

MILESTONES AND INSTABILITY (MID-THIRD TO EARLY FOURTH CENTURIES AD)*

Abstract: Traditionally milestones of all periods of imperial history were thought to attest road construction or repair, and some believe that they were composed or sanctioned by central authorities or even the emperor himself. Others have persuasively argued that later stones are often unrelated to roadworks or official propaganda. The scholarly community remains nonetheless evenly split between those who hold on to the traditional view and those who do not. This article is the first to demonstrate mathematically that the disproportionately strong representation of short-lived emperors of the mid-third to early fourth century cannot be a coincidence and that milestone erection increasingly peaks when governors or local authorities felt a need to demonstrate their political allegiance, notably after the accession of new emperors and imperial princes. Local initiative accounts for distinct regional differences in chronology and wording of milestone inscriptions. One of the most common inscribed monuments of this period thus provides evidence for political instability rather than maintenance of traffic infrastructure.

I. MILESTONES AS BUILDING INSCRIPTIONS?

It is frequently assumed that Roman milestones from all ages were set up, exclusively or predominantly, on the occasion of building or maintenance work on Roman roads. Symptomatic is Sheppard Frere's assessment of the significance of milestones in Roman Britain: "Milestones were usually erected to commemorate the building or repair of roads, and though the survival of these is uneven in different parts of the country, their evidence points to a steady programme of construction and

* My interest in milestones was first sparked when I had an opportunity to assist the late Professor Gerold Walser in the compilation of *CIL XVII* for Dalmatia at Freiburg University in 1993-1995. Subsequently I published a case study (Sauer (1998)), further developed my ideas and spoke on this topic on various occasions, e.g. at the British Epigraphy Society Spring Colloquium at Edinburgh in 2007 (*BES Newsletter* 17 (2007) 13-14) and at Melrose in 2008 (*Trimontium Trumpet* 23 (2009) 7-8). Long delayed by a series of other projects, I only found the time to produce this written synthesis of my research now. I am indebted to Professor Timothy Barnes, Professor Anthony Birley, Dr Gavin Kelly and two anonymous reviewers of *Ancient Society* for their kind and detailed comments on this article and for having saved me from linguistic and factual imperfections, though they are not responsible for any that may remain.

maintenance down to the middle of the fourth century.”¹ Numerous other scholars have proposed similar theories for other parts of the Late Empire, but there is no space here to discuss these individually.²

Others have expressed doubts that all late milestones still attest road repairs and have persuasively argued that they are often mere dedications paying tribute to the reigning emperor(s), unrelated to any roadworks.³ Even for late specimens, however, scholarly opinion remains split between those who consider them all building inscriptions and those who do not, the latter mostly not committing themselves as to how great or small the relative proportion of pure dedications was. This is not the first study to challenge the widely-held traditional view, that milestones in later Roman history still invariably attest roadworks or were intended to guide travellers to their destination. It is, however, the first to apply a systematic statistical approach to selected groups of milestones, which sheds significant new light on the prevalence of the phenomenon. Distinct differences in the frequency of milestone dedications emerge over space and time, which shed fascinating light on how communities in different parts of the Empire reacted to the political challenges posed by the constant changes of government.

Such a systematic approach is essential, as evidence has emerged which might at first sight support the traditional view that even late milestones tend to attest roadworks. A milestone of AD 46 from Rabland, near Merano,⁴ and another from Cesiomaggiore, near Feltre, of the

¹ Frere (1987) 291.

² Ando (2000) 322-323; Balty (2008) 145-146; Bărbulescu e.a. (2008) especially 178-179; Bekker-Nielsen (2004) 112; Alarcão (1988) I 51; Fodorean (2004); Foss (1977) 482; Glavaš (2011) 172; Grewe (1995) 352-354; Haegemans (2010) 69-73; Heinz (2003) 41, 65; Hitchner (2012) 228; Keppie (1991) 30, 66-67; Kunow (1987) 86; Lorient (2006) 408; Parker (2006) I 16; Preshlenov (2012) 56; Schneider (1935) 425; Zahariade (2006) 44-45, 49. According to Basso (1987a) 225 & (1987b), Herzig (1974) 640 & (1989) 69, Lostal Pros (1992) 272 and Mottas & Decourt (1997) 327 with no. 93, 329, some late antique milestones probably attest roadworks, whilst others do not.

³ Particularly important has been the recent work of Rathmann (2003) 120-135, especially 127. Rathmann argues persuasively that in the third century neither nominative nor specific references to repairs offer firm proof of actual roadworks. Questions remain though whether dedicatory milestones account for the majority or just a minority of those in the dative, nominative and those explicitly referring to repairs. On some milestones as dedicatory monuments see also Alföldy (1967) 40; Conti (2004) 36; Dietz & Pietsch (1997) 131-132; Klee (2010) 72-76; König (1973); Nesselhauf (1962); Pekáry (1968) 16-22; Salama (1951b) 74-75; Sillières (1986); Vavassori (2003); Vismara e.a. (2011) 31; Walser (1985) 58-63; Winkler (1985) 15-17; Witschel (1999) 71 no. 67, 345; *id.* (2002).

⁴ *CIL* V 8003 = XVII.4, 1 = Basso (1987a) no. 41 = Walser (1983) 74 no. 18, 106 fig. 17; *id.* (1980); Grabherr (2006) 64; Rosada (2002) 39; Walde & Grabherr (2002) 232-233.

beginning of the next year⁵ both inform us that Claudius had paved or repaired the *Via Claudia*, a major Alpine traffic route opened by his father, Drusus, after pacifying the Alps through war in 15 BC. Excavations at Lermoos, where the *Via Claudia* had to negotiate boggy terrain, have brought to light a timber substructure of the road, dated by dendrochronology to precisely the time the milestones had been inscribed, i.e. AD 46.⁶ Archaeological evidence from the same site also shows that the road was repaved repeatedly, in AD 74, 95, 102, 279, 327/333 and 374.⁷ Of course, this stretch of road may have been in particular need of maintenance, as it led across boggy terrain, but it is not unique in revealing evidence for repeated repaving.⁸ The *Via Claudia* has also yielded a series of milestones of the third and fourth centuries, up to AD 387/388 in Venetia et Histria and up to AD 363 in Raetia (Secunda).⁹ While the chronology of these milestones mostly does not match the dendro-dated episodes of road maintenance, they could in theory refer to repair work at other sections of this long road, while the phases of repaving attested at Lermoos in Raetia without epigraphic corroboration might have been commemorated on lost milestones, if we bear in mind that no more than a small fraction of them survived.¹⁰ Are the continued erection of milestones and the material evidence for roadworks up to the second half of the fourth century testimonies of the same phenomenon? The evidence from this important cross-Alpine traffic artery led Helmut Bender to argue that it had perhaps been somewhat premature to dismiss fourth-century milestones as imperial propaganda unrelated to any actual building programme.¹¹ There is, of course, no question but that roads and bridges continued to be repaired throughout imperial history and that such works were occasionally commemorated via milestones, as well as

⁵ *CIL* V 8002 = Basso (1987a) no. 36; Grabherr (2006) 65; Rosada (2002) 39; Walde & Grabherr (2002) 232; Walser (1980) 452-453 argues for an original compilation of the text in AD 46 and partial amendment early in AD 47, the sixth tribunician power and fourth consulship on their own might point to a date between 1 and 24 January AD 47.

⁶ Grabherr (2006) 59, 63, 130-131; Stefano (2002) 212; Walde & Grabherr (2002) 227; Czysz (2002) 245-247.

⁷ Grabherr (2006) 59, 63, 131-132; Stefano (2002) 212-213; Walde & Grabherr (2002) 227-228; Czysz (2002) 245-247.

⁸ Czysz & Dumler (2009).

⁹ *CIL* XVII.4, 1-30; V 8002-8003, 8047-8055; Walser (1983); Basso (2002) 343-346 & (2004) 288-292.

¹⁰ See Walser (1981) 386 on estimated survival rates.

¹¹ Bender (2000) 255.

other building inscriptions;¹² the question is whether such works account for the bulk, or just a minority, of late milestones.

Some of the most interesting examples of milestone inscriptions referring specifically to repair works come from North Africa. Torrents of water had hollowed out the roads and forced the people of Cuicul in Numidia to carry out repeated repairs (in AD 215/216, 222/235, 238/244, 244/249, 245 and 253). The earliest inscription, dedicated to Caracalla, is very specific: *Res pub(lica) Cuiculitanorum vias torrentibus exhaustas restituit ac novis munitionibus dilatavit*. This is repeated almost *verbatim* on the inscription of AD 222-235 and, it seems, that of AD 245, whilst the others omit the last four words referring to new layers of paving having been spread over the road. All the inscriptions make clear that it was the town itself which carried out the works.¹³ Road and bridge repairs, necessitated similarly by damage caused through rainfall and age, are recorded on the road between Cirta and Rusicade for AD 219, 220, c. 222, 239, 245/249, c. 250, 252/253 and 283/285.¹⁴

The scenario of road refurbishment described here is highly plausible. Swollen streams, landslides and erosion caused by heavy rain, not unusual for the area,¹⁵ could easily have damaged or washed away bridges and sections of road — all the more so if expansion of agricultural land and the ensuing destruction of natural plant cover, symptomatic of Rome's overexploitation of its natural resources,¹⁶ had accelerated the runoff of rain-water and thus exacerbated flooding. The North African provinces, whilst not entirely spared from armed conflict and economic downturn in the mid-third century,¹⁷ suffered probably considerably less than many other parts of the Empire. Did major floods, in the wake of human

¹² As rightly stressed by Witschel (2002) 326 no. 4, 328 no. 16; *CIL* IX 6059, 6066, XI 6328.

¹³ Salama (1951a) 215-219 no. 1 (corrected version of *AE* 1911.101), 220-223 no. 3 (= *AE* 1912.155), 226-227 no. 5, 228-229 no. 6 (= *CIL* VIII 22397), 230-232 (= *AE* 1911.104); *CIL* VIII 22399.

¹⁴ *CIL* VIII 10298-10299, 10302, 10304, 10308-10309, 10312, 10314-10316, 10318, 10320, 10323 = 22365, 22371-22373, 22379; cf. Salama (1951a) 217 & (2002) 134-137.

¹⁵ Salama (1951a) 216-219, cf. 265; Tert., *Ad Scapulam* 3.2; SHA, *Gordiani* 16.2; Haensch & Mackensen (2011) especially no. 56.

¹⁶ Haas (2006).

¹⁷ There is no space here to discuss to what extent the conventional term 'Third Century Crisis' is an appropriate description for the period in question (AD 235-284/285). Witschel (1999), especially 375, has rightly pointed out that the term 'crisis' may be more appropriate for the second half of period. There were significant geographic and chronological variations in the extent to which different provinces were affected by civil wars, invasions, adverse economic developments, insecurity, lesser investment in domestic and

interference with the natural environment, cause damage to the transport infrastructure throughout the century, less frequently perhaps after the epidemics and demographic decline of the 250s?¹⁸ Alternatively, did such problems peak under the Severan climax of North Africa's prosperity, the date of the earliest testimonies for roadworks caused by natural disasters? Did the later milestones simply reflect that a local tradition had developed that this is what had to be inscribed on a milestone? The identical or very similar wording of the latter series of milestones, *viam imbribus et vetustate conlapsam cum pontibus restituit*, all from the same geographic area, but spanning more than 60 years, raises some doubts as to whether the latest milestones represent accurate factual reports or simply faithful copies of a formula used on earlier specimens on view.

There is thus no serious doubt that the early milestones on the *Via Claudia* across the Alps were indeed set up on the occasion of road construction or repair, just like at least the earliest of the cited third-century Numidian inscriptions and many other milestones of the Early and High Empire. Yet the questions explored in this paper are how rapidly and for what reasons their proportion diminished at the expense of what I will argue to be purely dedicatory inscriptions. More specifically, I seek to explore the function of milestones between the mid AD 230s and Constantine I, without excluding evidence predating and postdating this period of change.

