

AN IMPERIAL INSCRIPTION FROM THE ROMAN FORTRESS AT CARPOW, PERTHSHIRE

by R. P. WRIGHT

IN September 1964 during the excavation of the east gate of the thirty-acre legionary fortress at Carpow, near Newburgh, on the south bank of the Firth of Tay, Dr J. Wilkes and Mr J. D. Leach discovered on the surface of the south roadway two portions of a monumental building-inscription. The present writer was invited by Dr Wilkes to write a note for his interim report but has found that the elaborate decoration of the sculptured panel and the unusual features in the fragmentary text have made it necessary to give a fuller discussion.¹ He has received invaluable help² from the Director and Staff of Dundee City Museum, for which he here makes grateful acknowledgment.

THE SCULPTURED PANEL

The left-hand panel (Pl. X, 1) is $33\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide by 38 in. high by $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. It has broken away from the inscribed area. The text is flanked by a pelta which springs from a central boss and terminates in beaked heads. In the upper part of the field a Victory, partly broken away, holds a palm-branch in her left hand and stands on a globe. A Capricorn moves left from the upper half of the pelta. In the lower part of the field are two confronting Pegasi and below them a broken figure which appears to be an eagle with outspread wings. The motif of the pelta terminating in bird-heads or rosettes is familiar on elaborate slabs of the Antonine period, and was used by *Legio II Augusta* and its detachments, of which the Pegasus and the Capricorn are the emblems,³ and also by other units.⁴ The emblems show that the present stone may be assigned to *Legio II Augusta*.

The dedication-slab of A.D. 205 found⁵ in 1960 at the east gate of Bainbridge fort has no pelta, but outside the frame of the cable-moulding has among other figures a Capricorn, a Victory on a globe with a palm-branch, and an eagle with a

¹ The following abbreviations have been used:

A.A.: *Archaeologia Aeliana*

A.E.: *L'Année Epigraphique*

Bruce Lap. Sept.: J. C. Bruce, *Lapidarium Septentrionale* (1875)

C.A.H.: *Cambridge Ancient History*

C.I.L.: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

C.W.: *Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society Transactions*

E.E.: *Ephemeris Epigraphica*

I.L.S.: *Dessau, Inscriptiones Latinae selectae*

J.R.S.: *Journal of Roman Studies*

² The Staff of the Museum has made the photographs and provided a squeeze. Mr H. Coutts, the Junior Assistant, supplied an excellent record of the inscribed slab.

³ cf. *Bruce Lap. Sept.*, p. 33, No. 33.

⁴ *Castell Collen, J.R.S.*, XLVII (1957), 227, Pl. XIII, 1; *Corbridge, J.R.S.*, xxvi (1936), 264, Pl. XXVIII, 4; *E.E.*, ix, 1146, *A.A.* 3, iv (1908), 262, fig. 8; *Halton Chesters C.I.L.*, vii, 562, *Bruce Lap. Sept.*, 92; on the Antonine Wall *C.I.L.*, vii, 1131, *E.E.*, ix, p. 628, Sir George Macdonald, *Roman Wall in Scotland* (ed. 2), 376, Pl. LXIV, 2 (*Legio VI*); *C.I.L.*, vii, 1138, Macdonald, *ibid.*, 386, Pl. LXVII, 1; *C.I.L.*, vii, 1136, Macdonald, *ibid.*, 387, Pl. LXXVIII, 1.

⁵ *J.R.S.*, LI (1961), 192.

wreath. As Dr J. M. C. Toynbee observes,¹ the figure-work on this is indeed crude.

The legionary craftsmen may have perpetuated the motif of a pelta with beaked heads a generation or more after the death of Marcus Aurelius and may have produced a devolved² form of the Antonine tradition in the later second or early third century.

On the horizontal margin below the pelta there are three letters, $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. high, from a minor, subsidiary inscription, which read:]P·FE[CIT. They may perhaps record the sculptor or the date of his work.

THE INSCRIPTION

The inscribed fragment³ is $26\frac{3}{4}$ in. wide by $22\frac{3}{4}$ in. high by $8\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick. Much of the face of the stone is badly weathered and flakes have broken away from the left-hand margin. Yet much of the vertical tooling has survived and the guide-lines can still be seen on the photograph and the squeeze. 'In antiquity the letters on the inscription may have been painted red, as traces of a stain still survive, being very



FIG. 1. Tentative reconstruction of the inscription (scale $\frac{1}{32}$)

strong in the M but also quite clear in the P, E and S.' On the upper edge there is a dowel hole $6\frac{4}{5}$ in. from the right-hand end: it is $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter and $2\frac{1}{10}$ in. deep. The sandstone 'is reddish-brown in colour and is probably of local origin from the Lower Old Red Sandstone series'.

