

CENTURIONS: THE PRACTICE OF ROMAN OFFICERSHIP

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## **Abstract**

GRAEME A. WARD: *Centurions: The Practice of Roman Officership*  
(Under the direction of Richard J. A. Talbert)

This dissertation examines the military and social roles of legionary centurions in the Roman legions during the late Republic and Principate. It combines textual accounts of centurions from such authors as Caesar, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, as well as epigraphic and archaeological evidence, including funerary monuments, dedicatory inscriptions, and the physical remains of legionary camps. By evaluating this evidence with reference to contemporary military and critical social theory (which integrates concepts of civil-military relations, compliance, social structures, and symbolic systems), I argue that centurions were crucial to defining and preserving important Roman military practices, and that an analysis of their position reveals important developments in Rome's military hierarchy and imperial administration.

The dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter addresses the centurion's disciplinary role in the legions, and reasserts the significance of corporal punishment in Roman military culture. Chapter Two investigates the centurion's idealized behaviour in combat, and how it affected views of his leadership and personal authority. The third chapter demonstrates how in the Roman world these practices in asserting authority were complementary rather than contradictory. Chapter Four evaluates centurions' place in the legion's command structure, including career structures, military expertise, and corporate identity, and identifies them as the singular

corps of officers in the legions. The fifth chapter explains their intermediate position in the legion's social hierarchy between soldiers and aristocratic commanders, and how this position was important to integrating soldiers into the Roman military community.

Finally, Chapter Six assesses political and administrative roles of centurions, arguing that they were the chief representation of Roman imperial authority among local populations.

My dissertation has two fundamental goals. The first is to combine and analyze textual, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence for centurions in order to establish their military, political, and cultural roles in the Roman Empire. In doing so, the dissertation provides the first comprehensive study of the duties, characterizations, and expectations of the Roman legions' intermediate officers. The second goal is to demonstrate that this analysis of centurions is crucial to understanding how attitudes toward violence, military discipline, social status, and personal authority were manifested both within the Roman military community and throughout the Roman Empire.

For Lindsey

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The faculty, staff, and graduate students in the Departments of History and Classics at UNC made my doctoral experience thoroughly enjoyable. I chose to come here because of the environment of friendliness and supportiveness that was so apparent, and it is because of that environment that I still pursue the study of history. Within that group, I thank especially my fellow ancient historians, who buoyed my spirits, broadened my perspectives, and got me out of the house.

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## List of Abbreviations

- AE* *L'Année Epigraphique* (Paris, 1888- ).
- BGU* *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden* (Berlin, 1895-2005).
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin, 1863-).
- FIRA* *Fontes Iuris Romani Antejustiniani*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Florence, 1940-3).
- IG* *Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1873-).
- IGRR* *Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes avctoritate et impensis Academiae inscriptionvm et litterarvm hvmaniorvm collectae et editae* (Paris, 1901-).
- ILS* *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, H. Dessau ed. (Berlin, 1892-1916).
- O.Claud* *Mons Claudianus. ostraca Graeca et latina* (Cairo, 1992-).
- OGIS* *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum*, W. Dittenberger, ed. (Lipsiae, 1903-1905).
- P.Col* *Columbia Papyri* (New York, 1929-)
- P.Heid.* *Veröffentlichungen aus der Heidelberger Papyrus-Sammlung* (Heidelberg, 1956-).
- P.Mich* *Michigan Papyri* (Ann Arbor, 1931-).
- P.NYU* *Greek Papyri in the Collection of New York University* (Leiden, 1967-).
- P.Oxy.* *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London, 1898-).
- P.Panop* *Urkunden aus Panopolis*, L.C. Youtie, D. Hagedorn, & H.C. Youtie, eds. (Bonn, 1980)
- P.Ryl* *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester* (Manchester, 1911-1952).
- PSI* *Papiri greci e latini: Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto* (Florence, 1912-).

- P.Sijp*      *Papyri in Memory of P. J. Sijpesteijn*, A. J. B. Sirks & K. A. Worp, eds. (Oakville, 2007).
- P.Tebt*      *The Tebtunis Papyri* (London, 1902-).
- P.Thomas*      *Essays and Texts in Honor of J.David Thomas*, T. Gagos & R.S. Bagnall, eds. (Oakville, 2001).
- P.Yadin*      *The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem, 1989; 2002).
- RE*      *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Pauly-Wissowa eds. (Munich, 1893-1980).
- RIB*      *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright, eds. (Oxford, 1965).
- SB*      *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten* (Strassburg, 1915-).
- SEG*      *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (Amsterdam, 1925-).

## Introduction

The death of Augustus in CE 14 prompted the most splendid public funeral in Rome up to that time. The procession through the city included senators, equestrians and their wives, the Praetorian Guard, priests, and members of the Imperial family. With the body's final arrival at the Campus Martius for cremation, Dio describes the final phase of the funeral in detail:

When the body was laid upon the pyre in the Campus Martius, first all of the priests filed around it, next came the knights, both those of the equestrian order but others as well, and soldiers from Praetorian Guard ran round it, casting upon it all the military decorations that any of them had received from him for valour. Next came the centurions bearing torches, as it had been decided by the Senate, and they lighted the pyre from beneath. And so it was consumed by fire, and an eagle released from it flew aloft, as if his spirit were being borne to the heavens.<sup>1</sup>

In a private funeral, the final act of bearing the torches to the pyre was a duty usually designated to one's closest family members. That such pride of place at a public funeral was given to centurions instead illustrates their importance to the foundations of Augustus' regime and the Roman army.

Centurions had long been an important organizational feature of the Roman legions. During the Republic, soldiers traditionally selected through the annual levy

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<sup>1</sup>Dio 56. 42. 2-3: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐς τὴν πυρὰν τὴν ἐν τῷ Ἀρείῳ πεδίῳ ἐνετέθη, πρῶτοι μὲν οἱ ἱερεῖς πάντες περιῆλθον αὐτήν, ἔπειτα δὲ οἱ τε ἵππις, οἱ τε ἐκ τοῦ τέλους καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι, καὶ τὸ ὀπλιτικὸν τὸ φρουρικὸν περιέδραμον, πάντα τὰ νικητήρια, ὅσα τινὲς αὐτῶν ἐπ' ἀριστεία ποτὲ παρ' αὐτοῦ εἰλήφεσαν, ἐπιβάλλοντες αὐτῇ. καὶ τούτου δᾶδας ἑκατόνταρχοι, ὡς πού τῃ βουλῇ ἐδόκει, λαβόντες ὑψῆψαν αὐτήν; καὶ ἡ μὲν ἀνηλίσκετο, ἀετὸς δὲ τις ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀφεθεὶς ἀνίπτατο ὡς καὶ δὴ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀναφέρων. Cf., Suet. Aug. 98.

selected centurions from among their number.<sup>2</sup> Military experience and a reputation for personal bravery are consistently cited by ancient authors as the primary factors in the election of centurions. Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims: “Out of all the centuries the bravest men were chosen as centurions, and each of these officers took care that his century should yield a ready obedience to orders.”<sup>3</sup> These middle-ranking officers were responsible for leading their *centuria* (comprising roughly sixty to eighty men) into battle, conveying orders from higher officers, and enforcing discipline.

Their reputation for discipline, bravery, and experience later made them a crucial component in Augustus’ sweeping reforms of the Roman legions. He transformed the legions into permanent, standing armies whose soldiers took on military service as a career, yet whose commanders remained drawn from the aristocracy and typically only served for several years. To make such an institution function, however, required greater emphasis on its middle-ranking officers to maintain discipline, provide a continuity of command, and form a direct channel between the soldiers and the legions’ aristocratic leadership. Augustus and his imperial successors therefore increased the pay and status of legionary centurions and assigned new military responsibilities to them, including tactical leadership of independent infantry units, combat training, logistics and supply, and authority to delegate soldiers to special tasks. These responsibilities helped centurions to develop skills that eventually made them valuable for a variety of additional tasks in the Roman military’s role in administering the empire.

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<sup>2</sup>See below, Chapter Four, 136.

<sup>3</sup>Dion. Hal. 4. 17. 4: λοχαγοὶ δ’ ἐξ ἀπάντων ἐπιλεχθέντες οἱ γενναιότατοι τὰ πολέμια τοῦς ἰδίους ἕκαστοι λόχους εὐπειθεῖς τοῖς παραγγελλομένοις παρείχοντο. On λοχαγοὶ as centurions, see below, Chapter Three, n. 67.

Over the last century, modern authors have noted the importance of the centurion to the success of the Roman legions. Delbrück called them the “crux of the legion,” while Parker described them as “the mainstay.” Syme claimed that centurions “provided the bones and nerves of the Roman army,” to which Brand adds “the backbone.”<sup>4</sup> In modern popular culture, legionary centurions have become one of the more recognizable figures from the Roman world, and have recently enjoyed a growing popularity. Many works of historical fiction can be found in bookstores that feature centurions as protagonists and central characters. In television, HBO’s two-season series, *Rome*, presents the civil wars and political revolution of the late Roman Republic largely through the eyes of one of Caesar’s actual centurions, Lucius Vorenus. The films *The Eagle* (2011) and *Centurion* (2010), meanwhile, both tell the story of centurions caught in the chaotic events surrounding the (mistaken) destruction of the Ninth Legion in northern England.<sup>5</sup>

In these media, centurions are presented with character traits idealized through ancient Roman literature: courage and prowess in combat, a strong adherence to traditional military and cultural values, sternness and severity in discipline, and a firm loyalty to the soldiers under their command. Indeed, the centurion, or at least the *idea* of him, is so strong that even the name “centurion” is used in many contexts outside of the

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<sup>4</sup>H. Delbrück, *History of the Art of War, Vol I*, (Westport, 1975), 429-436; H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions* (Oxford, 1928), 18; R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), 395; C. E. Brand, *Roman Military Law* (Austin, 1968), 51. Cf., B. Campbell, *The Roman Army, 31 BC-AD 337* (London, 1994), 47; L. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Totowa, 1984), 98.

<sup>5</sup>These films are loosely based on Rosemary Sutcliffe’s *The Eagle of the Ninth* (London, 1954). Noteworthy also is John Cleese’s portrayal of a fearsome (yet stupid) centurion in Monty Python’s *Life of Brian* (1979).

Roman world, and is especially popular for describing both real and fictional characters in the military or law enforcement, as well as modern types of tanks and submarines.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of this wide popularity, however, the centurion has received curiously little attention from modern scholarship, and remains a relatively poorly understood officer. While monographs on the Roman army and its organization are plentiful and continuing, they typically take no more several paragraphs or pages to describe the career paths or various prescribed duties of centurions.<sup>7</sup> Several authors have combined epigraphic evidence of centurions and their careers for a given region or period of time, but offer little analysis of their broader functions and activities.<sup>8</sup> Among all the acclamations by modern authors of centurions comprising the crux or backbone of the Roman legions, therefore, there is little explanation as to how or why centurions managed to ascend to this vaunted status, and even less attention to their broader impact on Roman military practices. There is, therefore, a significant need to address several important questions regarding this topic: what were the practices centurions employed to maintain military discipline, and to demonstrate qualities of leadership in combat? By what means was their military authority within the Roman military hierarchy asserted and preserved? How were centurions defined as officers by legionary rank and file and by aristocratic military leadership, as well as by civilians?

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<sup>6</sup>E.g., R. Leuci, *All the Centurions: A New York City Cop Remembers His Years on the Street, 1961-1981* (New York, 2005); J. E. Persico, *Roosevelt's Centurions: FDR and the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II* (New York, 2012).

<sup>7</sup>E.g., G. Webster, *The Imperial Roman Army of the First and Second Centuries AD* (London, 1969) 116-120; A. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army At War: 100 B.C.-A.D. 200* (Oxford, 1996), 13-16; Y. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (London, 1994), 43-45, 73-78.

<sup>8</sup>B. Dobson, *Die Primipilares: Entwicklung u. Bedeutung, Laufbahnen u. Persönlichkeiten e. röm. Offiziersranges* (Köln, 1978); Olivier Richier, *Centuriones Ad Rhenum* (2004); J. R. Summerly, *Studies in the Legionary Centurionate* (PhD Dissertation, Durham University, 1992).



## Historiography

There are several major studies that have focused on leadership and the roles of officers at the higher ranks within the Roman military. Brian Campbell's *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (1984) emphasizes the important symbolic, administrative, and military roles of the emperor within the army, and what effect his relationship with the army had on how and for whom the soldiers fought. The impact of Roman generals on the Roman army's successes and practices has also long been a popular topic among military theorists. M. H. Liddell Hart's treatment of Scipio Africanus in *Scipio Africanus: Greater than Napoleon* (1926), and J. F. C. Fuller's *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant* (1965), focus on these men's generalship and tactics in war. Goldsworthy's *In the Name of Rome: The Men Who Won the Roman Empire* (2003) argues for the impact of Roman generalship in key battles from the Republic to late antiquity. More specific works have explored in detail the status, roles, and attitudes of legionary commanders from the Republic and Principate.<sup>9</sup> Even equestrian officers such as legionary tribunes and auxiliary unit commanders have received thorough analysis.<sup>10</sup> That centurions, so commonly acknowledged to be crucial to the success of the Roman legions, have not yet received similarly comprehensive analyses is a serious gap in scholarship that needs to be addressed.

In exploring the legionary centurion's military status and roles within the Roman military hierarchy, this dissertation also engages with studies that consider the army's

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<sup>9</sup>See B. Campbell, "Teach Yourself to Be a General," *JRS* 77 (1987), 13-29; J. E. Lendon, "The Rhetoric of Combat: Greek Military Theory and Roman Culture in Julius Caesar's Battle Descriptions," *CA* 18.2 (1999), 273-329. S. P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley, 1999); A. R. Birley, "Senators as Generals" in G. Alföldy, B. Dobson, & W. Eck eds. *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft in der Römischen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 2000), 97-119.

<sup>10</sup>H. Devijver, *The Equestrian Officers of the Roman Imperial Army* (Amsterdam, 1989).

role in the development of Rome's imperial system, and how the army developed over time and interacted with changing Roman political and social institutions. Theodor Mommsen, in his *Römische Geschichte* (1854-56), combined the traditional textual accounts of the Roman army with rapidly growing epigraphic evidence to illuminate many aspects of the army that were directly related to the development of the imperial system and mechanisms of Rome's empire. Many later studies of the Roman army have followed Mommsen's lead. Lawrence Keppie's *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (1984), for example, demonstrates how the Roman professional army under Augustus grew out of the civil wars of the Triumviral period, and that its development reflected specific goals of the new regime.<sup>11</sup>

A greater number of studies on the Roman army have focused on the army as an institution in its own right, such as Alfred von Domaszewski's benchmark *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres* (1908). This massive work compiled and analyzed evidence of the imperial army's organization, as well as the ranks, duties and careers of its soldiers and officers. Von Domaszewski demonstrated that the Roman army was an extremely complex, structured, yet efficient military institution; he set the standard for monographs on the Roman army's organization by Parker, Harmand, Le Bohec, Davies and others.<sup>12</sup> Despite the age of many of these works, they are invaluable for their accumulation of evidence for the Roman army's organization and broader, non-military

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<sup>11</sup>Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Norman, 1984), esp. 132-133, 191-198. For further works in this vein, cf. W. V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327-70 B.C.* (Oxford, 1979); B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Empire in the East* (Oxford, 1990); A Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (2006); S. James, *Rome and the Sword: How Warriors & Weapons Shaped Roman History* (London, 2011).

<sup>12</sup>Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Köln, 1967); H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*; J. Harmand, *L'Armée et le soldat à Rome de 107 à 50 avant notre ère* (Paris, 1967); R. W. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army* (New York, 1989). For Le Bohec and others, see above, n. 7.

activities, but the breadth of their topic necessarily limits thorough discussion of any one military practice or rank.

Military studies that describe specific organizational or social features of the Roman army are largely influenced by the work of the so-called “Durham School,” named after the academic affiliation of its founder, Eric Birley. Birley combined epigraphic and archaeological evidence in his prolific studies of the Roman army, using methods and assumptions of the studies of more modern militaries to determine the Roman order of battle, organization, social structure, equipment, and interaction with civilians.<sup>13</sup> The Durham School that followed Birley has produced Anglo-German scholars such as Brian Dobson, David Breeze, and Michael P. Speidel, whose works similarly employ epigraphic and archaeological evidence to determine career paths, equipment, daily life in the camp, and the army’s “peacetime” activities.<sup>14</sup> This approach has even been applied to describing the career patterns and transfers of centurions, such as in Brian Dobson’s *Die Primipilares* (1978), J. R. Summerly’s *Studies in the Legionary Centurionate* (1992), and Olivier Richier’s *Centuriones Ad Rhenum* (2004). While these studies provide invaluable insight into centurions’ careers and social status, however, they offer little discussion of the strictly military and institutional aspects, that is, how and why centurions successfully fought, led, and were obeyed.

Studies of a more military perspective on the Roman army and its members have remained largely dominated by authors of general military, rather than ancient, history.

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. E. Birley, *The Roman Army: Papers 1929-86* (Amsterdam, 1988).

<sup>14</sup>See Dobson and Breeze, *Roman Officers and Frontiers* (Stuttgart, 1993); M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies* (Amsterdam, 1984). Cf., V. Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army* (Berkeley, 1981); A. R. Birley, *Locus virtutibus patefactus?: zum Beförderungssystem in der Hohen Kaiserzeit* (Opladen, 1992); M. A. Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 2009).

Older military treatises such as Max Jähns' *Handbuch einer Geschichte des Kriegswesens von der Urzeit bis zur Renaissance* (1880) remain useful for their discussion of how the army's organization affected its combat performance.<sup>15</sup> Most influential is Hans Delbrück's *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (1900-36), in which he evaluated Roman officers and soldiers according to the organization and strategies of the contemporary Prussian army, and subjected literary accounts of ancient battles to vigorous logistical analysis.<sup>16</sup> This focus on the logistics and practical realities of warfare was later adopted enthusiastically by John Keegan, whose extremely influential *The Face of Battle* (1976) probes military events and their consequences through a vivid account of the experiences of soldiers in combat. His closest disciple in Roman military studies is Adrian Goldsworthy, whose *The Roman Army At War: 100 B.C.-A.D. 200* (1996) evaluates the Roman army in battle according to contemporary military theory, arguing that its conduct was directly reflective of its complex social and administrative organization.<sup>17</sup>

A weakness of this approach, however, is that it often relies on modern military categories and assumptions at the expense of specifically Roman social characteristics and attitudes. W. V. Harris first argued in his *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327-70 B.C.* (1979), for example, that specifically Roman attitudes among both its aristocracy and soldiers towards warfare fundamentally influenced its organization and

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<sup>15</sup>See esp. 167-268.

<sup>16</sup>See above, n. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Other examples of Keegan's influence can be found in V. D. Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York, 1989) and in P. Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle," *JRS* 90 (2000), 1-17. For problems in this approach to ancient history, see E. Wheeler, "Firepower: Missile Weapons and the 'Face of Battle'" in E. Dabrowa, ed., *Roman Military Studies* (Kraków, 2001), 169-184.

practices.<sup>18</sup> This approach to the study of cultural factors in warfare has drawn increasing attention in recent studies of the Roman military. Jon Lendon's *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (2005) argues that changing Roman notions of *disciplina* and *virtus* and the interplay between them affected how Romans engaged in and understood war, and he cautions against viewing the legions as functioning like a modern military.<sup>19</sup> Susan Mattern and Sara Phang similarly explain Roman military deployment, institutional structures, and ideologies according to cultural attitudes and strategies of the Roman elite.<sup>20</sup> These studies demonstrate the important influence of uniquely Roman cultural factors in Roman military organization and culture; however, individual judgment and agency of soldiers are sometimes subordinated to readings of Roman military culture interpreted through primarily textual, rather than epigraphic and archaeological evidence. What is needed, therefore, is an approach that bridges the gap between "calculation and culture" in determining Roman military practices, and those of its officers in particular.<sup>21</sup>

## Scope and Sources

The dissertation focuses on the period from the late Republic to mid-third century CE. This is a lengthy period of study, to be sure, but is necessary for two main reasons. The first is the changing structure of the Roman army. The last century of the Republic

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<sup>18</sup>See esp., Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 18-27, 41-53.

<sup>19</sup>See esp., Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 176-178, 211, 312-313.

<sup>20</sup>S. P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley, 1999), passim, esp. 113-116; S. E. Phang, *Roman Military Service: Ideologies of Discipline in the late Republic and early Principate* (Cambridge, 2008), esp. 21-32, 99-100.

<sup>21</sup>On culture and individual agency the study of in warfare and the balance between , see W. Lee, "Warfare and Culture" in W. Lee, ed., *Warfare and Culture in World History* (New York, 2011), 1-11.

forms a logical *terminus post quem* because of the major developments in the legions regarding their recruitment, organization, and deployment across the empire during this period. C. Marius (157-86 BCE) adjusted the composition and recruitment of soldiers by eliminating the need for property qualifications, and he and later Roman generals gradually transformed the Roman legions from a militia recruited through annual levy to more permanent, standing armies who served for years at a time.<sup>22</sup> During the civil wars of Caesar and his successors, moreover, legions were increasingly organized by cohorts and began to acquire permanent titles and designations. Augustus and his successors during the Principate transformed the legions into a permanent military force, with more typical (though hardly standardized) careers, organization, duties, and pay, which formed the organizational basis for the legions during our period. Diocletian's reforms to the legions at the end of the third century, however, fundamentally reorganized this structure, adding new legions, reducing the size others, and altering their deployment and hierarchical organization to a degree that requires analysis far beyond the scope of this discussion.<sup>23</sup>

Another reason for choosing this period is the state of our evidence. Polybius (200-118 BCE) is the only writer of the mid-Republic to discuss centurions, and his account is brief. Textual sources from the late Republic and early Principate, in contrast, provide much greater detail. Sallust (86-35 BCE) and Cicero (106-43 BCE) provide numerous details about centurions in both military and non-military contexts, while

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<sup>22</sup>See below, Chapter Four, 125-126.

<sup>23</sup>For more on officers of Roman army during this period, see M. J. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire: The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople* (Amsterdam, 1998), 43-76, 97-106; P. Richardot, *La fin de l'armée Romaine (284-476)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris, 2001), 49-62; Le Bohec, *L'armée romaine sous le Bas-Empire* (Paris, 2006), passim; A. D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity: A Social History* (Malden, 2007), chapters 5-6.

Caesar's (100-44 BCE) commentaries on the Gallic and Civil wars provide by far the best textual account of them in combat during the late Republic. Livy (59 BCE-CE 17) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 BCE-c. 7 BCE) describe centurions in major events during the early to mid-Republic, but their distance from the actual events suggests a good deal of projecting backward the status and prestige of legionary centurions of Caesar's and Augustus' age.

Numerous historians from the Principate, such as Josephus (CE 37-100), Plutarch (CE 46-120), Tacitus (CE 56-117), Appian (CE 95-165) and Cassius Dio (CE 155-c. 229), offer stories of both individual centurions and groups of them in a variety of contexts, but are limited in detail. Military manuals by Onasander (first century CE) and Arrian (CE 86-160) describe ideal deployments and use of soldiers and officers, but only mention the role of centurions occasionally. Vegetius (fourth to fifth century CE) offers more, but since his work presents his ideal of the Roman army from the early Principate long before, his descriptions should be used cautiously.<sup>24</sup> Textual accounts of centurions in non-historical literature, such as in the letters of Pliny the Younger (CE 61-c. 112), or in fictional literature, poetry, and philosophy, also suggest attitudes towards their status and reputation.<sup>25</sup> Accounts of centurions in authors such as Apuleius, Eusebius, or the writers of Rabbinic and New Testament texts are especially useful in providing perspectives outside of the Roman political and social elite.<sup>26</sup>

The textual evidence for centurions, however, becomes scarce by the second century CE, which compels us to use other kinds of sources. The earliest surviving

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<sup>24</sup>On dating and using Vegetius, see below, Chapter One, n. 12.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., Juv. 16. 13-19; Hor. *Sat.* 1. 16. 72-74; Plin. *NH* 7. 20; Sen. *Clem.* 1. 16.

<sup>26</sup>Apul. *Met.* 9. 39; Euseb. *HE* 7. 15. On references in New Testament and Rabbinic texts, see below, Chapter Six.

epigraphic and visual evidence for centurions is from the Triumviral period,<sup>27</sup> but increases dramatically during the Principate. Thousands of dedicatory and commemorative inscriptions from the reign of Augustus to the mid-late third century CE provide details on military transfers and social activities of centurions across the empire. Surviving papyrological evidence for centurions is found as early as the first century CE, but is largely limited to the Roman army's presence in Egypt and the Near East. These documents include private correspondence, contracts for loans, formal petitions and complaints, as well as thanks from communities to centurions who served as local judges and patrons.<sup>28</sup>

Funerary epitaphs from this period also describe many centurions' careers, major assignments, and military decorations that reveal attitudes and expectations of the centurion, his family, or comrades towards his service. Epitaphs that include visual imagery of centurions, their armor, or decorations, moreover, similarly suggest what features or duties of the centurion required emphasis.<sup>29</sup> Archaeological evidence, finally, offers another avenue to understanding the roles of centurions. The physical remains and plans of legionary fortresses at Caerleon, Inchtuthil, Lambaesis, Novaesium, and Vindonissa give us details on the size, layout, and location of centurions' quarters. Although this sampling is limited to the northern and western parts of the empire, it can suggest how centurions' authority and military relationships were defined through physical space.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the relatively rich evidence for the Principate, the marked

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<sup>27</sup>E.g., Minucius Lorarius. See Appendix A, fig. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Many are collected in R. O. Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus* (Cleveland, 1971).

<sup>29</sup>Visual evidence contained largely in Appendices A and B.

<sup>30</sup>Representations of camps are presented in Appendix C.



decrease in surviving textual, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence during the crisis-ridden mid-late third century CE makes analysis of the legionary centurions beyond this period nearly impossible.

## **Method**

This dissertation presents a comprehensive examination of the legionary centurion's varied functions in the Roman military. In this context, the goal is not merely to describe the centurions' various military duties or careers, but to explain their *social roles* within the Roman army, and the impact of these roles on structuring the Roman army's unique organizational and cultural features. This analysis of officership, therefore, seeks to understand not only the characteristics of the legionary centurion, but also important features of the Romans' military practices more broadly.

To describe comprehensively the varied roles of legionary centurions poses several major challenges regarding the use of evidence. In contrast to discussions of certain Roman generals, we possess few texts written by centurions themselves. Papyri from Egypt and the Near East from the imperial period record certain letters, petitions, and orders from centurions, but this is a far cry from any "diary" that can describe their day-to-day activities and attitudes. We are thus left to interpret their status, behaviour, and identity through literature, imagery, and physical space. Despite their dissimilarity in genre and origin, however, these sources can share many formal characteristics, cultural perspectives, and biases, all of which helped to construct the centurions' identity and shape their behaviour. Many of the duties, perceptions and symbols of self-representation of the centurion were part of a persistent yet dynamic cultural construction

that developed through interaction between imagery and literature (mythical, historical, didactic), and were institutionalized through the actions of centurions themselves.

In addition to building upon the vast scholarship on the Roman army itself, the dissertation integrates several analytical approaches from military theory. Some of the same challenges confronting centurions and the Roman army – discipline, military authority, officership, social cohesion, civil-military relations – have been discussed by scholars of military history in many other contexts. John Lynn’s application of compliance theory to the army of Revolutionary France, for example, provides a model for understanding coercive and normative methods in acquiring the compliance of soldiers.<sup>31</sup> Military studies on combat motivation by authors such as Kindsvatter and Kellett also offer insight into how the nature of combat and the size of unit affects social cohesion between officers and soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Both Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz, moreover, have heavily influenced concepts of professionalism and officership that can be tested in evaluating the centurion’s status within the Roman military.<sup>33</sup> The purpose in using these analytical tools is not to provide simple models to explain the role of the centurion as an officer. That would be to ignore the fundamentally different values and social structures of the Roman army. In several cases, the dissertation demonstrates that the centurion transcends categorizations or definitions of officership that are often taken for granted in military studies. These approaches do, however, provide greater insight

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<sup>31</sup>Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-1794* (Boulder, 1984), 22-40.

<sup>32</sup>P. S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam* (Kansas, 2003); A. Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston, 1982), esp. 41-52, 73-79, 133-136; See also S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire* (New York, 1947), 132-159, 186-201.

<sup>33</sup>Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, 1957), 7-20, 61-65; Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York, 1962), 5-54.

into how other armies have understood or addressed fundamental military problems that are also relevant to Roman military culture.

In addition to drawing from scholarship on military history, the dissertation engages several approaches in contemporary critical social theory. Foucault's theories of technologies of representation help to articulate the relationship between soldiers, centurions, and the emperor through punitive acts in military discipline.<sup>34</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and symbolic violence have proved similarly influential in describing how authority can be defined and structured through social action.<sup>35</sup> Again, however, these concepts are used to provide insight into comparative social structures rather than a mold in which to pour evidence of Roman military practices. A feature of this dissertation is to posit another challenge to the broad application of Weberian categories of authority to Roman institutions.<sup>36</sup>

## **Organization**

The organization of the dissertation is topical rather than chronological. This approach makes the best use of the sporadic evidence of the centurion's status from Republic to Principate, and allows each of his roles in the Roman military to be analyzed in turn. This is not to suggest that there were no major developments in the centurionate during the period of study, and such developments – particularly in the centurion's duties

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<sup>34</sup>Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A. Sheridan trans. (New York, 1977), 23-27, 43-58, 104-111; *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, M. Bertani and A. Fontana eds., D. Macey trans. (New York, 2003), 28-46.

<sup>35</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, R. Nice trans. (Cambridge, 1977), 76-89, 163-179, 184-194.

<sup>36</sup>On this problem in general, see Lendon, "The Legitimacy of the Roman Emperor: Against Weberian legitimacy and imperial 'strategies of legitimation,'" *Herrschaftsstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis: Konzepte, Prinzipien und Strategien der Administration in römischen Kaiserreich* (Berlin, 2006), 53-63.

and status within the military hierarchy – will be addressed. The dissertation argues, however, that in many cases, despite fundamental changes to the Roman army and its activities, there remained an (often deliberate) continuity in the duties, imagery, and expectations of centurions between the Republic and Principate.

The first two chapters explore two major functions of centurions and how they became fundamental to characterizing the rank. Chapter One begins by examining the centurion's role in military discipline in the legions. Through analysis of textual and visual evidence, it demonstrates that the centurion was strongly associated with corporal punishment in both his duties and commemorative representation, and that this association with corporal punishment was crucial to defining his status. It argues, moreover, that the centurion's execution of corporal punishment was central rather than peripheral to defining Roman *disciplina* as a whole. Chapter Two examines the centurion's role as a combat officer. It shows that an individual, aggressive form of bravery in combat defined legionary centurions during the imperial expansion of the Republic and early Principate, and continued to do so even later, when major military campaigns of the Roman army became the exception rather than the norm. It also demonstrates that, although such acts of bravery were motivated at least in part by individual desire for rewards and social prestige, they were also often calculated to produce an effect on the centurion's soldiers.

The third chapter is directly related to the first two, in that it addresses how both of these characteristics served to define and assert the centurion's military authority. The chapter discusses the concept of an organizational strain in the Roman military between individual courage and collective discipline, and it interprets the centurion's dual function

with reference to military officership. It demonstrates that the centurion's association with severe discipline as well as with seemingly unbridled aggression in combat represented complementary rather than contradictory practices in asserting military authority in the Roman army: the centurion was expected to represent both of these virtues as a requirement of his status as a middle-ranking officer.

While the first three chapters analyze how ideals of the centurion's behaviour defined his authority, the next three chapters focus instead on the centurion's intermediate position in the Roman command structure and social hierarchy, and how this position affected military interaction with Rome's imperial subjects. Chapter Four examines how we may evaluate the centurionate as a corps of officers. It shows that the Roman legions during both the Republic and Principate lacked a corps of commanding officers, either by training or by social status. This organizational characteristic in the legions necessarily placed greater emphasis on expertise of the centurionate. The centurions' relatively consistent levels of experience, training, and sense of corporate identity gave them a unique status in the Roman military. Chapter Five addresses the impact of this status within the social hierarchy of the legion. It shows how through pay, social status, duties, and physical space, the rank both functionally and symbolically occupied an intermediate position between the rank and file and aristocratic commanders. It contends, moreover, that this intermediate position was crucial to integrating new recruits into the legion and defining their place within the Roman military hierarchy.

Chapter Six explores the legionary centurions' so-called "non-military roles" as a form of civil-military relations. It describes briefly several important duties performed by centurions outside of military contexts: engineering, diplomacy, local law and order,

and regional administration. It demonstrates first that the varied skills, military authority, and experience of centurions made them indispensable tools in many facets of Roman imperial administration during the Principate. It also shows that centurions often became seen by local inhabitants to represent the most immediate and powerful source of Roman imperial authority. As such, centurions lay at the intersection of Rome's military apparatus and imperial power.

## Chapter 1: Disciplinarians

### 1.1 Introduction

Legionary centurions performed an essential role in defining and preserving Roman military discipline. While both ancient and modern armies have employed fear and brutal punishments to gain compliance from their soldiers,<sup>1</sup> scholars have long considered the Roman army to be especially strict. Commonly described as forming the “backbone of Roman discipline,”<sup>2</sup> centurions in particular had the authority to inflict corporal punishment. Equipped with their vine-stick cane (*vitis*), the tool with which they flogged disobedient soldiers, centurions possessed the rare legal authority to beat a Roman citizen.<sup>3</sup> Sternness or near savagery (*saevitia*) in their disposition towards discipline, in fact, seem to have been the centurions’ hallmark, and many textual accounts of them highlight this characteristic. Exemplary is the centurion named Lucilius, who was murdered during the mutiny of the Danube legions in CE 14. He had apparently

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<sup>1</sup>The Spartan general Clearchus argued that soldiers should fear their commanders more than the enemy (Xen. *Anab.* 2. 6. 10; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 1. 17). Frederick the Great echoed this sentiment, while Wellington was a strong advocate of the use of flogging. Discipline was exceptionally harsh in Hitler’s *Wehrmacht*. See Keijzer, *Military Obedience* (Alphen aan den Rijn, 1978), 36; E. S. Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen: A Portrait of the British Officer, 1600-1956*, (London, 1956), 195; O. Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1991), 59.

<sup>2</sup>C. E. Brand, *Roman Military Law*, 51; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 429; J. Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, 1993), 268.

<sup>3</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 119. See esp. n. 19; Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, 61; O. Richier, *Centuriones ad Rhenum: les Centurions Legionnaires des Armées Romaines du Rhin*, (Paris, 2004), 431.

earned the nickname *cedo alteram* or “Give me another” because whenever his *vitis* broke when beating a soldier, he called for another to finish the job.<sup>4</sup>

The question of to what degree centurions relied on physical coercion to maintain the discipline of their soldiers and assert their authority addresses a larger discussion on Roman concepts and practices of punishment in the legions. The focus of this discussion has shifted considerably in recent years. Earlier European military theorists from Machiavelli to Delbrück maintained that rigid codes of obedience, strictly enforced through harsh physical punishment, were instrumental in preserving Roman commanders’ authority and ensuring the army’s success.<sup>5</sup> More recent studies, however, have contrasted these so-called “dominating” or external types of discipline with what are deemed more “positive” or mental aspects of Roman *disciplina*, such as appeals to legionary traditions, the binding forces of military and imperial cult, or a cultural ethos that exalted obedience and self-restraint.<sup>6</sup> Phang has recently defined *disciplina militaris* as a social and political ideology, a normative strategy in acquiring the soldiers’ compliance, serving to legitimate the authority of the Roman military elite.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 23.

<sup>5</sup>See A. Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford, 1989), 1-9, 16; G. E. Rothenberg, “Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus, Raimondo Montecuccoli and the ‘Military Revolution’ of the Seventeenth Century” in P. Paret ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (Princeton, 1986), 32-63; Keijzer, *Military Obedience*, 33-37, 48; H. Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 286, 288: “Only with the Romans were the concept and power of discipline fully recognized and accomplished.” On Roman discipline generally, cf. Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 1-11, 283-286; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 169-171; W. S. Messer, “Mutiny in the Roman Army: The Republic”, *CP* 15. 2 (1920), 159-162.

<sup>6</sup>Shame: Caes. *BC* 2. 31. Cult: A. Pegler, “Social Organizations within the Roman Army”, *TRAC* 9 (1999), 40-42; J. Hegeland, “Roman Army Religion,” *ANRW* ii.16. 2 (1978), 1470-1505. *Disciplina* as cultural ethos: Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 172-211. On mental and physical aspects of discipline, see G. Horsmann, *Untersuchungen zur militärischen Ausbildung im republikanischen und kaiserzeitlichen Rom* (Boppard am Rhein, 1991), 2-3, 102-109, 189-197.

<sup>7</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*.



One aspect of this shift in focus has been either to downplay or question outright the role of corporal punishment that was once seen to be so ideologically important to the Roman army. Kiesling, for example, sees the scholarly tendency to posit harsh punishment in Roman discipline as anachronistic “wishful thinking,” and claims that there is little evidence that the *vitae* served to identify centurions. Phang, meanwhile, claims that punishment requires legitimation, and officers cannot rely alone on “pure domination (the imposition of authority by force), which is inefficient.” More to the point, William Harris declares: “The army that needs very brutal discipline (and practices such as decimation) is precisely the army that cannot rely on the courage of its ordinary soldiers.”<sup>8</sup> To put these arguments simply, in motivating Roman soldiers to fight, the carrot was at least as important as the stick.