II. DEDICATIONS TO THE EMPEROR OR MESSAGES BY THE EMPEROR?

To some extent, the text of the inscriptions themselves, even if concise, may provide clues about the nature of the monument. Those who erected the milestones are sometimes named: mostly they are governors¹⁹ or urban communities and occasionally military units.²⁰ There are regional and chronological differences, and the lack of uniformity in the formulation of the inscriptions suggests that the decision to set up milestones was in this period in most instances not taken on an imperial level, but either on a provincial or a local one.²¹ Even private individuals could set up milestones,

public buildings and settlement decline. It is clear though that the period was one of political instability, with reigns being on average much shorter than before or after.

¹⁸ Alföldy (1989) 295-318; Witschel (2004) 267-269.

¹⁹ Rathmann (2006); cf. Dietz & Pietsch (1997) 131-132.

²⁰ Rathmann (2003) especially 31-41 and Isaac (1998) 61-62, 65, with references.

²¹ Noreña (2011) 220-223.

such as a certain Flavinus, perhaps a local landowner, 29 miles north of Bracara Augusta, on the road from Lucus Augusti in the north-western Hispanic province of Gallaecia. He dedicated a milestone to Constans in the lifetime of his father Constantine I (AD 333-337), accidentally using the plural abbreviation for *dominis nostris*, whilst naming only a single emperor: DD NN | CONSTANTII | NOBILISSIMO | CAESARI | POSVIT | FLAVINVS | MILIARIVM | XXVIII: “To our lords (*sic!*), Constans, the most noble Caesar, Flavinus set up this milestone, 29 (miles from Bracara Augusta).” We do not know whether Flavinus only honoured Constans, perhaps on the occasion of his promotion to the rank of *Caesar*, or whether his co-emperors received separate milestones.²²

It has long been recognised that, as time passed, the initial nominative forms of imperial names and titles, used to portray the emperor as active road builder, were increasingly superseded by the dative, implying that the monument was dedicated to the emperor (as Flavinus’ stone to Constans), rather than having been set up on orders by the emperor. Milestones addressed to emperors in the dative could even express the dedicating community’s devotion to the emperor’s *numen* and *maiestas*.²³ This adulatory formula is also found on three of the milestones discussed above, explicitly referring to repair works necessitated by torrents of water in the vicinity of Cuicul.²⁴ If even milestones of such ostensibly dedicatory character could describe roadworks, whether real or not, copied from earlier stones, one wonders whether the use of the dative or nominative alone provide any clues as to the function of the monument. As Walser has observed, all Constantinian milestones from the Gallic and Germanic provinces carry dative formulae, while the nominative still occurs in this period elsewhere, such as in northern Italy and northern Africa²⁵ and on two amongst 16 milestones naming Constantine I or his sons from Britain.²⁶ As there is no good reason to assume

²² Rodríguez Colmenero e.a. (2004) no. 165 (unlikely to predate AD 334, as Constans was only proclaimed *Caesar* on 25/12/333); cf. p. 223, nos. 302, 306, 354, 525, 575.

²³ Rathmann (2003) 127-128 with no. 747; Sillières (1990) 157-158 no. 102 (= *CIL* II 2201) 794; Hirschfeld (1907) 178-179.

²⁴ Dedicated to Philippus alone, to Philippus and his son and to Aemilius Aemilianus and his wife: Salama (1951a) 226-227 no. 5, 228-229 (= *CIL* VIII 22397), 230-232 (= *AE* 1911.104), 265-268.

²⁵ Walser (1981) 391 with no. 50; cf. *id.* (1980) 441, 447; Salama (1987) 59, 197; Rathmann (2003) 120-135; Alföldy (1967) 39-43; *CIL* V 8014 (= Basso (1987a) no. 50, cf. table 1) 8963; VIII 22112; Basso (2008) 72. The ablative and, occasionally, the genitive are used too: see Rathmann (2003) *passim*.

²⁶ *RIB* I 2259 and 2302.

that road maintenance had ceased in Gaul, but continued in adjacent territories to the north and south, the question arises whether the use of the nominative or the dative really allows us to differentiate between monuments which portray the emperor as active road-builder and passive recipient of declarations of devotion — or whether it reflects evolving fashions and traditions on a regional level.

Not that much thought was necessarily given to the choice of grammatical case. Milestone inscriptions contain uncountable linguistic or factual mistakes, ranging from numerical errors in counting consulships and years of tribunician power to frequent misspellings of words, and even imperial names and titles. It seems that what mattered was demonstrating the correct political allegiance, not erudition — and it will have made little difference whether the dative or nominative was chosen, or indeed whether the grammar was right or wrong. A group of milestones from Cappadocia, originally naming the *Augusti* Pupienus and Balbinus and the *Caesar* Gordian III in the nominative, form an interesting example of this. After the former two had been murdered, having been in power for just 99 days in AD 238, and Gordian III proclaimed *Augustus*, their names were erased and replaced by the names and titles of Gordian III in the dative, yet the verb *restituerunt* (“they restored”), dependent on the three as acting subjects, was on most inscriptions left unaltered. There are several variants, and on some stones Gordian’s former rank as *nobilissimus Caesar* was left unchanged, as was the nominative.²⁷ The Cappadocian governor, Cuspidius Flaminus Severus, named on no fewer than 19 or 20 milestones, was evidently keen to hastily demonstrate his loyalty to Gordian III. Even leaving aside a milestone of his successor²⁸ (and a disputed milestone of his possible predecessor²⁹), we

²⁷ French (2008) 131-132; Boybeyi & Probst (2008) = *AE* 2008.1505 = *SEG* 58.1663; *CIL* III 6913, 6936, 12176, 12198; cf. 6953; French (1988), p. 509-10, nos. 11, 21, 507, 524, 532, 542, 546, 552, 558?, 562, 726, 730, 751, 760, 776 (cf. French (2008) 132) 786, 793, 795, 869 (cf. *AE* 2000.1479 = French (1981) 91 no. 60(C) = Berges & Nollé (2000) I 283 no. 126); cf. Rathmann (2006) 204, 245 with no. 261. Whilst ‘*restituerunt*’ could have been plastered over, the frequency of errors on milestones which could not have been amended by filling letters with plaster suggests that such mistakes were quite acceptable.

²⁸ Berges & Nollé (2000) I 283-284 no. 127 = *CIL* III 12213 = French (1988) 311 no. 868 = *id.* (1981) 91 no. 60(B). The upper part of the milestone with the emperor’s name is lost, but the attribution to Gordian III is probably correct: Dietz (1980) 136; Remy (1988) 123; Gerhardt & Hartmann (2008) 1112.

²⁹ *CIL* III 6924. Townsend (1955) attributed this stone to Gordian III whilst still *Caesar* under Pupienus and Balbinus. His restoration has been widely accepted: Dietz (1980) 122-123 no. 20a, 137-138 no. 30; Remy (1988) 123; Boybeyi & Probst (2008) 136 no. 4 with

observe a remarkable burst of activity during the short reign of Pupienus and Balbinus and in the aftermath of their demise. That provincial roads were in need of such a rapid succession of repairs seems unlikely, and we are left with the impression that some or all of Cappadocia's milestone inscriptions of AD 238 are unrelated to roadworks and are instead related to the rapid change in emperors and a governor's eagerness to be seen to please.

Military units in Pannonia also set up many third-century milestones, including the only surviving milestone of the *Augusti* Pupienus and Balbinus, jointly with the *Caesar* Gordian III, in Europe (the names of the former two later erased). The imperial trio had, according to this inscription, restored the roads and bridges, in a ruinous state as a result of their age, through the agency of *Legio I Adiutrix Pia Fidelis P(upienu) B(albina) G(ordiana)*. Gordian's name and title combined nominative and dative forms,³⁰ suggesting perhaps that the text has been inscribed in some haste. The milestone stood two miles from Brigetio, the fortress of the named legion, in Pannonia Superior. The military in Pannonia evidently wished to take credit for propagating their emperor's name and preferentially erected milestones in the vicinity of their bases.³¹ Those from Upper Pannonia are generally in the nominative and refer in almost identical wording to the restoration of roads and bridges, those from Lower Pannonia are in the dative and do not refer to roadworks.³² Christian Körner sees the milestones as evidence for bridge and road repairs in Pannonia, notably under Philippus Arabs (AD 244-249), necessitated by intense enemy pressure.³³ Yet, roads would not have been maintained only in Upper Pannonia and neglected at the same time in its

further references; Gerhardt & Hartmann (2008) 1111-1112. Recently, however, French (2008) 127-130 has tentatively proposed an alternative restoration of the inscription, attributing it to Macrinus and Diadumenianus, whilst still *Caesar* (AD 217-218), and questioning that the named governor is identical to Sextus Catus Clementinus Priscillianus, consul in AD 230. Leunissen (1989) 199 with no. 308 and further references, accepts the dating of the milestone to AD 238, but argues that the named governor was Catus Clemens, suffect consul in AD 235.

³⁰ *AE* 1994.1395 = Lörincz & Számadó (1994).

³¹ There is, furthermore, not a single third-century milestone from the German provinces naming a military unit, suggesting that milestone erection was driven by local traditions rather than imperial policies: Rathmann (2003) 38, cf. 126-127.

³² Compiled and discussed by Rathmann (2003) 35-38: Pannonia Inferior: *AE* 1953.12; 1975.701; *CIL* III 3708, 3742, 10619, 10624, 10639, 14354⁴, 14354⁵, 14354⁶, cf. 3707; Pannonia Superior: *AE* 1994.1395; *CIL* III 4626, 11326-11327, 11332, 11333b, 11334 = 4627, cf. 4642.

³³ Körner (2002) 143-144, with no. 114; *id.* (2004) 326; cf. Fodorean (2004) 526-529 hypothesising that milestones attest road repairs from Pannonia to Dacia in the AD 250s.

neighbouring province. The difference is unlikely to reflect more than separate epigraphic traditions evolving amongst provincial armies.

If the nominative on its own is insufficient proof for the emperor having played an active part, how meaningful is it in combination with a specific propagandistic message? Seven milestones from the vicinity of the Numidian town of Zarai proclaim that emperors had restored the milestones of their world. Imperial names on two milestones with this formula have been erased, one of them perhaps belonging to Elagabalus or Severus Alexander.³⁴ The five datable milestones name Aemilius Aemilianus (AD 253), Aurelian (AD 270-275), Tacitus (AD 275-276), Diocletian (AD 285-305)³⁵ and Maximianus or Galerius whilst *Caesar* (AD 285-286 or AD 293-305).³⁶ The text of the first three of them is largely or completely preserved, and they are worth citing in full:

Imp(erator) Cae(sar) | Aemilius | Aemilianus Pius Fe(lix) | Aug(ustus)
Pontifex Max(imus) P(ater) P(atriciae) | mil(iaria) orbis | [sui] resti(tui)t³⁷

Imp(erator) Caesar | L(ucius) Domitius Aulrelianus Pius | Felix
Aug(ustus) miliaria orbis | sui restituit³⁸

[I]m[p(erator)] Caes(ar) | M(arcus) Claudius | Tacitus P(ius) | Felix
Aug(ustus) | mil(iaria) orbis | sui restitui[t]³⁹

At first sight it is tempting to think that these stones carry messages from the named emperors, and there are scholars who believe that they do. Referring specifically to the Aurelian milestone, Leszek Mrozewicz writes: “Without doubt, we are dealing here with a proud declaration of imperial power, of the very emperor who had succeeded in reuniting the Roman Empire.”⁴⁰ In his view, Aemilius Aemilianus had been the initiator of this particular rhetoric formula, whilst Aurelian, Tacitus and the tetrarchs followed his example. Rather than being just rhetoric, however, the formula *miliaria orbis sui restituit* (“he restored the milestones of his world”) refers

³⁴ *CIL* VIII 22482 and 22486 (with erased names and undated); the tentative attribution of the former to Elagabalus AD 218-222 is possible, but uncertain; IMP C M A[---] could also refer to M. Aurelius Alexander, i.e. Severus Alexander (cf. *CIL* VIII 10432, 10438), or another condemned emperor whose name started with M. A[---] and fitted into one and a half lines; cf. Hirschfeld (1907) 176-177.

³⁵ *CIL* VIII 22475.

³⁶ *CIL* VIII 22477.

³⁷ *CIL* VIII 22473. There seems to be space in the last line to insert SVI before RESTIT (cf. Gsell (1893) 158 no. 142; Hirschfeld (1907) 177 no. 1).

