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# The Macrostructure of the Roman *Pridiana*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the data structure of surviving Roman *pridianum*-type documents. These reports record the current status of a cohort and the changes since the previous report. Two *pridiana* and an interim report survive in a condition suitable for detailed analysis, and a further document, although fragmentary, also merits examination. Although no contemporary sources on data-recording practices in the Roman army have survived, the analysis of the extant documents reveals regularities that clearly indicate a deliberate organisation of statistical data.

## Keywords

*pridianum*; Roman Imperial Age; military papyri; Roman army

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## 1. The *pridiana*

All available information concerning Roman data-recording methodologies derives from primary sources such as papyri, tablets, and inscriptions. By examining similarities and regularities in surviving records, certain structural conventions in these documents may be identified. This article presents a comparative analysis of the preserved documents of a particular type: the *pridianum*,<sup>1</sup> a report detailing the status and changes of a cohort, compiled annually or, in Egypt, twice per year.<sup>2</sup>

Four *pridiana* and one *pridianum*-type document are extant from the Roman Empire. However, one of these, ChLA XI 501, is not suitable for the present analysis, as only the first few lines survived in a highly fragmentary state.<sup>3</sup> The structure of the following four documents will be examined:

- a) Tab. Vindol. 154, written in the last decade of the first century AD at Vindolanda in northern Britannia,<sup>4</sup> is technically an interim report of *cohors I Tungrorum* rather than a *pridianum*.<sup>5</sup> However, as will be demonstrated, its content and structure are identical to those of the corresponding sections of the *pridiana*, making it suitable for the present analysis.
- b) CPL 112 (RMR 63), written in Moesia Inferior between AD 100 and 105 and discovered in Egypt,<sup>6</sup> contains the *pridianum* of *cohors I Hispanorum veterana*.<sup>7</sup>

1 The *pridianum* is not explicitly mentioned in any ancient literary or historical source. However, according to a passage from the *Historia Augusta* (Alex. Sev. 21, 6), Emperor Alexander Severus kept records in his bedchamber to review the most important data concerning his soldiers. As convincingly argued by Phang (2011: p. 295), this passage may refer to *pridiana* alongside other records.

2 Stauner (2004: pp. 95–112) offers a comprehensive discussion of the *pridiana*, including an overview of the structure of the documents addressed in this study. Phang (2011: pp. 293–296) also discusses the *pridiana* and proposes a ‘structure of the ideal *pridianum*’; however, this outline calls for some revision. See also Pearson (2021: pp. 186–188) and Phang (2012: pp. 207–208).

3 For further discussion of this document, see Stauner (2004: pp. 100–101).

4 The tablet is available in the Vindolanda Tablets Online database: <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk>.

5 E.g. Bowman & Thomas (1991: pp. 65–66): ‘It is also worth bearing in mind that the archaeological context of the Vindolanda tablet gives us no reason to suppose that this document went into the official archives of the unit – it is perhaps more likely to have been an interim report compiled for the commanding officer.’ See also Phang (2011: p. 295): ‘Interim reports may have been requested and issued on an ad hoc basis, perhaps in preparation for or as a result of a campaign. Tab. Vindol. 2.154 [...], issued on May 18, not at the end of the month, may be one of these.’

6 During this period, *cohors I Hispanorum veterana* was stationed in Moesia Inferior. Hunt attributes the document’s arrival in Egypt to the cohort’s deployment there in AD 116 to suppress a Jewish revolt. By contrast, Fink proposes that the *pridianum* ‘was drawn up in the office of the legate of Lower Moesia and a copy sent to Egypt because the Coh. I Hispanorum had still formed a part of the army of Egypt at the beginning of the year.’ See Fink (1958: pp. 102–116, esp. p. 110).

7 Among others, Fink (1971: pp. 217–227) has published the document. See also Whately (2021: pp. 131–133) and Gilliam (1986: pp. 263–272).

- c) P.Brook. 24, dated to c. AD 215 and found in Egypt, is highly fragmentary; yet its preserved content clearly identifies it as a *pridianum*.<sup>8</sup>
- d) BGU 696 (RMR 64; CPL 118), written in AD 156 and discovered in Dura-Europos, contains the *pridianum* of *cohors I Augusta praetoria Lusitanorum equitata*.<sup>9</sup> Only its first section is extant, recording data on the arrival of new soldiers in a regular structure.

Compiled at different times and locations, these four documents offer insights that contribute to general conclusions regarding the *pridiana*.

## 2. Structure

When examining the macrostructure of ancient data-recording documents, two principal aspects must be considered:

- (i) the organisation of data, whether it is presented in a rudimentary graphical format (i.e. basic tables) or as running text;
- (ii) any discernible regularity in the sequence of presentation.