This change in attitude reflects studies in military theory following the Second World War that questioned the efficacy of corporal punishment and other more violent forms of discipline. In such studies, a strong categorical distinction is made between two kinds of discipline: coercive discipline is employed through direct (often physical) and institutional means; normative discipline, in contrast, promotes practices that seek indirectly to foster self-discipline and restraint, such as encouraging pride in one’s unit and its history, bonds of loyalty between soldiers, group consensus, and primary unit

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<sup>8</sup>E. C. Kiesling, “Corporal Punishment in the Greek Phalanx and the Roman Legion: Modern Images and Ancient Realities,” *Historical Reflections-Reflexions Historiques* 32 (2006), 242-246; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 111; W. V. Harris, “Readings in the Narrative Literature of Roman Courage”, 302. Supp. by G. W. Currie Diss., *The Military Discipline of the Romans from the Founding of the City to the Close of the Republic* (Bloomington, 1928), 47.

cohesion. In evaluating the effectiveness of the two types in military institutions, historians have generally shown clear preference towards the latter.<sup>9</sup>

Little attention in recent discussions of Roman *disciplina*, however, has been given to the role performed by the centurions. While these middle-ranking officers during the late Republic and Principate had many administrative and combat duties, they are portrayed in literature and commemorated in stone regularly in their function of administering corporal punishment. That they are largely absent from discussions of *disciplina* is thus, to say the least, problematic. One reason for the lack of attention given to them is perhaps because a focus on cultural or political origins of *disciplina* has invariably dwelled on Rome's "elite" members of the aristocracy, or how this elite transmitted its ideologies to the soldiers.

This chapter, in contrast, identifies the centurion as a key instrument in defining and guaranteeing discipline in the Roman military. It explores the evidence for centurions' disciplinary duties in the legions during the Republic and Principate, and considers the ideological bases of this form of authority. It then demonstrates that the duty of enforcing compliance through corporal punishment was critical to defining the centurion's authority as an officer. The conclusion that follows argues that corporal punishment and similar physical forms of discipline hardly diminished in importance during this period, but rather continued to define Roman concepts of *disciplina* and military authority.

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. A. Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 92, 133-159. Cf. M. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 8-9, 38-44; S. R. Frey, "Courts and Cats: British Military Justice in the Eighteenth Century," *MA* 43.1 (1979), 9; G. Phillips, "To Cry 'Home! Home!': Mutiny, Morale and Indiscipline in the Tudor Armies," *JMH* 65 (2001), 313-332. J. E. Hamby, "The Mutiny Wagon Wheel: A Leadership Model for Mutiny in Combat," *AFS* 28.4 (2002), 585-586.

## 1.2 Corporal Punishment in the Legions

Ancient authors took great interest in Roman military discipline, and generally favoured harsh actions toward transgressors. Polybius famously devotes an entire section of his *Historia* to describing admiringly the brutal punishments in the Republican legions.<sup>10</sup> Writers of the Imperial period continued to support strict disciplinary practices in order to prevent mutiny and disturbances in what was now a permanent, standing army. Valerius Maximus warns that if soldiers “stray from the right path they will crush unless crushed,” while Josephus claims that capital punishment was employed even for minor infractions.<sup>11</sup> The fourth century CE writer, Vegetius,<sup>12</sup> later advocated a strong stance against any kind of transgression by soldiers. He advises that the strictest severity is necessary in order to maintain discipline and prevent mutiny.<sup>13</sup>

Some references to military offences and their punishments during the Empire were later recorded in the Digest of Justinian.<sup>14</sup> The punishments listed include corporal punishment (*castigatio*), fines, the imposition of additional duties, transfer to another branch of the service, degradation from rank, and dishonourable discharge (*ignominiosa missio*).<sup>15</sup> The most severe military crimes, such as desertion, early flight from battle, and disobedience against a superior’s direct order (even if resulting in a successful

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<sup>10</sup>Polyb. 6. 37. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Val. Max. 2. 7. 14: *quae ubi a recto tenore descuerint, oppressura sunt, nisi opprimantur*; Jos. BJ 3. 102-7. Cf. Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup>The period in which Vegetius wrote is debated. Cf. M. B. Charles, *Vegetius in Context: Establishing the Date of the Epitoma Rei Militaris* (Stuttgart, 2007), 183-184, who suggests between CE 383-450. I follow T. D. Barnes, “The Date of Vegetius,” *Phoenix* 33. 3 (1979), 254-257, in his suggestion of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 3. 4: *ad omnem disciplinam artissima seueritate teneantur.*

<sup>14</sup>Menenius, *Dig.* 49. 16. 2; 16. 6: *Omne delictum est militis, quod aliter, quam disciplina communis exigit, committitur: veluti segnitiae crimen vel contumaciae vel desidiae.*

<sup>15</sup>Modestinus, *Dig.* 49. 16. 3. 1.

conclusion) are described as warranting capital punishment.<sup>16</sup> Execution for such shameful actions could be carried out by beheading, rods (*virgis caedi*), and stoning and clubbing (*fustuarium*).

Because of the limits of the literary record, which tends to focus on large-scale unrest and serious military transgressions such as desertion and mutiny,<sup>17</sup> evaluations of the significance of the role of physical punishment from Republic to Principate have primarily focused on the apparent frequency of capital punishment or the attitudes of individual commanders toward it. Less serious military transgressions, however, such as insubordination, theft, perjury, sodomy, false witness, or drunkenness, while less interesting to historians like Tacitus, were nonetheless far more common. *Castigatio* was prescribed for such infractions.<sup>18</sup> During the Republic, while tribunes were in charge of supervising disciplinary actions, centurions were responsible for executing them.<sup>19</sup> By the Principate, however, corporal punishment seems usually to have been left to a centurion's discretion.<sup>20</sup>

The centurion's authority to punish soldiers, moreover, was distinctly different from that of a tribune or legate because of its personal character. While higher officers

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<sup>16</sup>The most commonly cited episode of the latter is recorded in Livy 8. 7. 17, in which T. Manlius Torquatus had his own son executed in 340 BCE for engaging against orders.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. L. Brice, "Holding a Wolf by the Ears: Mutiny and Unrest in the Roman Military, 44 B.C. - A.D. 68" (PhD Dissertation, UNC Chapel Hill, 2003), 41-43.

<sup>18</sup>Menenius, *Dig.* 49. 16. 6. 3; Papinianus, *Dig.* 49. 16. 15; Frontin. *Strat.* 2. 8. 8-9, 11, 14. Polybius (6. 37. 9) states that capital punishment was administered for all these crimes in the Republic, but he is not corroborated elsewhere, and such brutality seems extreme. Cf. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army*, 261; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 113, 123-125.

<sup>19</sup>Polybius (6. 37-8) attributes supervision of disciplinary matters to military tribunes, but implies that the tribunes did not themselves inflict punishment. See M. Dobson, *The Army of the Roman Republic: The Second Century BC, Polybius and the Camps at Numantia, Spain* (Oxford, 2008), 54-55.

<sup>20</sup>Since crimes were to be judged closest to where the crime was committed (Modestinus, *Dig.* 49.16.3), military tribunes often were not present to make judgment, and there is no evidence of them ever giving an order in the Empire. See Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1970), 137-138, 246-247.

might indicate to subordinates those who should be punished,<sup>21</sup> centurions implemented the discipline and deployed the brutal force by their own hand, with their own *vitis*. This activity was not confined to camp, moreover, but could be performed in the heat of a battle. During the sack of Jerusalem in CE 70, for example, a centurion and an accompanying soldier were ordered to beat with the centurion's cane any soldiers who did not desist from damaging the Temple.<sup>22</sup> Legionary commanders took full advantage of centurions' experience in applying discipline, sometimes requesting their advice on what sort of punishment was appropriate in various situations, especially mutinies.<sup>23</sup> From the Republic onward, therefore, their authority as officers was closely linked to corporal punishment.

In the Roman world more broadly, authority was often articulated through terms and objects of physical violence or punishment. Certain visual signs, for example, could be employed to portray the disadvantages of punishment as more intense and certain than any advantages of transgression or resistance.<sup>24</sup> The Roman state commonly employed such signs in attempting to deter rebellion and lawlessness or to proclaim its imperial power. These signs could be as crude as the crucifixion of six thousand rebellious slaves along the Appian Way, or as artistically refined as the triumph of Roman over barbarian narrated on the Column of Trajan. Such visual representations of physical punishment could also reaffirm the authority of specific individual positions. Most famous is the

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<sup>21</sup>Tribunes indicated with a tap that a soldier suffer *fustuarium* (Polyb. 6. 38). On centurions using their *vitis*, see Richier, *Centuriones ad Rhenum*, 538; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 129.

<sup>22</sup>Jos. *BJ* 6. 262.

<sup>23</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 4. 19. See also Tac. *Ann.* 1. 30; Sen. *De Ira.* 1. 18; Veg. *Mil.* 1. 25.

<sup>24</sup>Foucault explains these signs as “obstacle signs,” necessary in creating a larger “technology of representation” regarding punishment. See *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A. Sheridan trans. (New York: 1975; 1977), 104-108.

bundle of rods and axes (*fasces*) that came to represent a Roman magistrate's *imperium*, or supreme power and authority. In a speech by Tacitus, the Cherusci leader, Arminius, refers to the fasces and the toga themselves as signs of Roman domination between the Rhine and Elbe rivers.<sup>25</sup> Rome is not unique among ancient cultures in using such signs. The great monarchs of Mesopotamia and Egypt were imperial predecessors in this art.<sup>26</sup> Spartan commanders, moreover, bore a curved staff (*βακτηρία*) both as a disciplinary tool and a badge of office.<sup>27</sup> Rome does appear rather uncommon among its contemporaries, however, when we find such signs used by its middle-ranking military officers. Centurions too symbolized their authority through a sign of physical punishment: the *vitis*.

### 1.3 Representations of the *Vitis*

Military equipment and clothing were important to constructing Roman military identity. The soldier's sword (*gladius*) and belt (*cingulum*), for example, were not merely useful tools or props, but visual elements that actively defined the man's status, authority, and profession in the legion.<sup>28</sup> Sculptors were also well aware of how to show military equipment, and by the Principate, there was a tradition of depicting equipment to represent specific ranks: the muscled cuirass for senior officer, the *signum* for standard-

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<sup>25</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 59. Cf. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 143.

<sup>26</sup>Mesopotamia: Z. Bahrani, *Rituals of War: The Body and Violence in Mesopotamia* (New York, 2008), passim. Egypt: A. M. Gnirs, "Ancient Egypt" in *War and Society in the Ancient and Mediterranean Worlds* (Cambridge, 1999), 71-104, with bibliography.

<sup>27</sup>E.g., Thuc. 8. 84. 2; Xen. *Anab.* 2. 3. 11; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 9.

<sup>28</sup>S. James, *Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VII, the Arms and Armour, and Other Military Equipment* (London, 2004), 243-263, esp. 257. Cf. I. Hayes, "Introduction: The Roman Army as a Community" in *The Roman Army as a Community*, 9-10; M. A. Speidel, "Dressed for the Occasion: Clothes and Context in the Roman Army," in *Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 2009), 237; James, *Rome and the Sword*, 16-19.

bearer, the horn for musician.<sup>29</sup> By the first century CE, commemorative inscriptions of centurions that gave visual prominence to the *vitae* became widespread. The repetition and circulation of this symbol through commemorative inscriptions became crucial to defining the centurion's military duties and authority as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest known visual commemoration of a centurion is that of Minucius Lorarius, who died in 43 BCE. His cognomen, Lorarius, means “the flogger” – one can speculate just how he or one of his ancestors acquired this cognomen. In case his name did not make the point obvious, Lorarius is shown boldly facing forward, with his left hand ready on the pommel of his sheathed sword, and his right hand holding the *vitae*.<sup>31</sup> This kind of display of the *vitae* came to characterize centurions' commemorative inscriptions during the Principate and beyond. One of the best preserved visual commemorations of a centurion is that of M. Caelius, who perished in the disaster in the Teutoburg Forest in CE 9. In this monument, the *vitae* actually passes below the frame of the image and overlaps the commemorative text, directly over Caelius' own name.<sup>32</sup>

By the late second to early third century CE, both soldiers and centurions were increasingly depicted in tunics or cloaks rather than in full gear.<sup>33</sup> Despite this trend, however, centurions still often chose to show the *vitae* as specific insignia of their rank

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<sup>29</sup>The centurion's deputy (*optio*) is similarly presented with his staff. See M. C. Bishop & J. C. N. Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2006), 10.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Bourdieu, *Outline*, 165: social representations of a group and of properties attached to that group “rank among the institutionalized instruments for maintenance of the symbolic order, and hence among the mechanisms of reproduction of the social order....”

<sup>31</sup>Appendix A, fig. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Appendix A, fig. 2.

<sup>33</sup>C. Franzoni, *Habitus atque habitudo militis: monumenti funerari di militari nella Cisalpina Romana* (Roma, 1987), 139. Speidel's suggestion that this trend reflects a desire to appear more as fellow civilians or “family men” is debatable. See “Dressed for the Occasion,” 237-238.

and authority.<sup>34</sup> The prominent depiction of the *vitis* was also not limited to strictly “military” commemorations that were established by comrades. A third century commemoration from Chester of M. Aurelius Nepos depicts him in this same stance, with *vitis* and sword, yet beside an image of his wife in civilian garb. The detached nature in which a centurion could represent his symbol of his military authority simultaneously with familial responsibilities is illustrated most vividly in the commemoration of Fl. Augustalis, who stands with his wife and young son. Although he bears no other military equipment, Augustalis grasps the large knob of the *vitis* with his left hand, and his son’s small shoulder with his right.<sup>35</sup> For some centurions, finally, a coiled *vitis* is the only visual image by which they are commemorated. Monuments to C. Anarius Felix and M. Creperius Primus from the mid-first century CE, for example, detail each man’s career as a centurion and depict what appear to be coiled vine branches.<sup>36</sup>

As early as the first century CE, the *vitis* so identified centurions that it became metaphorical for the rank itself – its own badge of office. Much like the expression “contending for the purple,” described the pursuit of becoming the emperor, Juvenal expressed the process of becoming a centurion as “petitioning for the *vitis*.”<sup>37</sup> According to Eusebius, “The vine-stick is a certain mark of honour among the Romans, and those who obtain it become, they say, centurions.”<sup>38</sup> Conversely, to lay down one’s insignia or

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<sup>34</sup>Appendix A, figs. 5-6, 8-11.

<sup>35</sup>Nepos and Augustalis: Appendix A, figs. 9, 11. On factors that can influence style and content of commemoration, see Keppie, “Having Been a Soldier: The Commemoration of Military Service on Funerary Monuments of the Early Roman Empire” in J. J. Wilkes ed., *Documenting the Roman Army* (London, 2003), 31-49.

<sup>36</sup>Appendix A, figs. 12-13. On curved vine sticks, see below, Appendix B, 276.

<sup>37</sup>Juv. 14. 193

<sup>38</sup>HE 7. 15: τιμή τις ἐστὶ παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις τὸ κλήμα, οὗ τοὺς τυχόντας φασὶν ἑκατοντάρχους γίνεσθαι.



be compelled to give them up typically symbolized one's departure from the Roman military community. Epigraphic evidence shows that for the highest-ranking centurion, the *primuspilus*, his final act was to "lay down his *vitis*" at the end of his term of service.<sup>39</sup> Civilians across the empire, moreover, could recognize the centurion by this instrument alone. When Apuleius' transformed protagonist and his master have their unfortunate run-in with an unnamed and cruel Roman soldier, this soldier's rank as a centurion is identified by his clothing and bearing (*habitus atque habitudo*), as well as his *vitis*, which he employs viciously on both victims.<sup>40</sup>

The *vitis* was symbolic of more than just the centurion's function in disciplinary matters. Pliny the Elder stresses this fact:

What more? Need I mention that the *vitis* has been introduced into the camp and placed in the centurion's hand to preserve supreme authority and command, and that this is the high reward which summons the lagging ranks to the sturdy eagles, and that even when used for punishing crimes it honours the punishment itself (*poenam ipsam honorat*)?<sup>41</sup>

In representing the centurion's supreme authority and command (*summam rerum imperiumque*), the *vitis* served at once as the centurion's device for physical punishment, a symbol of his disciplinary functions more broadly, yet also of his overall authority to command soldiers in battle. Pliny, therefore, appears to associate positively the centurion's exercising of corporal punishment with military discipline and authority. This association seems to have remained strong through to late antiquity. According to

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<sup>39</sup>*CIL* VII 2634; *ILS* 2296. On centurion's laying down insignia, Cf. B. Dobson, "The Significance of the Centurion and 'Primipilaris' in the Roman Army and Administration" in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 163 with n. 85; Speidel, "Dressed for the Occasion," 244.

<sup>40</sup>See below, Chapter Six, n. 89.

<sup>41</sup>*NH* 14. 3: *Quid, quod inserta castris summam rerum imperiumque continet centurionum in manu vitis et opimo praemio tardos ordines ad lentas perducit aquilas atque etiam in delictis poenam ipsam honorat....*

John Lydus, as late as the reign of Justinian in the sixth century CE, the Praetorian Prefect, a civil servant far removed from the legionary centurion, adopted the older military rank's symbol of the *vitis* as his own badge of authority.<sup>42</sup> What was once merely a centurion's disciplinary tool had (apparently) transformed into a broader symbol of imperial power.

The centurion was, therefore, crucially defined by his authority to administer corporal punishment. Pliny's statement, that when a centurion punishes crimes he honours the punishment itself, makes an additional point: the centurion's use of the *vitis* was established to be a sanctioned, honourable act for him to perform. Soldiers must in the end, however, *choose* whether or not to obey orders, to suffer or avoid punishment, to help or condemn friends.<sup>43</sup> If the centurion's punitive power did in fact gain a form of collective approval or tolerance, what were the limits of his punitive authority, and how might these limits have been defined by both officers and soldiers? Did this articulation of a centurion's authority, moreover, endure from the Republic to the Principate? These questions are important, for while discipline explicitly provides ways to increase an army's cohesion and combat effectiveness, it also more subtly reflects that army's self-image, and reveals many of its underlying concepts of authority.<sup>44</sup> The reasons how and why a centurion punished, therefore, are essential to understanding the nature of a centurion's authority as well as the concept of *disciplina* in the legions more broadly.

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<sup>42</sup>Joh. Lydus, *Mag.* 2. 19. Cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Oxford, 1964), 566.

<sup>43</sup>See Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 23, 36. Cf. Hamby, "The Mutiny Wagon Wheel," 586.

<sup>44</sup>Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 62.

## 1.4 Limits of Legal Authority and Social Status

Both ancient and modern soldiers are often believed to have accepted a punitive power based nominally in the authority of law. Such was the case of the classical Spartan army. Although unwritten, “the laws” of Sparta were authoritative and normative, and conformity to them was idealized.<sup>45</sup> French soldiers of the Armée du Nord during the Revolutionary period likewise recognized that their obedience was to *la loi* more than their officers.<sup>46</sup> Understood today, military law comprises official, specific mandates on acceptable and unacceptable actions by military personnel, their punishments, as well as guidelines for military judicial processes.<sup>47</sup> The authority vested in modern military law has become essential to defining and understanding the military status of officers, and their subordinates’ willingness to accept punishment. In the American military of the nineteenth century, for example, officers and soldiers blamed a weakly-enforced judicial system for loosening the bonds of military authority. A lack of legal standards led officers to flog soldiers without due process: “With free men allegedly equal before the law, conflicts took sharp focus when officers, in pursuit of obedience, neglected to obey

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<sup>45</sup>On Sparta, see Paus. 3. 5. 2; Hdt. 7. 104, 228: “For their master is the law (νομός), which they fear more than your subjects fear you.” The Macedonian system is seen as disciplined, but more flexible: see F. Naiden, “The Invention of the Officer Corps,” *JHS* 7.1 (2007), 35-60; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 286.

<sup>46</sup>“Every good soldier should obey without resistance, every time *la loi* commands him,” from journal of the Armée du Nord, *Argus* 79 (10 July 1792), quoted by J. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 99. Cf. 97-105.

<sup>47</sup>Brand, *Roman Military Law*, vii, who applies this definition from Anglo-American legal-military practice to the Roman army. See also A. W. Lane, “The Attainment of Military Discipline,” *Journal of Military Service Institution* 55 (1944), 1-19: “Military law protects personal rights and liberties by limiting the powers of the commander.”

the law intended to bind all in the justice system. No self-respecting citizen of the republic willingly accepted such abuse....”<sup>48</sup>

Although Roman soldiers had no “legal rights” as we might understand them, military historians have argued that their concepts of military discipline and law evolved to a degree that they were more comparable to modern armies than their ancient contemporaries.<sup>49</sup> Some ancient authors portrayed military discipline of the middle and late Republic as far more brutal than that of the Principate, that is, that it had softened over time. Decimation, for example, is described as exceptional by the reign of Tiberius.<sup>50</sup> Despite acknowledging that the decline from the austerity of prior generations is all too common a theme in elite writing of the Empire,<sup>51</sup> some studies find a linear development of formal discipline in the Roman army: while more primitive modes of punishment through hardcore obedience and severity were common to the Republic, gifted generals of the late Republic (e.g. Caesar) maintained discipline according to a more normative mode: shame and rhetorical persuasion. The military reforms of Augustus and his successors finally led to a more rationalized, bureaucratic military institution, with a more professional outlook, which relied increasingly on the authority of law. While severity could be perceived as illegitimate cruelty, authority

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<sup>48</sup>M. Vargas, “The Military Justice System and the Use of Illegal Punishments as Causes of Desertion in the U.S. Army, 1821-35,” *JMH* 55. 1 (1991), 1-4. Cf., R. A. Herrera, “Self-Governance and the American Citizen as Soldier, 1775-1861,” *JMH* 65.1 (2001), 21-52, esp. 33. See also Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 24, for French army: “Harsh and degrading punishments were not consistent with the soldier’s new status as a free and equal citizen.”

<sup>49</sup>E. Carney, “Macedonians and Mutiny: Discipline and Indiscipline in the Army of Philip and Alexander,” *CP* 89 (1996), 20; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 288: “Only with the Romans were the concept and power of discipline fully recognized and accomplished.”

<sup>50</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 3. 21: In failures against Tacfarinas, L. Apronius had every tenth man of a disgraced cohort flogged to death; something seen as “quite exceptional at that time.”

<sup>51</sup>Stated explicitly by Tacitus (*Hist.* 3. 11): *ut olim virtutis modestiaeque, tunc procacitatis et petulantiae certamen erat.* Cf. Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 121. See also E. Wheeler, “The Laxity of the Syrian Legions” in D. Kennedy ed. *The Roman Army in the East* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 229-276.

vested in law “displays administrative rationality...[the] bureaucratic process may have helped legitimate punishment in the soldiers’ eyes.”<sup>52</sup>

Upon closer examination of the ancient evidence, however, this narrative is problematic on several points. First, many non-violent forms of punishment were also advocated and employed during the Republic, while punishments for some crimes became far crueller during the Imperial period.<sup>53</sup> Second, the corpus of Roman military law is little more than a collection of treatises and opinions on military disciplinary procedure; there was no such thing as a Roman code of criminal law, let alone military law.<sup>54</sup> What treatises and opinions on military affairs that do exist, moreover, are inconsistent. While some sections treat desertion as an automatic capital crime, others advocate deductions in rank, transfer to another unit, or dishonourable discharge.<sup>55</sup> This inconsistency existed because punishments were meant to be exemplary in nature, and based more on specific circumstances (e.g., age of recruit, prior convictions, number of participants) than according to strict adherence to the letter of the law.<sup>56</sup> There was no systematic response to military transgressions, and officers could either petition the emperor to acquire his opinion, or more likely, decide themselves, as the circumstances

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<sup>52</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 112-113.

<sup>53</sup>Sallust argued (*Iug.* 85. 35; 100. 5) that it was better to reform soldiers by example than to punish them after the fact. For the Republic in general, see Currie, *The Military Discipline of the Romans*, passim; on the Empire, see MacMullen, “Judicial Savagery in the Roman Empire” in *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, 1990), 209-211, 215.

<sup>54</sup>J. J. Aubert, “A Double Standard in Roman Criminal Law? The Death of Penalty and Social Structure in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome” in *Speculum Iuris: Roman Law as a Reflection of Social and Economic Life in Antiquity*, J. J. Aubert & B. Sirks eds. (Ann Arbor, 2002), 95.

<sup>55</sup>Modestinus, *Dig.* 49. 16. 3. 9, 16.

<sup>56</sup>This was more or less true of forms of law until the modern era. See C. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1987), 2-10. For extenuating circumstances, see in Modestinus, *Dig.* 49. 16. 3. 7, 12; Menenius, *Dig.* 49. 16. 4. 15; 49. 16. 5. 3.

warranted.<sup>57</sup> That the execution of a centurion by Cn. Calpurnius Piso in CE 19 for exercising this very privilege of command was seen to be so unjust suggests that centurions too had acquired such licence by the Principate.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, it is unwise to extrapolate the example of one commander to the entire army of a given period. Caesar was not the only general of the late Republic, and he did not always show clemency toward his soldiers.<sup>59</sup> Augustus too was well known for his sternness, while Galba and Vitellius favoured approaches opposite to each other during the same period.<sup>60</sup> There is certainly no evidence that centurions carried out corporal punishment any less harshly or frequently over time. The choices by Roman officers concerning physical punishment probably reflect individual styles of leadership and circumstances that survive more or less randomly in our textual sources rather than general trends in the legions. The laws were not absolute, and initiative was left largely to the judgment and character of the individual officer, commander, or emperor.<sup>61</sup> It remains difficult, therefore, to describe the extent to which law supported a centurion's punitive authority. Military laws as recorded by Roman jurists provided a blueprint and

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<sup>57</sup>On petitions to the Emperor by soldiers and officers, see Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 278-289, 305-311; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 111.

<sup>58</sup>Sen. *De Ira*. 1. 18. Although the centurion was ordered to execute a soldier who had apparently lost his comrade in the dark, when the comrade later returned, the centurion threw out the charge, thereby incurring Piso's wrath. Cf. *Senatus Consultum de Cnaeo Pisone Patre* ii. 49-52.

<sup>59</sup>E.g., Caesar's execution of insubordinate soldiers during his triumphs in 46 (Dio 43. 24).

<sup>60</sup>Suet. *Div. Aug.* 24. Note also differences between L. Piso, M. Antonius, and Cn. Corbulo in Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 1. 26, 28, 31. On differing degrees of military punishment among commanders or emperors in general, see Kiesling, "Corporal Punishment," 243; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 305-306.

<sup>61</sup>Josephus (*BJ* 3. 102-103) emphasizes Roman soldiers' greater fear of their commanders than the laws. Cf. L. Brice, "Disciplining Octavian: A Case Study of Roman Military Culture, 44-30 BCE" in *Warfare and Culture in World History*, 41.

might have added some symbolic weight to his authority, but they were not the foundation on which soldiers accepted it.<sup>62</sup>

The other major factor that has been seen to affect who may suffer or inflict corporal punishment in the Roman army is the social status of the officer or soldier. Unlike the “peers” (οἱ ὅμοιοι) of the Spartans or the “foot companions” (οἱ πεζέταιροι) of the Macedonian king, Roman *militēs* were ideologically distinguished from the status of their commanders.<sup>63</sup> Roman military tribunes, for example, were drawn from senatorial and equestrian families alone, and they were not to suffer either corporal or capital punishment.<sup>64</sup> In Roman penal action more generally, much depended on one’s status, with common categories including male/female, free/slave, citizen/non-citizen, *honestiores/humiliores*. MacMullen put it succinctly: “rank and distance set apart the men who ordered and the men who suffered violence.”<sup>65</sup>

The use of physical punishment in the Roman world, moreover, not only was contingent on one’s social status, but perhaps helped to define it. Saller has argued that the act of beating or whipping was actively used to distinguish Roman citizen from slave.<sup>66</sup> The damage from whipping, Saller asserts, was not just physical, but psychological, since it infringed on one’s honour and dignity. Corporal punishment,

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<sup>62</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline*, 188: “Law does no more than symbolically consecrate... the structure of the power relation.” Cf. Weber’s division normative and sociological meaning that ought to be attributed to the law: *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, G. Roth & C. Wittich eds. (New York, 1968), 311-314.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Kajanto, “Tacitus’ Attitude”, 700-12. Cf. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 18-37, 241, 266; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, passim.

<sup>64</sup>Officers seem to have been exempt from *virgis caedi* by the late Republic. Cf. Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 118 with n. 36. Frontinus (*Strat.* 4. 1) records the only example of a tribune suffering *castigatio* as a certain Valerius in 252 BCE.

<sup>65</sup>MacMullen, “Judicial Savagery”, 204, 215. See also J. J. Aubert, “A Double Standard,” 102-103.

<sup>66</sup>R. P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge, 1994), 134-143.

therefore, was appropriate primarily for slaves but not for adults or citizens. This interpretation draws from Patterson's comparative study of slavery: "Whipping was not only a method of punishment. It was a conscious device to impress upon slaves that they were slaves."<sup>67</sup>

Hornblower sees this distinction as particularly important to ancient Greece, where striking someone could amount to charges of hubris, and in several incidents in which military officers or commanders employed it, they either made things worse or were forced to persuade their soldiers of justice their actions.<sup>68</sup> The use of physical punishment in the Spartan army should be understood as anomalous, unique to a political culture where it was employed to distinguish between Spartiate and helot, but was apparently proven ineffective when threatened against citizens of other Greek *poleis*.<sup>69</sup> Kiesling, however, has applied this distinction in physical punishment to the Roman legions as well: if flogging distinguished a citizen from slave at Rome, then how could soldiers tolerate the shame of being publicly flogged?<sup>70</sup>

Attitudes in the Roman military towards the role of status in determining the use of corporal punishment, however, appear to have been more complex. While developing from a broader social structure and interacting with it, the Roman legions, particularly during the Principate, possessed their own standards of conduct and distinct military

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<sup>67</sup>O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, 1982), 3.

<sup>68</sup>See *Anab.* 5. 8; *Thuc.* 8. 84. 2; *Plut. Arist.* 23. 2-4.

<sup>69</sup>S. Hornblower, "Sticks, Stones, and Spartans: The Sociology of Spartan Violence" in *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, H. v. Wees, ed. (London, 2000), 57-73. Cf. Kiesling "Corporal Punishment," 229, and 233: "Corporal punishment was almost unheard of in classical Greece because it was antithetical to the Greeks' self-image as a free man."

<sup>70</sup>Kiesling, "Corporal Punishment," 235.



values.<sup>71</sup> Within this military community, the centurion occupied a unique position in regards to his status and potential to inflict or suffer punishment. On the one hand, centurions during both the Republic and Principate were distinctly inferior in rank and social status to the legates and military tribunes. Unlike the higher officers who were excluded from suffering corporal or capital punishment, centurions were hardly untouchable. Caesar, although known for his clemency toward his soldiers, executed a centurion for false witness.<sup>72</sup> M. Antonius executed centurions whom he blamed for failures in his Parthian campaign, while Domitius Calvinus, as governor of Spain in 38 BCE, subjected Vibillius, a *primuspilus*, to *fustuarium* for leaving the line of battle.<sup>73</sup> This policy did not change in the Principate. Although Augustus and his successors are credited with narrowing the source and form of punishment for centurions,<sup>74</sup> these officers nonetheless remained subject to brutal punishment. Augustus himself reasserted the rule that centurions could be executed for desertion or abandoning their post.<sup>75</sup> The evidence suggests, therefore, that centurions were liable to suffer some of the same punishments as the rank and file.

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<sup>71</sup>See S. James, "Writing the Legions: The Development and Future of Roman Military Studies in Britain," *The Archaeological Journal* 159 (2002), 42; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 239; Goldsworthy, "Community under Pressure" in *Roman Army as a Community*, 197.

<sup>72</sup>Caes. *Afr.* 82. For punishment and execution of centurions during the Republic, see Polyb. 6. 37. 5; App. *Punic.* 3. 15; Vell. *Pat.* 2. 28. 3; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 1. 37.

<sup>73</sup>Vell. *Pat.* 2.78.3. Dionysius (9. 50. 7) retrojects this punishment to centurions whose soldiers ran away in battle against Aequi and Volsci during the fifth century BCE.

<sup>74</sup>Dio (52. 22. 2-3.) offers a speech by Maecenas to Augustus, where he advises that while any serious case could be left with the governor, centurions were among those whom only the emperor could punish.

<sup>75</sup>Suet. *Aug.* 24. Rabbinic texts (Sifre Num., p. 169, 11.8-11, Balak 131) also describe a centurion who was executed for desertion. See M. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London, 1983; 2000), 144.

On the other hand, in pay, reputation, and expectations, centurions were considered to enjoy a status far above that of the ordinary *miles*.<sup>76</sup> Greater contact with the rank and file neither eliminated this distinction nor precluded any need for centurions to validate their punitive power.<sup>77</sup> While most centurions had once been *milites*, they were no longer considered such by their soldiers in matters of discipline. Those centurions and former centurions who failed to grasp this reality suffered. Such was the case of Aufidienus Rufus, a camp prefect (*praefectus castrorum*) and former centurion, who was surprised by soldiers' violent treatment of him in the Danube mutiny. He had mistakenly believed that his application of the sternest discipline would necessarily be accepted by his inferiors, simply because he himself had once endured it as a soldier.<sup>78</sup> Centurions, therefore, occupied a unique position in the Roman military hierarchy in which they sometimes suffered violence but yet were also foremost in inflicting it.

It is also important to consider how the specific context or tools employed in these disciplinary measures implies different levels of shame or status. Although citizens are supposedly distinguished from slave or criminal by their freedom from physical punishment with impunity, Roman authors claim that parents also may (with due moderation) flog an errant child. Although Saller considers this likely because children were, like slaves, seen to lack "reason" (*ratio*) and therefore occasionally required a stern hand, he admits that the striking of a student by his teacher (*ludi magister*) is also a trope in Roman literature, and that this relationship appears to have been different from that

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<sup>76</sup>See below, Chapter Five, 175-181.

<sup>77</sup>*Contra Phang, Roman Military Service*, 18.

<sup>78</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 20.

between parent and child, or master and slave.<sup>79</sup> The centurion, tasked with both training and disciplinary duties, might very well have seen his relationship with soldiers as something like that between a *magister* and his *discipuli*.<sup>80</sup>

Saller's distinction between citizen and slave is also more applicable to the specific use of the club (*fustis*) and rods (*virgae*), which were strongly associated with tools used in punishing criminals in a civil context, and especially the whip (*flagella*), which was connected with the heavier beating (*verberario*) of slaves.<sup>81</sup> The centurion's use of his *vitis*, however, was considered distinct from these forms of corporal punishment: it was used in a specific military context with consideration given to both crime and transgressor, and those flogged by the centurion's cane were understood to bear less of the greater *infamia* associated with the punishment by such tools as the *flagella* and *virga*.<sup>82</sup>

A modern parallel in distinguishing between different forms of corporal punishment is found in the British Navy of the eighteenth century. Middle-ranking officers such as the boatswain's mate bore a rattan cane, two to three inches in diameter, which was occasionally used to strike the back of an errant seaman. An officer employing this kind of non-judicial punishment was seen to be both more humane and

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<sup>79</sup>Saller, *Patriarchy*, 143-150. Beating by parents and teachers: Sen. *Clem.* 1.14.1, 16.3; Juv. 7. 210; Mart. *Epig.* 10. 62. See, however, disagreement in Plut. *Mor.* 1. 12.

<sup>80</sup>See below, Chapter Five, 182-184.

<sup>81</sup>P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1970), 137; Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C.-A.D. 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden, 2001), 284. See, however, Phang's more recent doubts in *Roman Military Service*, 130. On the *infamia* of beating slaves, cf. Marcellus, *Dig.* 3. 2. 22.

<sup>82</sup>On ancient distinctions between tools of physical punishment, see Marcellus. *Dig.* 3. 2. 22; Suet. *Cal.* 26; Jos. *BJ* 2. 176, 326. See also Liv. *Per.* 57, or Dion. Hal. 9. 39, in which a centurion balks at the outrage of being beaten by a lictor. Cf. J. Bray, *Essai sur le Droit Pénal des Romains* (Doctoral Dissertation, Université de Paris, 1894), 29; C. E. Brand, *Roman Military Law* (Austin, 1968), 80-81; Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 88; Speidel, "Dressed for the Occasion," 241.

less likely to earn the enmity of those below deck than one who favoured the judicial punishment of flogging with the cat-of-nine-tails, which was closely associated with slaves. As one Captain Peyton observed, if officers got in trouble “for conveying now and then the lesser punishment of a stroke instead of applying to me [for a flogging], discipline at sea would become impossible.”<sup>83</sup>

Evidence that social status in the Roman army either determined or was determined by corporal punishment, therefore, is at best mixed. Rather than examining the ideological underpinnings of institutional discipline in the Roman army merely according to legal treatises or assumptions of social status, it is more fruitful to explore the specific military contexts in which legionary centurions performed their disciplinary role, and how this role evolved over the course of the Principate to become associated with important social, political, and religious concepts in the legions.