³⁸ *CIL* VIII 10374.

³⁹ *CIL* VIII 22474.

⁴⁰ Mrozewicz (2004) 356 (my translation).

to an actual renewal of roads. As these were symbols and safeguards of an effective functioning state and peace, the formula ultimately refers to state renewal.⁴¹ A similar hypothesis had already been advanced in the 1930s by Karl Schneider who, whilst conscious of the formula's repeated use in the vicinity of one town only, still believed in imperial authorship: it was Aemilius Aemilianus himself, evidently not lacking in self-confidence, who boasted to have restored the milestones of the whole world.⁴²

Yet while the wording implies that the named emperors had composed the text, there is nothing to suggest that Aemilius Aemilianus, even if of African descent,⁴³ or Tacitus during their short reigns, of c. three and seven months respectively, ever visited Numidia or took any personal interest in its roads or milestones — nor is there any obvious reason why they would have wanted their claim of global restoration to be recorded at this one community in inland northern Africa alone. Indeed, the clustering of this formula at this particular location suggests strongly that it reflects nothing more than a text composed by an official at local (and not even provincial, let alone imperial) level and then repeatedly copied, with minor variations, over the next half-century or more — whether officially sanctioned or, more probably, not. While the milestones do not name a dedicator, five of the seven known stones with this formula were found just one mile from the town of Zarai, so that it would have required no detective skills to establish who had commissioned them. To assume that a milestone functioned as a building inscription, let alone as a medium carrying a personal message from the emperor, only because the nominative was chosen, would seem unwise. The subtle message most probably was that the people of Zarai were the ruler of the world's loyal subjects.

The dedicatory character of milestones is most obvious in the case of milestones for individual princes or for other *Caesares* and *Augusti* outside their geographic area of responsibility. Imperial princes in the lifetime of their fathers and other recognised co-emperors are not only often named and listed on milestones, but from the mid-third century onwards sometimes received separate individual milestones.⁴⁴ This practice is particularly popular under the Tetrarchy and Constantine I and by no means restricted to provinces with any particular connection to the

⁴¹ Mrozewicz (2004) 356-357.

⁴² Schneider (1935) 421.

⁴³ *Epit. de Caes.* 31; Zonar. 12.21.

⁴⁴ *Empresses*, by contrast, never received separate milestones, as far as I am aware, though some feature in the third century jointly with their husbands and/ or sons.

named emperor. Such monuments are a further indication that they had become devotional monuments, as it is hard to see why Licinius I or his infant son (and that of Constantine's half-sister Constantia⁴⁵), Licinius II (Figs 6-7), for example, should have been credited with road improvements in the realm of Constantine. Dalmatius/Delmatius, the *Caesar* responsible for the lower Danube and Greece, not known to have travelled to the west and not likely to have taken a special interest in its transport infrastructure during his two years as *Caesar* (AD 335-337),⁴⁶ was honoured with no fewer than four milestones in the north-western Hispanic province of Gallaecia⁴⁷ and three in southern Gaul.⁴⁸ There are even a small number of milestones dedicated to deified emperors.⁴⁹ While the text of milestones often provides more or less subtle hints of their purpose, it is not always easy to interpret the text on its own and in subsequent sections we will focus primarily on context and chronology.

III. MILESTONES WITHOUT MILEAGE OR RELATION TO ROADS

The distance to the *caput viae*, the only relevant piece of information to the traveller, is only indicated on three milestones from Britain set up after AD 235 and on none at all after Florianus (AD 276).⁵⁰ This is in sharp contrast, not just to post-medieval British milestones whose text is largely confined to destinations and distances,⁵¹ but also to British milestones of the second century and the Severan dynasty, the majority of which provide mileage figures. In deliberately omitting any information useful for literate road users, late Roman milestones in Britain also differ from their contemporary counterparts in other parts of the Empire, such as Gaul, Germany, Italy and

⁴⁵ Cf. *CIL* XVII.2, 183ab.

⁴⁶ Barnes (1982) 87, 198-199.

⁴⁷ Rodríguez Colmenero e.a. (2004) nos. 91, 102, 150 (perhaps for two emperors, to judge by the start, DD NN, but name of second not preserved, though see no. 165 for DD NN being used for a single emperor), 586; see also Solana Sáinz & Sagredo San Eustaquio (1998) 124-125 no. 110; *id.* (2008) 427-428 nos. 27-28.

⁴⁸ *CIL* XVII.2, 96, 163a, 303b.

⁴⁹ Rathmann (2003) 129 with no. 753; cf. *CIL* XVII.2, 183a for Divus Constantius I. See also Pekáry's (1968) 21 sceptical comments. Sayar (1998) 408-410 nos. 290-291 (= *AE* 1998.1180-1181 = *SEG* 48.913-914) argues that two milestones, found c. 23 km NW of Perinthus in Thrace, styling Diocletian and Maximianus *divi*, were set up in their lifetime — and that they may attest road renewal.

⁵⁰ *RIB* I 2235, 2241, 2274, cf. 2281; cf. Edwards (2008) especially 73 and 83.

⁵¹ Benford (2002).

Northern Africa, where distances are still given on a considerable number of stones, even if far from always.⁵² Yet, Rome's insular provinces in Britain are not the only ones to stand apart. The British tendency to indicate distances on early milestones and to omit them from late ones is paralleled in the south of the Iberian Peninsula,⁵³ whilst in the north-west even many late antique stones indicate mileages.⁵⁴ The absence of empire-wide trends suggests that milestone inscriptions were composed at urban or provincial level, in most cases without any imperial directions or vetting.

Yet, while milestones on roads, devoid of all information for the traveller and often no more than a mile before the next settlement was reached, may have been of little practical use, they are still easier to explain by conventional theory than those from remote stretches of coast. Scholars have long been puzzled why none of the five Roman milestones from Cornwall has been found near a known public road. They all date to the period when the practice of milestone erection had reached its climax in Britain. Represented are Gordian III (AD 238-244), Gallus and Volusianus (AD 251-253), Postumus (AD 260-269), Constantine I whilst still *Caesar* (AD 306-307) and Licinius I (AD 308-321/324).⁵⁵ Ivan Margary,⁵⁶ Shepard Frere,⁵⁷ Malcolm Todd⁵⁸ and Charles Thomas⁵⁹ all deduced from the stones the existence of officially recognised roads in Cornwall, even if there is no evidence for paved roads in the area. Yet, if these milestones were set up by local communities, there is no need to postulate that dirt tracks were public roads, nor that central authorities had commissioned repeated maintenance works. As the stones were found near the coast (mostly reused in later structures, but unlikely to have been moved far), the simple statements of political allegiance to the reigning emperor or officially recognised co-emperors, like Licinius I, may have been addressed to those who arrived via sea routes as much as land routes. Increasing visitor numbers to an important tin-producing area, that was to evolve into

⁵² *CIL* XVII.2, *passim*; Basso (1987a); *ead.* (2008) 72; Donati (1974); Salama (1987) 61-62.

⁵³ Sillières (1990) especially 55; Corco Sánchez & Toscano Sa Gil (1992) 201-223.

⁵⁴ Rodríguez Colmenero *e.a.* (2004).

⁵⁵ *RIB* I 2230-2234; the Licinius milestone is likely to be early and very unlikely to date to the time after Constantinian mints had stopped issuing coins in his name in c. AD 321.

⁵⁶ Margary (1973) 121-122, 502-503, map 11; cf. Jones & Mattingly (1990) 176-177; Woolf (1970) 81-82; *TIR M30 London* (1983).

⁵⁷ Frere (1987) 279.

⁵⁸ Todd (1987) 218.

⁵⁹ Thomas (1993) 82-83.

a hub of maritime trade,⁶⁰ may well have triggered the adoption of the politically opportune practice of setting up milestones in once isolated communities, even if not served by proper roads.

IV. MILESTONE CLUSTERS

Most milestones were, of course, still placed on the verges of public roads. Indeed, the increasingly frequent erection of milestones resulted in the growth of veritable forests of milestones along major traffic arteries, spaced at intervals of one Roman mile (or one *leuga*). On the *Via Nova* from Bostra towards the Red Sea⁶¹ and on the road from Asturica Augusta to Bracara Augusta in Gallaecia some of these remain to the present day (Figs 1 and 8).⁶²

Inscriptions recovered from two cellars at Ladenburg and Heidelberg (Tables 1-2) were probably once part of milestone clusters too, one and four *leugae* (1.5 and 6 Roman miles, i.e. c. 2.2 and 8.9 km) from the *caput viae* at Lopodunum (Ladenburg) in Upper Germany, the *civitas* capital of the Neckar Swabians. Closer to the town, the distance is only indicated and preserved on the earliest stone, but omitted on the three latest. What was never omitted was the name of the sponsoring *civitas*. Interestingly, with the exception of Trebonianus Gallus (AD 251-253), one of the cellar deposits comprises a complete set of all main emperors in power for more than a year between Elagabalus and Valerian, the other of all, from Gordian III to Valerian. The list of imperial princes named is more selective, but that both collections contain one milestone of Decius, probably set up soon after his proclamation in AD 249, and one, of his elder son, Herennius Etruscus, probably dedicated soon after he had become *Caesar* in AD 250, is worth noting. The territory of the Neckar Swabians was abandoned around AD 260, which explains why there are no milestones of Postumus or any of his successors. The stones had perhaps been concealed before the Roman withdrawal from territories beyond the Rhine, with a view of re-erecting them or of re-using them as building material should direct control ever be

⁶⁰ See Barrowman (2007) especially 309-310 on the significance of increased activity in the area from the third century onwards.

⁶¹ Bauzou (1998) 109-127; Roll & Avner (2008).

⁶² Baptista e.a. (1998); Rodríguez Colmenero e.a. (2004) 353-589. On milestone clusters see also Klee (2010) 68; Rathmann (2003) 125-126; Schneider (1935) 425; Walser (1981) 385-386; Wilkes (1969) pl. 34.



Fig. 1: A typical milestone cluster on the road from Asturica Augusta to Bracara Augusta, 32 Roman miles from the latter town, in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula.

re-established. Why even the stones of condemned emperors were kept (those of Elagabalus and Severus Alexander with their names partially erased) is unknown. Neither do we know why Trebonianus Gallus was not represented. Little would be gained by speculating whether any stones were removed or completely destroyed during the short reign of his opponent and successor Aemilius Aemilianus (AD 253) or whether he had never received any. Otherwise the pattern seems clear: there are no significant omissions, and no two milestones from either collection are dedicated to the same individual emperor or father and son pair. Honouring virtually every new emperor who lasted for more than a few months with such roadside inscriptions (whether one every *leuga* or just at selected points) seems to have been an almost automatic procedure of Lopodunum's town council. In the first half of the third century this did not yet always happen immediately after news of the proclamation was received. Elagabalus appears to have had to wait for more than one year and a half⁶³ before the "most

⁶³ Note though that, whilst Walser (*CIL* XVII.2, 636, cf. p. 268) is probably right in dating the milestone to AD 220 on the basis of the emperor's third consulship, *tri(bunicia) potest(ate) iter(um)* provides a date of 10/12/218-9/12/219. The earlier date is more likely to be erroneous. See Speidel & Scardigli (1990) and Wiegels (2002) on the name of the *Civitas*.

faithful”, *devotissima*, *C(ivitas) U(lpia) S(ueborum) N(icrensium)* dedicated a milestone to the emperor — probably because the local habit of honouring new emperors with milestones had not yet been established when Elagabalus had been proclaimed *Augustus* in AD 218. Maximinus received a milestone not before his second year, after his son Maximus had been promoted to the rank of *Caesar*, and at least one of the Philippus stones dates to his second year in power too. Most of the other inscriptions are not precisely datable. What is clear is that the pattern cannot be explained with road maintenance. Had these stones been set up on the occasion of road repairs, it would be inconceivable that these were carried out regularly even during short reigns, but never more than once during a longer reign, unless after the promotion of a prince to the rank of *Caesar*.

