, Lugdunum and Arelate) and several others in Italy (GLORIA ROMANORVM *Emperor with labarum and two captives* at Aquileia and VICTORIA AVG LIB ROMANOR at Rome). Magnentius also struck a rare GLORIA ROMANORVM *Emperor dragging captive* at Aquileia and a rare FEL TEMP REPARATIO *Falling horseman* for Constantius at Rome. Bastien dated this phase from Magnentius' invasion of Italy on 27 February 350 to early May 350. His dating of the end of this phase was not based on any specific historical event, but instead on the fact that it had to end long enough before Nepotian's rebellion, which Bastien dated to June 350, in order to allow for Magnentius' first issue of the GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted Emperor riding down captive* type which clearly pre-dated the rebellion.

<sup>20</sup> Known from the date he installed his own Urban Prefect, Fabius Titianus, at Rome.





Phase Three: Magnentius introduced a new type for use across his territory (*GLORIA ROMANORVM Mounted Emperor riding down captive*). Very rare types were also struck at Rome (*RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE*), Aquileia (*BEATITVDO PVBLICA* and *VIRTVS EXERCITVS*) and Siscia (*VICTORIA AVG ET CAESS*). This phase also includes the coinage of Nepotian and the subsequent modifications to Nepotian's type made by Magnentius, as described above. Bastien dated this phase from early May to August 350. This dating was also based on numismatic evidence and not on any fixed historical date. It was based on the fact that the *GLORIA ROMANORVM Mounted Emperor riding down captive* type was struck both prior to, and immediately after, Nepotian's rebellion, which Bastien dated to June 350.

## REDATING NEPOTIAN'S USURPATION AND THE COINAGE OF MAGNENTIUS



Phases Four, Five and Six: Magnentius introduced a new universal type *VICTORIAE DD NN AVG ET CAES Two Victories with Wreath*, which is found in three variations: wreath on *cippus*, wreath without *cippus*, and wreath with a *chi-rho* on top. Bastien established separate phases for each variation: phase four from August to the end of 350, phase five from January 351 to August 352, and phase six from September to the end of 352. Bastien's dating for these three phases was based on numismatic evidence - the ratio amongst the known examples of the three variants of this coin type.



Phase Seven: Magnentius instituted a coinage reform introducing a new large denomination (*SALVS DD NN AVG ET CAES Large chi-rho*). A variation of this, with the legend *SALVS AVG NOSTRI*, was struck briefly in the name of Constantius at Treveri. Bastien dated this phase from January 353 to Magnentius' defeat in August 353. It is unclear exactly why he dated the beginning of this phase to January 353. As the type was only struck in Gaul it must date from after Magnentius retreated from Italy in September 352. January may have seemed like a likely date for a new denomination and type. Though not a medallion, an introduction date of early January would be apt for a new

denomination whose size rivals that of some medallions. This type was struck in several decreasing weight standards.



As can be seen, most of the dates of Bastien's phases are linked to numismatic indicators and not historical events. Thus the redating of Nepotian's rebellion, and the changes to Magnentius' coinage that this necessitates, results in significant redating of Bastien's phases.

### Redating Bastien's Phases

The new dating for Nepotian's rebellion affects most of Bastien's phases, not just the third phase into which the rebellion and Nepotian's own coinage actually falls.

Phase 1: The dates of Bastien's phase 1 do not require any adjustment. The phase ends just prior to Magnentius' seizure of Aquileia and Rome.

Phase 2: While the start date of Bastien's phase 2 does not require a change, the end date must be extended. Bastien based the end of phase 2 on the need to allow some time during phase 3 for the GLORIA ROMANORVM coins to be struck for Magnentius alone prior to Nepotian's usurpation. The end date of phase 2 is therefore really the start date of phase 3.

Phase 3: The start and end dates of Bastien's phase 3 must move to accommodate the new dating of Nepotian's usurpation, which occurs during this phase. Bastien dated the start of phase 3 approximately one month prior to his date for Nepotian's usurpation (3 June 350) in order to allow some time for Magnentius' first GLORIA ROMANORVM issue. Magnentius struck the GLORIA ROMANORVM for Constantius II using Rome's first to third officinae, and for himself using Rome's fourth to sixth officinae. Nepotian then took over Magnentius' GLORIA ROMANORVM type for a brief issue. He continued to strike it for Constantius II at Rome's first to third officinae, but struck it for himself at the fourth to sixth officinae.

