

A small, damaged marble pedestal block that has formed part of the collection of the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano (Mérida, Spain) since 1948 has hitherto escaped the notice of scholars. This is surprising, since it throws significant new light on the Roman administration of the province of Lusitania, as well as on the urban topography of Augusta Emerita in the second half of the third century A.D. The paper establishes as far as is possible the text of this damaged inscription and analyses its significance for our understanding of the administration of the province of Lusitania and of Roman Spain more broadly in the third century A.D. The pedestal supported a dedication to Mars Augustus and was set up at Emerita, the administrative centre of Lusitania, by an otherwise unknown *procurator Aug(usti) n(ostri) a(gens) v(ice) p(raesidis) p(rovinciae) L(usitaniae)*, a Roman equestrian procurator who was serving as acting governor of the province. Although the text is badly worn in parts and breaks off at the bottom, it is possible to discern that he made the dedication in fulfilment of a vow *pro incolumitate temporum* and to commemorate some refurbishment work to a *templum*. The paper argues that this was the temple of Mars (located originally in the area of the current Parador in the centre of Mérida), the dedicatory inscription from which (*CIL* II 468, of Hadrianic date) was reused along with some reliefs of *congeries armorum* in a chapel of Sta. Eulalia, Mérida's patron saint, located in front of her main sanctuary. The fact that the acting governor was an equestrian official styled *v(ir) p(erfectissimus)* allows us to date the dedication to the mid- to later third century. The latest attested senatorial *legatus Augusti pro praetore* of Lusitania is P. Clodius Laetus Macrinus, who set up a statue to Gallienus in the forum at Emerita most probably in 261 (*AE* 1993, 264). Hitherto the earliest equestrian *praeses* of the province attested is Aemilius Aemilianus, who set up a dedication to Jupiter also at Emerita in the 280s (*AE* 1992, 957). The paper argues that the newly attested equestrian provincial procurator and acting governor held office between 261 and the 280s. More significantly, his appointment reflects the changes that were affecting Roman provincial administration from the 260s across the Empire. Gallienus came to exclude senators from provincial governorships, preferring to appoint equestrians. The newly attested official from Emerita constitutes an intermediate phase in this development, with the equestrian procurator, who was already serving in Lusitania, taking on the role of provincial governor, in a manner analogous to the procurator and acting governor attested at Tarraco c. 250 (Cyprian *Ep.* 67.6.2) and M. Aurelius Alexander, the equestrian procurator of Baetica *agens vice praesidis* attested at Corduba setting up a statue in honour of Valerian and Gallienus in the period 253-260 (*CIL* II²/7, 259). Thus the new inscription from Emerita requires us to revise the history of the provincial administration of Lusitania in the second half of the third century and it also throws light on the urban topography and local civic life in this Roman colony, which was clearly not as much in decline as has previously been argued (e.g., A. M. Canto, *Gerión* 7, 1989).