Table 1: Milestone deposit from Ladenburg cellar

<i>CIL</i> XVII. 2 no.	<i>Terminus</i> <i>post</i> <i>quem</i>	<i>Terminus</i> <i>ante</i> <i>quem</i>	Emperor(s)	Distance	Dedicator
631	238	244	Gordian III	<i>l(eugam) I</i>	<i>C(ivitas)</i> <i>S(ueborum)</i> <i>N(icrensium)</i>
632	244	247	Philippus I (as <i>Augustus</i>) & Philippus II (as <i>Caesar</i>) ⁶⁴	?	<i>C(ivitas) U(lpia)</i> <i>[S(ueborum)</i> <i>N(icrensium)]</i>
633	249	251	Decius	No distance	<i>C(ivitas)</i> <i>S(ueborum)</i> <i>N(icrensium)</i>
634	250	251	Herennius Etruscus (as <i>Caesar</i>)	No distance	<i>C(ivitas) Ūl(pia)</i> <i>S(ueborum)</i> <i>N(icrensium)</i>
635	253	260	Valerian I & Gallienus	No distance	<i>C(ivitas) U(lpia)</i> <i>S(ueborum)</i> <i>N(icrensium)</i>

⁶⁴ Dated by Walser (*CIL* XVII.2, 632) to AD 245, his restoration of the stone probably based on *CIL* XVII.2, 640. Yet, the two stones differ in line breaks, and we cannot be sure that they both date to the emperor’s second tribunician power, clearly indicated on the latter milestone, but restored on the former.

Table 2: Milestone deposit from Heidelberg cellar

CIL XVII. 2 no.	<i>Terminus post quem</i>	<i>Terminus ante quem</i>	Emperor(s)	Distance	Dedicator
636	220	221	Elagabalus	<i>A Lop(oduno) l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) U(lpia) S(ueborum) N(icensium) devotissima pos(u)it</i>
637	222	235	Severus Alexander	<i>A Lop(oduno) l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>
638	236	238	Maximinus & Maximus	<i>l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>
639	238	244	Gordian III	<i>l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>
640	245 ⁶⁵	245	Philippus I (as <i>Augustus</i>) & Philippus II (as <i>Caesar</i>)	<i>l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>
641	249	251	Decius	<i>l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>
642	250	251	Herennius Etruscus (as <i>Caesar</i>)	<i>l(eugas) IIII</i>	<i>C(ivitas) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>
643	253	260	Valerian I & Gallienus	<i>A Lop(oduno) leug(as) IIII</i>	<i>Civit(as) Ulp(ia) S(ueborum) N(icensium)</i>

In the AD 270s, after the abandonment of the territory of the Neckar Swabians and Rome's other possessions beyond the Rhine, some milestone clusters further west appear to have served as quarries for hastily erected town walls. Seven or eleven milestones were reused in the late third or fourth-century town walls of Nantes. The dates of four are

⁶⁵ Firmly dated to AD 245 by *t(ribunicia) p(ostate) II*.

known: Tacitus (AD 275-276) was styled “the most merciful” (*clementissimus*) on two⁶⁶, a quality without obvious relation to road-building. The short-lived emperor’s milestones were found together with two, dedicated to his predecessors, Victorinus (AD 269-271) and the imperial prince Tetricus II (AD 272/273-274).⁶⁷ In the earliest of the four the local *C(ivitas) N(amnetum)* is identified as dedicator.⁶⁸ None of them provides information on mileage or destination (though two are not well enough preserved to exclude the possibility that such details might have been referred to).

100 km north of Nantes, at Rennes, 18 milestones or fragments thereof were equally found reused in the probably late third-century town walls. Of the 13 datable ones, one belongs to Septimius Severus and his family (AD 198-201), two to Maximinus and Maximus (AD 237), while the three main Gallic emperors are represented with no fewer than ten: three of Postumus (AD 260-269), four of Victorinus (AD 269-271) and three of Tetricus I (AD 271-274). Two of the Victorinus stones had once stood at a distance of four *leugae* (c. 8.9 km) from the town, as had an undated milestone, whether at the same road or at different roads; the other stones are without preserved indication of distance. The invariably strong representation of the Gallic emperors suggests that it was in the 260s and 270s that the *c(ivitas) R(edonum)* adopted the practice of setting up milestone as devotional monuments.⁶⁹

The phenomenon that obsolete milestones were reused as building material in defensive compounds has a parallel also north of the Channel. The late third-century coastal fortifications of Bitterne contained the only milestone from Britain to record road repair works, under an emperor in his 18th tribunician power, probably Septimius Severus (AD 209/210) or Caracalla (AD 214/215), as well as milestones of Gordian III (AD 238-244), Trebonianus Gallus with his son Volusianus (AD 251-253) and Tetricus I (AD 271-274). It is not known whether or not three more milestones from Bitterne may have come from the walls too, two of Tetricus I, one of them a palimpsest on a stone of Gordian

⁶⁶ *CIL* XVII.2, 389-390: one in the dative and the other using both dative and nominative forms for imperial epithets.

⁶⁷ The date of his elevation to *Caesar* is disputed. Kienast (1996) 248 and Drinkwater (1987) 187 opt for AD 273, Luther (2008) 337 argues for AD 272.

⁶⁸ *CIL* XVII.2, 387-388; cf. Provost (1988) 94, 96-97; Bedon (2001) 228.

⁶⁹ *CIL* XVII.2, 462-479; cf. Pouille (2008) 76, 341-349; Provost & Gilles Leroux (1990) 180-182, 191-192; Bedon (2001) 263.

III, as well as a probable milestone definitely naming Aurelian.⁷⁰ The latter must date to the short period between Aurelian's takeover of the Gallic Empire in AD 274 and his death in AD 275, suggesting that the local authorities, having honoured the last Gallic emperor with no fewer than three out of eight surviving inscriptions, were keen to publicly attest their support for his conqueror too. The strong representation of Gallic emperors amongst the milestones at Rennes, Nantes and Bitterne may mark the local heydays in using milestones as monuments to express loyalty. The Aurelian and Tacitus stones suggest, however, that this practice survived the demise of the Gallic Empire and that the reuse of the stones was sparked by security concerns rather than being a targeted act against the representatives of the breakaway empire.

V. STRONG OVER-REPRESENTATION OF SHORT-LIVED EMPERORS

The Gallic Empire issued coins for three emperors in power for a few months at most, Laelian (AD 269), Marius (AD 269) and Domitian II (AD 271).⁷¹ Yet none of them was honoured with a milestone, at least none that has survived and has been found and published yet (whilst there are 23 for Postumus, 17 or 18 for Victorinus and 17 for the Tetrici).⁷² Neither had any previous emperor whose rule lasted for less than a year (or prince whose father's rule lasted for less) received a milestone in Rome's north-western provinces — perhaps suggesting that town councils feared potential negative repercussions of overzealous support for an ill-fated pretender to the throne. Elsewhere, notably in a small number of Mediterranean provinces, milestones for ephemeral emperors had already been produced decades before. They include Pupienus and Balbinus (AD 238) and Aemilius Aemilianus (AD 253), all in power for just a quarter of a year.⁷³ Perhaps the least enduring emperor to be represented was Quintillus who probably ruled for just 17 days, or possibly up to 77, in AD 270.⁷⁴ For other short-lived usurpers of the third century, reigning for

⁷⁰ *RIB* I 2222-2228; Haverfield (1911) 139-144; King (1991); cf. Pearson (2002) 60-65.

⁷¹ Schulzki (1996) 70-75; Abdy (2009).

⁷² See section VII below.

⁷³ Cf. Rathmann (2003) 254, 256, 268.

⁷⁴ There is just one milestone naming emperor Quintillus, from Mauretania Caesariensis (*CIL* VIII 22598). Whilst procurator of Sardinia, Quintillus had himself dedicated another milestone to his brother Claudius Gothicus (AD 268-270). Added to at least two earlier

weeks rather than months and known through literature or coinage, there are no known milestones at all.

By the mid-270s authorities in some of Rome's western and northern provinces acted even more hastily in setting up milestones than they had done before, perhaps reflecting the increasingly rapid speed of governmental change between AD 274 and 276. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of third-century milestones is how astonishingly well short-lived emperors are represented. In the north and west of the Iberian Peninsula the pattern is particularly pronounced. Aurelian (AD 270-275) received five milestones during his reign of five years on the entire peninsula. Remarkably, four of these are from Hispania Baetica, which, in sharp contrast to Lusitania and Hispania Citerior, produced not even a single milestone for any emperor in the decade following Aurelian's demise. In contrast, his successor Tacitus (AD 275-276) is named on no fewer than c. 18 Hispanic milestones, 16 of them from a variety of roads in the west. Why the Tacitean milestone boom affected mainly the Peninsula's Atlantic side is not easy to explain. Perhaps the provincial governor of Lusitania, though unnamed and unknown, in whose dominion two thirds of the stones were found, was the driving force, perhaps the stones are testimony of a rivalry in subservience between various local communities in Lusitania and the north-west of Hispania Citerior. Alternatively, could in this instance the stones, mostly lined up along roads, have been set up on the occasion of a real road improvement scheme? The pattern of milestone erection over the next decade suggests otherwise. After a lull, with no milestones for Florianus (AD 276), and Probus' six years of rule (AD 276-282) being represented by a mere five, the short-lived dynasty of Carus and his sons (AD 282-285) produced no fewer than 47 stones on the Peninsula. They are geographically spread somewhat more widely than those of Tacitus, notably in the north-east of Hispania Citerior. The dynastic aspirations of the family, the promotion of the two sons to *Augusti* in their father's lifetime and their successive deaths in

stones at 119 miles distance from Caralis on the central Sardinian road to Olbia, it was probably not the only milestone the future emperor had set up on this long road. Probably during Quintillus' reign '... D N IMP CAES M AVRELIO I CLAUDIO P FELICI I INVICTO AVG ...' was changed to '... INVICTIS AVGG ...', the plural presumably referring to the two brothers: Boninu & Stylow (1982) especially 37-44 = *AE* 1984.446, cf. 444-445; Rathmann (2003) 198-199; 273, 275; Mastino (2005) 147, 336-337, 340, 371; Salama (1985) 227; Gerhardt & Hartmann (2008) 1176. Including this three-letter amendment, there are two milestones for Quintillus, an emperor recognised in all provinces, except those under control of the Gallic and Palmyrene Empires: Ibba (1997); cf. Hollard (2008).

283, 284 and 285 may account for the pronounced peak, as it stimulated the erection of separate milestones.⁷⁵

Peaks in milestone production differ from territory to territory, probably a result of local dynamisms and communities competing against their neighbours rather than those further afield. Aurelian, poorly represented in the Hispanic provinces and named on just two milestones in Britain, received no fewer than 16 within little more than a year in Gaul and Germany. The numerical peak (Fig. 5) as well as frequency of laudatory epithets, such as *magnus perpetuus imperator* (“great and everlasting emperor”), *pacator et restitutor orbis* (“pacifier and restorer of the world”) or *restitutor Galliarum* (“restorer of the Gallic provinces”) suggest that the burst in milestone dedication in AD 274-275 was sparked by Aurelian’s reunification of the Empire, rather than high levels of investment in the traffic infrastructure.⁷⁶ There is no shortage of scholars, however, who believe Aurelian’s milestones to attest “a fairly systematic programme of repair to the road network”.⁷⁷ The variety of epithets and the omission of some of them on several stones⁷⁸ probably imply that the decision on wording was left to local authorities. The adoption of titles, also featuring on imperial coinage and on inscriptions elsewhere in the Empire,⁷⁹ suggests that there was strong rivalry between communities, in the wake of the fall of the Gallic Empire, to express their allegiance to Aurelian in words likely to find official approval.

Emperor Florianus, who ruled the European provinces of the Roman Empire, northern Africa and Asia Minor for two or three months in the summer of the year AD 276 before being killed in a civil war against Probus, received no milestone in the Hispanic provinces. Yet with 12 (plus a possible thirteenth) milestones, he is overall well represented in his

⁷⁵ Solana Sáinz & Sagredo San Eustaquio (2006) 45, 243-248 & (2008) 415-417 nos. 25-28; Solana Sáinz & Hernández Guerra (2002) 68-92, 99-101, 181-205 nos. 177-247. Note that the counts include a few milestones whose attribution to the listed emperors is conjectural. There is no space here for individual scrutiny, all the more so as the rejection of the few uncertain cases would not alter the general trends. See also *CIL* II 2201 (an Aurelian milestone omitted from the above works). Pond (1970) 242 sees the milestones of Carus and his sons as evidence for road repairs.