Three of the four documents under examination, namely the Britannic (Tab. Vindol. 154), the Moesian (CPL 112), and the Egyptian (P.Brook. 24), exhibit both a graphical format and a consistent order. These records suggest that during the Roman Imperial period, data recorders routinely endeavoured to present information in a regular graphical format to facilitate efficient data management.

In the Britannic tablet, a graphically structured section (ll. 5–27) is preceded by a succinct introduction which records the date, the name of the cohort and the prefect, the total strength, and the number of centurions. The basic table that follows the phrase *ex eis absentes* ('of whom are absent') consists of two distinct columns, the second of which always contains a number.<sup>10</sup> The report divides the cohort's members into two groups: absent soldiers and present soldiers, with the latter further subdivided into unfit and healthy categories. The rows in this section can be classified into three types:

- a) status rows, specifying the number of soldiers in a particular category;
- b) summary rows, aggregating figures from multiple status rows (e.g. l. 17: *summa absentes*, 'total absent'); and
- c) detail rows, providing additional information about soldiers included in a status or summary row. In this document, indented detail rows indicate the num-

8 Thomas & Davies (1977: pp. 50–61).

9 Mommsen (1892: pp. 456–467); Fink (1942: pp. 61–71).

10 In line 9, the second column contains only the centurion symbol, indicating that a single centurion was stationed in Londinium. In the transcription, this symbol is rendered as 7 due to its similar shape.

ber of centurions within a given category, for instance, ‘in Coria 337 / including centurions 2’ (ll. 7–8).

<i>singulares leg(ati)</i>	<i>xlvi</i>
<i>officio ferocis</i>	
<i>coris</i>	<i>cccxxxvii</i>
<i>in is 7</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>londinio</i>	<i>7</i>

**Table 1:** The structure of Tab. Vindol. 154, ll. 5–9<sup>11</sup>

The extant portion of the P.Brook. 24 papyrus can be divided into three sections: (1) arriving soldiers; (2) dead or permanently departed soldiers; (3) temporarily absent soldiers, with the reasons for their absence. The document exhibits the same three types of rows as observed in the Vindolanda tablet.

Even though this *pridianum* does not display the same level of regularity as the Britannic and the Moesian documents, a certain awareness is evident in its arrangement. For example, when a single detail entry occupies multiple rows, the second one is always significantly indented (e.g. in col. II, ll. 8–9).

Status		‘Soldier’	Number		
Type	Number	Type	Number	Type	Number
<i>dimissus causer&lt;i&gt;e</i>		<i>mil(es)</i>			<i>i</i>
	<i>ab eodem praef(ecto) aeg(ypti)</i>				
<i>θ</i>		<i>mil(ites)</i>			<i>vii</i>
		<i>in is eq(ues)</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>dromadar(ius)</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>summa qui decesserunt</i>		<i>mil(ites)</i>			<i>xxx</i>
		<i>in is 7</i>	<i>ii</i>	<i>eq(uites)</i>	<i>xi</i>
				<i>dromadar(ius)</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>reliq[ui] n p</i>		<i>mil(ites)</i>	<i>cccclvii</i>		
<i>in is 7</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>dec(uriones)</i>	<i>iv</i>	<i>eq(uites)</i>	<i>c</i>
		<i>drom(adarii)</i>	<i>xiii</i>		
<i>absunt in choram</i>		<i>mil(ites)</i>			<i>cxxvi</i>
<i>ins.[ ]</i>		<i>[[dec]]</i>		<i>eq(uites)</i>	<i>x[.].</i>

**Table 2:** The structure of P.Brook. 24, col. II, ll. 3–14<sup>12</sup>

11 In order to illustrate the structure of the documents, the texts are presented in tables that preserve their original arrangement as closely as possible.

CPL 112 is also a regular document. Two *columnae* of the record have been preserved, but the first nineteen lines of the first *columna* are almost entirely destroyed; the only certainty is that dates and city names appear at the ends of ll. 12–19. It can be inferred that these lines recorded the year in which the soldiers were recruited and their places of origin. After recording the cohort's total strength on 1 January, the document lists arrivals from January through September, and the final entry in the first *columna* provides the actual total strength of the cohort.

The second *columna* can be divided into three parts, each introduced by a header, as shown in the opening line of the quoted text: *ex eis decedunt*. The first part records soldiers lost, the second details those temporarily absent outside the province, and the third concerns soldiers absent within the province. As in the two preceding documents, the figures consistently appear on the right side of the *columnae*. This papyrus likewise includes both summary and detail rows.