### **1.5 Positive Associations of Corporal Punishment**

Pliny’s statement that the use of the *vitis* “honours the punishment itself” appears to fit a Roman literary trope in which authors claim that soldiers harboured a “love of obedience.” Plutarch, for example, states that the exercises and punishments that Marius introduced to his legions during the late second century BCE, at first appearing stern and inflexible, later seemed to the soldiers salutary and just once they were accustomed to

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<sup>83</sup>Quoted in N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1986), 219. On use of the rattan, cf. 213-225.

it.<sup>84</sup> Corbulo, Titus, and other first century CE commanders are likewise credited for gaining support of their soldiers through constant drilling and harsh discipline.<sup>85</sup>

Such claims typically draw modern accusations of elite moralizing or nostalgia for the archaic *severitas* of the early Republic, since it is assumed that no Roman soldier could ever have supported or even tolerated such an overt form of coercive discipline, as opposed to the more “indirect” form of *disciplina* as an idealized ethos of labour or self-restraint.<sup>86</sup> Besides the caution that should be used in gauging the attitudes of a Roman soldier according to modern assumptions, however, it is important to consider not the degree to which legionaries welcomed or were “socialized” into accepting elite ideologies towards punishment, but rather the degree to which conformity among peers is often idealized in military communities.<sup>87</sup>

In many military communities, transgressors against this form of “virtuous conformity” are cast as a danger to the entire group’s cohesion and security, and both officers and fellow soldiers often advocate the use of corporal or capital physical punishment to address it. Perhaps the most famous example of this attitude from ancient Greece is found in the *Iliad*, when Greek soldiers’ applaud Odysseus’ beating of the obnoxious Thersites with the sceptre – another example of a reassertion of conformity through both a physical and symbolic object of authority.<sup>88</sup> Statements by British soldiers from nineteenth century are replete with examples of this viewpoint. One

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<sup>84</sup>Plut. *Mar.* 14.

<sup>85</sup>Corbulo: Tac. *Ann.* 11. 18; 13. 35. Titus: Jos. *BJ* 6. 155. See also Tac. *Hist.* 2. 19. Cf. Currie, *The Military Discipline of the Romans*, 46; Wheeler, “Laxity,” 232-233.

<sup>86</sup>E.g., Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 117; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 191-192, 258; Phang, *Roman Military Practice*, 111-115.

<sup>87</sup>D. L. Lang, “Values: The Ultimate Determinants of Commitment and Legitimacy” in T. C. Wyatt & R. Gal Eds., *Legitimacy and Commitment in the Military* (New York, 1990), 37-38.

<sup>88</sup>Hom. *Il.* 210-276.

infantry commander under Wellington, although pursued by a hostile army, stopped his unit in order to flog several transgressors. His actions were described with admiration by one soldier under his command: “No man but one formed of stuff like General Crauford could have saved the brigade from perishing altogether, and if he flogged two he saved hundreds from death by his management.”<sup>89</sup> Simply put, soldiers did not necessarily see the use of physical violence as inconsistent or incompatible with relationships with their officers.

Disciplinary systems must, moreover, be relatively consistent with the beliefs and standards of the soldiers as well as officers. Indeed, formal discipline can often offer soldiers an “excuse” for something that they must do anyway.<sup>90</sup> In institutions where such values as conformity, self-restraint, and obedience are cultivated and idealized, punishments often can appear natural, even virtuous. Necessity, in effect, can be made into a virtue, and it is for this reason that officers such as drill sergeants – typically characterized as tough, unflappable disciplinarians – frequently become role models and sources of pride to their soldiers rather than merely antagonists.<sup>91</sup>

In the Roman army, centurions occupied this institutional role, and their punishment of disobedience through the use of *castigatio* was sanctioned further by

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<sup>89</sup>Quoted in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 134. See also Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen* 194-195, quoting James Anton, quartermaster sergeant in 42nd Highlanders: “If no coercive measures are to be resorted to on purpose to prevent ruthless ruffians insulting with impunity the temperate and well-inclined and the orderly disposed, the good must be left to the mercy of the worthless.” Cf. A. R. Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859-1899* (London, 1977), 125-135.

<sup>90</sup>Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 36-37 describes the influence of discipline in establishing a “military habit.”

<sup>91</sup>Normalization: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 303-304. Virtue of necessity: Bourdieu, *Outline*, 77. On drill sergeants, see Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 163; Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 73.

religious tradition.<sup>92</sup> *Disciplina* in the sense of obedience to commands had strong religious associations. There was a cult established to *Disciplina* by the time of Hadrian in the early to mid-second century CE, and Tacitus refers to divine custom or law of discipline (*fas disciplinae*), whose violation carried severe consequences.<sup>93</sup>

The religious nature of *disciplina* is seen most clearly in the responsibilities incurred through the military oath (*sacramentum*). Sanctified by religious ties and Roman military tradition, it was crucial to the process of fostering cohesion and identity among legionaries.<sup>94</sup> During the Republic, soldiers who joined the legions were required first to swear to assemble at their commander's call, obey his and their subordinates' orders, and not to desert or flee from battle. This oath was reiterated with the arrival of new commanders.<sup>95</sup> The nature of the oath changed during the Principate, however, when the emperor became the oath's sole recipient, and the swearing of it became a liturgical feature. New recruits swore the *sacramentum* not only at their enlistment, but also annually on the emperor's accession day, and each third of January.<sup>96</sup> The oath also

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<sup>92</sup>On the sacral nature of the Roman army, see Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 7; Stoll, "The Religions of the Armies," passim; *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung: Die Religion des römischen Heeres im Nahen Osten* (St. Katharinen, 2001), 210-321.

<sup>93</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 19. *Disciplina* appears to have been deified during the reign of Hadrian, and there is an altar to her at Ghadames by a centurion of III Augusta Pia Vindex (*AE* 1960, 274). Cf. Birley, "Religion of the Roman Army," 1513-15; E. Wheeler, "The Laxity of the Syrian Legions," 232.

<sup>94</sup>A. D. Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle" in *Battle in Antiquity*, A. B. Lloyd ed. (1996) 207. For extensive discussion on the *sacramentum* and its history, see Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 19-32.

<sup>95</sup>Liv. 22.38; Polyb. 6. 21. 2; Dion. Hal. 10. 18; 11. 43; App. *Mith.* 59; *BC.* 2. 47; 4. 62. 268; Caes. *BC.* 2. 32. 9. According to Plutarch (*Sul.* 27. 4), the oath under Sulla included the clause "wherever [the commander] might lead." For general discussion, see R.E. Smith, *Service in the Post-Marian Army*, 31-3; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 19-32; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 115-119.

<sup>96</sup>January 3 was also a festival day, which included the burial of the last year's altar, and dedication of new one. See Hegeland, "Roman Army Religion", 1479.

had to be formally dissolved (*sacramentum solvere*) in a solemn ceremony at end of a soldier's service.<sup>97</sup>

The many incidents of mutiny or outright revolt against commanders and emperors in Rome's history have inevitably raised questions as to the importance of the *sacramentum* to the soldiers' behaviour and loyalties. Phang, in particular, questions outright whether religious activities and oaths played any role in determining disciplinary practices in the Roman military.<sup>98</sup> Examples of revolt and mutiny, however, should not necessarily make us cynical of the religious authority of the *sacramentum* or of its influence on both soldiers and commanders. *Religio* is consistently associated with the *sacramentum* in Roman literature, and Dionysius claims that Romans "observed the military oath beyond all others."<sup>99</sup> It is also clear that the oath was taken seriously by both commander and soldiers. Soldiers sometimes swore or renewed oaths on their own accord to restate their loyalty to a new commander, strengthen their resolve after severe defeats, atone for poor behaviour, or promise not to abandon each other in battle.<sup>100</sup> Following their witness of a lunar eclipse, mutineers of the Danube legions in CE 14 were persuaded that their violation of the *sacramentum* had displeased the gods. At the

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<sup>97</sup>See petitions for certificate of *honesta missio*: PSI 2026 = CIL XVI 13. On disciplinary and religious elements of oath, cf. G. Wesch-Klein, "Recruits and Veterans," 440; O. Stoll, "'Offizier und Gentleman: Der römische Offizier als Kultfunktionär,'" *Klio* 80. 1 (1998), 134-162, esp. 160; Brice, "Disciplining Octavian," 37-39.

<sup>98</sup>E.g., Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 92, claims that "The performance of offerings of incense and wine would not help the soldiers learn to fight," and that animal sacrifices were "scarcely practice for combat."

<sup>99</sup>Dion. 11. 43: ὁ τε γὰρ ὄρκος ὁ στρατιωτικός, ὃν ἀπάντων μάλιστα ἐμπεδοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι. On *religio* used in describe the oath: Caes. *BC*. 2. 32. 8; Epict. *Disc.* 1. 14. 15-17; Sen. *Ep.* 95. 35; Philo. *Vit. Ap.* 5. 35. 5; Herod. 2. 13. 5, 8. Cf. Onas. *Strat.* 5. 1. Cf. J. Rüpke, *Domi Militiae: Die religiöse Konstruktion des Krieges in Rom* (Stuttgart, 1990), 93-96, 239; Stoll, "Offizier und Gentleman," 139-142.

<sup>100</sup>App. *BC* 2. 63. For soldiers taking voluntary oaths, cf. Liv. 22. 38. 1-2; Plut. *Sul.* 27. 3.



same time, Tiberius apparently trusted the loyalty of those units based in Italy simply because they had sworn their oath to him.<sup>101</sup>

Even in the context of civil war, when military loyalties fluctuated, rival commanders consistently appealed to the soldiers' *sacramentum*. In attempting to secure the loyalties of soldiers who had joined Caesar from his rivals during the Civil wars, Curio went to great rhetorical lengths to convince soldiers that they had not in fact abandoned their earlier oaths, arguing that they were invalid for both legal and moral reasons. Brutus, in contrast, told soldiers who had followed Caesar that they should not feel ashamed for fighting against the state, since the dictator had taken advantage of their devotion to their oaths.<sup>102</sup> Even today, military oaths that lack a religious element still carry great moral weight, and although they are sometimes ignored or broken, it does not follow that they are insignificant.<sup>103</sup>

The authority of the *sacramentum* during the Principate was particularly significant because it combined disciplinary, political, and religious elements. In tying the oath to one's service to the legion's supreme commander, mutiny, desertion, insubordination, and other acts of disobedience constituted a grave act of indiscipline and a breach of trust that tarnished the image of both the legionary community and the authority of the Emperor.<sup>104</sup> The retribution of Jupiter was therefore invoked for all oath-

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<sup>101</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 28; Dio 57. 3. 2.

<sup>102</sup>Caes. *BC* 2. 32. 8; App. *BC* 2. 140. Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1.36, 53-6; 2.6, 64, 79; 4.31, 37, 58-9; Herod. 8. 7. 4.

<sup>103</sup>Lee, "Morale," 207.

<sup>104</sup>The attack on the military imperial images (*imagines*) of Galba by pro-Vitellian soldiers in CE 69 (Tac. *Hist.* 1. 56) was tantamount to treason (*maiestas*). Cf. Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 99.

breakers – transgressors became scorned as *sacer* and deserving of divine vengeance.<sup>105</sup>  
A defining role of centurions was to act as the avenger.

In Roman civic contexts, transgressions against social norms and imperial authority could be met with public punishments or executions in the arena. Here, the public disapproval against different transgressions could be manifested, and society allowed to participate as spectators.<sup>106</sup> In the Roman military context, transgressions that defied imperial authority and violated the *sacramentum* implied divine anger not only towards the individual transgressor, but his entire legion. For this reason, from the Republic onward, it was prescribed that the entire unit's soldiers participate in institutional discipline. Such participation could amount merely to bearing witness, or assisting in executing it.<sup>107</sup> This practice was not only employed to impress on fellow soldiers a fear of disobeying orders, but also to guarantee the centurion's action, who was understood to be acting on behalf of the community.<sup>108</sup> In effect, the centurions themselves were both symbolic and physical adversaries of military indiscipline.

The centurion's function in administering corporal punishment, therefore, reinforced not only his own authority, but the soldiers' bond to the legion and emperor.

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<sup>105</sup>Hegeland, "Roman Army Religion," 1478; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 29; Brice, "Disciplining Octavian," 37.

<sup>106</sup>K. M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Re-enactments", *JRS* 80 (1990), 44-73. On rituals that serve to strengthen and display power while simultaneously promoting discipline and corporate identity cf. Stoll, "The Religions of the Armies", 451-453.

<sup>107</sup>Polyb. 6. 37-8; App. *BC* 2. 47; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 29; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 1. 20. Menenius, *Dig.* 49. 16. 6. 3 states that deserters and those who flee from battle must be executed before their comrades as an example. Cf. MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society" in *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, 1990), 231.

<sup>108</sup>On ritualized punishment in the Roman world, see Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome*, 43. On public punishment, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 27, 58, 202-203. Nineteenth century British commanders like Wellington supported flogging over solitary confinement or hard labour because the latter remained unseen by other soldiers. See Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 195. Cf. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*, 115-116.

A centurion could render this symbolism explicit, as occurred in CE 69, when rebellious soldiers came to murder Emperor Galba. Only one man rose to defend him:

This was Sempronius Densus, a centurion, who, although having received no personal favours from Galba, nonetheless in defence of honour and the law placed himself before his litter. Initially, raising the cane with which centurions punish those soldiers who deserve a caning, he shouted at the attackers and ordered them to spare the emperor. Then, when they advanced to close quarters with him, he drew his sword and warded them off a long time, until he fell with a wound to the thigh.<sup>109</sup>

That Densus' first reaction to the assassins was to draw his *vitis* before his sword demonstrates his and his instrument's symbolic importance in helping to define Roman military authority in the Imperial period. Wielding it was not only a logical step in attempting gain compliance from the soldiers with a minimum level of force, but it also implicitly reminded the soldiers of their oath and duty to the emperor. In essence, Densus attempted to enforce normative compliance before being compelled to turn to a more coercive form.

Conversely, a perceived lack of loyalty of the centurion to the emperor barred him from bearing this insignia. A vacancy in the centurionate, for example, became available to a soldier named Marius during the third century CE. When he was about to receive the honour of the *vitis*, and thereby assume the rank, a rival claimed that it was not legal for him to receive the Roman dignity (Ρωμαίων ἀξίας), since he was apparently a Christian, and did not sacrifice to the emperors. He duly lost the rank, and was eventually

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<sup>109</sup>*Galb.* 26. 5: Σεμπρώνιος ἦν Δῆνσος ἑκατοντάρχης, οὐδὲν ἰδίᾳ χρηστὸν ὑπὸ Γάλβα πεπονθώς, τῷ δὲ καλῷ καὶ τῷ νόμῳ βοηθῶν προέστη τοῦ φορείου, καὶ τὸ κλημα πρῶτον, ᾧ κολάζουσιν ἑκατοντάρχαι τοὺς πληγῶν δεομένους, ἐπαράμενος τοῖς ἐπιφερομένοις ἐβόα καὶ διεκελεύετο φείδεσθαι τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος. ἔπειτα συμπλεκομένων αὐτῷ σπασάμενος τὸ ξίφος ἡμύνατο πολὺν χρόνον, ἕως τυφθεὶς τὰς ἰγνύας ἔπεσε. Tacitus' version (*Hist.* 1. 43) has Densus attempt to protect Galba's appointed successor, Piso. Dio (63. 5. 4-5), however, agrees with Plutarch.

executed.<sup>110</sup> Another centurion, Marcellus, is attested throwing down his *vitis* and belt during a celebration of the emperor's birthday in Tingis and loudly proclaimed himself as a Christian. When he was arrested and brought before the governor of Mauretania, he was apparently condemned not for being Christian, but for violating discipline in throwing down his belt and *vitis*.<sup>111</sup> The centurion's strong association with corporal punishment thus carried political and divine weight, and helped to define the institutional ties between soldier, officer, and emperor.

## 1.6 Resistance to Punishment

Inevitably, Roman soldiers could and did resist this form of discipline, and it is clear that they understood well who its chief representative was. Strict penalties were prescribed for any soldier who laid hands on a centurion:

For the ancients branded anyone who resisted a centurion who desired to punish him. If he seizes the *vitis* of the centurion, he must change his unit; if he breaks it on purpose, or raises his hand against the centurion, he is punished with death.<sup>112</sup>

Literature from the late Republic and Principate indicates that this fear was well justified, since among officers centurions were the most common victims of assaults by soldiers. This was particularly true in the ultimate form of resistance – mutiny. Centurions were beaten or murdered during mutinies against Caesar and Octavian during the civil wars.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Euseb. *HE* 7. 15.

<sup>111</sup>*Acta Marcelli* 1. 3. Cf. Stoll, "Offizier und Gentleman," 136-138.

<sup>112</sup>Macer, *Dig.* 49. 16. 13. 4: *Nam eum, qui centurioni castigare se volenti restiterit, veteres notaverunt: si vitem tenuit, militiam mutat: si ex industria fregit vel manum centurioni intulit, capite punitur.*

<sup>113</sup>Caesar: *Caes. Alex.* 57. On the mutinies among Caesar's ninth and tenth legions, see *Caes. Afr.* 54; *App. BC.* 2. 47; *Suet. Div. Iul.* 67. Octavian: *App. BC* 5. 16; *Dio* 48. 9. 2. See also the mutiny of some of Agricola's soldiers in *CE* 83 (*Tac. Agric.* 28; *Dio* 66. 20. 1). Cf. Messer, "Mutiny in the Roman Army," 158, 163-175.

When the Rhineland legions under Vitellius refused to recognize the legitimacy of Galba as emperor in January 69, centurions who attempted to protect the imperial images (*imagines*) suffered a similar fate.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps the most famous and detailed account of an assault on the centurions specifically as a group is found Tacitus' version of the mutinies of the legions stationed on the lower Rhine and upper Danube Rivers in CE 14. Tacitus' description of the initial stages of the mutiny on the Rhine is particularly revealing:

The legate offered no resistance, for the degree of the soldiers' madness broke his nerve. With sudden rage, swords drawn, they advanced on the centurions, who were the long-standing source of the soldiers' bitterness and the focus of their brutality. They knocked them down and flogged them, sixty lashes each to match the centurions' number. They then cast them, maimed, lacerated, and in some cases already dead, before the rampart or into the Rhine.<sup>115</sup>

The soldiers' focus on the centurions is striking, not only because of the centurions' complete loss of authority over their men, but also because of the method to the soldiers' violence. Each centurion was flogged by his own soldiers, likely with his own *vitis*. Tacitus not only conveys a sense of the breakdown of the authority of Roman military hierarchy, but worse, a complete reversal of it. It is no coincidence that he uses the term "brutality" (*saevitia*) to describe the soldiers' actions – this was the very charge that he has the soldiers raise earlier against their centurions.<sup>116</sup>

Although lower-ranking officers are often made scapegoats in violent mutinies, Tacitus seems to suggest here that these centurions got what they deserved. As

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<sup>114</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 1. 56-59.

<sup>115</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 32: *Nec legatus obviam ibat: quippe plurium vaecordia constantiam exemerat. repente lymphati dstrictis gladiis in centuriones invadunt: ea vetustissima militaribus odiis materies et saeviendi principium. prostratos verberibus mulcant, sexageni singulos, ut numerum centurionum adaequarent: tum convulsos laniatosque et partim exanimos ante vallum aut in amnem Rhenum proiciunt.*

<sup>116</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 17; 1. 31.

centurions during the Principate acquired the authority to inflict corporal punishment, some of them were clearly susceptible to becoming “petty tyrants” over their subordinates and dealing out punishment with little justification, and we may wonder whether centurions like “Give me another” Lucilius were so aberrant.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, Tacitus’ account of this incident and the mutiny of the Danube legions have been interpreted by scholars as evidence that Roman soldiers were generally hostile to the use of corporal punishment. According to Phang, they saw it as archaic, or a form of illegitimate cruelty (*saevitia*).<sup>118</sup> Kiesling, moreover, argues that the attacks on the centurions in CE 14 “attest to the existence of corporal punishment in the armies of the Principate but not to its institutional status,” which could not have been significant if floggings ultimately drove the legions to mutiny in CE 14.<sup>119</sup>

As with any mutiny, however, those of the Rhine and Danube legions had many structural and precipitating causes.<sup>120</sup> The accusations of brutality made against the centurions is only one among several complaints of the soldiers recorded by Tacitus, including their distance from home, the duration of service and campaigning, the poor state of supplies, and the meagre pay.<sup>121</sup> In other accounts of this mutiny, moreover, any centurions’ alleged behaviour is absent from the soldiers’ complaints, and the authors focus instead on how the soldiers saw the uncertain political and military situation following Augustus’ death as an opportunity to acquire either greater benefits or

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<sup>117</sup>On impact of destructive leadership and discipline, see G. E. Reed and R. C. Bullis, “The Impact of Destructive Leadership on Senior Military Officers and Civilian Employees,” *AFS* 36.1 (2009), 5-18. On lower-ranking officers as scapegoats, see Hamby, “The Mutiny Wagon Wheel,” 592.

<sup>118</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 112, 129. Cf. Saller, *Patriarchy*, 139.

<sup>119</sup>“Corporal Punishment,” 242.

<sup>120</sup>Cf. L. Brice, “Holding a Wolf by the Ears,” 148-239; I. Kajanto, “Tacitus’ Attitude to War and the Soldier,” *Latomus* 29 (1970), 699-718.

<sup>121</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1.17-18, 31.

discharge.<sup>122</sup> Tacitus himself stresses that the mischief from the Danube legions began when news of the death of Augustus caused the commander to break the normal round of duties (*solita munia*) in order to hold proper ritual for mourning.<sup>123</sup> Finally, although centurions were targeted in the mutiny, it is noteworthy that, when Drusus arrived from Rome to quell the mutiny on the Danube, the soldiers chose a centurion, Clemens, to speak on their behalf.<sup>124</sup> This would make little sense if their cause for complaint and hostility were focused towards the entire rank.

That the centurions in the Rhine mutiny received sixty lashes (to match exactly their number) suggests another interpretation. Tacitus here does not appear to describe merely a haphazard lynching, but a mockery of the centurion's disciplinary role. The irony that we and Tacitus see in the punishment of a centurion by his own *vitis* may well have been the soldiers' intention. To flog a centurion provided them with more than revenge – it was a visceral and symbolically powerful tool to articulate their resistance. In the case of CE 14, depending on the soldiers' perceived audience, this extraordinary act could have served to rally other mutinous northern legions, or served to challenge obliquely the military authority of the newly-ascended emperor, Tiberius.<sup>125</sup> It is no coincidence that the majority of assaults on centurions recorded by ancient authors occurred during periods of civil war and strife, when the military authority of the soldiers' commander or emperor was in doubt or challenged. Since centurions were

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<sup>122</sup>Cf. Vell. Pat. 4. 125. 4; Suet. *Tib.* 25; Dio 57. 4. 1-2.

<sup>123</sup>*Ann.* 1. 16. On mutinies typically occurring during times of rest and other factors, see Hamby, "The Mutiny Wagon Wheel," 575-578.

<sup>124</sup>*Ann.* 1. 26.

<sup>125</sup>See Suet. *Tib.* 25. 2 on how the legions on the Rhine "were even rejecting the princeps who was not chosen by themselves..." (*Germaniciani quidem etiam principem detractabant non a se datum...*) On mock trials as statements of revolt or resistance, cf. R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre, and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1985), 75-104.

understood to be an embodiment of *disciplina* and imperial authority, rebellious soldiers saw them as the logical target in a mutiny, and a useful symbol that they could appropriate to achieve their own ends.

From the Roman soldier's point of view, therefore, there was clearly a limit to the level of violence that a centurion could consistently deploy, and the centurions who misjudged this limit lost respect and authority and – if discipline or morale were already poor – suffered the wrath of their subordinates. Although we possess Tacitus' account of soldiers' hostile reaction to the punitive authority of specific centurions, however, there is insufficient evidence to suggest some general resistance by the soldiers to the premise of that authority. The legitimacy or illegitimacy of the centurion's use of corporal punishment in the legions appears to have been defined more by degree than absolute.

### **1.7 Conclusion: Between Coercive and Normative Discipline**

The ideological connection between the use of physical punishment and the centurionate during the late Republic and Principate is clear. In both juridical opinion and literary narratives, the centurion, more than any other Roman officer, was depicted enforcing discipline and executing *castigatio* against transgressors. Centurions themselves visually commemorated this function above all others, and the military insignia most commonly associated with centurions was the *vitis*. The centurion's disciplinary authority, moreover, although perhaps supported by the legal opinions in the Digest and other Roman military treatises, nonetheless was not based primarily on law. Nor was a superior social status the determining factor, since the centurionate included



men of varying wealth and education, as well as geographic and social origins.<sup>126</sup> Their punitive authority, rather, was impermanent and indefinite, requiring at least the passive support of the rank and file. In a community where conformity and moderation were virtues, centurions supported these virtues by punishing transgressors, while assuming a role that became strongly associated with imperial political authority and religious custom.

This point returns us to the questions raised at the beginning of the chapter, as to the importance of the centurion and physical punishment to *disciplina*. The argument that brutal disciplinary measures and punishments were inevitably inefficient and suggestive of a military that could not rely on its soldiers' courage is simply anachronistic. The idealization of the centurion's punitive authority did not diminish, but rather appears to have endured in the legions of the Principate, a period during which other aspects of the army's organization and practices are thought to have formalized, routinized, and professionalized. The evidence is therefore inconsistent with a view that a more professional atmosphere (with more complex and well defined organization, hierarchy, and symbols) necessarily militates against the need for corporal punishment.<sup>127</sup> Harsh punishments and strictly codified behaviour, in fact, are often more rather than less prominent in professional military institutions, which tend to enforce firm dogmas and stereotyped procedures.<sup>128</sup> Evidence suggests that this was true for the Roman army and the centurionate.

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<sup>126</sup>See below, Chapter Four, 137-147.

<sup>127</sup>Gilbert, "The Changing Face of British Military Justice", 83, applies this reasoning to the lower number of cases of formal discipline in the British Navy, widely regarded as more professional than its land-based counterpart.

<sup>128</sup>Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 136. See also Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 278.

In approaching ancient evidence from political, ideological, and cultural standpoints, moreover, recent studies have rigorously and creatively challenged an enduring yet often narrow understanding of Roman military discipline as something based only on rigid codes of obedience, backed by equally harsh punishment. In making this challenge, however, the role of formal military discipline has been pushed from the ideological center to the periphery to a degree that may not take sufficient account of the evidence for corporal punishment, and would doubtless surprise Roman soldiers and centurions themselves. Ostensibly, the centurion used fear and violence rather than fostering more internal and “legitimate ” forms of discipline. Such a distinction, however, is less usefully applied to Roman *disciplina*. The centurion’s authority to employ corporal punishment was based in fundamental Roman concepts of military tradition, imperial authority, and religious custom. Far from being necessarily perceived as illegitimate, physical punishment (or the fear of it), it seems, was fundamental to defining a centurion’s authority and Roman *disciplina* more broadly.

It is also true, however, that whatever the extent to which fear of the centurion affected the Roman army’s discipline, soldiers had to be led, not merely driven, into battle. Seneca recognized this:

There is not only one type of rule – the *princeps* rules over his subjects, a father over his children, a teacher over his pupils, a tribune or a centurion over his soldiers. Will he not seem the worst sort of father who restrains his children by assiduous blows for even the most trifling offences?<sup>129</sup>

To be sure, Seneca’s stoic perspective was not necessarily widespread during his day, but it does describe a reality for many military institutions: an officer’s authority cannot

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<sup>129</sup>*De Clem.* 1. 16. 2-3: *Non unum est imperandi genus; imperat princeps civibus suis, pater liberis, praeceptor discentibus, tribunus vel centurio militibus. Nonne pessimus pater videbitur, qui assiduus plagis liberos etiam ex levissimis causis compescet?*

endure through the fear of physical punishment alone. Military systems succeed or fail largely because of the status (i.e. prestige and respect) of the officers, which has to be achieved through actions other than punishment.<sup>130</sup> Centurions had a vested interest in continually demonstrating their worth to their subordinates, and the necessary price for their status was a high degree of conformity to the values of the soldiers, not just the elite leadership. One of these values was an expectation to face an enemy bravely and not retreat, even at the cost of one's life. As we shall see, centurions were counted on to adhere to this ideal as closely as they were to that of the stern disciplinarian.

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<sup>130</sup>F. M. Richardson, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of the Psychological Factors in War* (London, 1978), 92: "Discipline itself will not be enough." Cf. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 36; Goldsworthy *Roman Army at War*, 285. See also comments by A. du Picq, *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle*, trans. J. N. Greely & R. C. Cotton (Harrisburg, 1946), 39.

## Chapter 2: Combat Officers

### 2.1 Introduction

In the Roman army's siege of Jerusalem in CE 70, Roman assaults on the stronghold on the Temple Mount were stubbornly resisted by the Jewish defenders. Even after the Roman capture of the Tower of Antonia, Jewish defenders continued to inflict heavy losses on the Roman soldiers as they attempted to capture the Temple. The event gave Josephus an opportunity to narrate an individual exploit in bravery:

There was a centurion from Bithynia, Julian, a man of great repute, whom I had formerly seen in that war, and a man of very great fame for his skill in war, his strength of body, and courage in spirit. Seeing the Romans now falling back, and becoming demoralized, (for he was standing beside Titus at the Tower of Antonia), he leaped forward, and single-handedly put the Jews to flight, when they were already victorious, and he made them retreat into the inner corner of the Temple court. Their vast number fled from him in a mass, believing that neither his strength nor his aggression were humanlike. Because of this, he rushed through the midst of them as they were widely dispersed, killing those whom he caught. To be sure, there was no sight that appeared more amazing to Caesar's eyes, or more terrible to others present, than this.<sup>1</sup>

Authors as early as Homer have described this type of heroic exploit in narratives of combat. Authors of the Roman Empire were no exception, and they often portray situations in which the actions of a single soldier turn the course of a battle. What makes

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<sup>1</sup>*BJ* 6. 1. 8: Ἰουλιανὸς δὲ τις ἑκατοντάρχης τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Βιθυνίας, οὐκ ἄσημος ὢν ἀνὴρ, ὃν ἐγὼ κατ' ἐκείνον ἰστόρησα τὸν πόλεμον ὄπλων τε ἐμπειρία καὶ ἀλκῆ σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς παραστήματι πάντων ἄριστος, ὁρῶν τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ἐνδιδόντας ἤδη καὶ κακῶς ἀμυνομένους, παρειστήκει δὲ Τίτῳ κατὰ τὴν Ἀντωνίαν, προπηδᾷ καὶ νικῶντας ἤδη τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τρέπεται μόνος μέχρι τῆς τοῦ ἐνδοτέρου ἱεροῦ γωνίας. ἔφευγε δὲ τὸ πλῆθος ἄθρουν, οὔτε τὴν ἰσχὺν οὔτε τὴν τόλμαν ἀνθρωπίνην ὑπολαμβάνοντες. ὁ δὲ διὰ μέσων τῶν σκεδαννυμένων ἄλλοτε ἄλλη διαττων ἐφόνευε τοὺς καταλαμβανόμενους, καὶ τῆς ὄψεως ἐκείνης οὐδὲν οὔτε τῷ Καίσαρι θαυμασιώτερον οὔτε τοῖς ἄλλοις παρέστη φρικωδέστερον.

many Roman accounts unique among their contemporaries, however, is the frequency in which middle-ranking officers, the centurions, are the protagonists.

While the previous chapter examined the role of physical punishment as a key component in defining centurion, this chapter explores an equally important component: their idealized behaviour in combat. While centurions were expected at the very least to fight and lead soldiers from the front, ancient authors also frequently record them charging enemy lines or fortifications by themselves. Centurions often paid for these exploits with their lives – they perish in most of these vignettes and, in many cases, the Roman army is still defeated in the skirmish or battle for which they sacrificed themselves.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, when ancient authors differentiate between ranks in accounts of Roman casualties in battle, centurions suffer highly disproportionately, both in victory and defeat.<sup>3</sup> Describing these officers' casualties even seems to have been a favoured documentary method to illustrate the fierceness of a battle.

While the potential cost to the legions of losing valued and experienced officers is obvious, by the late Republic, the centurions' aggressive behaviour in combat nonetheless became an important characterization of the rank. Although considered champions of discipline and experience, centurions also cultivated a reputation as the Roman legions' "natural fighters."<sup>4</sup> Understanding the traditions, motivations, and ideology behind this reputation is thus crucial to understanding the centurions' roles as combat officers.

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<sup>2</sup>Eg. App. *Mithr.* 89; Caes. *BG* 5.35; *BC* 3. 53; *Hisp.* 23; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 11.

<sup>3</sup>One hundred and fifty centurions at Zela in 67 BCE (Plut. *Luc.* 35. 2); forty-six at Gergovia, thirty at Pharsalus (Caes. *BG* 7. 50-51; *BC* 3. 99; App. *BC* 2. 80); six *primi ordines* centurions and a *primuspilus* in Second Battle of Cremona (Tac. *Hist.* 3. 22). On generally high level of casualties among centurions, see Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 217-231.

<sup>4</sup>On natural fighters or "soldier-adventurers," see Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 185-191.

Many studies have attempted to describe some of the characteristics of a “Roman way of war,” and to understand the motivations for Romans to fight both individually and collectively.<sup>5</sup> Harris has argued that the Romans were simply more aggressive and bellicose than their contemporaries. A competitive senatorial aristocracy hungry for prestige and wealth idealized the *laus* and *gloria* to be gained through war. These characteristics were found too among the mass of Roman citizens, who were especially brutal in warfare, and were the driving force behind Rome’s aggressive expansion during the Republic.<sup>6</sup> Other analyses have emphasized the role played by material self-interest. The rewards of combat (i.e. land, booty, and slaves) doubtless motivated both soldiers and officers to fight, as did an opportunity for promotion within and outside the legions, and hopes of social advancement. Many Roman military decorations (*dona militaria*) were awarded to soldiers for individual bravery (*ob virtutem/ex fortia*). By the Principate, these awards typically marked them for promotion.<sup>7</sup> Most recently, however, the behaviour of Roman soldiers in combat has been attributed largely to the existence of a high degree of martial competition, with Roman soldiers vying with each other in acts of bravery not only to be esteemed by a commander or emperor, but also by each other.

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<sup>5</sup>For general discussions of Roman morale and combat motivation, see Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 248-282; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, passim; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 237-268; *Soldiers and Ghosts*, passim; A. D. Lee, “Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle” in A.B. Lloyd ed., *Battle in Antiquity* (London, 1996), 207-212; V. Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army* (Berkeley, 1981), 236-248.

<sup>6</sup>Harris has consistently supported this view. See “Readings,” 309, 316; *War and Imperialism*, esp. 18-27, 41-53. See also A. Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War: From Classical Greece to Republican Rome, 500-167 B.C.* (Boulder, 1997), 158-160.

<sup>7</sup>Material benefits of booty and confiscated land: P. A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower, 225 B.C.-A.D. 14* (London, 1971), 29-33; *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford, 1988), 240-275; S. P. Oakley, “The Roman Conquest of Italy,” in J. Rich & G. Shipley eds., *War and Society in the Roman World* (London, 1993), 18-22; Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 9-68, 75-104, 264. Marked for promotion: Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 236-248.

This competitiveness encouraged and preserved a highly aggressive behaviour in combat.<sup>8</sup>

While these factors applied equally and, in many cases, most to centurions, this chapter argues that they had the added motivation and responsibility as officers to adopt a very personal style of leadership. For military officers at many levels of command in modern armies, there is a benefit to “being seen” in performing acts of bravery. Good leaders should be prepared to lead by example and (at least appear) to share their subordinates’ dangers and hardships. Such behaviour, especially in dire situations, buttresses lagging spirits. This concept was well understood in the Roman army of both the Republic and Principate, and centurions in particular were expected to assume this role. In asserting and defining their privileged position in the legions, centurions relied on the example of their sword no less than the threat of their *vitis*.

## 2.2 “Connoisseurs of Violence”

To understand the centurions’ behaviour in combat, one must consider their actions in the context of what military theorists have described as the “fighter spirit.” Not easy to define, it is generally expressed as the combination of psychological and cultural motives that spur a soldier to “seek success in combat, regardless of his personal safety.”<sup>9</sup> While doubts remain whether the morale and motivations of Roman soldiers can be understood without more sophisticated psychological analysis than our sources can support, studies attempting to describe a Roman fighter spirit have nonetheless continued

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<sup>8</sup>Lendon, “The Rhetoric of Combat,” 310-311. Cf. *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 186; Goldsworthy, “Community under Pressure: The Roman Army at the Siege of Jerusalem” in A. Goldsworthy & I. Hayes eds., *The Roman Army as a Community* (Portsmouth, 1999), 201-202.