⁷⁶ As already rightly observed by Sotgiu (1975) 1045-1047.

⁷⁷ Watson (1999) 154, cf. 213; Cizek (1994) 161; Pond (1970) 37, 176-199, 233.

⁷⁸ *CIL* XVII.2, 31, 79, 158, 160, 164, 172, 184a, 319, 351, 404 (= *AE* 2001.1391) 498, 562; *AE* 1979.409; 1980.640; 1986.490; 2001.1393; Christol & Jannièrè (2001). *CIL* XVII.2, 183b has not been included in the count.

⁷⁹ Peachin (1990) 383-405 with references; Estiot (2004).

dominion.⁸⁰ Not one of them is from a site Florianus is likely to have visited during his brief reign, while no fewer than four are from Britain — furthest from the territories, between the Bosphorus region and Tarsus, through which the emperor had travelled during his short reign. E.A. Pond, even though he had only been aware of half of the milestones we know now, saw this as evidence for an “ambitious program of road repair” under Tacitus and Florianus.⁸¹ According to Leszek Mrozewicz, a Florianus milestone from Gallia Aquitania not only attests road maintenance, but also the emperor’s desire to express his claim of having restored order via such works. Hence he chose to be called *dominus orbis et pacis* (“lord of the world and of peace”). Mrozewicz takes this milestone and others as evidence that the Romans even in times of the greatest danger found the time to repair roads.⁸² Yet, not only is it unlikely that the emperor would have focused his attention on such far-sighted projects for the long-term benefit of the state, even personally deciding the text of individual roadside inscriptions in far-flung provinces while faced with threat of imminent elimination in a brutal power struggle with Probus, it is even improbable that the authorities in the provinces could have spared the resources. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Florianus withdrew troops from the European provinces, thus triggering or exacerbating some of the most devastating Germanic invasions Gaul ever experienced.⁸³ While Britain’s insular location, even if affected by sea-raids, appears to have resulted in it surviving the third century with less enemy-inflicted damage than most of the Continental provinces or Asia Minor, one still wonders whether this was a likely time for grand projects and whether there is not a more persuasive explanation for milestone erection booming under short-lived emperors and dynasties.

VI. MILESTONES AS INDICATORS OF PROLONGED POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Yet, while Pond’s “ambitious program” on an extensive geographic scale seems questionable, it is more difficult to decide whether or not

⁸⁰ See Sauer (1998) especially 200-203, for those known by the 1990s and *RIB* III 3524 found since.

⁸¹ Pond (1970) 224, cf. 217 on Tacitus. For an alternative view, see Sauer (1998) and Kreucher (2003) 131, 218-219.

⁸² Mrozewicz (2004) 357-359; *CIL* XVII.2, 369.

⁸³ Sauer (1998) 184-187.

milestones could attest small-scale road maintenance at a local level — perhaps necessary even in the worst of times, not least as the speed of troop movements could decide the outcomes of the unceasing string of civil wars during the most turbulent phases of the third century. Milestones, especially those omitting any indication of distance, were of course not a necessary element of any efforts to keep roads in a usable state. Yet, could those who see even late milestones generally as evidence for road maintenance works be right in so far that any such works formed a convenient excuse for setting up politically expedient devotional monuments? In the case of Florianus a few of his milestones (though far from all) line roads that troops, sent to reinforce his army on the eve of the impending confrontation with Probus, might have used. Did the occasion for setting up these monuments continue to follow the old tradition, while only the style of the text changed? If so, the spatial and chronological distribution of milestones could still reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, the intensity of structural repairs to roads, whatever the ulterior motives were for the use of the dative or particular emphasis on the emperor's honorific titles. Alternatively, did both occasion and style change? Were milestones in the third and fourth centuries increasingly pure expressions of loyalty, roads forming convenient places to reach a broad audience, whilst their erection was now unrelated to any real efforts on road maintenance?

Some of the case studies above have already demonstrated that, short of an extraordinary coincidence between road repairs and times when setting up stones was politically expedient, some milestones must have been devotional monuments. Now the question arises whether these represent the majority of late milestones or were just exceptions to the rule. One suitable case study is provided by Britain, as its milestones differ in a number of respects rather sharply from those of nearby Continental provinces, as well as Italy, North Africa and Asia Minor. Milestone inscriptions from Roman Britain are often extremely concise. The relative scarcity of effusively laudatory epithets for emperors in comparison with territories further south⁸⁴ might easily tempt us to think that, in contrast to such territories, milestones in Britain were not mainly monuments expressing devotion to the emperor. The more concise a text is, the more difficult it is to base an interpretation solely on the wording, and it can be all the more rewarding to examine inscriptions statistically.

⁸⁴ Cf. Sauer (1998) 195-196.

The evidence from Britain certainly is not what one would expect, if the frequency of milestones accurately reflected the intensity of road building and repair:

- 85 out of the 96 datable Roman milestones from Britain date to AD 238/244–317/340.⁸⁵
- Milestones predating AD 238 are scarce (just 11) and there is none at all prior to AD 119/120.
- Milestone production ceased in Britain altogether within the first four decades of the fourth century, perhaps even as early as the late 310s.

For the first 75 years of Roman rule over Britain construction and maintenance of public roads had not been commemorated on milestones (unless very rarely or in timber) and for the next 120 years only occasionally. It is hard to think of a reason for an unprecedented boom in investment in traffic infrastructure subsequently, in the last two thirds of the third century and at the beginning of the fourth.⁸⁶ What sets this period apart is political instability. The average lifetime of emperors in office during this period of transition was shorter than in any longer era before or after, and especially so in Britain:

Table 3: Duration of reigns of emperors recognised in Roman Britain.

Period	Total number of years when emperors were in power ruling for more than nine years	Percentage
AD 43-235	172 out of 192	c. 90%
AD 235-306	10 out of 71	c. 14%
AD 306-410	64 out of 104	c. 62%

In such a rapidly changing political environment, it was important for local dignitaries to demonstrate that they were always on the right political side. The habit of setting up milestones commenced on a significant scale only in politically unstable times, i.e. once from the late 230s

⁸⁵ See Fig. 5.

⁸⁶ The spatial distribution is worth noting too. They often cluster in the vicinity of towns and forts, whilst for effective communication the maintenance of sections of road at the midpoint between two settlements should have been as important as sections in their approaches: Sedgley (1975) 3 fig. 1; *RIB* I 98, 598, 2219-2314; I², p. 758 no. 98, p. 767 no. 598, p. 799-800; III, 3516-3527; *TIR M30 London* (1983); *TIR N30 Britannia Septentrionalis* (1987); cf. Rathmann (2004b) 168.

onwards the average lifetime of emperors in office had dropped dramatically, and it ceased once political stability returned in the early fourth century (Fig. 5).

The circumstances of the abandonment of the practice are worth closer scrutiny. In AD 306 Constantine I was proclaimed emperor, the first one since Alexander Severus (AD 222-235) whose rule over Britain was to last for more than a decade, indeed it was to last for over three decades, until AD 337. It cannot be coincidence that one of the peaks in setting up milestones in Britain occurred at the beginning of Constantine's reign only for them to cease altogether within a few years or decades thereafter (Figs 5-6). There is only a single known milestone inscription from Britain which might postdate the emperor's death, but is more likely to predate it, perhaps by as much as twenty years. The name of Constantine II in the nominative was incised into the back of a milestone of his grandfather, Constantius I. As the end is lost, we cannot exclude the possibility that it might belong to his reign as *Augustus* (AD 337-340), but could well date to the time shortly after he had been proclaimed *Caesar* in AD 317.⁸⁷ Once political stability returned under Constantine I, there was no longer a need for local authorities to demonstrate their loyalty to the new ruler by ensuring that milestones bearing his name were set up near their town or fort.

Despite being abandoned earlier than further south, milestones in Britain were the most enduring type of Roman stone inscriptions. Tombstones, records of building works and votive dedications had already ceased to be produced (or at least to be dated) well before milestones — and milestones had become by far the most frequent type of monumental inscription already before the production of other categories of stone inscriptions had come to an end.⁸⁸ It was only the need to display a loyal attitude towards the emperor which kept the habit of setting up public stone inscriptions in Britain alive at a time when this practice had otherwise been abandoned. Fourth-century Britain, the period when personal wealth of the rich seems to have reached its peak, did not become an illiterate culture. The private and to some degree the religious as opposed to the public sphere now became the centre of lavish display. Mosaic floors and portable objects still carried inscriptions, but the habit

⁸⁷ *RIB* I 2259, cf. 2258.

⁸⁸ Sauer (1996) 14-15, 20.

of setting up public stone inscription was over.⁸⁹ Yet, the post-Roman revival of this habit in the west may owe much to milestones, the most abundant late Roman inscriptions on public view in Britain.⁹⁰

VII. SIGNPOSTS OF IMPERIAL ACCESSION AND EPISODIC INSTABILITY

Milestones in our period had evolved into public declarations of allegiance to the emperor. Peak periods of milestone erection often correspond to more or less prolonged periods of political uncertainty. Within such periods, there could be several short and pronounced bursts of milestone production, often following an emperor's accession to the throne (Fig. 5). It is this phenomenon which will be examined systematically in this section.

Milestones of emperors in power for less than a year must obviously date to a time not long after their proclamation. Those of later third-century and fourth-century *Augusti* lasting for several years often cannot be dated to similarly short periods. This is the result of a high proportion of milestones from many provinces not providing any information permitting closer dating. Victory titles are frequently omitted, whilst consulships, imperial acclamations or the annually renewed tribunician power are not always listed or counted. If counted, errors or inconsistencies occurred frequently. A milestone of Postumus, to cite just one example, provides an unnumbered tribunician power in combination with his fourth consulship of AD 268.⁹¹ This clearly demonstrates that failure to count the number of years an emperor had held the tribunician power does not prove a date prior to the first annual renewal (in case of Postumus in AD 260). The partial or complete omission of such information is not proof that an inscription predates the bestowal of such honours and powers, as it was far from obligatory to provide a full list — even though the majority of inscriptions with unnumbered tribunician power probably indeed date to the time before the first annual renewal. The gesture of setting up a milestone to an

⁸⁹ See *RIB* I 721 for an exception to the rule.

⁹⁰ Todd (1999).

⁹¹ *CIL* XVII.2, 334. Whilst in this particular case, COS IIII being at the end of the line, a later updating of the inscription cannot be ruled out, a milestone (*CIL* XVII.2, 353) set up during or after his third consulship of AD 262, equally after an uncounted TRP, cannot be explained with a later amendment, as COS III is followed by a word divider and P • P in the same line.

emperor mattered, it seems, while meticulous listing of all titles and powers was a dispensable luxury.

The astonishingly large number of milestones in the name of short-lived emperors or set up during Aurelian's one-year rule over Gaul suggests that similar quantities of milestones of more enduring rulers are likely to date to their first year in power. Whether milestones in our period were predominantly erected within the first months of an emperor's reign or at a fairly regular rate throughout is crucial for establishing their function. For politically motivated monuments it was opportune for governors or communities to demonstrate their loyalty early, when questions on allegiance were most likely to arise, and before a new emperor's rule was firmly established. Once an emperor's name was on public display, the dedicators' loyalty was literally carved in stone and remained so for however long the reign lasted. If a series of milestones had been erected within the dedicators' area of administrative responsibility in the first year, there was no obvious need to create a similar number in subsequent years. If, on the other hand, milestones recorded maintenance work and any demonstrations of loyalty were merely a by-product, one ought to expect a steady rate of production without any peaks in an emperor's year of accession. If the truth lies somewhere in between, i.e. if some milestones were simple dedications and others were set up on the occasion of real roadworks, one would expect smaller spikes following the proclamation of a new emperor or of an imperial prince, but a significant degree of continuity between such events. In periods when it is not possible to date milestones precisely, the overall number of milestones per emperor is significant. If a noteworthy proportion of milestones were set up on the occasion of road maintenance works, then there should on average be more milestones for long-lived than for short-lived emperors.