Part of the projecting moulding, for a length of 10 in., frames the top of the die and shows that the fragment comes from the first and second lines. The left-hand sculptured panel carries the vertical moulding which formed the left margin of the die and also five inches of the die. At its right edge the lower serif and half of the vertical stroke of the I of IMP have been preserved. About five inches of the surface of the die have been lost between I and the partially preserved M. The die will have contained only four lines, and the letter-heights in lines 3 and 4 will have been less than the $5\frac{9}{10}$ in. of lines 1 and 2. If [. . .]S in the second line is a nominative, IMP must represent *Imp(erator)* in the nominative singular. After a wide space the second word begins with E. In l. 2 a word of three or four letters ends with S and after a wide space the next word begins with F or E. As *Caes.* does not follow *Imp.*, the alternative formula *D(ominus) N(oster)* may be suggested,⁴ with *et* as the connecting word. It is extremely difficult to see what *e*[. . . can be otherwise. The

¹ *Art in Britain under the Romans* (1964), 148.

² For the remains of a devolved pelta of the Severan period see *E.E.*, ix, 1114 from Ribchester (frontispiece to J. H. Hopkinson, *The Roman fort at Ribchester*, 3rd edn. by D. Atkinson, 1928).

³ Pl. X, 2. The quotations and the details presented in this paragraph have been drawn from the report sent by Mr Coutts.

⁴ The present writer gratefully acknowledges to Professor Sir Ian Richmond the restoration here pro-
pounded.

combination of the titles *dominus noster imperator*, sometimes with the addition of *Caesar*, begins in the second half of the second century.¹ These titles, whether in singular or plural, expanded or contracted, were extensively used from the time of Septimius Severus.² The formula *imperator dominus noster* was far less frequent. It seems to begin under Septimius Severus, who was cited with Caracalla in A.D. 197 (*A.E.* 1904, 75) and again in A.D. 202 (*A.E.* 1950, 237). Other texts include Geta (*A.E.* 1938, 146) A.D. 199-209, or Julia Domna with a secondary text replacing Geta's deleted names (*A.E.* 1922, 54). In A.D. 213 this formula is used in citing Caracalla with his fellow-consul for a date (*C.I.L.*, XIII, 7338, 8702). The present writer can cite no parallel for *et* connecting *imperator* and *dominus*. This longer and more precise style may have been used because the formula had not yet become fully standardised.

The developed form of the pelta motif discussed above supports a date in the late second or early third century. As *Imp.* indicates a single emperor, and the text, limited to four lines, could not include the full titles of a colleague, we may exclude the dates when there was more than one emperor, A.D. 161-9, 176-80, May 198-211, 211-Feb. 212. Septimius Severus is cited with Caracalla as Caesar in A.D. 198 in an inscription³ from Brough-under-Stainmore. The rebuilding at Bainbridge is dated⁴ to A.D. 205, and the work on Hadrian's Wall and to north of it at Risingham falls within the governorship of Alfenus Senecio, A.D. 205 - about 208. Until this work was complete it seems very unlikely that major structural work would be undertaken in an advance fortress on the River Tay at Carpow. The discovery of a coin⁵ of A.D. 202 at Carpow tends to support this date. The unusual plan of the east gate at Carpow is matched⁶ by the north-west gate of the Severan fort at Bewcastle.

According to the historians Dio and Herodian,⁷ Caracalla and Geta made terms with the barbarians after Septimius Severus died in February 211. 'On the other hand the coin issues of the period indicate that the campaign envisaged by Severus was actually carried into effect'.⁸ It is to be hoped that further excavation will provide fuller evidence. But as a provisional solution we may suggest that the text recorded Caracalla as sole emperor, between the death of Geta in February 212 and the Roman evacuation of Scotland. It may be observed that building activity could hardly have been in progress before the end of the winter frosts in Caledonia.

¹ e.g. in A.D. 155, *C.I.L.*, VI, 2120 (*I.L.S.*, 8380); in 180-3 under Commodus, *C.I.L.*, VIII, 10570, col. 4; in 194 under Septimius Severus and Clodius Albinus, *A.E.* 1934, 280.

² e.g. *C.I.L.*, VI, 461 (*I.L.S.*, 3361); *C.I.L.*, VIII, 2585.

³ *E.E.*, VII, 951; *J.R.S.*, XIV, 248.

⁴ *J.R.S.*, LI (1961), 192.

⁵ R. E. Birley, *Illustrated London News*, 29th Sept. 1962, 480; Wright, *J.R.S.*, LIII (1963), 164, note 37.

⁶ Sir Ian Richmond drew attention to this parallel; see *CW*,² xxxviii (1938), 213-14.

⁷ Dio LXXVII, 1, 1; Herodian III, 15, 6; IV, 1.

⁸ I. A. Richmond, *Roman Britain* (Pelican ed.), 58. Quotation taken from K. A. Steer, *Roman and Native in North Britain*, 95. The title *Brit(annicus)* was used on the obverse of coins, A.D. 211-13. Some of these are dated to 213 (*British Museum Coins V*, p. cc, p. 438 Nos. 48-55). On the coins the title changes to *Fel(ix) Aug(ustus)* in the course of 213 and in that autumn to *Germ(anicus)*. But there are instances on inscriptions where *Pius Felix Augustus* occurs, e.g. first in April 200 (*C.I.L.*, VI, 225; *I.L.S.*, 2186) and in 209 (*E.E.*, II, 491). As S. N. Miller (*C.A.H.*, XII, 42) and H. Mattingly (*British Museum Coins V*, p. clxxxviii) show, Caracalla and Geta returned to Rome late in 211 and not immediately after their father's death in February. Dio and Herodian have telescoped these events.