<sup>9</sup>Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 32.

to rely on comments by ancient writers on this topic.<sup>10</sup> Caesar himself described something similar to morale or aggressive fighting spirit as *animus*. He advocated that Roman commanders ought to nurture *animus* among their soldiers in order to preserve their energy or onslaught (*impetus*) against enemy forces. Caesar considered the fighting spirit to be crucial to victory.<sup>11</sup>

The Roman military concept of *virtus*, however, has received the most attention in modern scholarship. *Virtus* was more complex and fluid an idea than its loosely translated English equivalent, “courage,” and its scope and connotations in the Roman Empire appear to have expanded over time.<sup>12</sup> McDonnell and Harris, among others, view this courage as exceptionally aggressive and violent. In this sense, the *virtus* of Roman soldiers was not what one might consider the kind of valour that was conscious of danger (exemplified by a modern soldier who saves a comrade while under fire), but a far more aggressive reaction, described better with words such as fierceness (*ferocia*), rage (*ira*), or madness (*furor*).<sup>13</sup> By such descriptions, one should see the Roman legions less as methodical, armoured machines than armies whose soldiers were tensed with rage, ready

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<sup>10</sup>E.g., A. M. Eckstein, “Bellicosity and Anarchy: Soldiers, Warriors, and Combat in Antiquity,” *The International History Review* 27.3 (2005), 481-497. On doubts, see W. V. Harris, “Readings in the Narrative Literature of Roman Courage” in S. Dillon & K. Welch eds., *Representations of War in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2006), 300-304; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 237-238. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 26, divides morale into five elements: basic societal and group values, opinions and codes from army indoctrination, wartime opinions, reactions to service conditions, and esprit de corps.

<sup>11</sup>*Animus*: Caes. *BC* 3. 92. *Impetus*: *BG* 1. 52; Sen. *Ira*. 1. 9. 1. Cf. Lendon, “Rhetoric of Combat”, 286-287, 290-298; Phang, *Roman Military Practice*, 37.

<sup>12</sup>Harris, “Readings,” 300-301. D. C. Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome* (Ithaca, 1967), 20, said *virtus* was “untranslatable.” For the most extensive study on *virtus*, see M. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>13</sup>McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, passim; Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 53; “Readings,” 309. Both authors refer to Polybius’ description (6. 52. 7) of the Romans’ ὀργή. Keegan (*History of War*, 265-266) claims that the Romans were so eager for war and ferocious that they can be compared only with the Mongols and Timurids.



to be unleashed on their victims.<sup>14</sup> This primal aggression is argued to have been most prominent in the manipular army of the Republic. The youngest men formed the *velites*, whose loosely-formed units and emphasis on manoeuvrability required youthful agility and offered men opportunities to prove themselves in *virtus*. These *velites* often bore wolfskins into battle, while early Roman cavalrymen apparently fought with a bare torso, seemingly to acquire both a fearsome appearance and to be noticed by peers and commanders.<sup>15</sup>

Challenges, however, have been raised against the concept of Roman *virtus* as first and foremost an aggressive courage, rather than a concept that Romans understood and used far more flexibly.<sup>16</sup> Several studies convincingly refute the idea that the commanders and soldiers of the Roman Republic were exceptionally aggressive in warfare, pointing out that Rome's contemporaries were no less aggressive, and that there were many complex and often external factors that drew Rome into conflicts.<sup>17</sup> However Roman aggression is compared with that of their contemporaries, the trait of *ferocia* seems actually to have been embraced and idealized for characterizing the centurion in combat. By the late Republic, this reputation was proverbial. Cicero contrasts the *ira* of

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<sup>14</sup>Lendon, "The Rhetoric of Combat", 309-310; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 100; C. M. Gilliver, "The Roman Army and Morality in War" in *Battle in Antiquity*, 219; Harris, "Readings", 309, 316.

<sup>15</sup>*Velites*: Polyb. 6. 21-22; Liv. 26. 4; 30. 33; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 33-35, 66-67. Bare torso of cavalry: Polyb. 6. 25. 3-4. See also J. B. McCall, *The Cavalry of the Roman Republic: Cavalry Combat and Elite Reputations in the Middle and Late Republic* (London; New York, 2002), 26-30, 78-99, 100-136. On warlike nature and organization of maniples, see Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 185-186, 197.

<sup>16</sup>For broader meaning of *virtus*, see Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome*, 34-36; W. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana: Ihre Stellung im römischen Wertesystem* (Munich 1973), passim. *Virtus* as technical skill: Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 170.

<sup>17</sup>Both Polybius (5. 2. 6) and Livy (45. 40. 7) saw the Macedonians as more violent. Cf. J. Rich, "Fear, Greed and Glory: The Causes of War-making in the Middle Republic" in J. Rich and G. Shipley eds., *War and Society in the Roman World* (London, 1993), 9-37; A. M. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, passim.

the centurion with the emotionally detached reason (*ratio*) of the wise man. Lucan likewise refers to the mad rage (*rabies*) of Crastinus, one of Caesar's heroic centurions who fought at Pharsalus.<sup>18</sup>

Such aggression went above and beyond merely fighting beside their subordinates in the front line – ancient authors depict it primarily as near-suicidal, individual assaults. Appian, for example, explains how Mithridates' victory over C. Valerius Triarius in the Third Mithridatic War was made incomplete when a disguised centurion furiously attacked him. Before being cut to pieces, the lone centurion wounded the king severely in the thigh, forcing him to withdraw to his camp.<sup>19</sup> Caesar several times portrayed his centurions charging alone into the midst of an enemy line, or as the first to attempt to scale a city's walls.<sup>20</sup> Such was the case with L. Fabius, a centurion in Caesar's failed assault on Gergovia:

He refused to let anyone else scale the wall before him. He grabbed three of his fellow soldiers, got them to hoist him up, and climbed the wall.<sup>21</sup>

Such idealization continued well into the Principate. Josephus describes a centurion in the siege of Gamala who, cut off from his legion that remained outside of the city walls, led ten of his soldiers quietly into a private house. When night came with the chance for escape, he evacuated the house, but not before bursting into the bedrooms of the house's occupants and one by one slitting their throats.<sup>22</sup> Part of Hadrian's speech

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<sup>18</sup>Cicero: *Tusc. Disp.* 4. 25: *Et quidem ipsam illam iram centurio habeat...* Cf. *De Fin.* 1. 3 (9). Rage of Crastinus: Luc. 7. 471-4; Florus, 2. 13. 46.

<sup>19</sup>*Mithr.* 89.

<sup>20</sup>Caes. *BG* 2.25; 5. 35, 44; 6. 38; *BC*. 3.91, 99. Cf. *Hisp.* 23.

<sup>21</sup>Caes. *BG* 7. 47: *neque commissurum, ut prius quisquam murum ascenderet, tres suos nactus manipulares atque ab eis sublevatus murum ascendit.*

<sup>22</sup>Jos. *BJ* 4. 37. Centurions appear to have been specially selected for daring raids in sieges. See Liv. 25. 23.

(*adlocutio*) to Legio III Augusta at Lambaesis in CE 128 continues this theme: “But in fact you have not been lax in your training... the *primi ordines* centurions and the other centurions were as agile and strong as fits their character.”<sup>23</sup> Caracalla, when he granted the title and status of centurions on his Scythian and German bodyguards, also nicknamed them “the lions,” so fearsomely were centurions idealized.<sup>24</sup>

A reputation for *virtus* applied in the strictest sense also to a centurion’s male sexuality.<sup>25</sup> As an community, the Roman legions appear to have been highly masculine in their ideals and dispositions. Battles and individual combat were contests in “competitive male excellence,” and viewed as direct challenges to one’s masculinity, to one’s own *virtus*.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, masculinity and sexual behaviour were relevant to one’s perceived martial prowess and status. While such expectations could generally apply to Roman males of all military ranks,<sup>27</sup> centurions seem to have been held to particularly high standards. A breach of it directly undermined their self-perception and authority. A centurion’s lack of sexual restraint, for example, could be censured by ancient authors as characterizing a lower social status. Livy, for example, recounts a centurion’s rape of the imprisoned wife of a Gallic chieftain. Livy condemns this centurion as being

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<sup>23</sup>*ILS* 2487: *videtur attendisse vobis; primi ordines et centuriones agiles et fortes more suo fuerunt*. See also Dion. 4. 17. 4; Frontin. *Strat.* 2. 8. 1-5; Dio 68. 22b. 3; 74. 6. 6. Orosius (*Hist.* 4. 1. 10) tells how a centurion maimed one of Pyrrhus’ elephants at Heraclea (280 BCE), causing it to turn on its own army.

<sup>24</sup>Dio 79. 6. 1.

<sup>25</sup>On “phallic aggression” in Roman sexuality, see A. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humour*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1992), *passim*. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 167, denies any connection between *virtus* and male sexuality.

<sup>26</sup>London, “Rhetoric of Combat”, 310-12. This sense is expressed by Caesar (*BG* 2. 8; 6. 40). See also Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers*, 252, 262.

<sup>27</sup>A notable exception is Julius Caesar, whose sexual submission to Nicomedes IV of Bithynia was the source of gibes from his own soldiers (Suet. *Iul.* 2, 49).

“characterized by both the lust and greed of a soldier” (*libidinis et avaritiae militaris*).<sup>28</sup>

Writing during the early first century CE, Valerius Maximus mentions an earlier *primuspilus*, C. Cornelius (c. 149 BCE), who finished a brilliant career with great honours, yet after having admitted to sexual intercourse with a young man of free birth, he was thrown into a prison and died there in disgrace.<sup>29</sup>

While a lack of sexual restraint could damage a centurion’s authority, so too could accusations of excessive sexual passivity. According to Suetonius, the primary motivation for Cassius Chaerea’s decision to assassinate Gaius Caligula in CE 41 was the emperor’s constant gibes concerning Chaerea’s effeminacy. For a former centurion (one of the few from the lower Rhine legions not to be killed or demoted during the mutiny of CE 14), this was more than he could bear.<sup>30</sup> A centurion on the losing side of L. Antonius Saturninus’ revolt in CE 89, moreover, was spared by Domitian after he convinced the emperor that he had been used for other men’s pleasures, that is, that he had been a sexually passive partner (*pathicus/cinaedus*). This convinced Domitian that he was no threat, since he could never have commanded any respect from his superiors or subordinates.<sup>31</sup> An insult to the centurion’s masculinity, by extension, was an insult to his military authority.

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<sup>28</sup>Liv. 38. 24. 2.

<sup>29</sup>Val. Max. 6. 10. 11.

<sup>30</sup>Suet. *Cal.* 56. Cf. Dio 59. 29. 2, in which Caligula calls Chaerea “womanish” (γύγνις). On Chaerea surviving the mutiny, see Tac. *Ann.* 1. 32. Epictetus (Discourses 1. 16. 11) sees secondary sexual characteristics as social signs – they announce from afar, “I am a man” (ἀνήρ εἰμι).

<sup>31</sup>Suet. *Dom.* 10: *impudicus*. On the deviance of a male as receptive partner, see M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, 1995), 64, 70: “to do” (δοῦναι) is mark of a man; “to suffer” (πάσχειν) is that of a woman. On ties between social, spatial, and biological identities (e.g., *nif-haram*, exterior-interior, male-female, active-passive, penetrating-penetrated), see Bourdieu, *Outline*, 87-93; *The Logic of Practice*, R. Nice trans. (Stanford, 1990), 71, 293, n. 5.

If centurions were to remain fierce soldiers in battle, therefore, they were to be held to a high standard in masculinity. This sense of masculinity was applied further toward idealizations of the centurion's physical aspects, such as their clothing and equipment. For example, centurions wore greaves on active service, and they often displayed them in commemorative relief. The Roman soldier of the early and middle Republic apparently had worn a single greave on his left leg – a traditional practice associated with gladiatorial combat. Centurions alone among soldiers and officers, however, continued to use them during the Principate, perhaps to emphasize the rank's ties to individual combat and traditional Roman military culture.<sup>32</sup>

Status and prestige can also be embodied in the individual, incorporated into the body in one's principles, dispositions, inclinations, and even physical features such as gait, stance, and body language. It cannot be divorced from them.<sup>33</sup> For centurions, physical manifestation of experience in combat was important. When M. Antonius decided to face Octavian's forces at Actium in a sea rather than land battle, Plutarch has him criticized by one of his veteran legionary centurions. The unnamed centurion, whose body was covered with scars from his service, inquired, "Imperator, why do you put your trust in these wretched wooden logs rather than these wounds or this sword here?"<sup>34</sup> By indicating his sword, he voiced a preference to fight an infantry over a naval battle. By indicating his scars, he notified his commander of his own past bravery and experience in

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<sup>32</sup>On greaves and other distinctive accoutrements of the centurionate, see Appendix B.

<sup>33</sup>On deportment as language (i.e., physiognomy, gait, and other physical characteristics), cf. Gleason, *Making Men*, 56-81.

<sup>34</sup>Plut. *Ant.* 64: ὁ αὐτόκρατος, τί τῶν τραυμάτων τούτων ἢ τοῦ ξίφους καταγνοῦς ἐν ξύλοις πονηροῖς ἔχεις τὰς ἐλπίδας;

combat – such scars were a show of military status for any experienced Roman soldier, and for centurions in particular.<sup>35</sup>

Centurions are portrayed in literary sources as being exceptionally tall and strong. Cicero refers to T. Pontius, a centurion in the age of Cato the Elder, as the strongest man of his time. During the Principate, Pliny the Elder's discussion on instances of extraordinary strength included an account of Vinnius Valens. This centurion of Augustus' Praetorian Guard could lift fully-laden carts, hold carriages against the strength of horses, and perform other wonderful feats of strength, which he later had inscribed on his tomb.<sup>36</sup> Josephus claims that the aforementioned Cassius Chaerea was strong enough to kill with his bare hands. These traits were apparently still highly desirable in the Roman army centuries later. Vegetius later expressed the ideal qualities of centurions as including not only obedience, discipline, and skill in weapons, but also great strength and stature.<sup>37</sup>

This stature, moreover, was heightened further by the centurion's unique helmet. While *milites'* helmets of the Imperial army were unadorned in combat, the centurion's helmet bore a transverse crest (*crista transversa*), which increased his height and recalled the feathery plumes of the legions of the Middle Republic.<sup>38</sup> This height-enhancing headgear was meant not only for the centurion to be noticed in battle, either for drawing troops together or catching a commander's eye, but also to boost the image of his virile

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<sup>35</sup>See also Caes. *BG* 2. 25; *BC* 3. 53; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 20.

<sup>36</sup>Cic. *Sen.* 33; Plin. *NH* 7. 82.

<sup>37</sup>Jos. *AJ* 19. 1. 5-6, 11; Veg. *Mil.* 2. 14. 3-8. Cf. Cic. *Phil.* 8. 9; Liv. 2. 55; 25. 19. 9; Juv. 14. 193-195; Apul. *Met.* 9. 39-40. According also to Vegetius (*Mil.* 1. 5), there was a standard minimum height for different ranks in the legions. See *CTh.* 7. 13. 3.

<sup>38</sup>*Crista transversa*: See Appendix B, 278. Cf. Veg. *Mil.* 2. 13, 16. Plumes: Polyb. 6. 23. 12-13.

potency and martial skill.<sup>39</sup> Florus hinted that the centurion's already imposing form could be made even fiercer with the aid of some pyrotechnics. In fighting in Moesia during the first century BCE, a centurion named Cornidius apparently carried a pan of hot coals on the top of his helmet which, when fanned by his movement, appeared to wreath his head in flame.<sup>40</sup>

While this last account is fanciful, it nonetheless reveals the reputation in combat that centurions enjoyed as the legion's "natural fighters," with great physical stature and strength matched by aggression in combat. They seem to exemplify the tense, enraged Roman soldier, eager to fight. Lendon has suggested that the centurions' bravery represents more closely the commitment to traditional, heroic *virtus* in Roman military culture rather than the calculated courage of a Roman commander, who behaved with consideration for the spirit of his soldiers.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the young men typically perceived to be the most aggressive in battle, however, centurions were among the oldest, most experienced veterans, most of whom had only reached the rank in the middle to later part of their life – not usually considered the type to rush heedless into an enemy line.<sup>42</sup> During the Principate, moreover, these officers enjoyed increased pay, status, and prestige, which many were doubtless reluctant to throw away so carelessly.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Physical accessories could be designed to enhance evolutionary, often unconscious senses of height, health, and reproductive power, which was closely linked to martial prowess. See A. Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford, 2006), 89-90. Cf. Polyb. 6. 23. 13. On deportment, physiognomy, and gait as "language," See Gleason, *Making Men*, 56-81.

<sup>40</sup>Florus 2. 26.

<sup>41</sup>Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 218-220.

<sup>42</sup>On the youth of Roman soldiers who sacrifice themselves, see McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 199-200; H. S. Versnel, "Self-Sacrifice, Compensation, and the Anonymous Gods," in *La Sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Geneva, 1981), 141. A Famous example is that of Horatius (Polyb. 6. 55. 1-4; Liv. 2.10; Dion. Hal. 5. 23). On the statistical frequency of younger, unmarried men engaged in aggressive behaviour in more modern warfare, see Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 301.

<sup>43</sup>See below, Chapter Five, 182-184.

In fact, there is little reason to doubt that centurions were quite capable of making conscious decisions to perform such dangerous acts, and, according to ancient sources, they were motivated by several factors, including material rewards, social and professional advancement, and prestige. Most importantly, it should be remembered that centurions were officers as well as soldiers. As such, their actions could be calculated to affect the psychological behaviour of their soldiers. Indeed, we shall see that an aggressive behaviour in combat was an essential aspect to a centurion's authority as an officer.

### 2.3 Promotion and Decoration

The opportunity for "being seen" by a superior officer, commander, or emperor was a consistent motivation for any Roman soldier to perform brave, individual actions, since a noteworthy performance in battle could be rewarded in material or promotion.<sup>44</sup> Onasander advocated this martial tradition, arguing that the bravest *miles* ought to receive small commands, while officers who distinguish themselves should have higher commands, since such rewards both strengthen self-esteem and encourage others to prove themselves.<sup>45</sup> Caesar consistently promoted soldiers to the centurionate for their valour (*ob virtutem* or *virtutis causa*). Commanders such as Caesar, however, expected the behaviour that first earned them their promotion to continue in their new rank. Caesar makes this expectation clear in his praise of several centurions during the battle against the Sugambri in 53 BCE:

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<sup>44</sup>Hyg. 114.1; Sic. Flacc.156. 9; Hyg. Grom. 176. 13; *LC* 214. 12; 216. 11; 232.2. Cf. Richier, *Centuriones ad Rhenum*, 571. Lendon, "Rhetoric of Combat", 310; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 236.

<sup>45</sup>*Strat.* 34. 2. For career paths of centurions more generally, see below, Chapter Four, 137-147.



The centurions, some of whom had been promoted for their valour from the lower ranks of other legions to higher ranks in this legion, in order not to lose this glory for military exploits, fell together fighting most bravely.<sup>46</sup>

By at least Caesar's time, valour was a key to promotion also within the ranks of the centurionate. At Caesar's defeat at Dyrrachium in 48 BCE, for example, one of his centurions, Scaeva, bravely and single-handedly defended his position. Having suffered his shield to be pierced over one hundred times, losing an eye in the process, he nonetheless held his ground. Caesar rewarded him with money, *dona militaria*, and promotion to *primuspilus*.<sup>47</sup> This behaviour was rewarded even among the high-ranking *primipili*, such as Crastinus, a *primuspilus* who fought at Pharsalus that same campaign. Crastinus fell in battle, but was posthumously awarded many *dona* and burial in a large tomb.<sup>48</sup>

The potential for promotion and material gain was greater for the centurionate as it developed under Augustus and his successors. A legion's fifty-nine centurions aspired to become those of the first cohort (the *primi ordines*), a rank which offered greater prestige and pay. With skill and luck, they might rise to the rank of *primuspilus*, earning them enrolment into the equestrian order and possible candidacy for equestrian administrative posts.<sup>49</sup> Promotion *ob virtutem* remained common. Commemorations to

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<sup>46</sup>BG 6. 40: *Centuriones, quorum nonnulli ex inferioribus ordinibus reliquarum legionum virtutis causa in superiores erant ordines huius legionis traducti, ne ante partam rei militaris laudem amitterent, fortissime pugnantes conciderunt.* See also promotions of Q. Fulgenius (BC 1. 46) and centurions to naval commands (BC 1. 57).

<sup>47</sup>Caes. BC 3. 53; App. BC 2. 60; Val. Max. 3. 2. 23. This account is missed by Maxfield, who denies that *dona* were rewarded without a victorious outcome. See *Military Decorations*, 115.

<sup>48</sup>Caes. BC 3. 91: *faciam, inquit, hodie, imperator, ut aut vivo mihi aut mortuo gratias agas.* Cf. App. BC 2. 80. Crastinus is singled out with hostility by Lucan as the one who "first stained Pharsalus with Roman blood." See above with n. 18.

<sup>49</sup>See below, Chapter 4, 141. Cf. Dobson, "The Centurionate and Social Mobility during the Principate" in Breeze and Dobson, eds., *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 201-217; "The *Primipilares* in

centurions describe their promotion through brave deeds, sometimes combined with support from their units.<sup>50</sup> As “Commander in Chief” of the Roman army, the emperor was nominally responsible for all officer promotions and transfers, including centurions. Although it is difficult to determine the form or degree of their involvement,<sup>51</sup> emperors themselves occasionally seem to have had a hand in promoting centurions for their bravery. One such case was that of a centurion under Caracalla, T. Aurelius Flavinus, to whom a commemorative monument was established:

To T. Aurelius Flavinus, son of Titus, of the Papirian Tribe, *primipilaris*...honoured by the divine Magnus Antoninus Augustus with 75 000 *sesterces* and a promotion in rank because of keen bravery (*alacritatem virtutis*) against the hostile Carpi, and an action accomplished both prosperously and effectively.<sup>52</sup>

Rewards of less immediate material value were *dona militaria*, which Roman commanders had long rewarded as a way to motivate their soldiers.<sup>53</sup> In the same way that the Roman army used punishments to discourage transgressions, *dona* were given to encourage specific forms of positive behaviour:

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Army and Society” in Alföldy, Dobson, and Eck, *Kaiser, Heer, und Gesellschaft in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, 139-151.

<sup>50</sup>M. P. Speidel, “Becoming a Centurion in Africa: Brave Deeds and the Support of the Troops as Promotion Criteria” in *Roman Army Studies*, Vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1992), 124-8; E. Birley, *Carnuntum Jahrbuch* (1963), 21-33; Cowan, *For the Glory of Rome*, 133, 233.

<sup>51</sup>Pliny (*Pan.* 15) praised Trajan for remembering *fortia facta* of soldiers. Emperors’ involvement in promotion: *ILS* 2666; *ILS* 2081; *ILS* 9200. Cf. Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 90-112; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 104-6. The image of the emperor’s personal involvement in award and promotion had ideological precedents in Eastern dynasts, especially the Achaemenids. See Xen. *Cyr.* 1. 9. 14; Diod. 17. 59. 2. Cf. Briant, “The Achaemenid Empire” in *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, K. Raaflaub & N. Rosenstein Eds. (Cambridge, 1999), 109.

<sup>52</sup>*ILS* 7178; *AE* 1961, 208: T. Aurelio T. fil. Papir. Flavino primipilari et principi ordinis col. Oesc., et buleutae civitatu[m] Tyranorum Dionysiopol. Marcianopol. Tungroru[m] et Aquincensium, patron[o] college fabr., honorato a divo Magno Antonino Aug. HS L milia n. et XXV [et] gradum promotionis [ob] alacritatem virtu[tis] adversus hostes Ca[rpos] et res prospere et va[lide] ges[tas]. Cl. Nicom[edes] buleuta civitatis [Tyra]norum amico dign[issimo]. L. d. d. d. Cf. Campbell, *Roman Army*, no. 92.

<sup>53</sup>Polyb. 6. 39; Liv. 26. 48. The principal work on this topic is Maxfield’s monograph, cited above, n. 5. See also Domaszewski, *Rangordnung*, 68-70, 109-111, 137-139, 184-185; Y. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, 61-63.

They also have an admirable method of encouraging the young soldiers to face danger. After a battle in which some of them have distinguished themselves, the general calls an assembly of the troops, and bringing forward those whom he considers to have displayed conspicuous valour, first of all speaks in laudatory terms of the courageous deeds of each and of anything else in their previous conduct which deserves commendation, and afterwards distributes the following rewards...By such incentives they excite to emulation and rivalry in the field not only the men who are present and listen to their words, but those who remain at home also.<sup>54</sup>

Polybius understood the symbolic connection between reward and punishment through the use of military ceremony. As discussed in the previous chapter, punishment was often administered in full view of the entire legion. As witnesses to a flogging, attending soldiers were as much the ideological targets of the punishment as its actual victims. The ceremony for awarding *dona* mirrored this, in that declarations of the individual's actions were glorified and rewarded by the legionary commander in full view of other soldiers in order to promote the desired behaviour both among them and "those who remain at home."<sup>55</sup>

By the mid-Republican period, the Roman legions had already begun to award many different kinds of *dona*, and by the second century CE, they had developed the most sophisticated system of decorations prior to those of modern armies.<sup>56</sup> Legionary centurions are prominent winners of *dona* in literary narratives, and the centurionate accounts for the largest group of decorated men in surviving epigraphic evidence where

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<sup>54</sup>Polyb. 6. 39. 1-2, 8: Καλῶς δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους ἐκκαλοῦνται πρὸς τὸ κινδυνεύειν. ἐπειδὴν γὰρ γένηται τις χρεία καὶ τινες αὐτῶν ἀνδραγαθήσωσι, συναγαγὼν ὁ στρατηγὸς ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ στρατοπέδου, καὶ παραστησάμενος τοὺς δόξαντάς τι πεπραχέναι διαφέρον, πρῶτον μὲν ἐγκώμιον ὑπὲρ ἐκάστου λέγει περὶ τῆς ἀνδραγαθίας, κἄν τι κατὰ τὸν βίον αὐτοῖς ἄλλο συννύαρχη τῆς ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ μνήμης ἄξιον, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τῷ μὲν τρώσαντι πολέμιον γαῖσον δωρεῖται... ἐκ δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης παρορμήσεως οὐ μόνον τοὺς ἀκούοντας καὶ παρόντας ἐκκαλοῦνται πρὸς τὴν ἐν τοῖς κινδύνοις ἄμιλλαν καὶ ζῆλον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐν οἴκῳ μένοντας.

<sup>55</sup>See also Liv. 26. 48. For other examples of award ceremonies in the legions, see Caes. *Afr.* 86; *Alex.* 77; Suet. *Div. Claud.* 28; Jos. *BJ* 7. 5-17. Cf. Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War*, 157.

<sup>56</sup>Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 55.

courage in battle is listed as the main identifier. A large number of awards to centurions from the Flavian period, for instance, were earned during the Jewish war. This was not only a major conflict of that period, but also one that offered tactical situations that allowed for spectacular displays of bravery, such as the sieges that Josephus delights in describing with such vivid detail.<sup>57</sup>

There were great material incentives for centurions to win *dona militaria*. By at least the second century BCE, the rewarding of *dona* for brave acts seems to have accompanied or led to promotion to and within the centurionate. While Roman commanders often promoted many soldiers and centurions solely *ob virtutem*, even those centurions not immediately promoted were nonetheless marked for it through decorations.<sup>58</sup> Despite difficulties in pinpointing the stage of a centurion's career in which they received their *dona*, roughly one quarter of all decorated legionaries are recorded as being promoted to the centurionate, while over half of the centurions known to have received *dona* were promoted to *primuspilus* or higher.<sup>59</sup>

As the high casualty rates recorded by ancient authors demonstrate, these same acts of bravery could just as likely kill the centurion as distinguish him. Acts of valour and the *dona* rewarded for them, however, also offered great social prestige within the Roman military community. Judging by funerary inscriptions, when in full military

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<sup>57</sup>Jos. *BJ* 1. 148; 3. 333-334. Centurions assaulting walls or ramparts generally: Liv.25. 14, 23; 26. 48; Caes. *BG* 7. 47 *BC* 1. 46; Jos. *BJ* 1. 149; *AJ*. 14. 476. Cf. See Dobson, "The Roman Army: Wartime or Peacetime Army?" in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 113-128, esp. 125-126; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 137, 141, 189-191.

<sup>58</sup>Vegetius (2. 7) associates *dona* with rank. The best known example from the Republic is that of Sp. Ligustinus (Liv. 42. 34), who rose from *miles* to *primuspilus*. Caesar (*BC* 1. 46; 3. 53; *BG* 6. 40) commonly promoted men *ob virtutem*, as did Vespasian and Titus (*BJ*. 6. 135; 6. 53; 7. 15).

<sup>59</sup>E.g., C. Velius Rufus (*ILS* 9200; *AE* 1903, 368) and L. Aconius Statura (*CIL* XI 5992). Cf. Breeze & Dobson, *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 139; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 186-187, 243-244. On centurions failing to mention earlier career, see below, n. 118.

dress, centurions proudly bore their various *dona* overtop of their armour. In several cases, moreover, their career and achievements are represented visually only by these decorations.<sup>60</sup> In an institution that honoured and glorified martial prowess and bravery in all ranks, *dona* and the prestige associated with them likely helped to define one's rank and authority.<sup>61</sup> It is no surprise, then, that these awards were fiercely competed for by both soldiers and officers, simultaneously drawing from and encouraging a competitive atmosphere that was a hallmark of Roman warfare and a major motivating factor in the legions of the Republic and Principate.

## 2.4 Competition in Combat

Martial competition is often seen as characteristic for many cultures, especially among those broadly described as “heroic societies.” In such societies, physical strength and martial prowess were marks of recognition in one's household and community. Individual contests between warrior elites were especially common in military traditions.<sup>62</sup> This phenomenon included not only the fierce combat between opposing champions, but also rivalry within an army. Such rivalry is famously idealized in the *Iliad*, and was praised in wars between Greek *poleis* and the Hellenistic armies that followed.<sup>63</sup> It has been often argued, however, that such martial competition was

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<sup>60</sup>E.g., Appendix A, figs. 14, 17. On how these *dona* were displayed, see also Appendix B, 288.

<sup>61</sup>On *dona* defining rank and status, see below, 85-90.

<sup>62</sup>Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, 215-217; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Notre Dame, 2007), 121-130. For idealized elite warrior combat in other cultures, see chapters in *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, esp. J. J. Farris, “Japan until 1300”, 60-67; D. Webster, “Ancient Maya Warfare” 345; G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West 450-900* (London, 2003), 193; J. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder, 2003), 93-99.

<sup>63</sup>Greek: Hom. *Il.* 2.362-366; 8. 253-257; 13. 446-447; Hdt. 7. 226-277; Thuc. 6. 31. 3; Plut. *Ages.* 18. 3; *Pel.* 19. 4; *Phil.* 7. 4-5. On the likelihood of ritualized competition (ἀγών) between Greeks of opposing sides, see J. C. Dayton, *The Athletes of War: An Evaluation of the Agonistic Elements in Greek*

particularly prominent in the Roman military tradition, in which *gloria* and *fama* were sought through individual bravery and hand-to-hand combat.<sup>64</sup> While many Roman narratives tended to focus on the competition between social elites, writers such as Sallust projected this desire for *gloria* in combat on all Roman citizens in earlier times:

At first, the young man, as soon as he could to endure war, learned martial arts through labour in camp, and took greater pleasure in elegant arms and war horses than in prostitutes and the pleasure of feasts... But among them the great contest was for glory, and each sought to strike an enemy, to scale a wall, and *to be seen* while performing such deeds. This they regarded as wealth, fine fame, and great nobility.<sup>65</sup>

Although Sallust has in mind primarily the young members of the Roman aristocracy rather than its broader citizenry, a form of *gloria* was indeed contested within other ranks of the Roman army. Caesar employs a highly stylized and heroic narrative in his account of two centurions in combat against the Nervii in 54 BCE, T. Pullo and L. Vorenus. These two centurions were long-time competitors with each other. Caesar describes their colourful behaviour:

While the fight proceeded fiercely before the fortifications, one of them, Pullo, said, “Why do you hesitate, Vorenus? What better opportunity for showing your bravery do you want? This very day will decide our contests.” After he said this, he advanced beyond the fortifications, and rushed against the section of the

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*Warfare* (Toronto, 2006), *passim*. Macedonian: Arr. *Anab.* 1. 21. 1-3; 2. 27. 6; 7. 5. 4-6; Diod. 2. 25. 5. On competition more generally between Greek soldiers, see Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, esp. 45-47, 103-105, 127-128.

<sup>64</sup>E.g., Siccius Dentatus (Dion. Hal. 10.36-7; Plin. *NH* 7. 29); M. Valerius Corvus (Aul. Gell. 9. 11. 5); T. Manlius Torquatus (Aul. Gell. 9. 13); M. Claudius Marcellus (Plut. *Marc.* 2. 1). Cf. R. Cowan, *For the Glory of Rome: A History of Warriors and Warfare* (London, 2007), 102-12, 129-183; Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi: Military Defeat and Aristocratic Competition in the Middle and Late Republic* (Berkeley, 1990), 117-121. Stoll, “‘*De honore certabant et dignitate*,’ Truppe und Selbstidentifikation in der Armee der römischen Kaiserzeit” in *Römisches Heer und Gesellschaft: Gesammelte Beiträge 1991-1999* (Stuttgart, 2001), 108-129. On greater prominence in Roman than Greek culture, see J. E. Lendon, “War and Society” in *CHGRW* I, 503-516.

<sup>65</sup>*Cat.* 7. 4-6: *iam primum iuventus, simul ac belli patiens erat, in castris per laborem usum militiae discebat, magisque in decoris armis et militaribus equis quam in scortis atque conviviis libidinem habebant... sed gloriae maximum certamen inter ipsos erat: se quisque hostem ferire, murum ascendere, conspici, dum tale facinus faceret, properabat. eas divitias, eam bonam famam magnamque nobilitatem putabant.*

enemy forces that appeared densest. Nor did Vorenius remain within the rampart, but, mindful of everyone's high opinion, followed...and both having slain a great number, they retreated within the fortifications amid the highest applause. Fortune thus dealt with both in this rivalry and contest, that one rival was an aid and a safeguard to the other, nor could it be determined which of the two appeared worthy of being preferred to the other.<sup>66</sup>

Caesar's account recalls epic combat in the *Iliad*, where Greek and Trojan warriors spur one another in competition for honour and renown (τιμὴ, κλέος).<sup>67</sup> This was, of course, Caesar's intent – to relate the noble deeds of his soldiers to epic battles of the past, and to demonstrate the fierce rivalry between his soldiers in winning approval from their commander and peers. It is noteworthy, however, that the lone vignette of this kind in Caesar's commentary features neither aristocratic commanders and tribunes, nor rank and file soldiers, but centurions.

Beyond the individual desire for prestige or material reward, however, a competitive atmosphere in the legions is argued to have practical military advantages, since friendly competition can create bonds of friendship and cohesion within military units, as well as help to define the identity of the unit as a whole.<sup>68</sup> Alexander appealed to specific individuals and units in his army to foster competition.<sup>69</sup> Goldsworthy in particular has argued how Roman legionary commanders also actively encouraged competition by recalling the reputations of specific legions and individuals within them

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<sup>66</sup>Caes. *BG* 5. 44: *Ex his Pullo, cum acerrime ad munitiones pugnaretur, "Quid dubitas," inquit, "Vorene? aut quem locum tuae probandae virtutis exspectas? Hic dies de nostris controversiis iudicabit." Haec cum dixisset, procedit extra munitiones quaque pars hostium confertissima est visa irrumpit. Ne Vorenius quidem tum sese vallo continet, sed omnium veritus existimationem subsequitur...atque ambo incolumes compluribus interfectis summa cum laude sese intra munitiones recipient. Sic fortuna in contentione et certamine utrumque versavit, ut alter alteri inimicus auxilio salutique esset, neque diiudicari posset, uter utri virtute antefendus videretur.*

<sup>67</sup>E.g., *Il.* 12. 269-276, 310-328; 13. 150-154; 15. 285-299; 17. 141-168. On competing for honour and renown, see A. W. H. Adkins, "'Honour' and 'Punishment' in the Homeric Poems," *BICS* 7 (1960), 30-32.

<sup>68</sup>Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 43-52.

<sup>69</sup>Arr. *Anab.* 2. 10. 2.

before or during battle in order to spur the soldiers and create a stronger sense of pride and military identity.<sup>70</sup>

For the centurion, “being seen” was not only a contest for the attention of one’s commander in hope of receiving material reward, therefore, but essential to validating the centurion’s position in the eyes of both other centurions and his soldiers.<sup>71</sup> Centurions of the Republic in particular were outstanding participants in the pursuit of *gloria*. For Caesar, this competitive behaviour was exactly what he expected of them, and Pullo and Vorenus are not alone among centurions whom Caesar praises for it.<sup>72</sup> In a skirmish preceding the great battle at Munda in 45 BCE, two other of Caesar’s centurions, seeing their soldiers in danger, threw themselves into the middle of the fray. They died “in the cause of *gloria*.”<sup>73</sup> Centurions could be expected to measure their bravery not only among each other, but with members of other ranks as well. Livy, who projected the aggressive and competitive nature of centurions very early into Roman history, describes one vying for *gloria* in Scipio Africanus’ siege of Carthago Nova, in 209 BCE.<sup>74</sup> In this case, the centurion was not even competing with a Roman citizen, but a sailor from an allied state. At Gergovia, the centurion L. Fabius would not allow any *milites* to scale the city’s walls before him.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>E.g., Caes. *BG* 1.40-1; 8.19; Tac. *Hist.* 3. 23-24; 5. 16; *Agric.* 26. 2; Jos. *BJ* 6. 142. See Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 248-254; “Community under Pressure,” 201-202; S. P. Oakley, “Single Combat in the Roman Republic,” *CQ* 35. 2 (1985), 392-410. On the potentially destructive product of this competition, however, see Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 185-7, 254-256, 431-432, and below, Chapter Three.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 239: “esteem and disapproval of fellow members was a tremendously powerful force.”