In order to establish whether there is such a correlation, I have plotted the post-Severan and pre-Diocletianic milestones from Britain, Gaul and Germany and Asia Minor as case studies (Figs 2-4). Each of these case studies has been subdivided into an earlier phase (AD 235-253) and a later phase (AD 253-284/285). As far as Britain (Fig. 2), Gaul and Germany (Fig. 3) are concerned, the trend lines show that this subdivision is not meaningful. Both in the early and late phase there is no obvious correlation between the length of an emperor's reign and the number of milestone inscriptions which can be attributed to it, suggesting that no or only a small proportion of milestones in Rome's north-western provinces were set up on the occasion of any regular roadworks. Most of

them, it seems, were produced for political reasons only, with bursts of milestone erection following a change in government and only a trickle in the times in between.

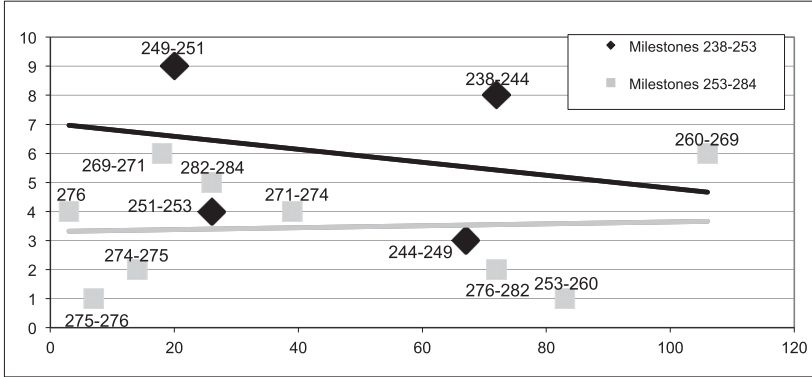


Fig. 2: Absolute number of post-Severan and pre-Diocletianic milestones in Britain of emperors in relation to the length of their reigns in months.⁹²

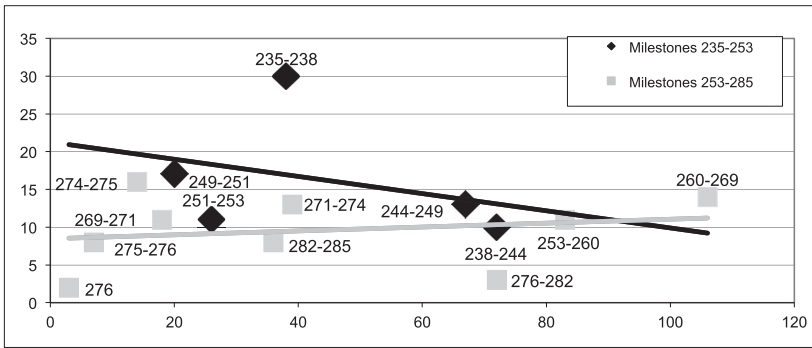


Fig. 3: Absolute number of post-Severan and pre-Diocletianic milestones in Gaul and Germany of emperors in relation to the length of their reigns in months.⁹³

⁹² Relevant entries in *RIB* I 98, 598, 2219-2314 (excluding 2246 and the first and second texts on 2301, whose proposed dating is too speculative); *I²*, p. 758 no. 98, p. 767 no. 598, p. 799-800; III, 3516-3527.

⁹³ *CIL* XVII.2, *passim*; *AE* 1978.499; 1979.409; 1980.631, 640; 1981.641; 1986.490; 1991.1239; 1993.1218; 1995.1018a; 1996.1048, 1140; 1997.1148a; 1999.1074; 2001.1393; 2002.1061; 2003.1231-1232; 2004.953.

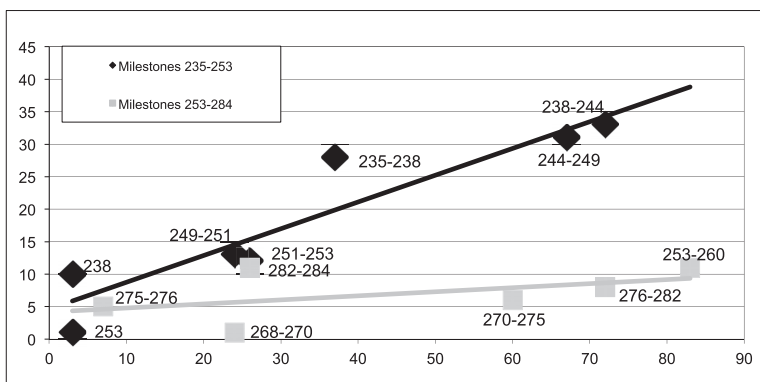


Fig. 4: Absolute number of post-Severan and pre-Diocletianic milestones in Asia Minor of emperors in relation to the length of their reigns in months.⁹⁴

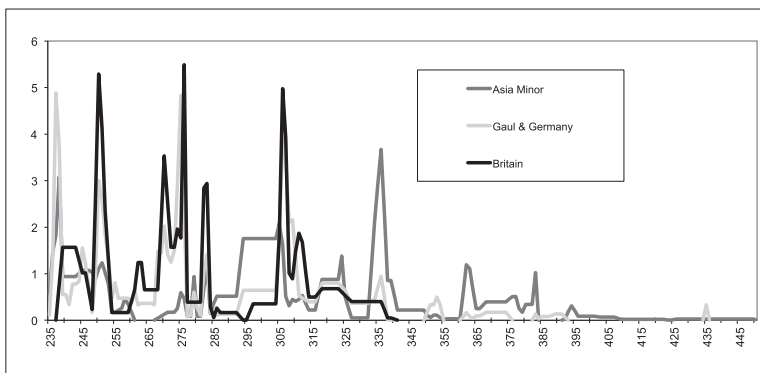


Fig. 5: Milestones from Britain, Gaul, Germany and Asia Minor from AD 235 to 450 per year: percentage of all milestones from each sample area, datable to this period, per year (sample size: Britain: 85, Gaul and Germany: 300, Asia Minor: 586). Milestones not attributable to a specific year have been assigned to the entire period possible, even though the majority is likely to date to the year following an emperor's accession; the graph is thus likely to under-represent the spikes in accession years.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Based on French (1988) listing the bulk of milestones known from Asia Minor. No attempt has been made to add milestones published since, e.g. in *AE*, *SEG* and French (2012), as the sample provided by French (1988) is large enough to be statistically viable. Furthermore, as the text of many of the milestones listed by French (1988) has not been published, it more difficult to be verify that all recently published milestones are indeed new.

⁹⁵ Sources: as previous three figs, plus *AE* 1977.529; 1986.478, 521; 1995.1018b-1019, 1031; 1996.966; 1997.1083; 2003.1267; 2004.902 (late antique milestones not included in *CIL* XVII.2).

One wonders whether in Asia Minor milestones served as much as monuments to proclaim loyalty to the emperor, as was the case in Britain. Our graph (Fig. 4) suggests that at least until AD 253, i.e. until the time before Asia Minor suffered extensive Persian and Gothic incursions, this was not so. There was, unlike in Rome's north-western provinces (Figs 2-3), a clear correlation between the length of an emperor's reign and the number of milestones.⁹⁶ The effects of the wars on Asia Minor were profound and could be felt in many spheres of life: the weight of provincial coinage, for example, dropped and most cities ceased to issue coins altogether in the AD 250s or early 260s, with only a few in the more sheltered south-west continuing beyond.⁹⁷ After AD 260 milestone erection in Asia seems to have come to a halt for several years⁹⁸ only to recommence slowly towards the end of the decade and to assume now an almost exclusively dedicatory role.⁹⁹ The complete hiatus in milestone production in Asia Minor for much of the AD 260s forms an interesting contrast to Britain. Honorific milestones often signal political volatility, but their erection depended on officials operating in an otherwise at least moderately secure environment, and Britain was arguably more economically stable and secure at the time.

Some might wonder whether the number of milestones is not simply too small to allow statistically meaningful analysis. Could the strong representation of some short-lived emperors be a result of chance? Is it possible, for example, that the survival of a similar number of Florianus and Probus

⁹⁶ The above-cited Pupienus and Balbinus milestones from Cappadocia are likely to be exceptions to the rule.

⁹⁷ Beyer (2002); Goltz (2008); Johnston (2007); Kettenhofen (1982); Nollé (1987) 254-264; Ziegler (1985) especially 114-119, 126.

⁹⁸ French (1988) 456-457; cf. *id.* (2012), p. 240, no. 94(B).1; *AE* 1983.902.

⁹⁹ Whilst a high proportion of milestones of the mid and late third century and Late Antiquity functioned as imperial accession markers, there are, of course, a significant number of exceptions to the rule. Five of the eight known Probus milestones from Asia Minor, for example, date to his fourth tribunician power (AD 279/280), all set up by the governor of Pontus, Aelius Quintianus: French (1988) nos. 908, 913-914, 959, 991, with further references, p. 459, 504, maps 12, 18; cf. *AE* 1977.787-788; 2006.1372; Gerhardt & Hartmann (2008) 1171; Kreucher (2003) 206; Lorient (2006) 406-407, 424-425. Little would be gained by speculating whether the activities of the governor were in any way related to Probus' various eastern campaigns, as there is much uncertainty about their precise chronology and nothing to suggest that Probus personally ventured to Pontus: Kreucher (2003) 150-177. It is possible that a small number of other Roman milestones were set up along imperial travel routes in anticipation of imperial visits, but this can only account for a small proportion, as the majority come from places the named emperors never came close to: Herzog (1974) 639.

milestone inscriptions from the north-western provinces is just a coincidence? Whilst Probus ruled at least 24 times as long as Florianus and his milestones ought to outnumber those of his predecessor by a similar factor, if set up at a steady rate, the sample is small. From the north-western provinces there are only six for Florianus¹⁰⁰ and five for Probus,¹⁰¹ including one stone with inscriptions for both.¹⁰² A probability calculation (Table 4) allows us to assess the odds of such an outcome occurring by chance.

Table 4: Probability of all possible ratios in a random sample of 11 milestones of Florianus and Probus, on the hypothetical assumption that these had been set up at a regular speed throughout and that thus under Probus' reign of six years there should have been 24 times as many as under Florianus' rule of no more than three months.

Number of milestones	Formula	Probability in percent	Probability expressed as 1 in X	Cumulative probability of this or a higher number of Florianus milestones expressed as 1 in X
11 Probus and 0 Florianus	$\left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^{11}$	63.82393306	1.57	1.00
10 Probus and 1 Florianus	$\binom{11}{10!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^{10} \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)$	29.25263598	3.42	2.76
9 Probus and 2 Florianus	$\binom{11}{9! \times 2!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^9 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^2$	6.09429916	16.41	14.44
8 Probus and 3 Florianus	$\binom{11}{8! \times 3!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^8 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^3$	0.76178740	131.27	120.61
7 Probus and 4 Florianus	$\binom{11}{7! \times 4!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^7 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^4$	0.06348228	1575.24	1484.90
6 Probus and 5 Florianus	$\binom{11}{6! \times 5!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^6 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^5$	0.00370313	27004.16	25892.52
5 Probus and 6 Florianus	$\binom{11}{5! \times 6!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^5 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^6$	0.00015430	648099.84	628984.60
4 Probus and 7 Florianus	$\binom{11}{4! \times 7!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^4 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^7$	0.00000459	21776154.48	21325647.91
3 Probus and 8 Florianus	$\binom{11}{3! \times 8!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^3 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^8$	0.00000010	1045255414.83	1030818728.40
2 Probus and 9 Florianus	$\binom{11}{2! \times 9!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right)^2 \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^9$	0.00000000	75258389867.92	74634083299.91
1 Probus and 10 Florianus	$\binom{11}{1! \times 10!} \times \left(\frac{24}{25}\right) \times \left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^{10}$	0.00000000	9031006784150.09	8996927513266.51
0 Probus and 11 Florianus	$\left(\frac{1}{25}\right)^{11}$	0.00000000	2384185791015620.00	2384185791015620.00

As the ten milestones, with a total of eleven inscriptions for the two emperors, have been found at separate sites, they represent a random sample, not likely to have been distorted by intensive archaeological fieldwork

¹⁰⁰ *CIL* XVII.2, 369, 580; *RIB* I 2235, 2275; III, 3524.

¹⁰¹ *CIL* XVII.2, 14, 43, 47; *RIB* I 2300.