EX EIS DECEDUNT												
[d]atus in classem fl(aviam) moesicam admin[...] iussu fausti[ni leg(ati)											i	
...iussu iust[i] leg(ati)			in is eq(ues) i									
...nt[...]			in is eq(ues) i									
remissus ad [he]rennium saturninum											i	
translatus in exerc[i]tum panno[n]i[-											i	
perit in aqua											i	
occisus a latronibus			eq(ues) i									
θetati												
summa decesserunt			in is									
restitutus ex non secutis											i	
reliqui numero puro												
in is	7	vi	dec	iiii	eq	in is	dup	ii	sesq	iii	cx[	
			dup	ped	i	sesq	vi	[				

**Table 3:** The structure of CPL 112, col. II, ll. 3–17<sup>13</sup>

The first eighteen lines of BGU 696 serve as the introduction to the *pridianum*, containing elements similar to those in the opening lines of the Britannic document. This is followed by an enumeration of soldiers who arrived between 1 January and 31 August. The document presents data on soldiers in a fixed sequence: (1) origin

12 The first header pertains to the status and summary rows, whereas the second pertains to the detail rows.

13 In the last two rows of the table, I have not resolved the abbreviations due to limited space.

and method of arrival; (2) the rank of the arriving soldier or, in the case of multiple arrivals, the number of arrivals; (3) detail rows when multiple soldiers arrive simultaneously; (4) *centuria* or *turma* assignment (not always indicated); (5) year of enlistment; (6) name; and (7) date of arrival. In cases of simultaneous arrivals, items 4–7 are repeated; if items 4 and 5 are identical, only items 6 and 7 are repeated.

While the content of each entry and the sequence of its constituent data are consistent, the overall arrangement appears somewhat random; nonetheless, the document exhibits regularities in its layout: the consistent positioning of arrival figures along the right-hand margin of the *columnae*, the regular application of line breaks, and the deliberate use of two distinct writing styles.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Macrostructure

BGU 696 is not suitable for a comparative analysis of the macrostructure of the *pridiana*, as its surviving portion preserves only the first two of the fourteen elements to be presented below. However, the remaining three documents allow the reconstruction of the general structural features of this document type. The most evident common characteristics are the division of data into status, summary, and detail rows together with the consistent placement of numbers along the right-hand margin.

The Vindolanda tablet begins with the current strength of the cohort, then it details the absent soldiers, provides a summary of absentees and those present, and contains information on out-of-service and fit soldiers.

1. Current strength (3);
2. Temporarily absent soldiers (4–16);
3. Summary of temporarily absent soldiers (17–18);
4. Summary of present soldiers (19–20);
5. Out-of-service soldiers (21–24);
6. Summary of out-of-service soldiers (25);
7. Summary of fit soldiers (26–27).

Among the extant *pridiana*, CPL 112 exhibits the greatest number of different elements, with seven sections preceding the point corresponding to the first entry in the Vindolanda tablet (i.e. the current strength). The initial element records the cohort's previous total strength; subsequently, a detailed account outlines the changes to that figure, including new arrivals, departures, and the integration of a straggler into the unit. The following sections are almost identical to the ones in the Britannic document, with the exception that the entry on temporarily absent soldiers is divided into two parts: soldiers on duty within and outside the province.

14 The latter is also emphasised by Fink (1942: p. 68).

1. Earlier strength (I, 26–28);
2. Arriving soldiers (I, 29–34);
3. Summary of arriving soldiers (I, 35);
4. Total number including lost soldiers (I, 36–II, 2);
5. Lost soldiers (II, 3–11);
6. Summary of lost soldiers (II, 12);
7. Arriving stragglers (II, 13);
8. Current strength (II, 14–16);
9. Temporarily absent soldiers (outside the province) (II, 17–22);
10. Summary of temporarily absent soldiers (outside the province) (II, 23);
11. Temporarily absent soldiers (in the province) (II, 24–37);
12. Summary of temporarily absent soldiers (II, 38–40);
13. Summary of present soldiers (II, 41–43);
14. Out-of-service soldiers (II, 44–?).

In P.Brook. 24, lines are missing from both the beginning and the end of all three *columnae*. The first *columna* provides information on arriving soldiers, the second on lost soldiers, and the end of the second together with the extant part of the third records entries on soldiers temporarily absent.

1. Arriving soldiers (I, 1–18);
2. Lost soldiers (II, 1–6);
3. Summary of lost soldiers (II, 7–9);
4. Current strength (II, 10–12);
5. Temporarily absent soldiers (II, 13–III, 18).

The following table presents a comprehensive overview of the similarities between the three documents. A question mark indicates the possible presence of a section in a lost part of the record, while a dash denotes its absence from the document. The detail rows are not represented, since their use is not as consistent as that of other elements.