<sup>72</sup>Other examples in Caesar: *BC*. 1. 46; 3. 53; *BG*. 2. 38; 5. 43; 6. 40; 7. 47; *Hisp.* 25.

<sup>73</sup>Caes. *Hisp.* 23: *desideratus gloria se efferentes*.

<sup>74</sup>Q. Tiberilius (Liv. 26. 48). See also Liv. 8. 8. 17-18.

<sup>75</sup>See above, n. 21.



Not every centurion, of course, was so interested in glorious formalities of competitive combat. In a twist to the traditional “David and Goliath” contest, Josephus describes an enormous and haughty Jewish warrior who challenged any Roman to meet him in single combat. An arrogant Roman cavalryman, whom Josephus claims was motivated by contempt for the giant’s lower social stature, accepted the challenge and was killed. Josephus praises instead Priscus, a centurion who then stepped forward and simply slew the giant with a dart while the latter celebrated.<sup>76</sup> Here Priscus appears to have sacrificed personal adulation for efficiency in order to terminate the giant’s jeering of nearby Roman soldiers.

Competition within a unit, of course, can sometimes have its drawbacks, since it can lead to contention rather than cooperation among soldiers. Lendon sees this as a problem particularly in the Roman legions, where the soldiers’ desire to prove their *virtus* sometimes conflicted with a commander’s desire for strategies and caution – the Roman soldier did not see himself as part of a team, and he was not considered as such by his superiors.<sup>77</sup> As we shall see, however, although competition and individual aggression among soldiers might stress discipline, for centurions, such behaviour was essential to their leadership and success as officers, since it both strengthened their military authority, and helped the soldiers’ overall performance on the battlefield.

## **2.5 Leadership in Combat**

Long before Ardant du Picq and Clausewitz, ancient writers emphasized the importance of psychological factors in warfare. Although some Greek and Roman

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<sup>76</sup>Jos. *BJ* 6. 175.

<sup>77</sup>*Soldiers and Ghosts*, 185-187. See discussion below, Chapter Three.

authors focus on logistics and more tactical elements of psychology in war (e.g. the use of surprise, numbers, noise), others, such as Xenophon, Caesar, and Onasander, place great weight on morale in achieving victory.<sup>78</sup> One traditional morale-building strategy that persists to this day is for commanders to be seen by their subordinates. It is often critical to preserving their authority and lends moral strength to their leadership.<sup>79</sup> Commanders must demonstrate that they too bear a proportionate burden of labour and war. This was well understood by commanders in the ancient world. Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings went to great pains to depict themselves at the forefront of their soldiers' battles.<sup>80</sup> The kings of Sparta fought and sometimes died alongside his fellow soldiers (οἱ ὄμοιοι).<sup>81</sup> Philip II of Macedon, moreover, proudly bore the scars of battle that helped to strengthen his position as king. His heir, Alexander, took this kind of leadership to extraordinary lengths, leading charges of the companion cavalry (οἱ ἑταῖροι) and sallies

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<sup>78</sup>Xenophon: *Cyr.* 1. 6. 12-19; 8. 5. 15; *Anab.* 3. 1. 42. Caesar: *BG* 6. 39; 7. 53; *BC* 1. 71; 3. 84. Onasander: *Strat.* 10. 25-5; 13. 1-3; 24. 1. See Lendon, "Rhetoric of Combat", 290-296; Goldsworthy *Roman Army at War*, 119. Clausewitz wrote on the morale elements of war and the "military spirit." See *On War*, M. Howard & P. Paret trans. and eds. (Princeton, 1976; 1984), 184, 187-188). Du Picq: *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle*, J. N. Greely & R. C. Cotton trans. (Harrisburg, 1946), esp. 149-165.

<sup>79</sup>Onas. 42. 2; 33. 1. See Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 105: "The need that a commander be seen by his men in all the circumstances of war may therefore be considered irreducible." Cf. R. S. Rush, *Hell in Hürtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Lawrence, 2001), 92-93; Kindsvatter, *American Soldier*, 229-245.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, Steles of Eannatum of Lagash (2460 BCE); Naramsin of Akkad (2254-18 BCE); Dardusha, of Eshnunna (1790-80 BCE); In the Egypt Old Kingdom, the king monopolized the role of warrior, as in the Narmer Palette. Cf. Bahrani, *Rituals of War*, 101-10, 133-54; W. Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley, 1992), 162-163.

<sup>81</sup>Spartan myth (Plut. *Agis* 21) held that enemies were reluctant to lay hands on a Spartan king in battle, but several were indeed killed. Cf. *Plutarch: On Sparta*, R. Talbert trans. (London, 2005), 240, n. 32.

in sieges that nearly killed him on numerous occasions.<sup>82</sup> Several Roman commanders from the early Republic likewise are recorded both fighting and dying in the front lines.<sup>83</sup>

By the middle-late Republic, however, a different portrayal of the Roman commander emerges. No longer expected to engage in hand-to-hand combat, legionary commanders (often consuls) are better described as “military managers” than heroic leaders. Famous is P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus’ own reported distinction between the two: “My mother bore me as a general, not a warrior.”<sup>84</sup> Still, there remained an ideal for the good Roman general. Marius perhaps best fit the standard description:

And though the war brought many hardships, he neither shunned any great labour, nor disdained any that were small, but surpassed the officers of his own rank in giving good counsel and foreseeing what was advantageous, and vied with the common soldiers in frugality and endurance, thereby winning much goodwill among them...and it is a most agreeable spectacle for a Roman soldier when he sees a general eating common bread in public, or sleeping on a simple pallet, or taking a hand in the construction of some trench or palisade.<sup>85</sup>

Symbolic acts such as sharing the soldiers’ diet, sleeping on the ground, assisting in manual labour – all of these could be expected from Roman generals.<sup>86</sup> Even in modern armies, officers who are never required to participate physically in battle nonetheless feel

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<sup>82</sup>Philip (Dem. *Nic.* 53.8); Alexander (Arr. *Anab.* 1. 13-16; 6. 8-11). On this ethos in the Greek world, see E. Wheeler, “The General as Hoplite” in V. D. Hanson ed., *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London; New York, 1991), 121-70.

<sup>83</sup>Eg., P. Decius Mus (Liv. 8. 8. 4-12) in 339; M. Claudius Marcellus (Liv. 20) in 222; C. Flaminius in 218 BCE (Liv. 22. 6. 1).

<sup>84</sup>Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 7. 4: *Imperatorem me mater, non bellatorem peperit*. On military managers, see Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 21-35.

<sup>85</sup>Plut. *Mar.* 7. 2-3: καὶ πολλὰ τοῦ πολέμου δυσχερῆ φέροντος, οὔτε τῶν μεγάλων τινὰ πόνων ὑποτρέσας οὔτε τῶν μικρῶν ἀπαξιῶσας, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν ὁμοτίμους εὐβουλία καὶ προνοία τοῦ συμφέροντος ὑπερβαλλόμενος, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς στρατιώτας ὑπὲρ εὐτελείας καὶ καρτερίας διαμιλλώμενος, εὐνοίαν ἔσχε πολλὴν παρ’ αὐτοῖς...ἤδιστον δὲ Ῥωμαίῳ θέαμα στρατιώτη στρατηγὸς ἐσθίων ἐν ὄψει κοινὸν ἄρτον ἢ κατακείμενος ἐπὶ στιβάδος εὐτελοῦς ἢ περὶ ταφρεῖαν τινὰ καὶ χαράκωσιν ἔργου συνεφαπτόμενος.

<sup>86</sup>Lee, “Morale,” 210-212; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 241. Compare with Hannibal (Liv. 21. 4. 5-7), Caesar (Suet. *Div. Iul.* 57), Tiberius (Vell. Pat. 114. 1-3), Corbulo (Tac. *Ann.* 13.35), Hadrian (HA *Hadr.* 10. 2). See also Onas. 42. 2: ἰδὼν γὰρ τις τὸν ἡγεμόνα πρῶτον ἐγχειροῦντα καὶ ὅτι δεῖ σπεύδειν ἔμαθε καὶ μὴ ποιεῖν ἠδέσθη καὶ ἀπειθεῖν ἐφοβήθη.

the need at least to maintain the image of physical fitness and of performing military tasks themselves. Examples include General Patton's conspicuous display of his sidearm in the Second World War, or air force commanders' desire to fly their own plane.<sup>87</sup>

Roman commanders too were expected to lead through personal example, and occasionally, Roman commanders are recorded fighting actively in the front line.<sup>88</sup> Such commanders, however, were exceptional rather than the norm during the late Republic and Principate, and the scattered accounts of them in the textual record are probably meant to highlight their rarity. Personal example by a commander became limited more often to placing himself near danger and encouraging or spurring the troops in front of him, rather than engaging themselves in hand-to-hand combat. Indulgence in the latter was sometimes seen as foolhardy, and a commander's death or mere rumour of it could spread panic throughout the army.<sup>89</sup> A Roman commander was not expected to be an Alexander.

The characterizations of centurions in combat are quite different. Not only were these officers expected to place themselves in danger near the front line, but to be the first to engage the enemy and the last to retreat. Unlike expectations for the military tribunes

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<sup>87</sup>Cf. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 47-48.

<sup>88</sup>Marius fought (Plut. *Mar.* 20. 6) but also declined a challenge (Plut. *Mar.* 25. 2; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 7. 5), as did Octavian (Plut. *Ant.* 62. 3). See also Pompey (Plut. *Pomp.* 7. 2; 19. 2), M. Antonius (App. *BC* 4. 111), Germanicus and Drusus (Suet. *Cal.* 3; *Clau.* 1), and Titus (*BJ* 5. 40-66, 69-97).

<sup>89</sup>See Onas. 32. 1-3; 33. 1-6; Polyb. 10. 13. 1-5. Caesar placed himself near the front line but did not fight hand-to-hand (e.g., *BG.* 2. 25). Cf. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 259-260, with n. 46; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 241, 247, 293-319. There is little evidence that emperors fought in the battle line until the third century. See Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 56, 65; "Teach Yourself to Be a General," 13-14. On panic caused by the death of a commander, see Jos. *BJ* 3. 236-238; Tac. *Hist.* 4. 34. Cf. J. D. Montagu, *Greek and Roman Warfare: Battles, Tactics and Trickery* (London, 2006), 37-39.

and commander, bravery among centurions did entail hand-to-hand combat.<sup>90</sup> This expectation can be understood largely with the centurions' subordinates in mind. Centurions who hurled themselves into an enemy line were not only seeking individual *gloria* in "competitive male excellence," but attempting to produce a collective, psychological effect on their soldiers. Both ancient and modern military writers have often interpreted battles as fluid and sporadic, where enthusiasm and confidence or discouragement and panic could quickly turn the outcome. In such situations, the natural fighters who engaged in skirmishes on their own initiative were critical to maintaining the confidence of their comrades.<sup>91</sup> For the Roman army of the Republic and early Empire, the centurion was expected to be the natural fighter *par excellence*.

Although centurions' aggressive behaviour has been interpreted as being motivated primarily as a desire for *gloria*, the situations in which these acts occurred are consistently those where their legion or unit was in desperate straits. The actions of one of Caesar's favourite centurions, P. Sextius Baculus, are illustrative. In 57 BCE, when his twelfth legion faced a desperate situation in a battle on the edge of the Sambre River against the Nervii, Baculus, already dazed and wounded in several places, nonetheless noticed many of his men beginning to break. He rushed to the front line in order to spur the soldiers and nearby centurions to hold their ground.<sup>92</sup> This same Baculus, now a

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<sup>90</sup>See Caesar's criticism of their inexperience and cowardliness at *BG* 1. 39. See also Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, 40, 98: "They seldom displayed initiative or courage; at worst they were cowardly and unreliable." See also below, Chapter Four, 127-134.

<sup>91</sup>Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 248, 257. On sporadic nature of Roman warfare, see Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle", 14-15. On the quick turns between confidence and panic, see Lendon, "Rhetoric of Combat", 293-299.

<sup>92</sup>Caes. *BG* 2. 22-25. "Baculus" is the Latin equivalent of the Spartan cane, βακτηρία.

near-invalid, was later critical to saving Q. Cicero's camp against the advancing Sugambri in 53 BCE:

Concerned for his own and everyone else's safety, he went forth unarmed from his tent. He saw that the enemy were close at hand and that the issue was in great danger. He snatched arms from those closest, and stationed himself by the gate. The centurions of the cohort that was on guard followed him; they sustained the battle together for a little while. After receiving many wounds, Sextius' spirit weakened; he was barely saved, drawn off by the soldiers' hands. Because of this respite, the others steeled themselves enough to venture to take their place on the fortifications and offer the appearance of defenders.<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, in a vicious fight between the legions of Vitellius and Antonius Primus during the second battle of Bedriacum (CE 69), the latter's seventh legion was badly mauled, having lost six *primi ordines* centurions, as well as its eagle (*aquila*). Another *primuspilus*, Atilius Verus, threw himself alone into the enemy, retrieved the eagle, and fell after killing many of the enemy.<sup>94</sup> Julian, the centurion in the Jewish War whom Josephus praises, likewise made his aggressive attack when he saw his own soldiers giving ground to the defenders.<sup>95</sup>

Although the deaths of combat officers can be psychological blows to the spirit of their subordinates, they have equal potential to infuriate them; soldiers could be inspired to avenge their fallen leaders, and their deaths could assist an army's fortunes. A description of British soldiers' reaction to the death of their captain during the Crimean War is illustrative: "The men rushed in the direction in which it was said he was, and

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<sup>93</sup>Caes. *BG* 6. 38: *Hic diffusus suae atque omnium saluti inermis ex tabernaculo prodit: videt imminere hostes atque in summo esse rem discrimine: capit arma a proximis atque in porta consistit; consequuntur hunc centuriones eius cohortis quae in statione erat: paulisper una proelium sustinent. Relinquit animus Sextium gravibus acceptis vulneribus: aegre per manus tractus servatur. Hoc spatio interposito reliqui sese confirmant tantum, ut in munitionibus consistere audeant speciemque defensorum praebeant.*

<sup>94</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 3. 22. Other examples of centurions using the standard to rally flagging legionaries: Liv. 25. 14; 34. 46; Caes. *BG* 4. 25; Dio 74. 6. 6; Frontin. *Strat.* 2. 8. 1-5.

<sup>95</sup>*BJ* 6. 81.

literally lifted the enemy from the field with the bayonet.”<sup>96</sup> Roman commanders could expect this attitude from their soldiers as well. Caesar cites approvingly his soldiers’ aggressive behaviour against Pompeian troops in another skirmish before Munda, during which the soldiers avenged deaths of the two centurions who had sacrificed themselves the day before.<sup>97</sup>

Similar to the divine sanctioning of the centurions’ disciplinary role,<sup>98</sup> their charges against the enemy seems to be given religious significance, in that their behaviour parallels the tradition of Roman *devotio*. *Devotio* was understood to be a ritual self-sacrifice by a Roman commander, in which, having made a formal prayer to offer his life and that of his enemies to the gods of the Underworld in exchange for the army’s victory in battle, he would throw himself at the enemy line. It was apparently performed by several Roman commanders in the early Republic, such as P. Decius Mus and his descendants.<sup>99</sup> While *devotio* by commanders is exceptionally rare in the literary record, the idealized behaviour of some centurions in combat appears to echo this practice. C. Crastinus, the *primuspilus* who fought and died for Caesar at Pharsalus, is presented most dramatically in Plutarch (described here as C. Crassianus):

The first to rush out from Caesar's lines was Caius Crassianus, a centurion commanding one hundred-and-twenty men, who was fulfilling his great vow to Caesar... and stretching out his right hand he cried: “You shall have a splendid victory, Caesar, and you shall praise me today, whether I live or die.” Mindful of these words, he rushed forward, drawing many with him, and threw himself into

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<sup>96</sup>T. Gowing, *A Soldier's Experience or, a Voice from the Ranks* (Nottingham, 1900), 110-111. Cf. Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 199-200.

<sup>97</sup>Caes. *Hisp.* 24: *Ita pridie duorum centurionum interitio hac adversariorum poena est litata*. On the two centurions, see above, n. 46.

<sup>98</sup>See above, Chapter One, 43-46.

<sup>99</sup>On formula and examples of *devotio*: Liv. 8. 9. 6-8; 8. 10. 11-12; 10. 28. 16-17; Cic. *ND* 2. 10; *Tusc. Disp.* 1. 89; *Fin.* 2. 61; Dio. 40. 43. On its rarity in the evidence, see McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 200.

the middle of the enemy line. The opponents immediately took to their swords and many were killed, and while Crassianus was forcing his way forward and cutting through the front ranks, one of them thrust his sword into his mouth with such force that its point drove through the nape of his neck.<sup>100</sup>

Crastinus' sacrifice lacks the formal ritualistic elements of the early acts of *devotio* described by Livy, but the parallel is clear. Just as centurions succeeded the formerly aristocratic role in hand-to-hand combat, their idealized aggression in battle might also be portrayed by Roman commanders and writers as a real continuation of the semi-mythical *devotio*. What appear to be suicidal charges by Crastinus, Verus, Julian, and others, therefore, might very well have been *intended* by these centurions as just that.<sup>101</sup>

While ancient authors mention the centurion's competitive desire for *gloria*, therefore, they simultaneously stress the necessity of the centurions' actions as a boon to their subordinates. In this sense, *gloria* had collective as well as individual implications for centurions. Even the brave actions of Pullo and Vorenus, whose number-counting slaughter of Gauls at first seems little more than a competition in *virtus*, were nonetheless performed in specific circumstances; their legion under Q. Cicero was in a desperate situation, outnumbered and besieged by the Nervii led by Ambiorix.<sup>102</sup> Centurions who failed to live up to this responsibility effectively relinquished their authority to command. Showing fear in battle in front of one's own soldiers especially demanded harsh

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<sup>100</sup>Plut. *Pomp.* 71: πρῶτος ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος φάλαγγος ἐξέδραμε Γάιος Κρασσιανός, ἀνδρῶν ἑκατὸν εἴκοσι λοχαγῶν, μεγάλην ἀποδίδους ὑπόσχεσιν Καίσαρι... ὁ δὲ τὴν δεξιὰν προτείνας ἀνεβόησε; Νικήσεις λαμπρῶς, ὦ Καίσαρ; ἐμὲ δὲ ἢ ζῶντα τήμερον ἢ νεκρὸν ἐπαινέσεις. τούτων τῶν λόγων μεμνημένος ἐξώρμησε καὶ συνεπεσπάσατο πολλοὺς καὶ προσέβαλε κατὰ μέσους τοὺς πολεμίους. γενομένου δὲ τοῦ ἀγῶνος εὐθὺς ἐν ξίφεσι καὶ πολλῶν φονευομένων, βιαζόμενον πρόσω καὶ διακόπτοντα τοὺς πρώτους ὑποστάς τις ὠθεῖ διὰ τοῦ στόματος τὸ ξίφος, ὥστε τὴν αἰχμὴν περᾶσσαν ἀνασχεῖν κατὰ τὸ ἰνίον.

<sup>101</sup>On *devotio* and possible use of it by centurions, see Cowan, *For the Glory of Rome*, 61-62, 85-91, 203, 206. On "heroic" and "altruistic" suicide and its religious, social, and psychological impact in combat, see J. W. Riemer, "Durkheim's "Heroic Suicide" in Military Combat," *AFS* 25.1 (1998), 103-120.

<sup>102</sup>*BG* 5. 44. See also heroic end of L. Fabius (*BG* 7. 50).



punishment as was the case of the aforementioned Vibilius, the *primuspilus* who was executed by *fustuarium* for retreating before his soldiers in battle.<sup>103</sup>

For centurions, therefore, competitive acts of bravery were desirable not only for the sake of personal prestige and status, but also the combat performance of their soldiers – it ensured the confidence of nearby subordinates while concomitantly asserting their status as preeminent fighters.<sup>104</sup> The dual nature of the centurion’s responsibilities in combat, moreover, is effectively illustrated by the visual memorials to their actions: *dona militaria*.

## 2.6 Defining the Centurion through *Dona Militaria*

While failure in leadership during combat could be harshly punished, centurions were well rewarded for living up to the ideal. As Rome’s military institution evolved into the standing legions of the Principate, their aggressive behaviour continued to be encouraged as a defining aspect of their rank. The evolution of *dona militaria* during the Principate helps to demonstrate this point. As a more elaborately structured system of ranks and careers developed in the Roman army of the Principate, so too did the system for awarding *dona*, and these decorations helped to define the centurionate. In the mutiny on the Rhine frontier in CE 14, for example, Germanicus attempted to address his soldiers’ grievances toward their superiors by revising the list of that legion’s centurions. Each centurion, after giving his name, rank, and origin, was then asked to account for the

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<sup>103</sup>See above, Chapter One, n. 73.

<sup>104</sup>This point is argued most strongly by Goldsworthy. See “Community under Pressure,” 199, 207-208; *Roman Army at War*, 165, 264. See also Feld, *The Structure of Violence: Armed Forces as Social Systems* (Beverly Hills, 1977), 71, for distinction between officer and leader: A leader in battle “is a member of a caste whose authority is based on the belief that its particular moral qualities dominate the environment and that the inspiration of its particular example can overcome the greatest quantitative odds.”

number of campaigns in which he had served, his courageous exploits, and the *dona* he had received for these acts. Only if his account was satisfactory to the soldiers, and he was supported by the military tribunes, did he retain his rank.<sup>105</sup> Centurions in the legions of the Principate frequently mentioned or depicted their *dona* in commemorative inscriptions. In some cases, the *dona* themselves were the only indicators of their military service or rank.<sup>106</sup>

More generally, decorations and ornaments are important symbols for defining and expressing authority and experience within a social group.<sup>107</sup> In military institutions specifically, different decorations can even reinforce different types of behaviour expected from varying ranks. In several modern armies, for instance, divisions of decorations were made between those “soldier-saving” awards that were given to soldiers, and “war-winning” given to officers. During the First World War, the Victoria Cross tended to be awarded to British rankers for exceptionally aggressive acts in the face of the enemy, while officers received them for other acts of leadership.<sup>108</sup> Such a scheme developed too in the Roman army. The rewards that centurions were eligible to receive, therefore, are highly revealing of the legions’ expectations for them in battle.

The oldest Roman military decorations comprised different crowns (*coronae*), which, at least during the Republic, seem to have been awarded regardless of rank according to specific actions. The golden crown (*corona aurea*) was the lowest order,

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<sup>105</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 44.

<sup>106</sup>E.g., T. Calidius Severus (Appendix A, fig. 15), whose visual component shows only his body armour, *vitis*, greaves, and helmet with transverse crest; L. Blattius Vetus (Appendix A, fig. 17), lacks the inscription entirely, but depicts *dona*, *vitis*, shield, sword, greaves. Cf. L. Keppie, *Colonisation and Veteran Settlement in Italy: 47-14 B.C.* (London, 1983), 46.

<sup>107</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline*, 165.

<sup>108</sup>Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 207-208.

and was given for general bravery. The rampart crown (*vallaris*) was awarded to the first soldier to storm an enemy encampment, while the wall crown (*muralis*) went to the first to scale a fortress or town wall. Centurions are recorded competing as early as the Punic Wars for the latter.<sup>109</sup> The civic crown (*civica*), often compared by modern scholars to the Victoria Cross of the British Army, was awarded specifically to someone who saved the life of a fellow Roman citizen, and was “the most glorious award that can be bestowed for military valour.”<sup>110</sup> By far the rarest award, however, was the grass crown (*obsidionalis*). It could only be awarded through acclamation by the entire Roman army, and was given to those credited with saving not just an individual, but the entire army.<sup>111</sup> Lesser decorations for general acts of bravery included discs (*phalerae*), armbands (*armillae*), and necklaces (*torques*), while newer awards that were developed during the Principate included the silver standard (*vexillum*), and the silver spear (*hasta pura*).<sup>112</sup>

In the Republic, all ranks theoretically were eligible to receive awards that were based on merit – whether a *miles*, centurion, or tribune, the first witnessed scaling a given wall could receive the *corona muralis*.<sup>113</sup> The Principate, however, brought major changes to the award system. Together with establishing a more formal system of ranks, it is also clear that awards were becoming far more rank-specific. Equestrian and

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<sup>109</sup>Q. Trebellius competed for the *muralis* in Scipio Africanus’ siege of Carthago Nova (Liv. 26. 48). L. Fabius was the first to scale the wall at Gergovia, fatally, and against Caesar’s orders, (Caes. *BG* 7. 47).

<sup>110</sup>Plin. *NH* 16. 3: *militum virtutis insigne clarissimum*. For general account of *coronae*, see *NH* 16. 3, passim; Polyb. 6. 39; Dio. Hal. 10. 37; Aul. Gel. *Noct. Att.* 5. 6. 13-17; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 67-81. On comparisons to the Victoria Cross, see Parker, *The Roman Legions*, 228-229.

<sup>111</sup>Plin. *NH* 22. 6. The award does not seem to have survived past the reign of Augustus. See Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 67-69.

<sup>112</sup>Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 82-95; Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 115-117.

<sup>113</sup>It would seem that one required a witness to confirm the exploit. See example of Q. Tiberilius (Liv. 26. 48).

senatorial officers (tribunes and legates) no longer received lower awards like *torques*, while *milites* were now ineligible for most of the *coronae* and newly established awards like the *hasta pura* and *vexillum*. Even awards within the centurionate were differentiated, with only the highest-ranking centurions, the *primi ordines* and the *primuspilus*, being eligible for the *hasta pura* and *vexillum*.<sup>114</sup>

By the Flavian dynasty, set patterns and progressions for awards at all levels emerged, and certain *dona* seem to have become awarded without the specific actions that they once required. A *miles*, for example, could not receive a *corona muralis*, while a centurion could do so, but without ever having scaled an enemy wall.<sup>115</sup> As the Roman army developed during the Principate, therefore, their award system also became more systematized and complex. This process has been interpreted as an ossification or “routinization” of *dona*, whereby a system that once awarded decorations according to charismatic acts and authority gave away to a more rationalized system of award by rank.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, however much the system for *dona* became “routinized” during the Principate, the criteria for awarding *dona* seems to have remained relatively flexible. No evidence suggests that either seniority or direct commission from the class of *equites* were determining factors for centurions to win *coronae*. Generally, although rank might determine the specific awards for which a man was eligible, specific acts of bravery that singled out an individual remained the most important criterion.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 114-115. This process parallels the gulf in rank between awards of the Military Medal and Distinguished Service Order in the British Army. See Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 63; Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 114.

<sup>115</sup>Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 56,

<sup>116</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 197

<sup>117</sup>Awarded for acts of bravery, the *corona aurea* was most commonly won by centurions. As Maxfield notes, however, we should be cautious with this evidence, since centurions and higher officers are

Even in a system of decorations increasingly determined by rank, analysis of the specific *dona* for which the centurions were eligible remains instructive. Similar to how centurions could both suffer and administer institutional punishment, in receiving decorations they again seem to occupy an intermediate position between ranker and aristocratic officer. On the one hand, unlike tribunes and legates, centurions were eligible for the lesser decorations of *torques*, *armillae*, and *phalerae*. Although their commemorative inscriptions tended not to mention lower ranks that they might have occupied, centurions still took pride in the *dona* that were more associated with those ranks, frequently citing them in inscriptions and bearing them on their cuirasses in visual commemorations.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, centurions were also eligible for higher awards for which *milites* were not, including the various *coronae*, *vexilla*, and *hastae purae*. It is noteworthy that the lowest rank ever to receive the rare *corona obsidionalis*, a decoration awarded to some of Rome's most famous commanders of the Republic, was a centurion.<sup>119</sup>

The history and traditions of different awards likely also continued to encourage certain kinds of behaviour. While it is doubtless true that the *corona muralis* and *vallarum* seem later to have been awarded without the specific requisite of storming a wall or encampment, the decorations still carried a history and distinction for highly aggressive individual action. It should not surprise that the various *coronae*, once awarded during

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over-represented in the epigraphic evidence. See *Military Decorations*, 48, 136, 185-187. Cf. Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 110.

<sup>118</sup>See Dobson & Breeze, "The Rome Cohorts and the Legionary Centurionate" in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 88-112, esp. 103; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 184. Centurions awarded *armillae*, *phalerae*, and *torques*: Tib. Claudius Vitalis (*ILS* 2656); Petronius Fortunatus (CIL VIII 217; *ILS* 2658); C. Velius Rufus (*ILS* 9200; *AE* 1903, 368). Displayed on cuirasses: Appendix A, figs. 2-3, 14, 17-18.

<sup>119</sup>The *primuspilus* Cn. Petreius Atinas in 101 BCE (Plin. *NH* 22. 5-6). Other recipients mentioned by Pliny include the famed L. Siccus Dentatus, P. Decius Mus, Q. Fabius Maximus, Scipio Aemilianus, Sulla, and Augustus.

the Republic for outstanding examples of individual bravery, appear most commonly awarded during the Principate to centurions rather than tribunes or other senior ranks.<sup>120</sup> Even as the Roman system of awards began to designate certain *dona* to different ranks, therefore, centurions appear to have remained pre-eminent in receiving decorations that were traditionally rewarded for aggressive, individual bravery.

The distribution of *dona militaria* effectively illustrate what was expected by the Roman military from centurions in combat. Although eventually acquiring a rank and status in the imperial legions that made them eligible for the decorations of equestrian and senatorial officers, they nonetheless continued to receive and advertise the decorations of the *miles*. This makes sense when considering the ideal for centurions as combat officers. They were simultaneously expected to be leaders with the tactical function of commanding their *centuriae*, yet also individual combatants with equal if not higher expectations of bravery than the soldiers under their charge.

## **2.7 Conclusion: The Roman Combat Officer**

Personal, aggressive leadership in combat helped to define the centurionate. An idealized conception of them as experienced yet highly aggressive officers in combat was well established by the late Republic, and persisted in literary narratives of the Empire. Even as the centurions progressively acquired greater pay, status, and logistic responsibilities, they themselves emphasized first and foremost whatever recognitions and decorations they had acquired in war. This ideal was encouraged not only through promotion and public recognition based on *fortia facta*, but also by an institution that

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<sup>120</sup>Statius Marrax alone won five *aureae* (*ILS* 2638). See also Lepidius Proculus (*CIL* XI 390; *CIL* XI 391); Velius Rufus (*ILS* 9200; *AE* 1903, 368); Sex. Vibius Gallus (*CIL* III 13648; *IGRR* III 1432; *ILS* 2663).

supported competition for martial prestige at all ranks. From the centurion's perspective as an officer, however, the most important product of this behaviour was the respect to be earned from their subordinates. As combat officers, centurions were expected not merely to place themselves in danger – for this was an expectation for a commander too – but to distinguish themselves consistently and actively in the “killing zone.”<sup>121</sup>

Such a style of leadership, however, obviously came with great cost to individual centurions. Despite the bravery of Julian in the siege of the Temple Mount, Josephus describes this centurion's fate after he slipped on the stoned courtyard and was set upon by the defenders:

He received very many strokes of these iron weapons on his shield, and he often attempted to get up again, but was hurled down by those who struck at him. Yet as he lay, he stabbed many of them with his own sword. He was not killed quickly, since all the parts of his body where he could be mortally wounded were covered by his helmet and cuirass; he also drew his neck closer to his body, until his other limbs were splintered, and no one dared to come to help him, so that he then yielded to fate... he left behind a very great fame, not only among Romans, including Caesar himself, but also among his enemies.<sup>122</sup>

Some might be tempted here to recall the words with which General Pierre Bosquet described the Crimean War's infamous Charge of the Light Brigade: “It is magnificent, but it is not war – it is madness.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Killing zone: Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 104-105. Cf. “Killing field” in Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 197-209. On the importance of risk and sacrifice for combat officers, cf. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 238-242.

<sup>122</sup>*BJ* 6. 1. 8: ὁ δὲ πολὺν μὲν τῷ θυρεῷ σίδηρον ἐξεδέχετο, πολλάκις δὲ ἀναστῆναι πειράσας ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν τυπτότων ἀνετρέπη, καὶ κείμενος δ' ὅμως ἔνυπτε τῷ ξίφει πολλούς· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνηρέθη ταχέως τῷ τε κράνει καὶ τῷ θώρακι πεφραγμένος πάντα τὰ καίρια πρὸς σφαγὴν καὶ τὸν αὐχένα συνέλκων· μέχρι κοπτομένων αὐτῷ τῶν ἄλλων μελῶν καὶ μηδενὸς προσαμῦναι τολμῶντος ἐνέδωκε... μέγιστον οὐ παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις καὶ Καίσαρι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ τοῖς πολεμίοις κλέος καταλιπών.

<sup>123</sup>*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre - c'est de la folie*. Quoted in R. D. Heinl, *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations*, (Annapolis, 1966), 346.

Certainly, this idealized behaviour sometimes deprived veteran officers of their lives and the legions of experienced and valuable leaders. In addition to the danger to the centurions themselves, moreover, this individual, often competitive behaviour could sometimes prove counter-productive. This has been argued to have been the case at Gergovia, when a centurion's eagerness proved destructive to his unit and to the siege, much to Caesar's frustration.<sup>124</sup> Much later, commanders such as Wellington shared Caesar's frustration. Bravery was useful, but only in the right circumstances, since a display of thoughtless bravery could damage plans and waste lives.<sup>125</sup> In both Roman myth and juridical opinion, moreover, even brave actions that ended in successful outcomes were intolerable if done against orders. The Roman military hero, Cn. Domitius Corbulo, made this expectation clear in Armenia to a *primuspilus*, Paccius Orfitus, whom he forced to camp outside the ramparts as punishment for attacking Parthian troops against orders.<sup>126</sup>

Such aggressive behaviour, moreover, appears opposed to the characterization of centurions explored in the previous chapter as stern disciplinarians, officers who brooked no disobedience. This contrast is noted especially by Lendon, who argues that these two conflicting characterizations result from a cultural tension in the Roman army between ideals of *disciplina* and *virtus*.<sup>127</sup> This tension that he describes is similar to what military theorists sometimes described as institutional or organizational strains, the innate yet often contradictory systems of authority and behaviour that some theorists see as

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<sup>124</sup>Caes. *BG* 7. 52. See Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 221-222.

<sup>125</sup>Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 152.

<sup>126</sup>Modestinus, *Dig.* 49. 16. 3. 15; Livy 8. 7. 17. Orfitus: Tac. *Ann.* 13. 36. 5.

<sup>127</sup>*Soldiers and Ghosts*, 178, 210-211. See below, Chapter Three.



inevitable, yet often necessary in many military organizations. The next chapter will consider this characterization of the Roman army in the context of organizational strains and military authority of the centurionate.

## Chapter 3: The Centurion's Military Authority

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters have demonstrated that two prominent idealizations of legionary centurions emerged from the Roman army of the late Republic and Principate. On the one hand, they were praised and feared in literature as stern officers, obedient to their superiors' commands and brutal in disciplining transgressing subordinates. Not only were centurions responsible for carrying out *castigatio* in the legions, but representations of them and their *vitis*, especially in visual commemoration, were circulated to an extent that by the first century CE they emerged as symbolic adversaries of disobedience towards the army and the emperor. On the other hand, centurions were strongly characterized by an individual, seemingly undisciplined, aggression. Although highly valued in the legions for their experience, they were honoured above all else in literature and commemorative monuments for personal bravery and fierce behaviour in combat. This personal style of leadership was seen to be an essential method for centurions to earn praise both as individual fighters and as combat leaders.

Both of the previous chapters, moreover, have discussed how these idealizations of the centurion are taken to reflect structural problems or strains in the Roman army's organization, practices, and success from Republic to Principate. First, the idealization of centurions in visual commemoration and literature as both obedient disciplinarians and aggressive individual combatants reflects what some Roman military studies describe as

a tension between traditional virtues that emphasized both the heroic, individual pursuit of *gloria*, and those that valued instead self-restraint, obedience, and rational planning. Lendon, for example, asks: “If the Roman army excelled as the only modern institution in a savage world, could it be that it excelled also by preserving the culture of a savage tribe in an increasingly modern world?”<sup>1</sup> Harris sees something similar: “In many respects, their behaviour resembles that of many other non-primitive ancient peoples, yet few others are known to have displayed such an extreme degree of ferocity of war while reaching a high level of political culture.”<sup>2</sup>

Second, the centurion’s association with corporal punishment is seen to contradict more normative codes of discipline and obedience that apparently developed during the Principate. This strain appears to fit with a problem explored in modern studies of combat motivation and military sociology, which describe a strain between strategies that seek to exact compliance from soldiers through coercive methods of “domination” and those that employ normative or indirect methods of “manipulation.”<sup>3</sup> Expressed in terms of Classical Greek thought, the authority of Roman officers relied on a precarious balance between force (*βία*) and persuasion (*πειθώ*).<sup>4</sup>

These apparent problems illustrated by the centurionate are related in as much as they both concern Roman military authority and the different ways it could be expressed:

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<sup>1</sup>Lendon, “Rhetoric of Combat,” 325.

<sup>2</sup>*War and Imperialism*, 53. Cf. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 163-232, 310-313; Phang, *Roman Military Service* 15-25, 43-53, 73, 100-101; Harris, “Readings,” 300-320; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 62-71, 195-205, 300-310; Keegan, *History of War*, 265-266.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Keijzer, *Military Obedience* 33-51; M. D. Feld, *The Structure of Violence*, 13-27, 71-75; Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 41-52, 90-135, 152-159; Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 22-40, 97-100; R. Gal, “Commitment and Obedience in the Military: An Israeli Case Study,” *AFS* 11.4 (1985), 554-556.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Saller, *Patriarchy*, 143: “Words, not the whip, are the appropriate mode of treatment for the honorable freeborn in the household, just as in the public sphere”

did Roman military culture idealize one kind of military behaviour or style of leadership over another in different periods of Rome's history, perhaps reflecting changing attitudes in its military culture and structure? Or, if these different ideals were consistently expected and encouraged during both the Republic and Principate, is it even feasible that an officer such as the centurion would be expected to embody both simultaneously?