¹⁰² *RIB* I 2280.

within the territory of a single community acting in an atypical manner. The above results are thus valid. The strong representation of Florianus milestones, in relation to those of Probus, suggests that more milestones were set up on average per month under Florianus than under Probus, with a probability of more than 600,000 to 1.¹⁰³ In Gaul, where the three Probus inscriptions all come from the south (and none of them dates to the beginning of his reign), the imbalance may in part also be related to the repercussions of the Germanic invasions early in his reign. Yet even the six British inscriptions of the two emperors on their own provide a probability as low as 1 in 27,791 of there being four or more Florianus inscriptions (using the same parameters as in the previous calculations).

Whilst even this small sample demonstrates the extreme improbability of coincidence, it may nonetheless be worth testing the method with a second case study based on a somewhat larger sample. Interestingly, the number of milestones for the three main Gallic emperors is almost equal. Leaving aside those from Hispania Citerior, which was not under permanent control of the Gallic Empire, there are 20 for Postumus, and 17 each for Victorinus and the Tetrici, even though Postumus' reign lasted about three times longer than that of the Tetrici and about six times longer than that of Victorinus. Of the 20 milestones of Postumus, 13 cannot be attributed to any particular period within his reign (AD 260-269), one each dates to AD 261, 262/263, 262/267, 267/268 and 268/269 and two to AD 268. None of the 17 milestones of Victorinus provides information which allows dating it to a shorter period within his reign (AD 269-271).¹⁰⁴ If one assumed hypothetically that milestones were erected at a regular pace throughout the reign of Postumus and continued to be set up at the same pace under Victorinus, there ought to be little more than one sixth of them, bearing in mind that Postumus' rule lasted for approximately 106 months, that of Victorinus only for 18. The probability that in a random sample of 37 surviving milestones of these two emperors,

¹⁰³ There is no need to exclude the one milestone, carrying an inscription of Florianus and a second of Probus, as there is no local bias one way or the other. If all inscriptions attested roadworks, two on the same stone would still relate to separate projects. Even if one excluded it, thus reducing the sample to five and four respectively, the probability of five or more surviving Florianus milestones occurring in a sample of nine in total (assuming again a ratio of 1: 24 in antiquity) is still as low as 1 in 88,743. If Florianus' reign should have lasted for just two months, the ratio would be 1: 36, and the odds of a random sample yielding a similar proportion of Florianus milestones, in relation to those of Probus, even lower.

¹⁰⁴ Rathmann (2003) 273-278, with references, plus *AE* 1999.1074; 2002.1061; *RIB* III 3523 (cf. 3518-3519, 3525); Wittke e.a. (2010) 222-223.

there should be 17 or more of Victorinus are as low as 1 in 209,258 (if those of Postumus outnumbered those of Victorinus by a factor of $\frac{53}{9}$ to 1 in antiquity).¹⁰⁵ We may thus safely reject the hypothesis that milestones were set up at the same regular pace throughout the reigns of Postumus and Victorinus and that the strong representation of Victorinus is a result of coincidental survival. The burst of milestone erection after the proclamation of Victorinus was probably the result of communities, who had set up milestones of Postumus previously, wishing to put on record that they did not hold the dead emperor in greater esteem than the living. None would have wanted to be the last, and we may imagine that the action of one community triggered a domino effect amongst others. If, by contrast, milestones reflected a steady programme of road maintenance, one ought to expect the milestones of Postumus to be greater in number than those of his two successors combined.

The evident absence of any correlation between the length of an emperor's reign and the number of milestones set up in his name in Britain (as in nearby Continental provinces), exemplified by the strong representation of Decius, Florianus and the Carus dynasty (Figs 2 and 5), suggests that in the majority of cases milestones were set up shortly after the authorities had heard about the accession. Later, five of the milestones of Constantine I from Britain were erected during the one year while he was *Caesar* (AD 306-307) and only eight over the next thirty years, after his promotion to the rank of *Augustus* (AD 307-337)¹⁰⁶ (not counting those of his sons and other recognised co-emperors and fragmentary late milestones not attributable to a specific emperor) (Fig. 6). Only Constantine's initial acceptance of the rank of *Caesar*, i.e. of the lower imperial rank in the Tetrarchic system, renders his earliest inscriptions datable to a short period, unlike those of most of his predecessors who had been *Augusti* from the start. The unusually large number of Constantinian milestones in the north-west (Figs 6-7), dating to the year following his accession as *Caesar* (AD 306-307), mark this event.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Using the same calculations as in Table 4 and replacing the variables: 20 milestones of Postumus, 17, of Victorinus; reigns estimated at 106 and 18 months respectively.

¹⁰⁶ Constantine I as *Caesar*: *RIB* I 2233, 2237, 2292, 2303, 2310, cf. 2301, excluded as restoration hypothetical; as *Augustus*: *RIB* I 2242, 2249, 2267, 2285, 2288, 2302; III 3520-3521; as *Caesar* or *Augustus*: *RIB* I 2220.

¹⁰⁷ As rightly pointed out by Loscheider (2007) 369-371, even if he maintains that the majority of milestones functioned as distance markers or were set up on the occasion of roadworks; cf. Tomlin (2006). Frere (1987) 336, by contrast, argues that the "short period of rule as Caesar saw heavy repairs to the roads of Britain."

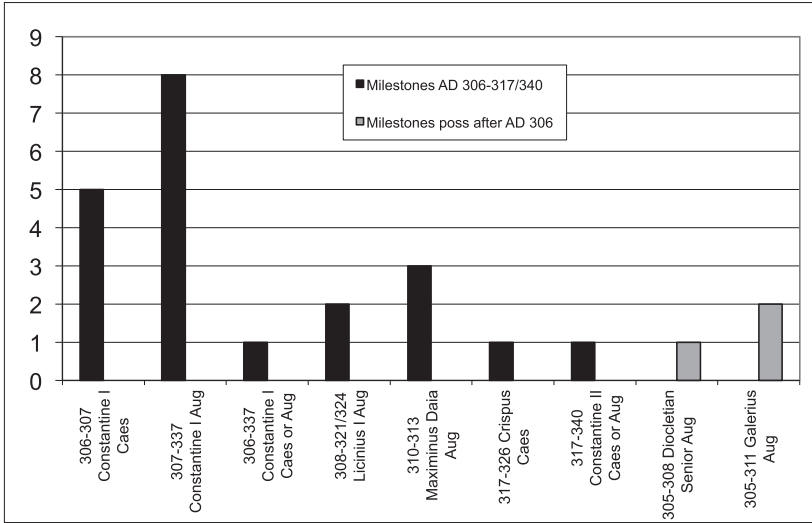


Fig. 6: Constantinian inscriptions on milestones from Britain, with a disproportionate number dating to his accession year, as well as to individual co-emperors and imperial princes.¹⁰⁸

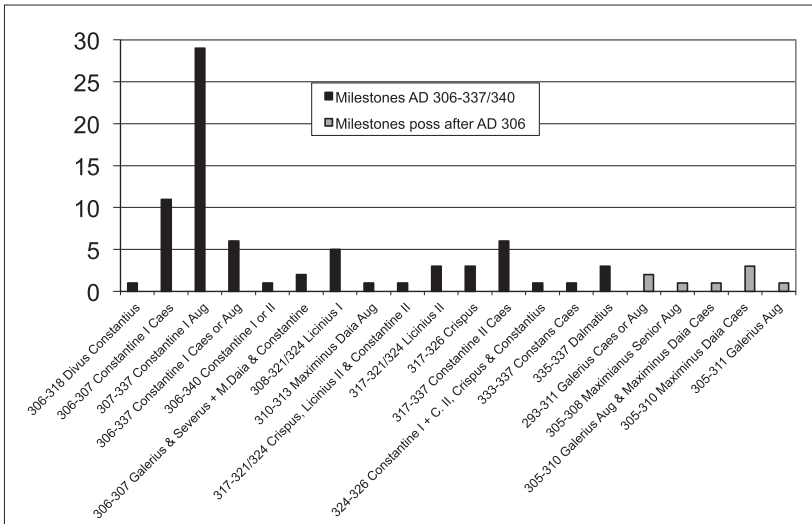


Fig. 7: Constantinian inscriptions on milestones from Gaul and Germany, showing a similar pattern as the previous graph.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Sources: cf. Fig. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Sources: cf. Figs 3 and 5. Dating based on *RIC* and Kienast (1996) 264-317.

When did the function of milestones change? This will have differed from province to province and the change may sometimes have been gradual rather than abrupt. Developments in the later 230s may have been pivotal. In Hispania Citerior there are no fewer than 43 milestones of Maximinus and Maximus, normally in the nominative (though at least one in the dative and one more using both cases). All well-preserved specimens date to AD 238, after Maximinus' seventh imperatorial acclamation in response to the defeat of his rivals, Gordian I and II, in Africa; they were set up through the agency of the governor of Hispania Citerior, Quintus Decius Valerinus,¹¹⁰ who was to become emperor and the recipient of numerous dedicatory milestones himself 11 years later (AD 249-251). 24 of these milestones (from a variety of roads) refer specifically to road and bridge repairs, five (all from a stretch of a single road) do not, while the remainder is not sufficiently well preserved to tell.¹¹¹ Are they evidence for Maximinus and Maximus having instructed road maintenance work in AD 238 or for the famous governor's eagerness to show that he remained loyal, whilst open revolt had spread from Africa to Italy? An inscription attests that the governor had sent a vexillation of *Leg(io) VII Gem(ina) P(ia) F(idelis)*, while it still carried the (subsequently erased) honorific epithet *M[a]xim[i]n(iana)*, to a vantage-point at the east coast of the Peninsula. The aim of the mission, far from the legion's headquarters at León in the north-west, was probably to spot and intercept any seaborne hostile landing. Decius wished to make public which side he supported in the civil war, and his numerous milestones in the name of Maximinus and Maximus, all dating to a war lasting just three months, were part of the effort.¹¹² His milestones are a sign of politically unstable times, as were those from Africa, on some of which the names and titles of Maximinus and Maximus were erased only to be the inscribed again later, reflecting almost certainly the revolt of Gordian I and II and the restoration of Maximinus' rule following their defeat.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Alföldy (1987) 430-462, especially 453-454; Gerhardt & Hartmann (2008) 1129-1130.

¹¹¹ Rodríguez Colmenero e.a. (2004) nos. 12-15, 103, 108, 117, 130, 134, 148-149, 156, 172, 199, 245, 289, 313, 349-350, 367-368, 384, 416, 431, 446, 453, 460-461, 468, 599, 667 (cf. 410 excluded as too uncertain); Solana Sáinz & Hernández Guerra (2002) nos. 89, 91-93, 120-127 (cf. 88, 90, 94-119 excluded as included in Rodríguez Colmenero e.a. (2004) or too uncertain).

¹¹² Alföldy (1987) 430-462; *AE* 1978.440; Birley (1998) 65-66; cf. Haegemans (2010) 71-72.

¹¹³ Kallala (2002); Schneider (1935) 420-421.

It is interesting to note that amongst the 30 milestones from Gaul and Germany, dating to the reign of Maximinus, 28 postdate his first year in office and the proclamation of Maximus as *Caesar* in AD 236, quite a number of them dating to AD 237; the two from AD 235¹¹⁴ were both found in the southern foothills of the Alps. Several milestones of Maximinus and Maximus refer specifically to the repair of roads and bridges (perhaps delayed by the repercussions of the Alamannic wars of AD 233-236).¹¹⁵ There is not a single milestone of Maximinus and Maximus from Britain. Is this evidence that there was little or no work on the island's roads or that it was too far from the theatres of civil war to warrant such a demonstration of loyalty — or perhaps that it was only shortly after this time that the fashion for setting up milestones for reasons unrelated to road repairs was adopted here? If we cannot be sure that the abundance of Maximinus and Maximus milestones on the Iberian Peninsula attests heavy road maintenance, or their absence in Britain neglect, it is hard to know how meaningful contemporary milestones alleging road repairs in Gaul and Germany or elsewhere in the Empire are, even if predating the civil war. Specific references to repair of roads become much scarcer and less specific in Gaul and Germany after the demise of Maximinus and his son, and even more so after the death of Gordian III, perhaps an indication of the changing function of milestones.