	Tab. Vindol. 154	CPL 112	P.Brook. 24
1. Earlier total strength	–	I, 26–28	?
2. Arriving soldiers	–	I, 29–34	I, 1–18
3. Summary of arriving soldiers	–	I, 35	?
4. Total number including lost soldiers	–	I, 36–II 2	?
5. Lost soldiers	–	II, 3–11	II, 1–6
6. Summary of lost soldiers	–	II, 12	II, 7–9
7. Arriving stragglers	–	II, 13	–
8. Current strength	3	II, 14–16	II, 10–12



	Tab. Vindol. 154	CPL 112	P.Brook. 24
9. Temporarily absent soldiers	4–16	II, 17–37	II, 13–III 18
10. Summary of temporarily absent soldiers	17–18	II, 38–40	?
11. Summary of present soldiers	19–20	II, 41–43	?
12. Out-of-service soldiers	21–24	II, 44–	?
13. Summary of out-of-service soldiers	25	?	?
14. Summary of fit soldiers	26–27	?	?

**Table 4:** Structural comparison of the three records

The first seven elements of CPL 112 do not appear in the Britannic document, while the first, third, and fourth elements are probably lost from P.Brook. 24. The seventh section appears only in CPL 112, and in this document, the ninth element is divided into two parts, separately recording soldiers absent *intra provinciam* and *extra provinciam*. The last five sections are completely lost from P.Brook. 24, while the last two elements are preserved only in Tab. Vindol. 154.

All differences between the extant sections of the *pridiana* can be explained, thus resolving apparent inconsistencies. The first of these is the absence of the initial seven elements in the Vindolanda tablet, which can be sufficiently explained by the lack of change in the total strength of the cohort since the last interim report. However, given the absence of any data concerning the time interval between the compilation of such interim reports, this remains an assumption. If the interval was sufficiently short, it may nevertheless be a plausible explanation.

The second difference concerns the treatment of temporarily absent soldiers: while CPL 112 separates those stationed within the province from those outside it, such a distinction does not appear in the Vindolanda tablet or P.Brook. 24. This variation may be attributed to the size and location of the provinces. Moesia Inferior, from which CPL 112 originates, was much smaller than Egypt, and soldiers transferred beyond its borders would typically have travelled much shorter distances than those sent from Egypt to another province. In the case of Britannia, any such movement would have required a sea crossing, significantly reducing the likelihood of interprovincial deployments compared to a province like Moesia Inferior. Consequently, in Egypt and Britannia, it was likely unnecessary to distinguish between intra-provincial and extra-provincial deployments.

The third difference is the absence of an entry in two documents for the recruited stragglers. The explanation for this is more straightforward: if no such event occurred, the element was simply omitted. It also seems clear that if the other two events that changed the total strength (arrival or loss of soldiers) did not occur,

these entries were likewise omitted. Furthermore, if there was no change at all in the total strength of the cohort since the previous report, the document began directly with the current strength, as evidenced by the Vindolanda tablet.

No further differences can be observed between the macrostructure of the extant parts of these documents. Based on the available information, a more accurate hypothetical macrostructure of the *pridiana* can be proposed:

1	Earlier total strength	Sections 2, 3–4, and 5 were included only if the corresponding event occurred, while section 1 was added only if at least one of these events had taken place.
2	Arriving soldiers and summary	
3	Total number including lost soldiers	
4	Lost soldiers and summary	
5	Arriving stragglers	
6	Current strength	
7	Absent soldiers and summary	If necessary, divided into soldiers within and outside the province.
8	Summary of present soldiers	
9	Out-of-service soldiers and summary	
10	Summary of present fit soldiers	

**Table 5:** Hypothetical macrostructure of the *pridiana*

The surviving portion of the fourth *pridianum* (BGU 696) contains the first two of the ten elements identified above, and the extant section of the document does not contradict the presented structure. Consequently, there is no reason to suppose that its original form did not include all of these elements. Following an introduction, line 14 of the first *columna* records the previous total strength of *cohors I Augusta praetoria Lusitanorum equitata*, followed by three detail rows. The list of arrivals since 1 January, with detail rows if necessary, extends from line 19 to the end of the surviving part of the document.

## 4. Conclusion

The structure of the *pridiana* exhibits striking regularities, although nearly one and a half centuries separate the earliest and the latest of the four known documents, which come from Britannia, the Balkans, Egypt, and Syria. The high degree of regularity exhibited by these documents suggests regulation by a centralised authority, potentially implemented through organised training in compilation practices, through the dissemination of model templates, or through the issuance of formal guidelines

for statistical reporting. Regardless of the specific mechanisms employed, it is evident that the imperial military leadership sought to standardise the compilation of the *pridiana*, a document of critical importance for recording the status of the cohort, in order to produce records that were clearly structured and readily manageable.<sup>15</sup> Such standardisation would have been essential to the effective administration of the Roman army, which comprised several hundred thousand members.

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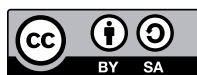
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15 Cf. Stauner (2004: p. 112) on the possible functions and handling of these documents.



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