This chapter addresses these questions by examining the centurionate as a case for the relationship between authority, obligation, and coercion in Roman military culture, and how military authority could be generated and expressed during the late Republic and Principate. It describes first the role of certain theoretical models by Weber and Bourdieu, as well as more specific works of military sociology, have contributed to framing these contradictions in the Roman military's ideologies and practices, and how, in each case, the centurionate seems to illustrate the problem. The chapter argues, however, that the centurion's idealized military traits, as expressed in textual and epigraphic evidence, are illustrative not of contradictions in Roman military thinking, but rather of a military practice that helped to nullify potential strains in the Roman military hierarchy. Concepts of normative and coercive strategies, or *virtus* and *disciplina* were, for centurions, complementary rather than contradictory ideals that were crucial to preserving ties of obedience between the *milites* and their superiors.

### **3.2 Categories of Authority**

To explain the willingness of an individual or group to accept subordination, Weber stressed that fear and expediency were insufficient bases for power. Legitimate authority (*legitime Herrschaft*), he argued, must be accepted as a valid norm, and the

willingness to submit to that authority requires a belief in the legitimacy of its source.<sup>5</sup> “Authority,” however, erroneously suggests a single rather than the multiple, overlapping practices for defining and preserving certain social and institutional relationships. Weber outlined three main categories of legitimate authority (rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic), and described them explicitly as “ideal types,” (*reinen Typen*) meant to promote systematic analysis. He cautioned, therefore, against attempts to insert whole and concrete historical realities into one of these types.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the caution expressed both by Weber himself and later scholars about the universal application of these *reinen Typen*, these categories have continued to influence understanding of authority and legitimacy. Many studies continue to frame Roman military, political, and social institutions according to at least one of them.<sup>7</sup> In several studies of more modern military organizations, moreover, bases of legitimacy for a western officer’s command has been expressed in one of three ways: a system of rational rules, a personal authority based on tradition, or personal authority based on heroic charisma.<sup>8</sup> More generally, one of the consequences of applying Weber’s distinct, social categories to studies of the Roman army (among other military institutions) is that one is

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<sup>5</sup>*Economy and Society*, 37, 946-948, 953-954. *Herrschaft* is often translated as both “domination” and “authority” in Weber’s work, since he himself stressed different components of *Herrschaft* at different times. I translate it here as “authority” to distinguish it from a sense of “domination” used by other authors in this chapter (e.g., Janowitz, Feld), where the sense is closer to Weber’s definition of power (*Macht*). On this translation, See *Economy and Society*, 53, with n. 31.

<sup>6</sup>*Economy and Society*, 215-216. On these types, see 217-245.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris, 1976); R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), 79. T. Hölscher, “The Transformation of Victory into Power: From Event to Structure,” in *Representations of War*, 27-48. Cf. Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 21, n. 28. For analysis and criticism of the use of Weber, see M. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* (New York, 1985), 88-103, and esp. Lendon, “The Legitimacy of the Roman Emperor,” 53-58.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., Janowitz & Little, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 3rd ed. (Beverly Hills, 1974), 43-65; G. Teitler, *The Genesis of the Professional Officers’ Corps* (Beverly Hills, 1977), 14.

inexorably persuaded to see military authority according to several, distinct categories. These different forms of authority are argued to transform according to changes in a military institution's structure of ranks, status and skills of its members, technology, size, and broader culture. The existence of multiple forms of authority within an institution, therefore, can lead to contradictory ideals and practices, or what Janowitz once described in the military as "organizational strains."<sup>9</sup>

### **3.2.1 Primitive Aggression versus Rational Discipline**

The Roman army is often viewed to be more sophisticated and professional in its organization, equipment, skill-structure, and discipline than any army preceding it and many following it.<sup>10</sup> Recent studies, however, have argued that its comparatively modern organization and discipline coexisted with an extremely violent and primitive emphasis on individual combat. Even during the Principate, as Rome's army settled into the role of a "peacetime" army of occupation rather than a "wartime" army of conquering,<sup>11</sup> the historical-mythical bravery and aggressive spirit of soldiers and commanders of the early Republican army continued to be idealized. The legions' overall success arguably relied on cultivating this traditional "fighter spirit." Weber once described this as a tension between the primitive, individual bravery and disciplined, organized behaviour in the Roman army. It was the product of the routinization from charismatic to rational-legal

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 8-51.

<sup>10</sup>See above, Chapter One, 32.

<sup>11</sup>For changing role of the army, see B. Dobson, "The Roman Army: Wartime or Peacetime Army," in D. J. Breeze & B. Dobson eds., *Roman Officers and Frontiers* (Stuttgart, 1993), 113-128; Keppie, *Roman Army At War*, 51-57, 146, 174. Cf. L. de Blois, "Army and Society in the Late Roman Republic" in *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft*, 11-31.

systems of authority, which he related to a strain in warfare between the charisma of individual action and the cohesiveness of rational discipline.<sup>12</sup>

Weber's understanding of this tension between charisma and rational discipline in the Roman army's development from the Republic to Empire remains influential. Phang, for example, sees the Roman army possessing aspects of all three types of legitimate authority. While the Republican army was initially more charismatic and patrimonial, it became increasingly rational-legal and bureaucratic. Religious and sacred aspects of Republican *disciplina militaris*, the early commanders' unlimited *imperium* and use of donatives, aristocratic competition for *gloria*, and other elements of earlier Roman warfare all became routinized under the more bureaucratic army of Augustus and his successors. The elite that dominated the Roman army rationalized traditional ideologies towards *disciplina militaris* to preserve the army's cohesion. "*Disciplina militaris*," Phang states, "was a legitimating ideology, in Weberian terms, that practically routinized the 'charismatic' nature of the late Republican warfare, though it did not realize the Weberian ideal type of rational discipline."<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, because the Roman army operated on more than one system of authority, Phang asserts that there was a strain created by an emphasis on *virtus* during the Republic that was less compatible with the "rationalized" and professional army in the Empire: "A practically Homeric *virtus* was inconsistent with social control, which

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<sup>12</sup>*Economy and Society*, 1150-51. Weber thought to have originated with the heavily-armoured Greek hoplites and Roman legionaries. Cf. 1148-49: "It is the fate of charisma to recede before the powers of tradition or of rational association... This waning of charisma generally indicates the diminishing importance of individual action." Cf. 954, 970-971, 980.

<sup>13</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Practice*, 21-29, 35-36. On modern militaries as Weberian-type bureaucracies, see D. L. Lang, "Values: The Ultimate Determinants of Commitment and Legitimacy" in *Legitimacy and Commitment*, 30. On military strain between the discipline of armed forces and bureaucratic rationality of the state, and the brutality and destructiveness of warfare, see M. D. Feld, *The Structure of Violence: Armed Forces as Social Systems* (Beverly Hills, 1977), 14.

required *modestia* (obedience, respect for authority) in soldiers.”<sup>14</sup> Phang places the centurions of the imperial legions squarely on one side of this strain. Weber’s types of *legitime Herrschaft* are evoked to contrast the centurion’s charismatic authority, earned through aggressive acts of *virtus*, with the more rational-bureaucratic authority of the emperor and the army’s elite commanders.<sup>15</sup>

Strong objections, however, have been raised to describing the Roman army during the Principate as rational or bureaucratic, since there is also strong evidence for the continuing importance of patronage and personal connections in developing the military authority of commanders and emperors. More to the point, we should exercise greater caution in applying a sense of legal-rational authority extensively to organizations that were somewhat amateurish by modern standards, and to an emperor and aristocratic elite who sought more personal, social, and uniquely Roman distinctions of *honos* and *gloria* rather than “strategies of legitimation.”<sup>16</sup> While strict categories of legitimate authority may be rejected in describing Roman military culture and organization, however, Weber’s understanding of the conflict between charisma and discipline has remained the basis for discussions of the strains or tension between the heroic *virtus* of the single combatant and the Roman ethos of *disciplina*.

Lendon asserts that an inconsistency is apparent when considering idealizations of the centurionate in particular. Polybius describes the officer’s ideal traits during the second century BCE:

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 99-100: “The prestige of masculinity suggests that charismatic authority (vested in the personality rather than in the social status or legal powers) persisted in the Roman command.”

<sup>16</sup>Lendon, “The Legitimacy of the Roman Emperor,” passim; *Empire of Honour*, 13-24. Cf. Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 79-103; James, “Writing the Roman Legions,” 39-41. On role of patronage, merit, and seniority in the centurionate, see below, Chapter Four.



And they want the centurions not to be so much daring and danger-loving as men ready to lead, steadfast and profound rather than spirited; not carelessly eager to attack or engage in battle, but even when pressed and overwhelmed, to endure and die for their duty.<sup>17</sup>

For Polybius, centurions were ideally steadfast (στάσιμος) rather than daring (θράσος) or danger-loving (φιλοκίνδυνος).<sup>18</sup> Polybius' ideal centurions appear to contrast those whom we have seen praised later by Caesar, Tacitus, and Josephus. Several solutions are suggested to address this apparent contradiction. One is that Polybius' ideal is more Spartan than Roman, and is reflective of a Greek military thinking that focused on organization and avoidance of positive and negative excesses (σωφροσύνη).<sup>19</sup>

More recently, however, Lendon has described this contradiction as the product of “a military culture at war with itself” between the contradictory ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina*. This contradiction played out in the development of the Roman army's social and institutional ranks. There was a shift in Roman military culture whereby young aristocrats, formerly idealized for their courage in the early Republic, were replaced as exemplars of *virtus* in Caesar's day by legionaries and centurions of more humble background, who themselves formerly had been exemplars of *disciplina* and obedience. Centurions and the *milites*, in turn, were eventually supplanted in *virtus* by auxiliary

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<sup>17</sup>Polyb. 6. 24. 9: βούλονται δ' εἶναι τοὺς ταξίαρχους οὐχ οὕτως θρασεῖς καὶ φιλοκινδύνους ὡς ἡγεμονικοὺς καὶ στασίμους καὶ βαθεῖς μᾶλλον ταῖς ψυχαῖς, οὐδ' ἐξ ἀκεραίου προσπίπτειν ἢ κατάρχεσθαι τῆς μάχης, ἐπικρατουμένους δὲ καὶ πιεζομένους ὑπομένειν καὶ ἀποθνήσκειν ὑπὲρ τῆς χώρας.

<sup>18</sup>McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 65.

<sup>19</sup>Lendon, “The Rhetoric of Combat,” 299-300. He is supported by Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi*, 96: “The cardinal virtues in a Roman soldier were to follow orders and stand his ground at all costs.” This is consistent with Polybius (6. 52; 6. 54). See also McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 64, 71, for a definition of *virtus* that attempts to encompass both aggressive and enduring aspects of courage.

soldiers during the later first and second century.<sup>20</sup> In setting apart the individual, competitive *virtus* of centurions and *milites* from the collective *disciplina* and rational planning of the tribunes and commander, Caesar's own admonition of his soldiers and centurions after the failed assault on Gergovia is illustrative:

As much as he admired the greatness of their spirit, since neither the fortifications of the camp, nor the height of the hill, nor the wall of the town could impede them, to the same extent, he condemned their licentiousness and arrogance, since they believed that they knew more than their general about victory and outcome of affairs; and that he desired from his soldiers forbearance and self-control no less than courage and excellent spirit.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, a tension between *virtus* and *disciplina* in the Roman army persisted through changes to its recruitment and organization under Marius, Caesar and other late-Republican commanders through to Augustus and his successors.<sup>22</sup> Roman commanders' authority and success relied on their ability to balance their use of rational planning and disciplined cohesion with their soldiers' own desire to perform aggressive feats; the commander complemented the aggressive attitudes of the soldiers with his own tactical preparations.<sup>23</sup>

The ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina* accordingly developed not only into an ideological tension in Roman military culture, but also as an institutional one between

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<sup>20</sup>London, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 178, 218-220, 242-248. Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 99-100, likewise identifies centurions be more closely with the *milites*.

<sup>21</sup>Caes. *BG* 7. 52: *quanto opere eorum animi magnitudinem admiraretur, quos non castrorum munitiones, non altitudo montis, non murus oppidi tardare potuisset, tanto opere licentiam arrogantiamque reprehendere, quod plus se quam imperatorem de victoria atque exitu rerum sentire existimarent; nec minus se ab milite modestiam et continentiam quam virtutem atque animi magnitudinem desiderare.*

<sup>22</sup>Changes to recruitment and organization: Sall. *Iug.* 84-86; Plut. *Mar.* 9, 25; Plin. *NH* 5. 25; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 1. 7. Caesar: Suet. *Iul.* 24. 2; Augustus: Suet. *Aug.* 38. 2; 49; App. *BC* 5. 3; Dio 52. 27-28; 54. 25. 5; 55.23.1. Successors: Tac. *Ann.* 4. 4; Jos. *BJ* 3. 70-107; Suet. *Dom.* 7.3. See Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 57-79, 132-198.

<sup>23</sup>See speech by Aemilius Paulus in Polyb. 3. 109, which makes this distinction. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 71, notes that Caesar (*BG* 1. 13, 40; 7. 22, 29; *BC* 1.58; 3.73) sometimes contrasts the traits of *diligentia*, *consilium*, *ratio*, and *scientia* of commanders with the *virtus* of the *milites*. Cf. London, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 211, 230-231.

military ranks. In the armies of the late Republic and Principate, centurions are established with *milites* as somewhat volatile, yet necessary champions of aggressive courage, to be harnessed by the more rational, discipline-oriented legates from the aristocracy. While described effectively as opposing traditional, almost unconscious ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina* that manifest themselves as a tension specifically in the Roman army, this tension is directly related to another strain commonly seen in modern militaries: the conflicting institutional emphases on personal initiative versus rigid obedience, or between strategies that indirectly encourage soldiers to fight and risk their lives in combat, and those that more directly coerce them.

### **3.2.2 Domination versus Persuasion**

An enduring challenge for military organizations and theorists concerns the most effective strategies in acquiring compliance from soldiers. Lynn has arranged these strategies into three categories: coercive (physical and psychological intimidation), remunerative (material incentives), and normative (symbolic rewards and punishments, social commendation and condemnation).<sup>24</sup> Most armies have tended to combine these strategies – all three of those mentioned were employed in the Roman legions of both the Republic and Principate.<sup>25</sup> More often, however, studies of modern military institutions have proposed broader, more binary concepts of disciplinary strategies that draw either explicitly or implicitly from Weber’s essential distinction between power (*Macht*) and

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<sup>24</sup>*Bayonets of the Republic*, 23-26, adapted from S. Westbrook, “The Potential for Military Disintegration” in S. Sarkesian ed., *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military* (Beverly Hills, 1980), 244-278.

<sup>25</sup>For general discussion on coercive, remunerative, and normative strategies in Roman army, see Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 250-264.

authority (*Herrschaft*): obedience versus commitment, external versus internal discipline, dominating versus manipulative methods. The view that most armies have employed both in varying degrees is considered the basis for organizational strain in military institutions.<sup>26</sup>

The first chapter briefly discussed the concept of the distinction between domination and manipulation in discussing military discipline. The goal of domination is unquestioning obedience from soldiers – a “mechanical compliance.” Direct orders are issued without need for discussion or persuasion concerning the final end, and the system employs negative sanctions and threats (often physical) to elicit the desired behaviour. Domination is often equated with institutional discipline, a coercive type that belongs to the institution and is external to the individual soldier. Manipulative or persuasive strategies, in contrast, are thought to appear more legitimate in the soldiers’ eyes, employing more normative techniques that emphasize consensus and group goals. Rather than seeking mechanical compliance, the army encourages individual initiative and practices that generate cohesion and morale, pride in one’s unit and its history, bonds of loyalty between soldiers, and a desire for victory. It is likened to a form of “positive” or “self-discipline.”<sup>27</sup>

Studies of military discipline and obedience agree that an officer’s authority cannot rely on negative sanctions alone. Keijzer’s assertion is illustrative: “Ultimate dedication cannot be obtained solely by application of penal sanctions. They will be

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<sup>26</sup>E.g., Feld, *The Structure of Violence*, 14, 27, 94; H. Levine, “Between Social Legitimation and Moral Legitimacy in Military Commitment” in T. C. Wyatt & R. Gal eds., *Legitimacy and Commitment in the Military* (New York, 1990), 10; Gal, “Commitment and Obedience in the Military,” 554-555. For *Macht* and *Herrschaft*, see above, n. 5.

<sup>27</sup>See above, Chapter One.

ineffective unless there is a general acceptance of the necessity of obedience and a social climate in which one's fellows as well as one's superiors serve as checks on a tendency to infraction, and, ultimately, infraction is inhibited by the individual's conscience."<sup>28</sup>

Janowitz likewise argued that evolving views towards discipline have led to a shift from domination to a greater reliance on manipulative methods.<sup>29</sup>

This narrative appears to fit well with developments in military discipline and justice in western armies. The use of brutal punishments that included flogging, mutilation, burning, and death began to decline during the eighteenth century, while capital punishment became rare by the nineteenth.<sup>30</sup> Definitions of discipline, however, continued to emphasize the "dominating" aspect: a strict adherence to rules, regularity, subordination, and unquestioned obedience to established government.<sup>31</sup> The First World War is commonly seen to have put an end to the emphasis in many European armies on mechanical compliance based on strict adherence to orders. British officer manuals made this shift explicit: "Obedience is not the product of fear, but of understanding...as obedience is a moral quality, so must punishment be the same, for it is resorted to to foster and nurture it."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*Military Obedience*, 50. Cf. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*, 36-37.

<sup>29</sup>Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 8. See also arguments in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 89-93.

<sup>30</sup>Frey, "Courts and Cats", 5-11; Gilbert, "The Changing Face of British Military Justice" 80-82. On discipline of Revolutionary French army, see Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*, 97-118, 24: "Military punishments remained, but they became more a matter of justice than of compulsion...Discipline was expected to be mainly self-imposed."

<sup>31</sup>E. A. Ellis, "Discipline: Its importance to an Armed Force and the Best Means of Promoting or Maintaining It in the United States Army," *Journal of Military Service Institution* 16 (1895), 213. Cf. M. B. Stewart, "The Army as a Factor in the Upbuilding of Society," *Journal of the Military Service Institute* 36 (1905), 391-404.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 92.

A concept of “positive” discipline thus emerged, emphasizing perseverance, psychology, morale, and initiative. Treatises from the Second World War on the topic continued this trend, emphasizing morale, pride, and self-discipline as the keys to good discipline: “At its best, [discipline] is instilled and maintained by pride in oneself, in one’s unit, in one’s profession; only at its worst by a fear of punishment.”<sup>33</sup> The change in attitudes is attributed to several factors, including changing attitudes in society at large, social origins of recruits, and conditions of combat, especially technology of firepower.<sup>34</sup>

For increasingly professionalized and specialized armies, then, indirect and manipulative strategies are argued to appear more legitimate and to be more successful in acquiring compliance and superior performance from soldiers. This apparent shift in favour of disciplinary strategies from domination to manipulation, however, has not eliminated the need for coercive strategies in military institutions, and there remains the need for a relative balance between negative sanctions and positive incentives.<sup>35</sup> According to Janowitz’s model, the persisting debate concerning the correct conditions in which to relax or reassert formal discipline causes the organizational strain that is seen to be so common in military institutions. It is a “contradictory interplay of the two styles – initiative and consultation on the one hand, rigid subordination and unquestioning

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<sup>33</sup>E. Wavell, *Soldiers and Soldiering* (London, 1953), 116. Cf. A. W. Lane, “The Attainment of Military Discipline,” *Journal of Military Service Institution* 55 (1944), 1-19. On the “winds of reform,” see Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 194.

<sup>34</sup>Keijzer, *Military Obedience*, 35. Social origins of recruits: Frey, “Courts and Cats,” 5. Conditions of combat and technology: S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 22-23, 44-47.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 133; Keijzer, *Military Obedience*, 50; M. v. Crevald, *Fighting Power: German and US Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Westport, 1982), passim. Problems with this view: O. Bartov, *Hitler’s Army*, 30-59.

compliance on the other hand....” Military institutions, however, can and do function despite these internal strains.<sup>36</sup>

As we have seen in the first chapter, this traditional view of a strain between coercive and normative strategies of discipline has been applied to the Roman army as well,<sup>37</sup> and again the centurionate appears to illustrate the strain. Although centurions were idealized for their individual aggression and employed strategies meant to motivate their subordinates indirectly, such as leading by personal example in combat, they were also portrayed as exceptionally brutal in their reliance on coercive discipline.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.3 Military Authority in the Centurionate**

The centurionate, then, appears to represent a structural problem in Roman military culture, in which different emphases on self-discipline and aggressive courage, or domination and manipulation, created a contradiction or strain in its ideologies and practices of leadership, discipline, and behaviour in combat. There are several fundamental problems, however, in applying such strict categories of authority and social practices to Roman military culture. We have already seen in the first chapter that modern definitions of coercion and domination are often too absolute to apply to Roman disciplinary methods and ignore the social context of corporal punishment in the legions.

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<sup>36</sup>Keijzer, *Military Obedience*, 47. Cf. Janowitz & Little, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 43-44, 54, 62.

<sup>37</sup> See above, Chapter One, 32-33.

<sup>38</sup>E.g., Brand, *Roman Military Law*, 80: “The authority of the centurion was purely disciplinary. His badge of office was a vine staff (*vitis*) with which, through personal chastisement, he compelled instant obedience to his commands.”

The centurion's punitive authority also displayed productive and manipulative aspects and had ideological associations beyond their immediate victims and audience.<sup>39</sup>

By the same token, the entire distinction between domination and persuasion has also been challenged, since so-called normative strategies can be interpreted to possess violent, dominating elements. Phang, for example, has recently argued that certain behaviour and disciplinary strategies of Roman commanders during the Principate, while seemingly normative, were actually a form of violence through which the elite dominated their subordinates. These practices designed to help the elite acquire compliance from Roman soldiers are equated with what Bourdieu called "symbolic capital."

### 3.3.1 Symbolic Violence in the Roman Legions

For Bourdieu, definitions of capital and interest were far too restricted because social practices were being examined through a capitalist lens, which recognized no other economic activities than those that are economically self-interested and geared towards maximizing material profit. This definition, he argued, effectively renders practices not perceived to be oriented towards this goal as gratuitous or economically *disinterested*.<sup>40</sup> Many social practices in pre-capitalist societies such as ancient Rome are thus described as "traditional" or "value-rational" and understood to be embedded within political, social, and religious customs and institutions that are indifferent or even opposed to the economic capital of a market economy.<sup>41</sup> More problematically, this narrow definition

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<sup>39</sup>*Discipline and Punish*, 27, 58.

<sup>40</sup>Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 112-113; *Outline*, 176-177; Moore, "Capital" 101.

<sup>41</sup>An obvious product of this division is the long-running "Modernist-Primitivist" debate in studies of ancient economies. Cf. Finley ed., *The Bücher-Meyer Controversy* (New York 1979); J. Andreau, "Twenty Years after Moses I. Finley's *The Ancient Economy*" in W. Scheidel & S. v. Redden eds., *The Ancient Economy* (New York, 2002), 33-52; R. Saller, "Introduction," 1-12, and D. P. Kehoe, "The Early



“can find no place in its analyses, still less in its calculations, for the strictly symbolic interest which is occasionally recognized...only to be reduced to the irrationality of feeling or passion.”<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, therefore, advocated a more complex account of the relationships between dominant and subordinate groups and individuals, in which one should understand any resource, including non-material goods, which functions as a social relation of power as capital.<sup>43</sup>

The fundamental difference between Bourdieu’s concepts of strictly economic and symbolic capital lies in the fact that the self-interested nature of the former is obvious while that of the latter is latent.<sup>44</sup> Practices that acquire symbolic capital must appear unselfish or unmotivated by considerations of personal advantage. In military practices, for example, the power of command over individual soldiers often works best when it is masked or invisible, since orders that appear arbitrary and self-interested can provoke greater resistance. The power of a superior officer relies on persuading inferiors to devote themselves to the superior’s interests, while at the same time masking the dissymmetry of the relationship.<sup>45</sup> This “symbolic violence,” as Bourdieu called it, causes arbitrary relations of power to become misrecognized or euphemized as self-evident and virtuous.<sup>46</sup>

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Roman Empire: Production,” 543-569, in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, W. Scheidel, I. Morris & R. Saller, eds. (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>42</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline*, 177.

<sup>43</sup>Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 42.

<sup>44</sup>Moore, “Capital,” 103.

<sup>45</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline*, 181. Cf. Servan, *Le Soldat Citoyen* (1780), quoted in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 102-103: “A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas...this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work.”

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 167-169. Cf. Moore, “Capital” 104-105; Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 64. Foucault (*Discipline and Punish*, 303) described this process as *normalization*. Lendon (*Empire of Honour*, 23-24) suggests this

The Roman world arguably saw little distinction between symbolic and economic capital. Although typically expressed in terms of social status, historians have long noted the various ways through which members of the Roman aristocracy sought to strengthen their prestige, which could be represented materially by the size and location of one's *domus*, the size of one's retinue of slaves and clients, or in the style and quality of one's clothing. Patron-client relationships, imperial cult, triumphs, and gladiatorial exhibitions – practices in the Roman world generally described in terms of an individual or group's concern for *dignitas*, *gloria*, or *honor* – were, among other things, socially or economically *interested* practices geared ever towards strengthening one's social position.<sup>47</sup>

Among the most important of these practices for the aristocracy was participation in warfare. Military achievements were transposable (and often essential) to an aristocrat's success in holding public offices, and even those who did not personally engage in hand-to-hand combat nonetheless earned praise for membership in a legion that secured a military victory.<sup>48</sup> Roman emperors similarly sought to bolster their prestige through military practices. Legionary worship of the emperors' *genii*, depictions of the emperor in martial settings, and the personal presence of the emperor on military

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concept in his description of the Roman honour system, which offers a “face-saving” way to describe obedience, subjugation, and authority.

<sup>47</sup>Patron-client relationships: Cic. *Fam.* 10. 10. 1; Sen. *Clem.* 1. 13. 5; Plin. *Ep.* 1. 7. 2; Dio 53. 4. 1; *ILS* 6093-116. Cf. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), 349-386; R. MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (New Haven, 1988), 77-84, 96-121. Cities competed for dedicating temples to Tiberius (Tac. *Ann.* 4. 55). On Imperial cult, cf. S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power* (Cambridge, 1984), 65-77. Triumphs: Plut. *Pomp.* 31. 4; Suet. *Iul.* 18, 37; Jos. *BJ* 7. 116; Tac. *Agric.* 44. Cf. M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, 2007), 7-41. On prestige and symbolic interest generally, see esp. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 30-106; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 180-182; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 42;

<sup>48</sup>Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 17-41; Hölscher, “The Transformation of Victory into Power,” 27-48; C. Nicolet, *World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (London, 1980), 108-109; 123-125; Goldsworthy *Roman Army at War*, 265-266; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 185.

campaign were practices intended to establish his broader, political authority over his soldiers, civilian subjects, and potential enemies.<sup>49</sup>

Phang explicitly identifies Roman aristocratic goals and practices in warfare with Bourdieu's concepts of social practices.<sup>50</sup> The strategies of leadership described in the previous chapter, such as the commander being present near the front line or sharing his soldiers' labours, for example, should be understood as forms of symbolic violence. Fundamental to these strategies was the promotion of a disciplinary ideology in the legions that rendered respect for authority (*modestia*), courage in battle (*virtus*) and prolonged physical work (*labor*) as virtues to be praised by all soldiers.<sup>51</sup> In Phang's scheme of Roman military authority, the corporal punishment that the centurion represented was a form of archaic and illegitimate cruelty at odds with the more rational, bureaucratic institution into which the legions had apparently transformed during the reigns of Augustus and his successors. More to the point, such a direct, blunt form of domination conflicted with the more indirect, symbolic practices employed by the Roman elite.

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<sup>49</sup>On worship, see above, Chapter One, 45-46. Martial depictions of emperors include the Augustus of Prima Porta, the Cancelleria Relief of Domitian, the Column of Trajan, and the Arch of Septimius Severus at Rome. Cf. Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 142-148. Presence on campaign: Caligula (Suet. *Cal.* 43), Claudius (Suet. *Claud.* 17), Trajan (Dio 68. 6-9), M. Aurelius (Dio 72. 11), Septimius Severus (77. 11-15; Herod. 3. 8. 4-5). On the emperor's relationship to the army more broadly, see Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 6; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 250-260; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 33-35, 108-109, 240.

<sup>50</sup>Phang, however, generally avoids Bourdieu's specific terminology, substituting "prestige" for symbolic capital, and "subordination" for symbolic violence, in order to avoid anachronism. See *Roman Military Service*, 34.

<sup>51</sup>See *Roman Military Service*, 155-162, 199-200, 201-226. On positive associations of discipline and conformity, see Sall. *Cat.* 11. 5-6; Cic. *Cat.* 2. 2. 10; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 16, 19, 28; *Hist.* 1. 5; 2. 19; *Agric.* 16. 3-4 Dio 52. 14. 3; 76. 15. 2; Herod. 3. 8. 5. Cf. Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 181-203; Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy*, 141.

While Phang's application of Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic practices in the Roman legions is innovative, there are several problems with this model of Roman military authority. First, Bourdieu saw these two forms of violence (i.e., overt and symbolic) as neither separate nor contradictory, but interrelated and mutually supportive. As he asserts, "There is an intelligible relation – not contradiction – between these two forms of violence, which coexist in the same social formation and sometimes in the same relationship...this coexistence of overt, physical, economic violence and the most refined symbolic violence is found in all institutions characteristic of this economy, and at the heart of every social relationship."<sup>52</sup> To describe an opposition between formal and symbolic aspects of Roman *disciplina*, therefore, creates exactly the kind of crude distinction in social relations of power that Bourdieu refutes.

More problematically, Phang's interpretation is based solely on perceptions of elite and imperial attitudes toward military virtues and identities, and how these ideologies were "imposed" on soldier and subject; it argues for a sort of ideological hegemony, a top-down understanding of structures and ideologies of power in which the subordinate or dominated groups are "socialized" into identifying with the established order and thereby reproducing its dominant position.<sup>53</sup> The Roman army, however, should not be viewed as a monolithic institution with only a top-down ideology, with one group's interests dictating the rest.<sup>54</sup> There can be multiple forms of subjugation within a social group or institution, and they do not all begin at the center with the Roman

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<sup>52</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline*, 191.

<sup>53</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 21: "Ideology socializes the dominant and subordinate classes to identify with the established order...."

<sup>54</sup>On differing provincial, regional, and regimental interests, see I. Hayes, "Introduction: The Roman Army as a Community," in A. Goldsworthy & I. Hayes eds., *The Roman Army as a Community* (London, 1999), 7-14.

emperor and aristocratic elite.<sup>55</sup> Roman military ideals and dispositions toward authority and leadership, rather, could be influenced by other ranks of the legions, and it may be this multiple application of symbolic violence at different levels which rendered the legions so formidably and persistently resilient.

It is unclear what kind of “symbolic capital” legionary centurions might have sought according to Bourdieu’s scheme, and the prestige accrued from military achievements was certainly far more limited beyond centurions’ military careers than those of their aristocratic superiors. While centurions were militarily and socially subordinate to the senatorial aristocracy and emperor, however, they nonetheless needed to express their own authority relative to their subordinates, and they thus contributed to how Roman military discipline and leadership in combat could be expressed. What made their contribution particularly meaningful to the Roman military was their intermediate position between these bases of military authority.

### **3.3.2 The Sword and the Stick**

To understand the ideological bases of the centurions’ military authority, we need to understand that all features of a centurion, from behaviour to physical appearance, were part of a military practice with long-term as well as immediate goals in asserting their intermediate position in the legions. The centurions’ disciplinary functions and reputation are more obvious. The execution or threat of physical punishment provided a vivid and effective method for centurions to assert their authority and subordinate their soldiers to the legionary hierarchy – a soldier obeyed because he was physically

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<sup>55</sup>On multiple directions of power, see Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 29-30.

compelled to obey. The *vitis*, therefore, became crucial to symbolizing the centurion's disciplinary function, and the execution of that function acquired a sense of virtue, as well as social, religious, and political meaning – the centurion and his *vitis*, for all its coercive implications, nevertheless became a positive articulation of Roman authority.

The less obvious but arguably more important method through which centurions asserted their authority in the legions, however, is illustrated best in their idealized behaviour in combat. As combat officers, many of whom were former *milites*, centurions had to associate themselves with the interests of their subordinates, and sometimes paid a personal price in doing so. The price for a middle-ranking officer went beyond the occasional gesture of shared labour, or distribution of booty from a commander – it required that centurions demonstrate that they possessed the very virtues that corresponded to their rank and status.<sup>56</sup> Caesar's account of Pullo goading his fellow centurion, Vorenus, into rushing into the enemy line of Nervii, colourfully illustrates this expectation.<sup>57</sup> Centurions ideally earned their place in the legions by being the last to retreat, the first to scale a wall, or a willingness to throw themselves against an enemy when their own soldiers' spirit was waning.

Of course, that combat officers were sometimes expected to fight and die as a duty of their rank is not a practice unique to Roman or even ancient armies. As late as the Second World War, American company commanders led their units from the front,

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<sup>56</sup>See Bourdieu, *Outline*, 193-194; C. C. Moskos & F. R. Wood, "Institution Building in an Occupational World" in *The Military: More than Just a Job?* (Washington, 1988), 280, 287: "Leadership must affirm altruistic norms at the micro or small-unit level. Socialization by deed is much more powerful than socialization by word."

<sup>57</sup>See above, Chapter Two, 74-75. Caesar here parallels his centurions with Sarpedon and Glaucus in the *Iliad* (12. 310-328) when the former reminds Glaucus that their great place of honour, wealth, and prestige are earned by their fighting strength and leadership in battle.

and both they and their NCOs suffered casualties disproportionate to their soldiers.<sup>58</sup> In evaluating American performance in the Second World War and the role of modern combat officers, however, Marshall even argued that they should not take unnecessary risks because of the negative effect on their soldiers' morale:

The small unit commander who practices self-exposure to danger in hopes of having a good moral effect on men, instead, frays the nerves of troops and most frequently succeeds in getting himself killed under conditions which do no earthly good to the army...A commander cannot rally his men by spectacular intervention in the hour when they have lost their grip if they have grown accustomed to seeing him run unnecessary risks in the average circumstances of battle.<sup>59</sup>

This opinion appears to have been shared by American rank and file themselves.

Soldiers both appreciated and expected their officers to lead by example and be willing to sacrifice themselves, but had no tolerance for recklessness or "glory hounds." Necessary, calculated risks were acceptable, but a dead officer cannot command anyone.<sup>60</sup>

According to this assessment, a centurion's competitive exploits in combat cannot inspire soldiers if they no longer seem extraordinary, or result in the centurion's death.

Roman centurions and soldiers, however, would likely have disagreed with this assessment, since there are not only immediate, tactical but also long-term, social consequences of these practices. If one considers centurions' exploits not merely as attempts to acquire individual *gloria* or inspire soldiers in specific battles, but as acts that were part of a continuing practice in asserting their military authority, such behaviour appears less wasteful. For an intermediate officer who lacked his aristocratic counterpart's ability to acquire soldiers' obedience through appeals to ancestry, legal and

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<sup>58</sup>Rush, *Hell in Hürtgen Forest*, 91, 301-316; Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 229-245. For British army, see Teitler, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 284-285.

<sup>59</sup>*Men Against Fire*, 186-187.

<sup>60</sup>Kindsvatter, *American Soldier*, 235-241.

political authority, or the promise of land and great material rewards, such individual actions were critical to asserting his authority over his soldiers. The cost of this practice to the legions and individual centurions could indeed be high, but arguably remained more economical when compared to the dangers facing centurions who relied too often on more brutal strategies in asserting their authority.

What has been described by both ancient and modern writers as acts of altruistic leadership and competitive *virtus*, or the desire to promote the appearance of reciprocity with subordinates, therefore, were more complex in their goals.<sup>61</sup> While a centurion's decision to charge on the battlefield was affected by other factors, from the desire for personal glory to the rush of adrenaline before the onslaught of close-ordered combat, centurions perhaps also saw the need to use such exploits to fulfil expectations of their rank.<sup>62</sup> This practice is characteristically similar to the normative strategies expressed in military theory, in that the centurion persuaded his soldiers to accept his dominant position and obey his orders through indirect means that masked his interests and goals. It was less immediate and direct than the threat of the *vitis*, but just as effective in asserting their position in the legionary hierarchy.

Bourdieu's warning against reducing certain social practices to "the irrationality of feeling or passion" is relevant here. "Rational" is a highly idiosyncratic and contextual concept, and we should be cautious in limiting the centurions' aggressive actions in combat strictly to the heedless *virtus* of a heroic fighter, or the unconscious product of a

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<sup>61</sup>On reciprocity, Lang, "Values," 23, discusses the importance "equilibrium" or "what one gives to an organization and expects in return." Cf. definition of "transactional leadership" in J. M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York, 1978), passim, esp. 4-20.

