

Martin in Purple

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The writings of Sulpicius Severus, an early fifth-century Gallic author, offer a fascinating (though frequently overlooked) view of one aristocrat's attempt to come to grips with the diminution of Roman power in the west. As the centre of Roman interest shifted to the east, Sulpicius proposed a parallel *cursus honorum*, that of the heavenly magistrate, to fill the void. In this paper, I will discuss how Sulpicius employed confrontations between Saint Martin and Emperors, usurpers, Roman officials, and soldiers to stake out a claim to an alternate source of secular authority. Through confrontation with (and triumph over) representatives of the imperial government, Sulpicius argued for the viability of his divine magistracy and offered a paradigm that would allow a Gallic aristocrat to exercise power in a rapidly changing world.