

A Bull Crowned by Two Stars: The Palatine Banner of Julian the Apostate

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The most famous monetary series of Julian the Apostate are those that in the years AD 361-363 show a bull standing underneath two stars and the legend SPES REI PVBLICAE. Many interpretations have been suggested for this series of coins but few have connected them with others of similar format and purpose.

The billon series of Magnentius with the Chi Rho type were aimed at reflecting the Palatine emblem of this Gallic usurper. This was the badge of Constantine that Magnentius took in the critical war years AD 351-353 against Constantius II. Julian removed the Constantinian emblem of the *schola palatina* in the year AD 361, only to adopt another emblem with solar connotations, the starry bull.

The adoption of the bull crowned by two stars as the emblem of the *schola palatina* of Julian was not the result of a willingness to provoke the old Constantinian guard. It was adopted by Julian as a solar and philo-Persian image in the year AD 361. Julian's intention was to draw attention to his personal *schola palatina*, and through this, to point to all the members of his expeditionary army as conquerors of Persia. Since the year AD 360, Julian clearly had the intention to continue with the expeditionary project of Constantius II in Persia. The bull coins reflect a Julian who was rather more a continuator of earlier policies and less polemic than that portrayed in ancient and modern historiography.

Given that the Palatine iconography of the Roman emperors in the 4th century was not always uniform, it cannot be confirmed that the starry bull was a symbol that voluntarily eradicated all the other solar images. It can only be said that the solar bull of Julian attempted to assimilate this emperor with Alexander, commonly recognized as conqueror of the Persian world. Several iconographic examples have been studied in order to understand the extent to which the Roman military heraldry of the 4th century, as with that of the 3rd, is complex and associated with particular missions. Different written sources of Christian and Pagan authors are also examined to show the degree to which the bull of Julian did not convey intentions that were pro-pagan or anti-Christian.