The letters in ll. 1 and 2 are $5\frac{9}{16}$ in. in height, with wide spaces between the words. The text (see fig. 1) may have read:

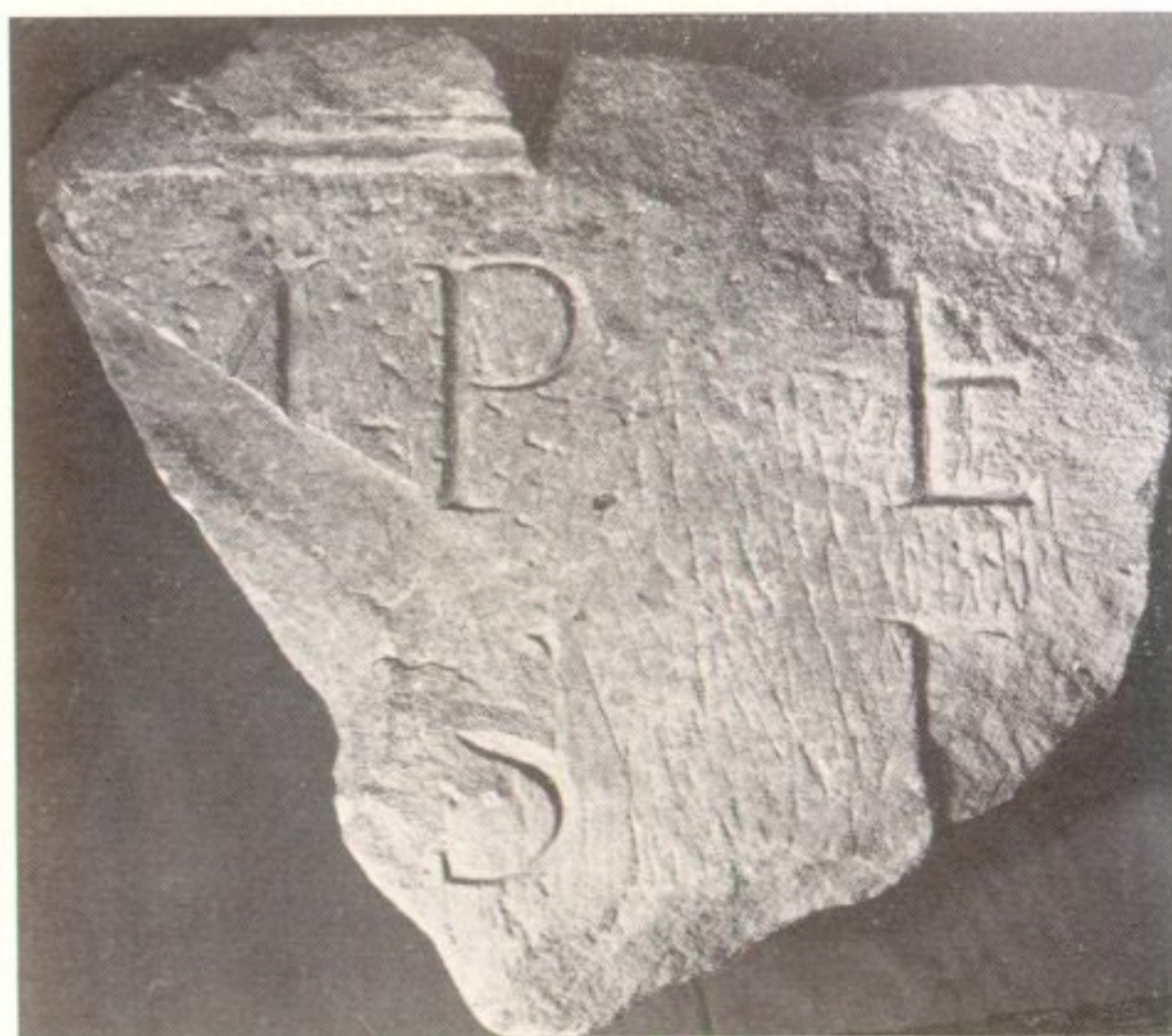
[I]MP E[T D N M AVR ANTONINVS]
[PIV]S F[ELIX . . .

To admit this text with its ample spacing the die would need to be about fourteen feet wide. This would be unusually large, but the dedication¹ to Caracalla in A.D. 213 at Risingham measured 18 ft. 9 in., but had no flanking panels.

¹ *C.I.L.*, vii, 1002; Richmond, *Northumberland County History*, xv, 135, No. 19.



1. Left-hand panel of inscription from Carpow (scale *c.* $\frac{1}{16}$)
Photograph by courtesy of Dundee Corporation Art Galleries and Museums



2. Fragment of inscription from Carpow (scale $\frac{1}{8}$)
Photograph by courtesy of Dundee Corporation Art Galleries and Museums