Similarly, Bastien dated the end of phase 3 to a couple of months after his date for the end of Nepotian's usurpation (30 June 350) in order to allow for Magnentius' three post-Nepotian issues at Rome - the very brief continuation of Nepotian's VRBS ROMA type, a brief issue of the very similar

RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE type, and a final issue of the GLORIA ROMANORVM type, which was still being struck at all of Magnentius' other mints.

We therefore have to adjust the dates of phase 3 based on the revised dates for Nepotian's rebellion, 10 May to 7 June 351. Based on the timing and rarity of Magnentius' three post-Nepotian issues at Rome it makes sense to maintain a similar period of time in phase 3 after Nepotian's fall. Bastien allowed approximately two months from 30 June to August 350. A similar period of time would take us from the new date of 7 June 351 into early August 351.

To determine the start of phase 3 we need to examine the duration of phases 2 and 3. In Bastien's system phases 2 and 3 accounted for approximately 6 months (27 February to August 350). With our redating they last approximately 18 months (27 February 350 to August 351). If we examine the quantity of coinage from these two periods we see that they appear to be roughly equal. Though not equivalent to a full survey of all known coinage, Bastien's extensive survey yielded the following figures for phase 2 versus phase 3 at Magnentius' active mints:<sup>21</sup>

Mint	Phase 2	Phase 3
Treveri	78	89
Lugdunum	57	59
Arelate	37	40
Rome	149	104 +
Aquileia	49	51
Total	370	343

Thus we see that the number of coins appears to be fairly equal, though slightly more come from phase 2. If we apply this to the new 18 month duration of phases 2 and 3 we would have two nine month periods. If we applied this exactly, we would have a break between phases 2 and 3 at the end of November 350. However, given that there is no known historical event of any importance around this time, and that it is an odd time to apply a major change to coinage types, it would make more sense to date the change to the beginning of the new year. This corresponds well with Bastien's figures which give slightly more for phase 2 than phase 3. Thus I have chosen to make phase 2 last just over 10 months from 27 February 350 to the end of 350, and phase 3 last approximately 8 months from the beginning of 351 to August 351. This dating also has the advantage of placing the change of phases, and thus coin types, to just after Vetrano's abdication on 25 December 350 - the only known historical event of any import around this time.

This redating of Bastien's phase 3 from May 350 to January 351 also matches the evidence regarding the titulature of Magnentius' medallions and coinage. The introduction of the GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted emperor riding down captive* type, with its D N MAGNENTIVS P F AVG obverse legend, must date to after the issuance of Magnentius' medallions with earlier-style the IMP CAE MAGNENTIVS AVG obverse legend. As noted above, these medallions were apparently

<sup>21</sup> For Rome, Bastien lists 94 examples under Magnentius, plus 10 for Nepotian. However, he notes that his listing of coins for Nepotian is not complete. Bastien, *Le monnayage de Magnence*, 207 - 209.



produced in late 350 for distribution as New Year's gifts on 1 January 351. Magnentius' phase 3 can therefore no longer be dated to mid-350.<sup>22</sup> The obverse legend therefore changed to D N MAGNENTIVS P F AVG at the beginning of 351, shortly after the medallions, the last issue to use IMP CAE MAGNENTIVS AVG, were struck.

Given these new dates, Magnentius' VRBS ROMA type should now be dated to mid-late June 351, not July 350 as in Bastien. This was Nepotian's main type and was struck briefly for Magnentius, and, we now know, for Decentius, immediately after Nepotian's defeat.

Magnentius' RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE type should be dated to late June or early July 351, not mid-late July 350 as in Bastien. This brief type used the same design as the VRBS ROMA type, which it immediately followed, but changed the legend.

Magnentius' GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted emperor riding down captive* type was still being struck in August 351, and did not end in August 350 as per Bastien. In addition to the reasons outlined above, the type was struck at Rome for both Magnentius and Decentius, and thus had to have been struck after the VRBS ROMA and RENOBATIO VRBIS ROMAE types.

