The ‘Entente Variable’: representations of Britain in the Gallic panegyrics

The *Panegyrici Latini* collection of 12 epideictic speeches addressed to Roman emperors (or representatives) derives from Gaul (3rd-4th centuries CE). Despite occasional self-conscious protestations of their ‘provincial’ Latinity (XII(9)1.2, II(12)1.3), in fact their Latin has been characterised as free from Gallicisms (Adams 2007) and generally notable for their Ciceronian and Plinian manner (eg Gibson and Rees 2013). Their use of the *cursus mixtus* might be an index of their provincialism – Oberhelman and Hall (1985). The speeches’ ‘pure’ Latinity is of ideological significance itself.

Less consistent is this Gallic collection’s cultural perspective, as this analysis of its representations of Britain demonstrates: X(2) (289CE) was delivered in anticipation of Maximian’s attempt to re-integrate Britain in to the Empire; VIII(4) (297CE) is the best surviving narrative of the eventual campaign; VI(7) of 310CE eulogizes Constantine’s elevation to the throne at York in 306; and II(12) of 389CE distinguishes perniciously between Britain and Gaul’s role in the usurpation of Magnus Maximus (383-88CE). These various Gallic representations of Britain draw their fire in different ways, including direct description and intertextual association (most notably, Caesar and Vergil). These Gallic Latin characterisations of Britain help to situate the orators (and those they represent) against prevailing stereotypes and imperial ideologies of the geographies and margins of Empire; as geography and political ideology collapse into each other, Britain is represented as marginal and Gaul is implicitly characterised as integral.

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