<sup>62</sup>On effect of the conditions of close-ordered battle in Greek and Roman warfare, see Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 191-227; Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 96-104.



primal Roman *ferocia* that more rational legionary commanders needed to harness and then steer in the right direction.<sup>63</sup> As officers, centurions too were expected to understand the consequences of their actions for their personal authority, and to perform a role that strengthened the relationship between soldiers and commanding officers.

This point also addresses the question as to whether a contradiction existed between the Roman ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina*. The question is characteristically similar to a traditional subject for military leaders: How does one teach independent-minded soldiers to exercise self-discipline and accept commands? Put in another way, what is the correct balance between promoting individual judgment and initiative, yet also obedience, discipline, and unity?<sup>64</sup> Marshall noted this earlier: “We say that we want men who can think and act. We are just as steadfast, however, in proclaiming that the supreme object in training is to produce unity in action. These two aims are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are the complementary halves of an enlightened battle discipline.”<sup>65</sup>

The complementary aspect of Marshall’s “enlightened battle discipline” seems also to have been expected from Rome’s middle-ranking officers. Valerius Maximus praises at length the brave deeds of Scaevius, a centurion in Caesar’s British expedition whom Caesar himself promoted. The characteristics that Caesar emphasizes are instructive:

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<sup>63</sup>On applying “rationality” to military practices, see Lee, “Warfare and Culture,” 1.

<sup>64</sup>See Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 293, on finding line between “fear of misdirected violence and their recognition that if a man’s will to fight is the ultimate decider of battles, they should cultivate an aggressive spirit in their troops.” Cf. R. A. Herrera, “Self-Governance and the American Citizen as Soldier, 1775-1861,” *JMH* 65.1 (2001), 35-39.

<sup>65</sup>Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 133. Soldiers surveyed in the US Army about ideal traits in combat effectiveness rated “courage and coolness” two times higher than all other factors combined. Cf. R. A. Beaumont & W. P. Snyder, “Combat Effectiveness: Paradigms and Paradoxes,” in S. C. Sarkesian ed., *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military* (Beverly Hills, 1980), 25.

You were great in battle, but even greater in recalling the *disciplina* of a soldier. And so, with your words and deeds honoured by one of the greatest judges of *virtus*, you were promoted to the centurionate.<sup>66</sup>

Scaevius earned his promotion to the coveted centurionate by demonstrating simultaneously qualities in both forbearance and courage. Dionysius of Halicarnassus projects this dual criterion for promotion to the centurionate back even to the age of the Roman monarchy: “Out of all the centuries those greatest in war were chosen as centurions, and each of them took care that their *centuriae* should be obedient to the orders they receive.”<sup>67</sup> To contrast this praise, one needs to look no further than Caesar’s own criticism and demotion of three centurions during his African campaign a generation earlier:

T. Salienus, M. Tiro, and C. Clusinus, you have risen in rank through my indulgence rather than your own courage, and having attained the rank, you have demonstrated neither excellence in war, nor good conduct in peace, and have been more enthusiastic in sedition and inciting your soldiers against your general than in showing forbearance and moderation. I therefore judge you unworthy of leading the ranks in my army....<sup>68</sup>

Unlike Scaevius, the centurions Salienus, Tiro, and Clusinus had failed to demonstrate the twin ideals expected of their rank: individual bravery on the one hand, and forbearance and restraint on the other.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Val. Max. 3. 2. 23: *magnus proelio, sed maior disciplinae militaris memoria. itaque ab optimo uirtutis aestimatore cum facta tum etiam uerba tua centurionatus honore d<on>ata sunt.*

<sup>67</sup> Dion. 4. 17. 4: *λοχαγοὶ δ’ ἐξ ἀπάντων ἐπιλεχθέντες οἱ γενναιότατοι τὰ πολέμια τοὺς ἰδίους ἕκαστοι λόχους εὐπειθεῖς τοῖς παραγγελλομένοις παρέιχοντο.* The Greek term *λοχαγός* alternates with the more precise *ἐκατόνταρχος* in describing centurions, in contrast to the alternate terms for tribune, *ταξίαρχος* and *χιλίαρχος*. Compare above passage with Dion. 11. 60. 5. See H. J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis* (Toronto, 1974), 163.

<sup>68</sup> *B Afr. 54: Tite Salienne M. Tiro C. Clusinas, cum ordines in meo exercitu beneficio, non uirtute [sitis] consecuti ita vos gesseritis ut neque bello fortes neque pace boni aut utiles fueritis et magis in seditione concitandisque militibus aduersum uestrum imperatorem quam pudoris modestiaeque fueritis studiosiores, indignos vos esse arbitror qui in meo exercitu ordines ducatis....*

<sup>69</sup> Other examples of Caesar’s praised centurions for steadfastness as well as aggressiveness. See Caes. *BG* 2. 25; 5. 35; 6. 38-40.

The Roman military ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina*, therefore, while seemingly contradictory in their application, were nonetheless complementary in their objective, and were expected simultaneously from their middle-ranking officers. This is nowhere more apparent than in the many funerary inscriptions to centurions from the late Republic and Principate. The centurion is shown bearing the *vitis* in one hand and his *gladius* in the other, representing how his military authority relied on both discipline and bravery.<sup>70</sup> This representation differs from that of the combat officer of British army during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who did not carry weapons, but bore a cane or “swagger stick,” with which he differentiated himself from his soldiers.<sup>71</sup> Roman centurions during the Principate, in contrast, bore the sword *and* the stick, and they were praised for upholding the kind of courage and competitiveness idealized by Caesar, yet also the discipline and forbearance idealized earlier by Polybius.<sup>72</sup>

### **3.4 Conclusion: An Intermediate Form of Military Authority**

As expectations for the centurionate reveal, Roman ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina* were not understood necessarily to be mutually exclusive or in conflict, either between ranks or within one. Rather than being seen to embody a heroic *virtus* that existed in an adverse (if necessary) tension with the rational planning and *disciplina* of commanding officers, centurions in both textual and visual evidence appear to have been useful representations for an army that saw these virtues as both necessary *and* complementary

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<sup>70</sup>E.g., Appendix A, figs. 1-4.

<sup>71</sup>See Janowitz & Little, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 101.

<sup>72</sup>Discipline and forbearance: Frontin. *Strat.* 4.7.8; Jos. *BJ* 6. 262; Plut. *Galba* 18. 4, 26. 5; *Otho* 13. 5; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 66; *Hist.* 1. 56; 3. 22; 4. 19; Veg. *Mil.* 2. 14. 3-8. Courage and competitiveness: Jos. *BJ* 4. 37; 6. 81, 175; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 11; *Hist.* 3. 17; Val. Max. 3. 2. 23 Dio 68. 22b. 3; 79. 6.

in its centurions.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, centurions were not strait-jacketed to one cultural ideal or the other. Which style of leadership centurions adopted was determined at least as much by their own evaluation of their strength and position relative to their soldiers at a given time and place – their individual *judgment* – as on notions of broad development in Roman military culture from Republic to Principate.<sup>74</sup>

The interpretation that an organizational strain between strategies of domination and manipulation existed in the Roman army and was detrimental to its functioning, moreover, mischaracterizes what were two differing strategies of asserting a Roman officer's military authority. The formal, coercive discipline described as "domination" still required consensus and persuasion, and had a broader intention than the punishment of an individual soldier. Conversely, practices designed to persuade Roman soldiers to obey their centurions more indirectly, such as personal acts of valour in combat, although not overtly coercive, were nonetheless a form of domination – the goal of both strategies was the legionaries' subordination and compliance. Simply put, such categories as "normative" and "coercive" were not that far apart in Roman military thinking, and reinforced, rather than conflicted with, each other.

Of course, as Caesar's demotion of the three centurions in his African campaign demonstrates, a gap obviously existed between the ideal and reality of their behaviour – many centurions doubtless did not fit either ideal. Rosenstein's caution about extrapolating Roman soldiers' behaviour from how it appears in literature is appropriate: "The point here is not to assert that Roman soldiers consistently lived up to these high

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<sup>73</sup>Goldsworthy *Roman Army at War*, 281. Cf. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 303-304; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 287.

<sup>74</sup>See Lee, "Warfare and Culture," 3: "culture provides a repertoire of choices; it does not limit individual possibility, but it shapes individual vision."

ideals. In many cases they probably did not.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, this dual image of the centurion comprises but a single and exhortative perspective of the rank that hardly tells the full story. As Lynn might put it,<sup>76</sup> there is a mismatch between discourse and reality, between the traditional centurion depicted in glorious hand-to-hand combat and the experienced officer during the Principate, who followed established military careers, enjoyed lavish pay and prospects relative to his soldiers, and performed many logistic and administrative tasks beyond the realm of warfare. These aspects of the centurionate also helped to form its identity and authority, and need to be addressed. The next chapter will begin by examining the centurionate as an institution in its own right, with distinct careers, criteria for promotion, levels of expertise, and corporate identity, and argues that the centurions formed the primary corps of officers in the Roman legions.

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<sup>75</sup>*Imperatores Victi*, 97-98.

<sup>76</sup>Lynn, *Battle*, xix-xxii.

## Chapter Four: *Vir Militaris*

### **4.1 Introduction**

A professional command structure is widely seen to be an essential component for any complex military institution. By the Principate, although the Roman army comprised many positions above the rank of *miles*, each with separate titles, distinctions, and functions, there was no word in Latin for “officer,” and little evidence to suggest a Roman concept of a defined cadre of officers or “officer corps” that was distinct in status and function from the rank and file. The apparent lack of such a structure in the Roman legions clearly raises questions concerning their organizational structure and ideological underpinnings, such as in what rank military expertise was concentrated, or whether ranks were distinguished primarily by social status, seniority, or merit.

Several reasons for the difficulty in describing officership in the Roman legions are readily apparent. The most obvious is that the Roman army was never “built from scratch.” In typically Roman fashion, rather than possessing any kind of constitution or organizational blueprint, its military institutions developed gradually from Republic to Principate in their organization, hierarchy of command, recruitment, and functions. A larger problem, however, concerns just how to evaluate ranks in the Roman army according to criteria established through any but modern military definitions. One such concept is the “officer corps” itself. Some studies have had little problem in describing a Roman officer corps, although they might disagree on who comprised its membership.

Delbrück, for example, considered such a corps to have developed during the Second Punic War, but for him, the centurionate of the Principate best characterized officership. Smith, meanwhile, in his study of the army of the late Republic, limited that distinction to the legates, prefects, and tribunes.<sup>1</sup> Others resist using the term entirely, defining the ranks instead more loosely as a “hierarchy of command,” or according to social status – an “officer class.”<sup>2</sup> There is also disagreement about the use of the term “professional” when describing officers and soldiers in the Roman army. Several studies have already questioned using such a term to describe offices and duties that should be understood as social rather than professional distinctions in the Roman world.<sup>3</sup>

These challenges are nowhere more acute than in analyzing the centurionate. Scholars have struggled to define centurions consistently according to their prescribed duties, the size of the units under their command, or their perceived social status. Centurions have been associated with both modern combat and staff officers, as well as commissioned and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Their functions, meanwhile, have been equated with modern infantry ranks as varied as first sergeant, sergeant major, captain, major, and colonel.<sup>4</sup> The variety of conclusions shows that these modern constructs can bring us no closer to answering fundamental questions about the structure of the legionary centurionate: What were the criteria for promotion to and within the

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<sup>1</sup>Delbrück, *History of the Art of War I*, 336-338; *II*, 162-163; Smith, *Service in the Post-Marian Roman Army*, 64.

<sup>2</sup>Hierarchy of command: Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 33-37, 116. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 220, 231, defines an officer class of senatorial and equestrian families distinct from the centurions, who were drawn from the humble background of the soldiers.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 21, 247. See also De Blois, “Army and Society,” 30; Alföldy, “Das Heer in der Sozialstruktur des Römischen Kaiserreiches” in *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft*, 37.

<sup>4</sup>As NCO: Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 634. First Sergeant: Delbrück, *History of the Art of War I*, 429-436. Sergeant Major: Parker, *The Roman Legions*, 30-31. Captain, major, and colonel: Dobson, “The Empire” in *Warfare in the Ancient World*, J. Hackett ed., (London, 1989), 205; Brand, *Roman Military Law*, 52. Cf. Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 87.

rank? What level of skills and experience could they acquire, and how did this affect their place in the legion's command structure? Was there a unified understanding of the centurion's status? Answering these questions requires a closer examination of textual and epigraphic evidence of their careers, duties, and expectations.

While the previous three chapters demonstrated how the centurionate helped to define Roman military ideals in discipline, combat, and leadership, the current chapter examines the centurions' place in the legion's command structure and their importance for understanding Roman attitudes towards officership. First, it evaluates what criteria we must use in describing officership and professionalism in the Roman army of the late Republic and Principate. It then compares the criteria for promotion to and within the centurionate with those of higher ranks in the legions, and evaluates the level of expertise and experience to be found in this rank. Lastly, it demonstrates how the rank was defined by attractive material and social benefits, but also by unique traditions. Altogether the chapter demonstrates that the legionary centurionate possessed levels of experience, expertise, and corporate identity that were unique in the Roman military command structure, and argues that those best described in modern terms as "officers" were to be found in the legions' middle ranks.

## **4.2 Criteria for a Professional Corps of Officers**

Military and sociological studies have proposed extremely vigorous definitions of professionalism that consider the concept according to its institutional forms (i.e., associations, licensure, and a code of ethics), in which professionals are identified by their exclusive possession and application of special skills or knowledge acquired



through training.<sup>5</sup> Huntington formulated arguably the most influential model for professional officership, which comprises three fundamental characteristics: expertise in a specialized skill or knowledge, corporateness, and responsibility to society at large.<sup>6</sup> Huntington's model of military professionalism is widely adopted, and although it has been critiqued and occasionally revised, it commonly remains the starting point of discussion.<sup>7</sup>

By most of these criteria, no Roman ranks of officers can be described as professional – the Roman world lacked such modern structures as educational institutions and a centralized state, as well as a high degree of standardization and bureaucratization. We should, however, be wary of such firm definitions that exclude all but the most modern institutions, to the detriment of our study of ancient ones. Different societies conceive of professionalism or amateurism differently.<sup>8</sup>

The label of “professional” has long been applied to the Roman military, but its beginnings and criteria are debated. Earlier scholars argued that the great generals of the late Republic, such as Marius, Caesar, and Pompey, established the first professional armies, comprising an increasing number of volunteer soldiers who served for extended periods of time far from Italy.<sup>9</sup> Other studies credit Augustus with professionalizing the

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<sup>5</sup>A. Abbott, *The System of Professions* (Chicago, 1988), 5-9. D. M. Snider, *Army Professionalism, the Military Ethic, and Officership in the 21st Century* (Carlisle, 1999), passim.

<sup>6</sup>Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 8-18.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Janowitz & Little, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 45-46; Teitler, *The Genesis*, 6-7; J. W. Hackett, *The profession of arms: the 1962 Lees Knowles lectures given at Trinity College, Cambridge* (Washington, 1986), 3-4; H. Sørensen, “New Perspectives on the Military Profession: The I/O Model and Esprit de Corps Reevaluated,” *AFS* 20.4 (1994), 599-617; W. B. Skelton, “Huntington and the Roots of the American Military Tradition,” *JMH* 60.2 (1996), 325-338.

<sup>8</sup>Naiden, “The Invention of the Officer Corps,” *JHS* 7.1 (2007), 40.

<sup>9</sup>E.g., Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 411-425, esp. 414; Parker, *The Roman Legions*, 36. Smith, *Service in the Post-Marian Army*, 64.

Roman army by establishing more consistent grades of pay, length of service, promotion, chain of command, and the use of the cohort as the primary tactical unit.<sup>10</sup> Most scholars, however, see a gradual transformation to professionalism from the Republic to Principate. As early as the second century BCE, soldiers such as Sp. Ligustinus, who continually volunteered for service in the Roman army and made it his permanent occupation, were “near-professionals.” The reforms by the triumvirs, Augustus, and his immediate successors provided the institutional structures required to professionalize the army.<sup>11</sup>

The debate as to which ranks of officer deserve to be called professional exists partly because none of these studies explicitly define their criteria for professionalism. For the most part, it seems that when contrasted with the term “amateur,” the term “professional” is used here synonymously with “primary occupation.” In this sense, a Roman professional officer committed himself primarily to long-term service. While this criterion distinguishes the established legions of the Principate from those that had been levied annually during the Republic, it does not attempt to distinguish officer from soldier. It is perhaps more fruitful, therefore, to determine the existence of a corps of officers in the legions. In its most basic form, a corps of officers includes the following components: a system of ranks, titles, and promotion based on merit and experience as well as social status; members often possessing technical expertise or training in specific tasks; a distinct group with its own identity within a society or military institution.

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<sup>10</sup>E.g., Kiesling, “Corporal Punishment,” 242: “The early Principate completed the transformation of Roman legions into long-service professional army.” Cf. W. Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Malden, 2007), 114-122; Phang, *Roman Military Discipline*, 3, 24; Dobson, “The Roman Army: Wartime or Peacetime Army?”, 111-128.

<sup>11</sup>Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 55: “The Romans adopted professional attitudes to warfare long before the army had professional institutions.” Cf. Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 33-34. Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 29. On Sp. Ligustinus, see Liv. 42. 34.

### 4.3 The Legions' Commanding Officers

Military service was a traditional role for the Roman aristocracy in the Republican period. Down to the end of the second century BCE, a period of service (*stipendium*) of ten years was nominally required for future senators.<sup>12</sup> Legates, those men of senatorial rank delegated by a consul or praetor to command parts of a legion for limited periods of time, only emerged in the late third to early second centuries BCE, as Roman armies campaigned increasingly farther away from Italy. Legates were typically appointed by the senate according to a magistrate's advice, and were usually in the course of a senatorial career, perhaps in between offices. They often had limited military experience.<sup>13</sup>

The next most senior officers of the middle to late Republic, the military tribunes, had to be at least of equestrian birth. All tribunes were traditionally required to have served five years in the army, while more senior tribunes had served for ten years.<sup>14</sup> While the rank possessed great prestige, the tribunes' duties appear to have been largely administrative. They are described helping to select soldiers through the *dilectus* and maintaining general supervision of training and affairs in camp, such as directing the *sacramentum* and passing on orders and watchwords from commander to centurions. They are recorded most often giving advice in the legionary commander's council

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<sup>12</sup>A .R. Birley, "Senators as Generals" in *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft*, 98.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 39-40.

<sup>14</sup>Polyb. 6. 19. 1.

(*consilium*).<sup>15</sup> Their function in battle, however, is unclear. Young tribunes of the early Republic are recorded engaging in individual combat, and suffered high casualties in military catastrophes.<sup>16</sup> They are also seem occasionally to have been given temporary commands over legions and detachments, as well as communicating the commander's orders in battle to individual maniples or cohorts.<sup>17</sup> These latter practices, however, became rarer by the second century BCE, when legates were increasingly prominent. Tactically speaking, moreover, it is clear that it was the duty of centurions rather than tribunes to command the maniples or cohorts in battle.<sup>18</sup>

Augustus and his imperial successors reformed and regulated many elements of the military hierarchy, including, finally, the assignment of individual commanders to the legions.<sup>19</sup> Although legions became permanently commissioned, with their own names, symbols, and traditions, the part-time structure of the higher ranks remained. Until the Severan dynasty,<sup>20</sup> the legateship remained exclusively for senators who were appointed by the emperor himself. Their commands seldom lasted longer than two years.<sup>21</sup> Granted, there are examples of commanders who spent longer periods of their career in military service. Some men, such as Cn. Domitius Corbulo, Cn. Julius Agricola, and

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<sup>15</sup>*Dilectus* and camp administration: Polyb. 6. 19-26, 33-39; 10. 20. 1; Liv. 22. 38; 26. 51; 44. 33. *Consilia*: Polyb. 8. 7. 5; 11. 25; Caes. *BG* 4. 23; 5. 28; Liv. 25. 23. On training, see below, Chapter Five, 182-184.

<sup>16</sup>Hand-to-hand combat: Liv. 7. 9-10; 7. 26; Caes. *B Hisp.* 25. Casualties; Liv. 10. 20; 21. 59; App. *Mithr.* 89; Caes. *BG* 5. 15. See Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 219, n. 14.

<sup>17</sup>Polyb. 14. 3; 18. 21; Liv. 7. 34; 8. 25; 10. 14; 44. 36. Caes. *BG* 2. 26; *BC* 1. 21.

<sup>18</sup>Polyb. 6. 24; Liv. 25. 14. Cf. See Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 39-40.

<sup>19</sup>This development followed Caesar's *ad hoc* use of legates in the Gallic and Civil Wars. See Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 23; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 132-136.

<sup>20</sup>Increasing numbers of *equites* began to occupy commands and governorships under Septimius Severus. See Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman army*, 404-408. Cf. Smith, "The Army Reforms of Septimius Severus," *Historia* 21. 3 (1972), 481-500.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. G. Alföldy, *Epigraphische Studien* III (Köln, 1967), 85; Campbell, "Who Were the *Viri Militares*?", *JRS* 65 (1975), 19.

Julius Quadratus Bassus, held more than one command and acquired reputations for their military abilities.<sup>22</sup> These commanders, however, appear to have been the exception rather than the rule.<sup>23</sup>

Legions now had six military tribunes, one of whom was of senatorial rank (*laticlavus*) and the other five equestrian (*angusticlavii*). Both typically held this rank in their legion for one year only.<sup>24</sup> The senatorial tribunate required no prior military experience. It seems to have existed primarily as an opportunity for young aristocrats to acquire some military experience (*prima rudimenta*) before moving on to higher public offices and military commands.<sup>25</sup> Equestrian tribunes typically served as commanders of auxiliary cohorts before becoming tribune, so they possessed some prior military experience.<sup>26</sup> Their duties appear to have remained largely administrative, including supervising official discharge of soldiers, overseeing distribution of food and supply, and leading major religious ceremonies in camp.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Corbulo: Tac. *Ann.* 13. 8. Agricola: Tac. *Agric.* 18. 4-6. Bassus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 508.

<sup>23</sup>For interpretation of a favoured class of senatorial men with a distinctively military career (so-called *virii militares*), see: Syme, "The Friend of Tacitus," *JRS* 47 (1957), 131-135; G. Alföldy, "Die Generalität des römischen Heeres," *BJ* 169 (1969), 233-246. Campbell, "Who Were the *Virii Militares*?", 12-31, casts doubts on the existence of such a group. See, however, Birley, "Senators as Generals," 116-117.

<sup>24</sup>Few men served more than once. Notable exceptions include Agricola (Tac. *Agric.* 5; *PIR*<sup>2</sup>, I 84); Hadrian (*HA Had.* 2. 2); Minucius Natalis (*ILS* 1061). Cf. Campbell, *Roman Army*, no. 103. Necessity likely compelled some *laticlavi*, however, to serve beyond this twelve-month period. See Birley, "Senators as Generals," 101-105.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., *ILS* 1066, 1071, 1077. On gaining experience, see Suet. *Aug.* 38. 2; Tac. *Agric.* 5. On *laticlavus* as "senator designate," see Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 117.

<sup>26</sup>E.g., *ILS* 2720, 9007, 9471; Campbell, *RA* no. 106-109. Prior service in *auxilia* became customary during reign of Claudius (Suet. *Claud.* 25. 1). Many, however, did not progress to the legionary tribunate. Cf. Birley, "Septimius Severus and the Roman Army," in *Roman Army Papers*, 21-40.

<sup>27</sup>Discharge and judicial duties: Tac. *Ann.* 1. 37, 44. Other duties were prescribed later and recorded in the Digest (*Macer* 49. 16. 12. 2). See Devijver, "Die Aufgabe eines Offiziers im römischen Heer Kommentar zu Aemilius Macer, Dig.XLIX, xvi, 12,2" in *The Equestrian Officers*, 1-15. Cf. Roth, *Logistics*, 273. On short tenure of tribunate, see Campbell, "Who Were the *Virii Militares*?"; Gilliver, "The Augustan Reform," 190.

In a speech ascribed to C. Marius, Sallust criticizes the amateurish nature of the late Republican system by having Marius compare his military experience with that of more aristocratic candidates:

I pray you, ponder well whether it would be better to change your minds and send on this or any similar errand one of that cluster of nobles, a man of ancient lineage and many ancestral portraits—but no campaigns; with the result that, no doubt, being wholly in ignorance of the duties of such an office, he might hurry and bustle about and select someone among the people to act as his adviser. In fact, it very often happens that the man whom you have selected as a commander looks about for someone else to command him.<sup>28</sup>

Sallust's assessment has given fodder for continued debate in current scholarship concerning whether or not there was a regular scheme of promotion for higher officers, and just how "amateurish" were such officers. Historians as early as Delbrück have emphasized the amateurism of the higher commands with the professionalism of lower ranks such as the centurionate, and have argued that the commander was more or less interchangeable.<sup>29</sup> This assessment goes too far, since it ignores the important actions that legionary commanders performed before battle (e.g., reconnaissance, forming the line of battle) as well as more intangible elements in leadership that could prove crucial in battles. As Goldsworthy notes, legions with experienced soldiers and lower officers were still likely to lose battles if their commanders were weak.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Sall. *Iug.* 85. 10-11: *Quaeso, reputate cum animis vestris, num id mutare melius sit, si quem ex illo globo nobilitatis ad hoc aut aliud tale negotium mittatis, hominem ueteris prosapiae ac multarum imaginum et nullius stipendi: scilicet ut in tanta re ignarus omnium trepidet, festinet, sumat aliquem ex populo monitorem officii sui. Ita plerumque evenit, ut, quem vos imperare iussistis, is sibi imperatorem alium quaerat.*

<sup>29</sup>F. E. Adcock, *The Roman Art of War under the Republic* (Harvard, 1940), 101; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 429-436.

<sup>30</sup>Reconnaissance: Caes. *BG* 1. 21-22; 5. 36 Frontin. *Strat.* 1. 2; Jos. *BJ* 5. 52-53; 7. 190; Arr. *Tact.* 1; Dio 68. 31. 3. Line of battle: Caes. *BG* 1. 24-25; Frontin. *Strat.* 2. 3; Arr. *Tact.* 12; See Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 116-170, esp. 125-149.

Others have argued that patronage (particularly by the emperor) played a more important role than seniority or merit in promoting tribunes and legates. While acknowledging that career patterns exhibit certain regularities, Saller and Campbell have argued that there is little evidence to suggest any scheme based on seniority and merit (which in itself is difficult to evaluate), or that there was any deliberate attempt to ensure regular experience. Many men of equestrian and senatorial background were fast-tracked to commands through their relationships with the imperial family.<sup>31</sup> The desirable qualities for such officers as described in official and personal correspondence by such authors as Pliny and Fronto generally emphasized competence, loyalty, education, and “charm” more than military experience or expertise.<sup>32</sup>

James has taken this argument the furthest, arguing that, as part of wider Roman society, a system of patronage was crucial to determining promotion and military authority not only among the equestrian and senatorial ranks, but all levels. Using the eighteenth century British navy as his model, James argues that personal interest between patron and client (i.e., officer and soldier) was accepted as normal, and by no means necessarily detrimental to an officer’s authority. “All officers,” James argues, “were inevitably placed in the position of patrons of their men, and were expected to look after their interests and to see that they were rewarded materially for their loyalty and zeal;

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<sup>31</sup>Saller: *Personal Patronage*, 80-103, 110; Campbell: “Teach Yourself,” 13-22. Cf. E. Birley, “Senators in the Emperor’s Service,” *PBA* (1953), 197-214; W. Eck, “Beförderungskriterien innerhalb der senatorischen Laufbahn, dar gestellt an der Zeit von 69 bis 138 n. Chr.,” *ANRW* II.1 (1974), 158-228.

<sup>32</sup>E.g., Plin. *Ep.* 2. 13; 3. 2; 3. 8; 4. 4; 7. 22; 8. 12; Fronto *Ad Amic.* 8; *TV* II, 225; *TV* III 660. Cf. Caes. *BC* 3. 92; Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 28; *Acad.* 2. 2; Sall. *Iug.* 85. 10-12; Tac. *Ann.* 4. 6; *Agric.* 9; Suet. *Aug.* 88. On the “gentlemanly” traits of commanders, see Birley, “The Commissioning of Equestrian Officers,” in *Documenting the Roman Army*, 1-18; Stoll, “Offizier und Gentleman,” 144-145.

their authority, and sometimes even their lives, depended on their ability to fulfill this role, as much as on discipline or any other factor.”<sup>33</sup>

Other studies, however, have strongly argued against the idea of the amateurish Roman officer or that the Roman legions lacked formal career patterns or criteria for promotion. Imperial legates had to govern their province as well as command their legions, so that tactical expertise was hardly the only criterion for the post. “Merit,” expressed as experience serving as commander or tribune and success in military campaigns, moreover, seems to have helped one’s promotion, and if war or major campaigns were a possibility, emperors might select and transfer qualified men with care.<sup>34</sup> Birley has shown evidence for some regularity in appointment, particularly in regions such as Britain, which required men of greater military experience. Finally, Romans would not have understood the distinction between such modern concepts as amateur and professional, and we can hardly refer to Roman commanders as amateurs, since no military academy existed anywhere to train commanders until modern times.<sup>35</sup>

Neither interpretation can be confirmed because of the limitations of our evidence. Members of the Roman aristocracy rose through both the traditional, senatorial careers as well as through the more rapid posts offered personally by the emperor. While some of these candidates theoretically could have acquired the skills and knowledge suitable to their posts, however, our sources give no sense of formal criteria either during

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<sup>33</sup>James, “Writing the Roman Legions,” 40-41. Cf. *Rome and the Sword*, 169. His use of the British navy as parallel is based on interpretation by Rodger, *Wooden Walls*, 274-303. See, however, D. K. Benjamin & A. Tifrea, “Learning by Dying: Combat Performance in the Age of Sail,” *JEH* 67.4 (2007), 968-1000, esp. 991.

<sup>34</sup>E.g., Sex. Iulius Severus during Bar Kochba revolt (Dio 69. 13. 2). Cf. G. Alöldy, “Consuls and Consulars under the Antonines; prosopography and history,” *AncSoc* 7 (1976), 263-299; Dobson, “Wartime or Peacetime Army?”, 123.

<sup>35</sup>Birley, *Locus virtutibus patefactus?: zum Beförderungssystem in der Hohen Kaiserzeit* (Opladen, 1992), passim, esp. 8-15; “Senators as Generals,” 116-117.



the early or later imperial period, and what criteria did exist were likely hard to enforce.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the experience or skills that some men acquired before reaching the senior military offices, the reality remains that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the Roman army ever developed a system of promotion or training for its equestrian and senatorial officers. Although commanders could consult military treatises and acquire advice from more experienced lower officers, there was “no formal process for educating officers in ordnance, tactics, and strategy, and no systematic means for testing the quality of aspirants to top commands.”<sup>37</sup> What is more, the limited tenure of a legionary command and the high number of men who occupied the rank prevented the Roman military from developing an experienced pool of high-ranking officers, such as the “Royal Companions” (ἑταῖροι) of Macedonian kings.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, the absence of such an institution during the Principate was likely intentional. Emperors by no means wished to develop a corps of experienced, expert commanding officers comprising equestrian or senatorial men, since such officers could become too popular or powerful and thereby threaten the authority and position of the emperor.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, while some Roman aristocrats of the Principate did have a “military career” of sorts, most were, in all but the strictest sense of the term, amateurs in

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<sup>36</sup>Eck, “Professionalität als Element der politisch-administrativen und militärischen Führung. Ein Vergleich zwischen der Hohen Kaiserzeit und dem 4. Jahrhundert n.Chr.” in P. Eich et al. *Der Wiederkehrende Leviathan: Staatlichkeit und Staatswerdung in Spätantike und Früher Neuzeit* (Heidelberg, 2011), 97-114.

<sup>37</sup>Campbell, “Teach Yourself to Be a General,” *JRS* 77 (1987), 22. Cf. 14-18, 23. Authors of surviving military treatises include Onasander, Julius Africanus Frontinus, Aelian, Arrian, Polyaeus, Hyginus, and Vegetius.

<sup>38</sup>Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 122. Cf. Campbell, “Who Were the *Viri Militares*?”, 22-27; Alföldy, “Das Heer in der Sozialstruktur,” 336-337.

<sup>39</sup>A perception most common in Tacitus: *Agric.* 39; *Ann.* 2. 5; 11. 19). Cf. Smith, *Service in the Post Marian Army*, 73; Birley, *Locus virtutibus patefactus*, 9; Campbell, “Teach Yourself,” 27; Stoll, “Offizier und Gentleman,” 150: „Die Monarchie hatte im Grunde vielleicht auch gar kein Interesse an einem reinen Berufsoffizierskorps....“

respect to their criteria for promotion, experience, length of their service, and identity as a distinct group.

The higher ranks of the legions, therefore, were defined primarily according to social status and comprised men of generally limited military experience. That the Roman army had no training or standardized career structure for its higher ranks does not mean, however, that it had no corps of officers. The lack of any defined high command necessarily placed a greater burden on the skills and experience of the legions' middle-ranking officers. As early as the middle Republic, centurions such as the legendary Sp. Ligustinus were choosing to make the army not only their career, but also their chief means of self-identification.<sup>40</sup> Tacitus later tended describe such individuals as “military men” (*virī militares*), and he applied this title less to senators like Corbulo than to those centurions who had risen to the rank of *primuspilus*.<sup>41</sup> Unlike legates and tribunes, moreover, comparatively regular criteria and avenues of promotion developed for centurions. What skills or knowledge that they could not gain by an education through a military academy, many were nonetheless obliged to gain instead through decades of daily practice.<sup>42</sup>

#### **4.4 The Centurionate as a Corps of Officers**

##### **4.4.1 Careers and Promotion**

Establishing the existence and development of a Roman military career structure for the more junior ranks of the Roman legions during the Republic and Principate has

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<sup>40</sup>Liv. 42. 34.

<sup>41</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 4. 42. 2; 15. 10. 1, 67. 3; *Hist.* 3. 73. 2. Cf. Birley, *Locus virtutibus patefactus*, 11.

<sup>42</sup>On importance of experience in improving combat performance and officership, see Benjamin & Tifrea, “Learning by Dying,” 975.

occupied scholars of the Roman military since the nineteenth century. There are no extant diaries of Roman soldiers, and no literary or epigraphic evidence has revealed the existence of a single, mandated or strictly-defined set of standards for promotion and transfer within the legions. Despite the notoriety of the Roman army's record-keeping in administrative accounts and rosters, moreover, details actually appear to have been rather flexible or inconsistent, depending on the period and location.<sup>43</sup> In attempting to build schemes for Roman military careers, therefore, scholars have been obliged to compile epigraphic evidence from broad geographic and chronological sources that detail individual careers.<sup>44</sup> This in itself is potentially a problem, since different legions across the empire might have varied in their organization and promotion practices. As James has argued, there was arguably no single, monolithic "Roman army," but rather many *armies*.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the caution needed for drawing conclusions from such a broad spectrum of evidence, it should also be remembered that soldiers and officers might choose to omit aspects of their careers in commemorative inscriptions, making it even more difficult to discern how they rose to their position.<sup>46</sup> As we shall see, the centurionate presents a particular challenge because of the variety in centurions' backgrounds and careers, especially during the Principate.

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<sup>43</sup>Evidence on diligent record-keeping in Veg. *Mil.* 2. 19 and Ulpian, *Dig.* 39. 1. 42 is supported by Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 53. See, however, Phang, "Military Documents, Languages, and Literacy" in *Companion to the Roman Army*, 286-305.

<sup>44</sup>Prominent works in this vein include Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, and articles in E. Birley, *The Roman Army: Papers, 1929-1986* (1988); M. P. Speidel *Roman Army Studies* (1984); D. J. Breeze & B. Dobson, *Roman Officers and Frontiers* (1993); M. A. Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit* (2009). On centurions in particular, see Dobson, *Die Primipilares*; Summerly, "Studies in the Legionary Centurionate"; Richier, *Centuriones ad Rhenum*.

<sup>45</sup>James, "Writing the Legions," 38-39.

<sup>46</sup>Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 184; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 247. See also above, Chapter Two, n. 118.

During the mid-late Republic, centurions were not appointed as permanent officers, but were chosen together with their soldiers for Rome's army through the annual levy (*dilectus*). While the exact workings of this process are obscure to us, ancient literary sources suggest that the military tribunes had assigned soldiers according to their four classes of age and wealth (*velites, hastati, principes, triarii*). The latter three classes each elected twenty centurions, each pair of whom led maniples of 60 to 120 men, while the most prestigious of all centurions, the *primuspilus*, joined the commander's body of advisors (*officium*).<sup>47</sup>

Military experience and a reputation for personal bravery are cited by ancient authors as the primary factors in the selection of centurions in the Republican period.<sup>48</sup> While Dionysius attributes the origin of the *dilectus* all the way back to Rome's monarchy, his depiction of centurions, like those of Livy, often reflects his own time during the first century BCE.<sup>49</sup> Despite Livy's record of the complaints by centurions for being recruited into new campaigns without recognition of their prior position, there is no evidence to suggest that any standard or coherent system of promotion for centurions existed in the Republican army. Even for those centurions during this period who volunteered for additional campaigns, there was no guarantee that they would occupy the same rank as before.<sup>50</sup> It was only during the initial stages of the Principate, as part of the

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<sup>47</sup>Dion. Hal. 9. 39; Polyb. 6. 19. 1 – 24; Cf. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 33-35.