VIII. REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND LOCALISM

A slow start in taking up the practice of setting up milestones under the Early or High Empire and a sudden and sharp decline in the early fourth century has not been observed only in Britain, but also in some other Roman frontier territories, such as Lower Germany,¹¹⁶ Tripolitania¹¹⁷ and Palestine,¹¹⁸ in all of which certain post-Constantinian inscriptions occur only on a very small proportion of milestones or are

¹¹⁴ *CIL* XVII.2, 2 and 4; for the other Maximinus stones see index p. 269 and *AE* 1996.1048.

¹¹⁵ Walser (1981) 394.

¹¹⁶ Rathmann (2004a).

¹¹⁷ Mattingly (1995) 61, 223 no. 32, with references; cf. *AE* 1996.1695-1696.

¹¹⁸ Isaac (1998) 48-75; Isaac & Roll (1982) 66-86, 91-98, 133-141; Fischer e.a. (1996) 294-295; Roll & Avner (2008) = *AE* 2008.1551-1559. To some extent this also holds true for the Trajanic acquisition of Arabia, even though there are post-Constantinian

absent altogether. By contrast, the peak periods of milestone erection in the central Italian regions IV and V show little overlap with those at the empire's periphery; here milestones of the Early Empire (late first century BC – early second century AD) feature prominently, as well as highly laudatory milestones of the early to late fourth century, with a marked gap in between.¹¹⁹ In an important study Ray Laurence has recognised the sharp contrast between the total absence of pre-Tetrarchic third-century milestones from some regions of Italy and their general scarcity throughout the peninsula. He has made a convincing case that in Italy, and to some extent Asia Minor, they peak in periods of political stability — in sharp contrast to frontier territories where in the third century milestones take on a “role as a means of asserting loyalty ... relevant to those regions in which there was a military presence.”¹²⁰ Other Mediterranean territories differ again. In the south of the Iberian Peninsula, for example, milestone erection continues throughout the third century, but there is no particular peak and, in contrast to some northern provinces, emperors in power for less than a year do not feature.¹²¹ There is no space here to summarise when milestone erection ebbed and flowed in each province of the Roman Empire,¹²² but suffice it to say that there are massive variations and no empire-wide trends. Such major contrasts between different territories under Roman rule show that, far from being centrally coordinated, the decision to set up milestones was made sometimes on a provincial and sometimes on a community level.

There are also regional differences in the physical characteristics and material of late milestones. To save costs and effort, in Britain the nearest available source of suitable stone tended to be used;¹²³ some stones are small and some were not shaped like columns at all, thus considerably facilitating and accelerating the production process. People in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula were similarly thrifty. On the road from Asturica Augusta to Bracara Augusta a granite quarry,

inscriptions: Bauzou (1998); Thomsen (1917) especially 89-93; *AE* and *SEG passim*, e.g. *SEG* 44.1399; 48.1912-1913.

¹¹⁹ Donati (1974).

¹²⁰ Laurence (2004) especially 51. I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees of *Ancient Society* for drawing this article to my attention.

¹²¹ Sillières (1990) especially 168, fig. 8.

¹²² See Kolb (2004) 139-141 for graphs for selected parts of the Empire; cf. *ead.* (2006).

¹²³ Sedgley (1975).



Fig. 8: A typical milestone cluster on the road from Asturica Augusta, at 31 Roman miles from Bracara Augusta.

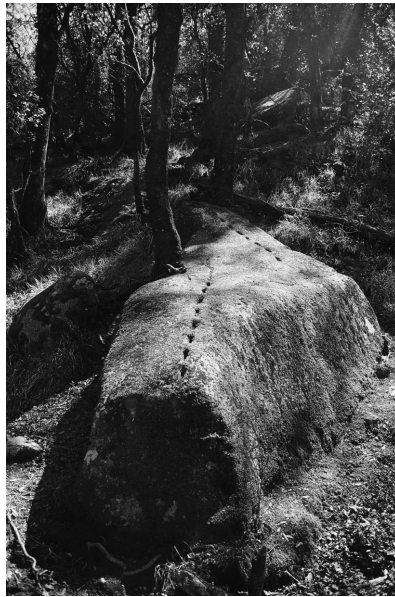


Fig. 9: Stone blocks for new milestones were often quarried and carved as close as possible to the intended position; this rock is just c. 200 m from the milestone cluster on Fig. 8 and, conveniently, on the same road. Neatly aligned wedge holes are part of an unfinished effort to extract two more stone blocks of suitable shape and size for milestones.

with preserved traces of wedge holes in neat rows, in preparation for splitting off stone blocks for further milestones (Fig. 9), is in the immediate vicinity of a cluster of granite milestones at mile XXXI from Bracara (Fig. 8).¹²⁴ By contrast, in northern Italy imported Aegean marbles were used for some fourth-century milestones, notably in the reign of Constantine I, even if local stones were employed as well and old milestones reused. The choice of cheaper local stone in north-western Europe will in part reflect the increased transport costs for ornamental stone to remote locations, but in part also local priorities. Speed was of the essence during the turbulent later third century in Britain, whilst aesthetics and ostentatious display of expensive materials were not. Marble milestones in fourth-century Italy reflect more stable conditions, though here the short-lived emperors Magnentius, Julian (as *Augustus*) and Magnus Maximus, recognised in Italy AD 350-352, 361-363 and 387-388, often had to settle for local stone or palimpsests too.¹²⁵

Successive inscriptions on the same stone, cheaper and faster than cutting and inscribing a new stone, were common in many provinces. The names of former emperors who had been condemned were of course often, more or less thoroughly, erased, or occasionally removed from public display in more creative ways. It is probably no coincidence that the only surviving milestone of a representative of the British Empire is an example of this procedure. A milestone, carrying Carausius' name (AD 286-293), replacing an earlier erased and mostly undecipherable inscription, was turned upside down and rededicated to Constantine I whilst *Caesar* (AD 306-307), thus not only saving the efforts involved in having to create a new column, but also hiding the British usurper's name from view. This may have saved this one milestone from erasure, though whether the column's former top end was buried long before its rededication or whether it had been concealed by some other means under the reigns of Allectus and Constantius I is unknown. This stone was found one mile south of Carlisle. While the Carausius and Constantius I inscriptions contained, as all other milestones from Britain from the mid-280s onwards, no information on dedicator, *caput viae* or distance, its location alone would have

¹²⁴ Baptista e.a. (1998) 22-23; cf. Rodríguez Colmenero e.a. (2004) nos. 330-346.

¹²⁵ Grossi (2007) with references; cf. Basso (2011). See Salama (2002) 88-89 and 135-137 on the use of local marble for some milestones in Numidia.

revealed who had set it up.¹²⁶ Whatever the propagandistic purpose, whether singular or in groups, the milestones that travellers on many roads encountered once every mile as they progressed still provided useful points of orientation in Late Antiquity, as references to milestones in literature attest.¹²⁷ Indeed, the very fact that roads continued to attract much traffic throughout imperial history made them ideal places for local authorities to display their political allegiance. Virtually everybody travelling through a province or approaching a particular town, fort or fortress on a public road was bound to pass milestones.

IX. THE PERIOD'S MOST COMMON DEDICATIONS TO THE EMPEROR

The function of milestones changed over time and varied from province to province. Notably from the AD 230s onwards they served increasingly often as a medium to express political loyalty and less and less often will have been set up on the occasion of actual road maintenance. There are marked differences between provinces in the start and peak periods of honorific milestone production; while in some milestones had a strong tradition and gradually assumed a new role, in others, notably the British provinces, they only became popular after they had largely lost their original purpose.

Benjamin Isaac and Christian Witschel have astutely observed that the spatial distribution of later Roman milestones in a variety of territories was far from random. Not all possible positions, at one-mile intervals, had an equal chance of being represented. Instead, milestones cluster at localities where the maximum number of people was likely to see them. The conspicuous scarcity of milestones from stretches of roads leading through desert and mountainous territories and their clustering in the most fertile lands, as well as the frequency of Latin milestone inscriptions in some of the provinces where Greek and Semitic languages were spoken, led Isaac to conclude that they were

¹²⁶ *RIB* I 2290-2292; cf. Schneider (1935) 425-426, 429 for a selection of further examples of milestones carrying a succession of inscriptions.

¹²⁷ Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber Vitae Patrum* 6.1; Barnes (2008); Chapman & Taylor (2008); Salama (1989). See also Amm. Marc. 19.8.5, though the tenth milestone may be a metaphor for a distance of ten miles (Dr Gavin Kelly, pers. comm.; cf. Amm. Marc. 26.10.19).

not meant to meet the practical needs of the provincial population, but were directed at the army¹²⁸ — and perhaps other officials too. Milestone inscriptions in Greek in the eastern half of the Empire indeed appear to be more frequent in provinces not bordering imperial frontiers,¹²⁹ though each region developed its own traditions. On the Peloponnese, for example, one notices a shift from Latin to Greek in the late third century, the choice of language evidently being left to locals. Milestone inscriptions from Trajan to Gallienus are in Latin, for Florianus and Carus with his sons, there are two each, one each in Greek and one in Latin, for Probus there is at least one in Latin, whilst the Tetrarchic and Constantinian milestones (sometimes repeatedly amended) are in Greek.¹³⁰

The wide variation in style demonstrates that the texts were not normally prescribed or even sanctioned by central authorities, let alone the emperor himself.¹³¹ Milestones in our period, as Isaac has aptly put it, “are the symptoms of a system that makes any official suspect who does not produce mechanical declarations of obedience”,¹³² yet a system which depended on local dynamisms and varied from province to province and from town council to town council. Few, if any, will have dared to oppose the suggestion to set up milestones for the reigning monarch. Yet somebody had to set the precedent to be imitated by others. This is why we sometimes see noteworthy numbers of milestones for short-lived third-century emperors in some provinces or parts thereof and none at all in others. Military and civilian officials would have approached towns mostly by road. It was here that displays of political allegiance had the best chance of reaching their target audience.

¹²⁸ Witschel (2002) 331, 371; Isaac (1992) 111-112, 304-310. Less persuasive is the hypothesis (*ibid.* 305) that the discovery of no more than one milestone in the area of Scotland is a related phenomenon. This is better explained with the early date and brevity of Rome’s control over southern Scotland, abandoned before the bulk of milestones in Britain were set up.

¹²⁹ *AE passim*; Gounaropoulou & Hatzopoulos (1985).

¹³⁰ Steinhauer (1998) = *AE* 1998.1249-1251 = *SEG* 46.379-381; Pikoulas (1998); *JG* V.1, 449; cf. *SEG* 46.327; 48.562. The attribution of two more inscriptions, one in Latin and one in Greek (Pikoulas (1998) 308 no. 3b = *CIL* III 7307 right and *AE* 1998.1249a) to Probus seems uncertain.

¹³¹ As rightly observed by König (1973) 423-427, Herzig (1974) 639-640 and Rathmann (2003) 43, contrary to Pekáry (1968) 18-21 and Sillières (1986) 358.

¹³² Isaac (1992) 308.



Fig. 10: Photo taken at Rawalpindi in Pakistan on 7 August 1990: roads in the modern as well as in the ancient world are places where public displays of the names or images of political leaders reach a wide audience.¹³³

Today images of political leaders, often jointly with messages directed at the public, are widely displayed in public places. To an extent this was true in antiquity too, but statues could not be mass-produced and never existed in quantities comparable to modern printed posters. This is reflected in the survival of considerably fewer statue bases, dedicated to emperors of the third and fourth centuries, than of contemporary milestones.¹³⁴ Only coins provided a viable way for mass-dissemination of the emperor's image, name, title and political messages. With the demise

¹³³ The photo features three posters of the late Pakistani president Zia-ul-Haq. A text over the left image makes clear that this is a memorial set up after his death in 1988 (information on the text and its meaning kindly supplied by Dr Crispin Bates).

¹³⁴ Witschel (2002) 370-371.

of provincial coinage in the first century in the west and the later third century even in the last strongholds in the east, official coin production was entirely state-controlled. Milestones of our period, far from documenting road maintenance history, were the cheapest and most widely employed medium left to local communities and governors to showcase their political allegiance. They are symptomatic of a time of intense local rivalry in publicly demonstrating subservience to a rapid succession of emperors, before most dedicators would have had a chance to form an opinion on their qualities.

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