The redating of phase 3 also necessitates a redating of the opening of Magnentius' mint at Ambianum (Amiens, France). Bastien, using the Croydon Hoard, dated the opening of Ambianum to May 350, at the start of the new GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted emperor riding down captive* type.<sup>23</sup> We should therefore re-date the opening of the mint of Ambianum to January 351, our new date for the start of the GLORIA ROMANORVM type.

Phase 4 to 6: The dates of Bastien's phase 4 must also shift. Based on the new date for the end of phase 3, our phase 4 now begins August 351. However, its end date, both dates of phase 5, and the start date of phase 6 require an examination of the distribution ratio of the entire *Two Victories* coinage.

In Bastien's schema, these three phases totalled 28-29 months, from August 350 to the end of 352. With our new dating, these three phases have to fit into a shorter period, roughly 16-17 months, from August 351 to the end of 352. Once again we need to examine the quantity of coinage from these three periods. We find that Bastien's figures for the active mints yield:

Mint	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6
Treveri	48	66	62
Ambianum	18	39	47
Lugdunum	42	142	29
Arelate	15	91	16
Total	123	338	154

Thus we can see that phase 4 accounts for 20% of the coinage, phase 5 for 55%, and phase 6 for 25%. If we apply this to the 16 - 17 months duration of the three phases we would have roughly 3 months for phase 4, 9 months for phase 5, and 4 months for phase 6. We also need to consider the fact that

<sup>22</sup> Curtis Clay, Email to the author, March 6, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Bastien, *Le monnayage de Magnence*, 34.

## REDATING NEPOTIAN'S USURPATION AND THE COINAGE OF MAGNENTIUS

examples of the phase 6 *wreath with Chi-rho* sub-type are known from Aquileia and Rome, though they are rare. This means that phase 6 must start before late September 352 when Magnentius lost both of these mints to Constantius' forces. We should therefore push the end of phase 5 back a month to August 352. This remains consistent with the coin distribution figures given above. If we apply this to the dates of the three phases - August 351 to the end of 352 - we get:

Phase 4: VICTORIAE DD AVG ET CAES (wreath on *cippus*). September 351 to the end of 351.

Phase 5: VICTORIAE DD AVG ET CAES (wreath without *cippus*). The beginning of 352 to August 352.

Phase 6: VICTORIAE DD AVG ET CAES (wreath with a *chi-rho* on top). September 352 to the end of 352.

Bastien dated the VICT DD NN AVG ET CAES legend variant of the *Two Victories* type, struck at Lugdunum, to the last three months of phase 5, June - August 352. As our phase 5 is now substantially shorter, but still ends in August 352, we can probably redate this type to July - August 352.

Phase 7: The dating of Bastien's phase 7 does not require any adjustment. The phase begins after the loss of the Italian mints and is not affected by the change in the dating of Nepotian's usurpation.

### A New Schema for Magnentius' Bronze Coinage

Based on the discussion above we get the following schema:

Phase	Bastien's Phases	Duration	Adjusted Phases	Duration
1	18 January to 27 February 350	5 weeks	18 January to 27 February 350	5 weeks
2	27 February to Early May 350	2 - 2 1/2 months	27 February to End 350	10 months
3	Early May to August 350	3 - 4 months	January to August 351	8 months
4	August to End 350	4 - 4 1/2 months	September to End 351	4 months
5	January 351 to August 352	20 months	January to August 352	8 months
6	September to End 352	4 months	September to End 352	4 months
7	January to August 353	8 months	January to August 353	8 months

Note: As my dating of phases 2 and 3, and of phases 4 to 6, is based in large part on Bastien's survey of coins, it would have to be adjusted if any new information alters significantly the known ratios for the distribution of coinage during these phases.

### Magnentius' Recognition of Constantius

The redating of Nepotian's usurpation also requires us to redate the coinage Magnentius struck in Constantius' name, which Bastien believed ended during his phase 3 (May to August 350).

Bastien lists FEL TEMP REPARATIO *Falling horseman* type coins struck by Magnentius for Constantius during phase 3 at Arelate and Aquileia. For Rome, Bastien lists Magnentius as striking the GLORIA ROMANORVM *Mounted emperor riding down captive* type for Constantius with mint mark \* / RP. Bastien believed that these coins for Constantius were not only struck prior to Nepotian's usurpation, but also afterwards when Magnentius again struck the GLORIA ROMANORVM type for himself.

