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A Roman military diploma of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus found in Carlisle at Hadrian's Wall

Three fragments of a Roman military diploma were found during the 2025 season of the community digs at the Carlisle Cricket Club excavations. The excavation will be published in detail in a future monography. We thank the leading archaeologist Frank Giecco for access to the military diploma fragments, and for information on its find context, and Anna Giecco for the overview image. The fragments were discovered in the cellar of a small temple in the remains of a burnt wooden box, near a well. The temple lies between a large bath house and a Roman road. The bath house is possibly related to Septimius Severus and his court staying in Carlisle in 210/211 AD. The temple is preliminarily dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd century AD. The find spot of the diploma is in close proximity to Hadrian's wall and within a few 100 meters of the camp of the *ala Gallorum Petriana milliaria civium Romanorum*,¹ of which multiple lead seals were found during the excavation.²

Measure of the fragments together gives a width of ca 55 mm, and a height of ca 52 mm, depending on the position of the midsize fragment, which has no clear contact to the others. The right edge of the outer side is preserved on the largest fragment. The preserved parts of the diploma show heavy melting damage due to fire. The largest fragment has on the outer side partially visible text in 11 lines. The mid-sized left fragment carries only the letters 'NN' and 2 lines below a 'T' on the outer side. On the smallest fragment no letters are visible. On its inner side only a few letters are legible. They must be from the end of the inner text of a *tabella I*. No additional fragments were found, so that only about ¼ of *tabula I* survived.

¹ J. E. H. Spaul: *Ala*². The Auxiliary Cavalry Units of the Pre-Diocletianic Imperial Roman Army, Andover 1994, 180-182.

² Information by the excavators and ex. gr. RIB II 2411,84. The fact that a lead seal from the *ala I Pannoniorum Sabiniana* was also found is not significant. The unit was stationed in Arbeia (South Shields), near the eastern end of the vallum.



Fig. 1: View of all three fragments together.



Fig. 2: Tabella I, with the legible portion of the Diploma text.

On the outer side of the fragment the following letters are legible (see Fig. 1 + 2), albeit with some uncertainty:

[IMP CAES MARCVS AVRELIVS ANTON]INVS AVG[VSTVS]

[PONTIFEX MAXIM TRIBVNIC POTEST XV]II COS III ET

[IMP CAES LVCIVS AVRELIVS V]ERVS [AVG TR]IB

[POTEST II COS II DIVI ANTONINI F DIVI HAD]RIANI NE

[POTES DIVI TRAIANI PARTHICI PRO]NEPOTES

[DIVI NERVAE ADNEP]OTES

[EQVIT ET PEDIT QVI MILITAV IN ALIS ---] QVAE APPE

[LLANT --- ET I P]ANN[ONIO]R SAB

[INIAN --- ET GALLOR PETR] ∞ CR

[ET ---]ET

[---]NA

[---]

Reading and reconstruction of the outer side:

The fragment has been damaged by fire in many places, so that not many letters can be read with certainty. The genealogy of the two emperors listed in lines 4–7 makes it certain that this must be a diploma of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. If Augustus was indeed written out in full in line 1, this most likely points to the first years of their joint reign, since this spelling has been found only in a single diploma from the year 162.³ The full name Augustus is also partially found in RMD IV 288 and AE 2014, 976. If, in line 2, the two vertical strokes before COS III belong to the numeral of the *tribunicia potestas*, this would indicate *tribunicia potestas XVII* for Marcus Aurelius, which lasted from 10 December 162 to 9 December 163. This becomes highly probable because the victory title *Armeniacus* was certainly still absent in the titles of Verus. He adopted it in the autumn of 163. Accordingly, the titles of both emperors has been restored in line with these observations.

³ W. Eck – A. Pangerl, Eine neue Bürgerrechtskonstitution für die Truppen von Pannonia inferior aus dem Jahr 162 mit einem neuen Konsuln paar, ZPE 173, 2010, 223–236 = AE 2010, 1854.

In line 6 only stands *divi Nervae adnepotes* like in the diploma already cited from the year 162.⁴

The diploma is an auxiliary diploma. The number of units that were included in the constitution is unfortunately lost.

Of the names of the units listed after *appellantur*, perhaps two can be cautiously reconstructed. SAB may have been derived from the name of the *ala I Pannoniorum Sabiniana*, and ∞ (= *milliaria*) CR in the following line from the *ala Gallorum Petriana milliaria c(ivium) R(omanorum)* — that is, the unit whose camp has been identified not far from the site where the fragments were found.

The inner side:



Fig. 3: Tabella I intus.

On the inside, the letters M + O N may perhaps be discernible. They must have appeared in the penultimate or final line of tabula I intus, since the right margin of the tabula I extrinsecus now forms the lower edge of the intus side. However, the letters cannot be meaningfully connected with a text that must have stood there.

⁴ See n.3.

The mere fact that the fragments of the diploma were found in Britain makes it highly likely that the document was intended for a soldier in the British Army. This becomes certain if the remains of the names of the two *alae* — the *ala I Pannoniorum Sabiniana* and the *ala Gallorum Petriana milliaria civium Romanorum* — are correctly read and reconstructed. This also means that the recipient of the diploma most likely settled in the settlement that had surely sprung up not far from the nearby camp. This could indicate that this very diploma was intended for a veteran of the unit stationed there. However, this is not conclusive.

Other diplomas that mention this unit and were found in Britain include the following:

RMD V 360, found in Aldwinckle, issued in the year 122.

AE 2008, 800, found in Brompton, also from the year 122.

CIL XVI 82 = RIB II 1, 2401,8, found in Wroxeter / Viroconium from the year 135

Another conclusion is possible if the date 162/163 is correct. During those years, Sex. Calpurnius Agricola was governor of Britain, and his name can therefore be inserted into the text, albeit with a question mark. He is attested by numerous inscriptions in the province,⁵ as well as by a fragment of a diploma,⁶ of which, however, very little has survived. Whether both diplomas stem from the same constitution must therefore remain an open question.

This makes it possible to reconstruct the text in approximately the following form:

*[Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M(arcus) Aurelius Anton]inus Aug[ustus] / [pontifex maxim(us),
trib(unicia) potest(ate) XV]II co(n)s(ul) III et / [Imp(erator) Caes(ar) L(ucius) Aurelius
V]erus [Aug(ustus) tr]ib(unicia) / [potest(ate) II co(n)s(ul) II divi Antonini f(ili)ii, divi
Had]riani ne/[potes, divi Traiani Parthici pro]nepotes, / [divi Nervae abnep]otes /
[equit(ibus) et pedit(ibus), qui militav(erunt) in alis --,] quae appe/[llan(tur) ---- et I
P]ann[onio]r(um) Sab/[inian(a) et --- et Gallor(um) Petr(iana)] (milliaria) c(ivium)
R(omanorum) / [et --- et cohortibus --- et sunt in Britannia sub Calpurnio Agricola(?)
leg(ato) XXV stipendiis emeritis dimissis honest(a) miss(ione),
quorum nomina subscripta sunt civitatem Romanam, qui eorum non haberent, dederunt ---]
etc.*

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⁵ A. R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain*, Oxford 2005, 155-157.

⁶ P. Weiß, *Statthalter und Konsulndaten in neuen Militärdiplomen*, ZPE 171, 2009, 231-252, hier 250-252 = AE 2009, 1836.