My redating shifts the dating of phase 3 from May to August 350, to January to August 351. Genuine military hostilities between Magnentius and Constantius began in July 351, after Magnentius moved into the Balkans. As it is very unlikely that Magnentius would have struck coinage for Constantius beyond this date, we should date the end of his coinage for Constantius at Arelate, Rome and Aquileia to July 351, slightly before the end of phase 3. This means that it is unlikely that any of the GLORIA ROMANORVM coins for Constantius were struck after Nepotian's rebellion.

This change substantially extends the amount of time that Magnentius recognized Constantius on his coinage. Instead of ending by August 350, as Bastien thought, it means that Magnentius recognized him until well after Vetrano's abdication, and indeed right up to the eve of direct military hostilities between the two sides in July 351.

### Coinage reform - weight reduction

The redating of Magnentius' coinage phases provides insight into the timing of Magnentius' coin weight reduction. Under Bastien's original schema all three sub-types of the *Two Victories* type, which show a declining weight, were believed to have been issued well before Constantius' weight reduction in September 352. The weight reduction was, therefore, thought to have been Magnentius' policy, which was followed, around a year later, by Constantius. However, with the redated coinage it is clear that the weight reductions in the two parts of the Empire occurred much closer together. Magnentius' large denomination coins began to slide in January 352, at the start of the second *Two Victories* (without *cippus*) type, and reached the 1/72 of a Roman pound standard in September 352, at the start of the third *Two Victories* (with *chi-rho*) type. Constantius' large denomination coins began to slide in January 351, with the introduction of his third series (marked Γ or III), and reached the 1/72 of a Roman pound standard in mid-late September 352, with the introduction of the fourth series (marked LXXII or Δ).<sup>24</sup>

Therefore the relationship between the two weight reductions is very different from what Bastien believed. Constantius' coins began to decrease in weight well before Magnentius'. For most of 351 Magnentius' coins were slightly heavier than Constantius'. Then, beginning in 352,

<sup>24</sup> Details on the weight reductions of the coinage of this period come from a study of many sources. I have relied mainly on Georges Depeyrot, "Le système monétaire de Dioclétien à la fin de l'empire romain," *Revue Belge de Numismatique et de Sigillographie*, CXXXVIII (1992): 66; and Pierre Bastien, *Le monnayage de l'atelier de Lyon: de la mort de Constantin à la mort de Julien (337-363)*, (Wettern: Éditions Numismatique Romaine, 1985), 92 - 96; but also on Lawrence H. Cope, *The Metallurgical Development of the Roman Imperial Coinage during the first Five Centuries A.D.*, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Chemistry, Liverpool Polytechnic, 1974), 231; Miloje R. Vasić, "Le trésor de Boljetin (IVe siècle)", *Sirmium VIII: École Française de Rome*, (1978), 140; and Carson, *Late Roman Bronze Coinage* 1990, 241.

Magnentius' coins also started to decrease in weight. The new official 1/72 of a Roman pound weight standard appears to have been introduced at around the same time by both Constantius and Magnentius. The introduction of this new weight standard was therefore not a case of Constantius following Magnentius' lead, but of both Emperors acting around the same time.

## Conclusion

As noted above, the revised dating of Nepotian's rebellion from June 350 to May - June 351 better reflects the majority of ancient sources, the known tenures of the Prefects of Rome, the evidence of Magnentius' medallions and coinage, and the dating of Decentius' consulship. It also provides for a more logical sequence of the historical events of this period.

The traditional June 350 dating for Nepotian's rebellion provides little explanation for, or context to, his rebellion. The rebellion simply arises five months after Magnentius' usurpation but well before any other historical event of importance. The modified dating of May – June 351, on the other hand, places Nepotian's rebellion into a much more logical and understandable sequence of events. The rebellion occurs after Constantius II's arrival in the Balkans and replacement of Vetrano. Constantius' appointment of Gallus as Caesar late that winter (15 March 351), and subsequent sending of Gallus to take command of the forces in the East, indicated that the initiative might be moving to his side. It would have been clear to many observers that Constantius intended to soon move westward to confront Magnentius. A rebellion, "behind the lines" in Rome, makes much more sense in such a context. Unlike June 350, the belief that a rebellion might succeed and last long enough to welcome the arrival of Constantius' forces was not unrealistic in the summer of 351.

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