<sup>48</sup>See above, Chapter Two.

<sup>49</sup>Dion. Hal. 4. 17. 4; Liv. 42. 34. Cf. Polyb. 6. 24. 1-2; Caes. *Afr.* 45.

<sup>50</sup>Despite the centurions' complaints, Livy states that the consuls conducted the *dilectus* "with much more care than at other times" (*multo intentiore quam alias cura habebant*). See above, n. 11. Cf. Patterson "Military Organization and Social Change" in J. Rich & G. Shipley eds., *War and Society in the Roman World* (London, 1993), 99.

general reforms of the army under Augustus, that more consistent patterns of promotion to the centurionate seem to have developed.

There appear to have been many criteria for entry into the centurionate during the Principate. As discussed previously in Chapter Two, promotion for martial exploits and general acts of bravery remained an important factor. Ancient authors record many soldiers promoted to the centurionate for courage in combat (*ob virtutem*), while centurions themselves recorded their promotion according to brave exploits (*ex fortia*).<sup>51</sup> When Germanicus was compelled to revise the list of his legions' centurions in the aftermath of the Rhine mutiny in CE 14, the number of a centurion's military campaigns and decorations was made an important criterion for him to remain in service.<sup>52</sup>

There is abundant evidence, however, that some men became centurions through social connections. As early as the late Republic, Cicero mentions the centurionate being put up for sale by Roman commanders.<sup>53</sup> While Cicero depicted such promotions as either shameful or reflective of darker times, the practice hardly seems uncommon, particularly during the Principate. Pliny is quite casual in describing how he secured a position in the centurionate for a friend, Metilius Crispus, although he remains vague in how he did so. There is no evidence that Crispus had prior military experience.<sup>54</sup> Epigraphic sources suggests that many centurions were recruited directly from civilian life (*ex paganus*). One such centurion was directly appointed to the centurionate at only

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<sup>51</sup>See above, Chapter Two, 68-73.

<sup>52</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 44.

<sup>53</sup>Cic. *Pro Lege Man.* 37; *in Pis.* 87.

<sup>54</sup>Plin. *Ep.* 6. 25. 2. See also example of L. Decius Longinus (Notizie degli Scavi 1913, 22) and C. Publilius Semptimus in Birley, "Promotions and transfers in the Roman Army II: The Centurionate" *Carnuntum Jahrbuch* 7 (1963-64), no. 29. Cf. Gilliver, "The Augustan Reform," 191.

eighteen years of age.<sup>55</sup> Obviously, he had not acquired much (if any) training and experience. Former magistrates of local city councils (*ordines decurionum*) and men of equestrian rank who joined the centurionate (*ex equite Romano*) are especially common among these centurions who are directly promoted from civilian positions.<sup>56</sup> Patronage and social connections, therefore, do not appear to have been viewed as an illegitimate way to secure a position in the centurionate.<sup>57</sup>

That said, epigraphic evidence clearly suggests that the majority of centurions were promoted by rising through various ranks below the centurionate in the legions and other military branches.<sup>58</sup> First among these was the rank of *immunis*. These soldiers were not offered higher pay, and the position did not technically entail a promotion, but they were privileged because the rank exempted soldiers from heavier fatigues (*munera graviora*).<sup>59</sup> After serving as an *immunis*, a soldier then might join the rank of *principales*. Perhaps representing a closer parallel in both status and duties to modern NCOs, these subaltern officers received increased pay and had specific administrative and combat duties. Most prestigious and well understood today are the standard-bearer

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<sup>55</sup>*CIL* III 1480; *ILS* 2654.

<sup>56</sup>*ILS* 2654-56; Dio 52. 25. 7; Juv. 14. 193-9; Suet. *De Gram.* 24; *HA Pert.* 1. 4-5; *ILS* 2656. Cf. Campbell *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 103-104; Dobson, "Legionary Centurion or Equestrian Officer? A Comparison of Pay and Prospects" in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 186-200; Alföldy, "Das Heer in der Sozialstruktur," 37. On direct appointment to auxiliary centurion from civilian (*ex pagano*), see J. F. Gilliam, "*Paganus* in B.G.U., 696," *AJP* 73. 1 (1952), 65-68.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Suet. *De Gram.* 24; *HA, Vit. Pert.* 1. 4-5. See also examples in Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 31; Dobson and Breeze, "The Rome Cohorts and the Legionary Centurionate" in *Roman Officers*, 103-104; Dobson, "The Roman Army: Wartime or Peacetime Army?", *Ibid.*, 125-126; Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 87.

<sup>58</sup>For a general overview of the path to the centurionate, see Breeze, "Organization and Career Structure" 11-56, and Maxfield's useful diagram in *Military Decorations*, 26-27. See also Speidel, "The Tribunes' Choice in the promotion of Centurions," *ZPE* 100 (1994), 469-470.

<sup>59</sup>See list of *immunes* in Paternus, *Dig.* 50. 6. 7. Each legion had roughly 620 of such men. Cf. Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 45-47; Watson, *Roman Soldier*, 75-86; M. A. Speidel, "Specialisation and Promotion in the Roman Imperial Army" in *Heer und Herrschaft*, 440-444. For Roman army fatigues, see Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 33-68.

(*signifer*) and eagle-bearer (*aquilifer*). Other ranks, however, whose exact functions are unclear, include “staff orderly” (*beneficiarius*), scout (*speculator*), officer of the watchword (*tesserarius*), and a “senior administrative clerk” (*cornicularius*).<sup>60</sup> Highest in rank below the centurionate was the centurion’s own deputy and second in command of his *centuria*, the *optio*. Achieving this rank seems to have marked a soldier for promotion to the next available vacancy in the centurionate.<sup>61</sup>

While the majority of centurions rose through legionary ranks, additional military avenues were available. Some men were promoted directly to the centurionate from the legionary *auxilia*, as well as the *vigiles*, urban cohorts, and the Praetorian Guard.<sup>62</sup> Promotion to the legionary centurionate sometimes also involved temporary transfer to other units. One could, for example, serve as an officer in the *auxilia* (e.g., decurion) before transfer back to the legions and promotion to the centurionate.<sup>63</sup>

The more clerical duties of the centurionate, including requisitioning supplies, assigning duties and fatigues, correspondence between outposts, and approving transfers ensured that literacy must have been an important criterion for promotion.<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup>They were roughly 480 *principales* in each legion, who were given between one-and-a-half (*sesquiplicarius*) to two times (*duplicarius*) normal pay. See Breeze, “Pay Grades and Ranks below the Centurionate” in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 61-63. On *beneficarii*, see below, Chapter Six, 235.

<sup>61</sup>The position directly before centurion was often referred to as *optio ad spem ordinis*. See Breeze, “Pay Grades,” 61; Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, 85.

<sup>62</sup>From the *auxilia*: *CIL* VIII 2354; *ILS* 2544. *Vigiles* and Praetorian Guard: Campbell, *RA* nos. 89-91. Sixteen years service in the Guard could grant one promotion to the legionary centurionate. Cf. Dobson, “The Significance of the Centurion,” 154-158; H. G. Pflaum, *Les Carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le haut-empire romain*, Vols. 1-4 (Paris, 1960-61), nos. 32, 36, 50.

<sup>63</sup>*CIL* VIII 2354. Cf. P. Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (London, 2008), 138.

<sup>64</sup>See *ILS* 2658; *CIL* IV 3340; *BGU* 423 (Campbell, *Roman Army* no. 10); *P.Mich.* VIII 466 (*Roman Army* no. 36). Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 179, estimates that, on average, a man with good conduct and literacy could expect to reach the centurionate in 15-20 years of enlisted service. Cf. Gilliver, “The Augustan Reform,” 191; J. N. Adams, “The Poets of Bu Njem: Language, Culture, and the Centurionate,” *JRS* 89 (1999), 126.

evidence suggests, indeed, that many centurions, particularly in the African and the eastern provinces, seem able to write in both Latin and Greek.<sup>65</sup> Their duties in organizing the construction of camps and other physical structures, moreover, also called for some knowledge in a variety of rudimentary technical skills in engineering.<sup>66</sup> This was especially true for anyone hoping to become camp prefect (*praefectus castrorum/legionis*). As the legions took on more constabulary functions, therefore, a general goal seems to have been to provide most prospective centurions with training in *both* military and administrative tasks.<sup>67</sup>

There appear to have been several levels of promotion within the centurionate itself. By the period of Caesar at the latest, it was common for legions to be organized into cohorts rather than maniples, and by the Flavian period, the legion assumed the form it would more or less maintain for two centuries.<sup>68</sup> Legions had a nominal strength of 4500-5000 soldiers, divided into ten cohorts. The tenth to the second cohorts comprised six *centuriae*, each nominally comprising eighty soldiers and commanded by a centurion. The centurions in each of these cohorts were given symbols and titles according to their position in the line: *hastatus posterior, hastatus prior, princeps posterior, princeps prior,*

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<sup>65</sup>R. Rebuffat, "L'armée romaine à Gholiaia" in *Kaiser, Heer, und Gesellschaft*, 42; M. A. Speidel, "Das römische Heer als Kulturträger" in *Heer und Herrschaft*, 532. Phang, "Military Documents," 301, claims: "Centurions and clerks represent a Latin-literate elite."

<sup>66</sup>On camps, see below, Chapter Five, 184-191.

<sup>67</sup>Breeze "Organization and Career Structure," 270; Speidel, "Specialisation," 448.

<sup>68</sup>For general discussion on legionary organization, see Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 1-121; M. P. Speidel, *The Framework of an Imperial Legion* (Cardiff, 1992), passim; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 33-35, 64-65; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 222-231. See also references in Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 13, n. 3. For complications in determining this shift, cf. Wheeler, "Battles and Frontiers," 648-649.



*pilus posterior*, and *pilus prior*.<sup>69</sup> The first cohort of a Roman legion, however, seems to have been larger, with a strength of 800 soldiers divided among only five *centuriae*. Its centurions, the *primi ordines*, were the most prestigious in the legion, and they received double the pay of the other centurions.<sup>70</sup>

The most senior member of the *primi ordines* was the *primuspilus*. Epigraphic evidence suggests that this was only a one-year appointment, although it could be held more than once.<sup>71</sup> In addition to leading their *centuria* in the first cohort, they had several responsibilities in provisioning the legion and supervising training.<sup>72</sup> It was an extremely prestigious rank, since it offered even greater pay (roughly sixty times that of a legionary) and held the honour of being strongly associated with the legion's *aquila*. Perhaps most importantly to a soldier who had risen through the ranks, the position guaranteed enrolment into the equestrian class upon completion of service.<sup>73</sup> Because of the opportunity to rise in social class, the title of *primuspilus* itself was special. While it could not be inherited, it was nonetheless commonly referenced when honouring sons,

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<sup>69</sup>Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 63-66. Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 13-14. For associated symbols, see M. P. Speidel, "The Centurion's Titles," *Epigraphische Studien* XIII, (Köln, 1983), 43-61; J. C. Mann, "Legionary Centurial Symbols," *ZPE* 115 (1997), 295-298.

<sup>70</sup>Based on camp plans at Inchtuthil, Novaesium, and Caerleon, the list of *optiones* from Lambaesis under Severus (*CIL* VIII 18072), and references in Pseud. Hyg. *Mil. Castr.* 3. 4; Caes. *BC* 3. 91; Veg. *Mil.* 2. 7-8. See Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 174-179; Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 114. For doubts, see Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 14, . n. 7. For debate as to whether the *primi ordines* also comprised the *pilus prior* of the other cohorts, see T. Sarnowski, "Primi ordines et centuriones legionis I Italicae und eine Dedikation an Septimius Severus aus Novae in Niedermoesien," *ZPE* 95 (1993), 205-219; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 15; Richier, *Centuriones*, 468-472. For pay, see data collected in D. Rathbone, "Warfare and the State" *CHGRW* II 161.

<sup>71</sup>See Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 112-117; Dobson, "The Primipilares," 143.

<sup>72</sup>T. K. Kissel, *Untersuchungen zur Logistik des römischen Heeres in den Provinzen des Griechischen Ostens – 27 v. Chr.-235 n. Chr.* (St. Katharinen, 1995), 161-166; Roth, *Logistics*, 274.

<sup>73</sup>For pay and relationship with the *aquila*, see below, Chapter Five, 175, 200-201. On social origins, see Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, 74-78. Promotion to equestrian class: *CIL* XI 5992; *ILS* 2226; Cic. *Phil.* 1. 19; Caes. *BC* 3. 104.

sons-in-law, and other descendants. Like the title of *consularis*, it defined the centurion permanently, regardless of a change in wealth or transition to a civilian career.<sup>74</sup>

By the reign on Claudius, former *primipili* (*primipilares*)<sup>75</sup> could also undertake a second career of sorts. Many served immediately after as the *praefectus castrorum*. Our evidence for this officer's duties is limited, but it appears that he was third in rank to the legate and *laticlavus* tribune during the Principate. According to Vegetius, he oversaw camp construction and maintenance, sanitation, artillery, and other logistic tasks.<sup>76</sup> Their proven loyalty and long service also made *primipilares* only candidates for important military positions at Rome, such as the tribunes and prefects of the Praetorian Guard, *vigiles*, and urban cohorts. After this, they could become *primuspilus* for the second time (*primuspilus bis* or *iterum*). Those few who reached this rank were favoured for some of the most important (and desirable) equestrian appointments, such as the imperial procuratorships, and the prefecture of Egypt.<sup>77</sup>

The system of promotion within the levels of the centurionate is unclear. Following Vegetius (*Mil.* 2. 21), earlier scholars argued for a schematic system of promotion, whereby one began as a centurion in the tenth cohort, and would be promoted through each consecutive cohort until reaching the *primi ordines*.<sup>78</sup> Doubts have been

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<sup>74</sup>*CIL* XIII 6752; *RIB* 1713; *IGRR* III 472, 474; IV 617. See Dobson, "The *Primipilares*," 140-146.

<sup>75</sup>The title *primipilaris* was introduced in the reign of Augustus. On this rank and prospects, see Dobson, "The *Primipilares*," 139-152; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 34-35; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 176-177.

<sup>76</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 2. 10. Tacitus (*Ann.* 12. 38) records them directing the construction of forts. Earliest attested example is Vespasian Pollo, maternal grandfather of Vespasian (Suet. *Vesp.* 1. 3). Cf. Dobson, "The Significance of the Centurion and 'Primipilaris,'" 146-148; Roth, *Logistics*, 272.

<sup>77</sup>Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 118-119; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 34-36. Examples of *primuspilus bis* in Dobson, "The Significance of the Centurion," 171-172. About 30-32% of procurators in empire were former centurions. See data in H. G. Pflaum, *Les Procurateurs Équestres* (Paris, 1950), 179-188. Egypt: Brunt, "The Administrators of Roman Egypt" in *Roman Imperial Themes*, 236;

<sup>78</sup>*Die Rangordnung*, 93-94; Parker, *The Roman Legions*, 34.

raised that such a schematic system of promotion existed, however, since there is no evidence for differentiation between the centurions of the tenth and second cohorts in pay or status.<sup>79</sup> It is more likely that the centurions of the second to tenth cohorts were equal in rank, yet differed in seniority. Promotion within the centurionate, then, amounted primarily to reaching the *primi ordines* and, finally, the *primuspilus*.<sup>80</sup>

Courage in combat seems to have remained important for promotion within the centurionate, and commanders are known to have promoted centurions to *primuspilus* for specific martial exploits during both the late Republic and Principate.<sup>81</sup> Opportunities for many centurions to demonstrate their bravery in combat to their superiors, however, must have been limited by the declining frequency of major military campaigns during the Principate.

Epigraphic evidence indicates that an important criterion for promotion to *primuspilus* was seniority through length of service. Unlike the equestrian and senatorial officers above them, as well as the *milites* below, there was no limit to the centurions' term of service in the Principate. A *miles* enlisted in the ranks for up to twenty-five years of service before honourable discharge (*honesta missio*). According to the author of the *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian felt compelled to issue an edict concerning the length of service in the legions:

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<sup>79</sup>Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army* 114; Richier, *Centuriones*, 476-498

<sup>80</sup>T. Wegeleben, *Die Rangordnung der römischen Centurionen*, PhD diss. (Berlin, 1913), passim; Birley, "Promotions and Transfers in the Roman Army II: The Centurionate" in *The Roman Army*, 206-220, esp. 206; Dobson, "Legionary Centurion or Equestrian Officer?", 190 with n.25, and 194-196; Speidel, "Roman Army Pay Scales" in *Heer und Herrschaft*, 372.

<sup>81</sup>Liv. 42. 34; Caes. *BG* 6. 40; *BC* 1. 46; 3. 53; Jos. *BJ*. 6. 135; 6. 53; 7. 15. Exemplary careers include those of C. Velius Rufus (*ILS* 9200; *AE* 1903, 368), L. Aconius Statura (*CIL* XI 5992), and T. Aurelius Flavinus (*ILS* 7178; *AE* 1961, 208). See above, Chapter Two, 68-73.

Furthermore, with regard to the length of military service, he issued an order that no one should violate ancient usage by being in service at an earlier age than his strength warranted, or at a more advanced one than common humanity permitted.<sup>82</sup>

In most cases of centurions receiving *honesta missio*, however, they do not mention any fixed term of service.<sup>83</sup> Many were definitely not discharged after twenty-five years, but served well beyond that duration, some even into their sixties, seventies, and even eighties.<sup>84</sup> The youngest attested *primuspilus* was already forty-nine, while the oldest was seventy-eight.<sup>85</sup> Juvenal jokes about sexagenarians still waiting for promotion to the position.<sup>86</sup>

While centurions are counted among many cities' magistrates and benefactors, as time went on, there seem to have been fewer than might be expected for men of their status and potential wealth on retirement. We can speculate that this is at least partly because the length of service for centurions might have left some too elderly to embark on much of a municipal career. Some centurions, indeed, apparently did not retire at all.<sup>87</sup> For *milites*, death during military service has been estimated at roughly fifty

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<sup>82</sup>*HA, Hadr. 10. 8: De militum etiam aetatibus iudicabat, ne quis aut minor quam virtus posceret, aut maior quam pateretur humanitas, in castris contra morem veterem versaretur, agebatque, ut sibi semper noti essent, et eorum numerus sciretur.*

<sup>83</sup>*CIL II 4514; III 6234; 12411; VIII 2354; 7080; AE 1924, 85.*

<sup>84</sup>Seventy years old: T. Flavius Virilis (*CIL VIII 2877; ILS 2653*). Eighty: Petronius Fortunatus (*CIL VIII 217; ILS 2658*). Cf. Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 32; Birley, "Promotions and Transfers" in *Roman Army Papers*, 219-220.

<sup>85</sup>*ILS 2461 and CIL III 11301*. On duration of centurionate and ages, see esp. Richier, *Centuriones*, 512-514; Birley, "Promotions and Transfers," 219-220.

<sup>86</sup>Juv. 14. 197-198: *ut locupletem aquilam tibi sexagesimus annus / adferat*. See also Suet. *Cal.* 44. 1, in which Caligula gives forced pensions to many old *primipili* for being "too old and infirm." Cf. Dobson, "The *Primipilares*," 141-145.

<sup>87</sup>Dobson, "The Centurionate and Social Mobility," 104-105.

percent.<sup>88</sup> That centurions served longer than the standard *missio*, however, and were not only exposed to the same conditions as *milites* but in battle could suffer casualties disproportionate to their number, suggests that death rather than discharge terminated the military service for many. More than any officer, centurions were wedded to the army – the centurionate was quite literally a lifetime career.

The *primipilate*, therefore, can be interpreted somewhat as the “cherry on the cake” – the reward for long devotion and service to the legions. The average age of those who reached this prestigious position has two implications for promotion in the centurionate. First, the *primipili* during the Principate were potentially very different from those of the Republic, such men such as Baculus and Crastinus, whom Caesar describes fighting with such vigor.<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that all *primipili* during the Principate were necessarily too old to fight properly, since these officers are still attested fighting and dying in battle.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, while the thought of men of such age actively fighting in the modern military would seem impossible, older commanders, officers, and soldiers who participated actively in combat are commonly attested in the Greek world as well, and, in some cases, such men even formed elite units.<sup>91</sup> Still, we may guess that older *primipili* were likely more common in quieter areas of the empire, and the prestige of the rank during the Principate appears to have been more closely associated with

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<sup>88</sup>A. R. Burn, “*Hic Breve Vivitur*: A Study of the Expectation of Life in the Roman Empire,” *Past and Present* 4 (1953), 10. See further study in Dobson, “The Centurionate and Social Mobility,” 102, n. 2.

<sup>89</sup>See above, Chapter Two, 69, 81-82.

<sup>90</sup>E.g., Tac. *Ann.* 13. 36. 5; *Hist.* 3. 17, 22

<sup>91</sup>E.g., Philopoemon (Plut. *Phil.* 18. 1), Agesilaos (Xen. *Ages.* 2. 28). For elite units, see Diod. 19. 41. 2 and Plut. *Eum.* 16. 4 on Alexander’s phalanx of “Silver Shields,” who served at least into their seventies. On this phenomenon generally, see Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 89-95.

experience and long service than with the martial exploits of their Republican predecessors.<sup>92</sup>

Second, that seniority played a critical role in the ascension to the highest ranks of the centurionate suggests also that the kind of patronage that accelerated the military careers of many aristocrats through the higher ranks was less important to promotion through centurionate. Younger, direct appointees to the post from among *equites* and local community magistrates were common, but these men hardly fit the image of the high-ranking centurions who had served in one fashion or another for decades. The most prestigious ranks of the centurionate seem not to have been reserved for fast-tracking equestrians, but for those men who had advanced through the ranks and devoted most of their lives in loyal military service to the emperor.

Alföldy has argued that one's rank in legionary hierarchy, expressed through duties, privileges, and corporate characteristics, corresponded with one's position in the social hierarchy of the civilian society.<sup>93</sup> This seems to have been only true to a point, however, since the centurionate does not fit well with this scheme because of both its varied composition and criteria for promotion. Unlike the higher officers and lower legionary ranks, whose membership was strictly defined by social status, the centurionate included men of both equestrian and non-equestrian status. It comprised a variety of officers with different skills and social backgrounds, some of whom had risen through the lower ranks because of their martial prowess, technical skills, or seniority, while others through social connections. Although evidence suggests that there was not a single, predetermined path of promotion either to the rank or within it, the greater emphasis on

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<sup>92</sup>On age of *primipili*, see Dobson, "The *primipilares*," 145-146.

<sup>93</sup>"Das Heer in der Sozialstruktur," 28, 37-39.

experience and seniority than social status likely ensured that the majority of regular centurions had served for well over a decade in various ranks and functions, with many senior centurions remaining in military service for most of their lives.<sup>94</sup> The potential experience and expertise to be found in this group, moreover, were crucial to Roman legionary command structure.

#### 4.4.2 Military Expertise

Almost any definition of officership requires that its members possess a relatively high level of expertise in some field. For centurions of the Republican period, this expertise lay primarily in the experience acquired through marching and fighting in formation that they had gained through service in the rank and file. The increasing diversity in the legions' activities and in its soldiers' careers during the Principate, however, illustrates how many centurions were now assuming logistic and clerical responsibilities that required expertise in areas beyond hand-to-hand combat. While the broad array of the centurion's more "administrative" responsibilities during the Principate will be addressed in the sixth chapter, their increasingly prominent role in military leadership is relevant here to evaluating their status as a corps of officers.

Despite Livy's idealized portrayal of grizzled, veteran centurions such as Ligustinus, many centurions during the middle Republic were often still the same age or even younger than the tribunes and consuls who commanded their legions. During the later Republic, however, this trend reversed, and centurions' experience and continuity of

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<sup>94</sup>Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 179. Dobson, "The Significance of the Centurion and 'Primipilaris' in the Roman Army and Administration" in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 178-180, estimates that ninety posts as legionary centurion and seven as Praetorian became available each year. Of these, Dobson suggests that roughly seventy were former *milites*, seventeen were Praetorians, and ten were commissioned.

service became vital as increasingly younger and less experienced tribunes served in the military for no longer than three years.<sup>95</sup> A vivid example of this discrepancy is recorded by Pliny the Elder. In 102 BCE, the soldiers in a legion under the command of Q. Lutatius Catulus were in a panic and cut off from retreat by the marauding Cimbri. Cn. Petreius Atinas, the legion's *primuspilus*, was forced to kill the tribune whose indecision was endangering the legion, and he then single-handedly led it to safety. Rather than being punished by Catulus for killing his superior officer, Atinas was awarded the rarest decoration of the Roman military at the time: the *corona graminea*. According to Pliny the Elder, this was the only recorded occurrence in which the decoration was awarded to an officer below the tribunate.<sup>96</sup>

The story of Atinas' "fragging" of his commanding officer is extraordinary in itself, but it also highlights what was becoming an increasingly common disparity in experience between many tribunes and centurions during the late Republic.<sup>97</sup> By early the Principate, the average age of new recruits to the legions was now between eighteen to twenty-two years, and most men promoted through the ranks to the centurionate had already served between thirteen to twenty years. Promotion to the centurionate beyond this age appears to have been rare.<sup>98</sup>

Arguably the most valuable area of military expertise for centurions was their ability to deploy and maintain the cohesion of their units in battle. While some

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<sup>95</sup>Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 106; K. Gilliver, "The Augustan Reform and the Imperial Army" in *Companion to the Roman Army*, 191. For Caesar's own contrast between his centurions and tribunes, see *BG* 1. 39-41.

<sup>96</sup>Plin. *NH* 22. 6.

<sup>97</sup>Caes. *BG* 1. 39-41 provides a commonly cited example.

<sup>98</sup>Richier, *Centuriones*, 512-514; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 103; Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, 179. See esp. Breeze, "The Organization of the Career Structure of the *Immunes* and *Principales* of the Roman Army" in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, 39.



commanders are portrayed as fighting with their soldiers, most placed themselves behind the line in order to change orders in the course of battle and direct reserves as needed.<sup>99</sup> Roman military treatises stress that legions had divisions, each with their names, numbers, and officers, primarily so that they might receive *new* orders quickly. The legionary commander was to give every order or countersign through his officers rather than by himself. To do otherwise, Arrian asserts, demonstrates a commander's inexperience.<sup>100</sup> Roman commanders usually gave orders through music (horns), messengers (by horse), and visual gestures (fires and standards).<sup>101</sup> Commanders could also convey orders vocally, if close enough to their soldiers.<sup>102</sup> In any case, legionary officers below the commander were clearly essential to communicating and executing these orders.

Just how the manipular system functioned in Republican warfare is confusing. While centurions commanded the two halves of each manipule, it is unclear if any one officer had general command over each entire manipule.<sup>103</sup> Tactically, the maniples were designed primarily for a straightforward advance and crash into enemy lines in an open space. The cohort system, however, which was fully developed by the time of Caesar and appears to have become dominant during the Principate, was far more flexible and organized, and could deal with smaller groups of concentrated enemies in more difficult

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<sup>99</sup>Fighting with soldiers: see above, Chapter Two, 78-80. From behind: Plut. *Brut.* 43; Caes. *BG* 7. 85; *BC* 3. 93-94; Tac. *Agric.* 35-37; Dio 56. 13. Cf. Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 150-154.

<sup>100</sup>Arr. *Techne Taktike* 5; Onas. *Strat.* 25. 1.

<sup>101</sup>Plut. *Crass.* 25. 6; Veg. *Mil.* 3. 5; Onas. *Strat.* 25. 2-3; 26. 1; Cf. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, 49-50

<sup>102</sup>See Plut. *Mar.* 45; Caes. *BG* 2. 20-26; *Afr.* 16; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 65; *Hist.* 3. 24; Onas. *Strat.* 33. 6.

<sup>103</sup>Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 39-40, and Roth, *Logistics*, 261, suggest that tribunes may have performed this function, but Polybius, who describes the tribunes' duties at length, makes no mention of this. Cf. B. Isaac, "Hierarchy and Command Structure in the Roman Army" in *The Near East under Roman Rule: Selected Papers* (Leiden; New York; Köln, 1998), 389.

terrain.<sup>104</sup> It is in this system that centurions became essential not only in communicating but in executing tactics on the battlefield.

Legionary soldiers did not identify themselves in inscriptions by their cohort, however, and unlike other Roman military divisions, the cohort had no *genius* in military cult.<sup>105</sup> As Isaac has noted, moreover, if the cohort was primarily a tactical rather than administrative unit, then why, unlike the legion, *centuria*, auxiliary cohort and cavalry wing (*ala*), did it not have its own commanding officer? Despite the shift from maniple to cohort the centurions continued to be designated in manipular terms, that is, *hastati*, *principes*, and *pilani*.<sup>106</sup> Goldsworthy, among others, has attempted to solve this problem by positing the most senior centurion of each cohort (*pilus prior* or *primuspilus*) as its nominal commander.<sup>107</sup>

There is insufficient evidence, however, to conclude that the senior centurion led each cohort, that cohorts operated very independently on the battlefield, or that there was an intervening officer between the legate and centurions. In modern military terms, when deployed in cohorts, the legion had a regimental colonel and fifty-nine captains or company commanders, but no battalion commanders in between. Similarly, although lower-ranking *principales* like the *optio* helped the centurions in maintaining the line of advance, there is little to no sense of importance of officership below the centurion, such

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<sup>104</sup>M. J. V. Bell, "Tactical Reform in the Roman Republican Army," *Historia* 14. 4 (1965), 410-412; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 33-34.

<sup>105</sup>See "The Cult of the Genii in the Roman Army and a New Military Deity," *ANRW* ii. 16. 2, 1544. See also below, Chapter Five, 197-198.

<sup>106</sup>The term *pilani* became synonymous with the *triarii* by the second century BCE.

<sup>107</sup>Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 13-16, 131-133. Cf. Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 120; Breeze, "The Organization of the Legion: The First Cohort and the *Equites Legionales*," *JRS* 59 (1969), 55; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 98; Richier, *Centuriones*, 536.

as we might attach to a modern platoon or squad commander.<sup>108</sup> Rather than saying that the legion was an army of ten cohorts, therefore, we should say that “the legion was essentially a force consisting of sixty centuries, some of them of double size.”<sup>109</sup>

The *centuria* was smaller in scale than many modern military companies, but it was a subdivision generally common to ancient armies.<sup>110</sup> Asclepiodotus claims that a unit roughly of such number was the maximum size in which one could hear equally well commands coming from different directions.<sup>111</sup> The centurion thus commanded a unit whose size and deployment was designed at least in part to strengthen combat performance in a system of warfare that generally lacked sophisticated communication in the middle of combat.

The deployment of the Roman legion in either cohorts or maniples, therefore, appears to have placed most of the tactical responsibilities on the middle-ranking centurionate. While this does not necessarily mean that centurions exercised tactical independence over their *centuriae* and cohort in pitched battle, they assumed a great responsibility alone in bringing their soldiers to the point of battle and holding them there. Adjusting the rate of advance, direction, intervals, and formation of a company of men of 80-150 soldiers within a larger cohort required skill and experience, especially on uneven ground. The failure of one cohort to hold an enemy back allowed the opposing forces to breach the line, causing panic and disintegration. A failure of a *centuria* on the

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<sup>108</sup>Isaac, “Hierarchy and Command Structure,” 393-399; Gilliver, “The Augustan Reform,” 192.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>110</sup>E.g., in ancient China, such as in the Western Zhou, where units of one hundred were led by a “centurion” (*baifu zhang*). See Yates, “Early China,” 13-18. See also the classical Spartan army, which had a unit (πεντηκοστύς) led by a πεντηκοντήρ (Xen. *Lac.* 11. 4; Thuc. 5. 68. 3). Cf. J. F. Lazenby, *The Spartan Army* (Warminster, 1985), 5-11. Ptolemaic armies were divided into centuries led by a ἑκατόνταρχος: N. Sekunda, *Hellenistic Infantry Reform in the 160s BC* (Gdansk, 2006), 30-31.

<sup>111</sup>Asclep. *Tact.* 2. 9.

extreme flank to hold its position often led to the enemy rapidly rolling up the entire line.<sup>112</sup> While no legionary centurion attended a military academy, combat experience (whether in pitched battle or small-scale conflicts) was generally a quality that centurions needed to possess.

Tactical expertise also made centurions invaluable to legionary commanders as sources of military advice. Roman commanders had a military council (*consilium*) that they could summon at any time either to ask for advice or to convey orders.<sup>113</sup>

Centurions had long been important resources to these councils. In the legions of the middle Republic, the first centurion to be elected during the *dilectus* had the privilege of attending councils.<sup>114</sup> As early as 212 BCE, a centurion, Q. Naevius, was widely credited and apparently decorated for innovating tactics in fighting Campanians.<sup>115</sup> Commanders of the first century BCE onward often seconded *primipili* and other centurions to their *consilium*.<sup>116</sup> These officers could offer political as well as military advice. Cn. Calpurnius Piso was convinced by his centurions to seize the province of Syria illegally following Germanicus' death in CE 19. Vespasian, meanwhile, invited his most distinguished centurions to his council in CE 69 to determine his course of action in the coming civil wars.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Richier, *Centuriones*, 536-537; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 138-140, 176-182; Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle," 1-17. See, also E. Wheeler, "Firepower: Missile Weapons and the 'Face of Battle'" in E Dabrowa ed., *Roman Military Studies* (Kraków, 2001), 169-184. Cf. Menenius. *Dig.* 49. 16. 6. 3: *Qui in acie prior fugam fecit, spectantibus militibus propter exemplum capite puniendus est.*

<sup>113</sup>Onasander (*Strat.* 3. 1) calls this council the σύνοδος. Cf. Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 131-132.

<sup>114</sup>Polyb. 6. 24.

<sup>115</sup>Liv. 26. 4; Val. Max. 2. 3. 3; Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 7. 29.

<sup>116</sup>See, for example, Plut. *Sull.* 28. 5; Caes. *BG* 3. 5; 5. 28-30; Jos. *BJ* 6. 262; Tac. *Ann.* 2. 76; *Hist.* 3. 56; 4. 19; Arr. *Ect.* 22; Veg. *Mil.* 2. 21.

<sup>117</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 2. 76; *Hist.* 2. 81.

Centurions certainly seem to have had little hesitation in arguing with their superior officers or commander in these sessions. Caesar portrays a *consilium* held by the legates Lucius Aurunculeius Cotta and Quintus Titurius Sabinus over how to address the revolt of the Eburones under Ambiorix in 54 BCE. Cotta, the tribunes, and the *primi ordines* centurions all argued against the more senior Sabinus that they ought to remain fortified in camp. Sabinus fatally overruled them.<sup>118</sup> In describing the legion's subsequent ambush and annihilation, Caesar picks out two centurions by name:

Eventually, T. Balventius, who the year before had been *primuspilus*, a brave man and one of great authority, was wounded in both thighs with a javelin; Q. Lucanius, of the same rank, while fighting most valiantly, was killed while coming to his son's aid when he was surrounded by the enemy.<sup>119</sup>

The grim fate awaiting those who ignore centurions' advice is a motif in Tacitus. He portrays Vitellius as especially culpable. After the defeat of his legions by Primus Antonius at Cremona in CE 69, "singular bravery" was shown by Julius Agrestis, a centurion who volunteered to visit Antonius' camp in order to determine his strength. Vitellius was not happy with what he had to report:

Agrestis returned to Vitellius, and when Vitellius denied that what he reported was true, and even accused him of having been bribed, he replied "Since you have need of some greater proof, and I have no further use to you than by my life or death, I will give you proof that you can believe." Having thus departed, he confirmed what he said by a voluntary death.<sup>120</sup>

Ignoring Agrestis' advice, Vitellius led his meagre forces against Antonius "against the judgment of the most experienced among the centurions, who, had they been consulted,

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<sup>118</sup>Caes. *BG* 5. 28-31.

<sup>119</sup>*BG* 35: *Tum Tito Balventio, qui superiore anno primum pilum duxerat, viro forti et magnae auctoritatis, utrumque femur tragula traicitur; Quintus Lucanius, eiusdem ordinis, fortissime pugnans, dum circumvento filio subvenit, interficitur.*

<sup>120</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 3. 54: *Agrestis ad Vitellium remeavit abnuentique vera esse quae adferret, atque ultro corruptum arguenti 'quando quidem' inquit 'magno documento opus est, nec alius iam tibi aut vitae aut mortis meae usus, dabo cui credas.' atque ita digressus voluntaria morte dicta firmavit.*

would have told him the truth.”<sup>121</sup> Casperius, a centurion at the Roman fortress at Gorneae, was similarly ignored in CE 51 when advising against accepting peace with Rhadamistus, who had seized the throne of Armenia from Mithridates, an ally of Rome. According to Tacitus, the disregard for his advice led to the murder of Mithridates and the resulting power vacuum in Armenia.<sup>122</sup>

In addition to centurions being granted licence to express opinions independent of their superiors, they were often given independent military commands. Centurions had long been compelled to take charge of a military situation in the absence or death of their superiors. The earliest attested case occurred after the Roman defeat at the Baetis river in 211/212 BCE. With the death of the army’s two commanders, Cn. Cornelius Scipio and P. Cornelius Scipio, a *primuspilus*, L. Marcius Septimus, took charge of the remnants of the legions and stabilized a Roman front on the Ebro River until the arrival of Scipio Africanus the following year. He continued to lead an army under Scipio, and even forged a treaty with the defeated city of Gades on his own authority.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, after the destruction of Varus’ legions in CE 9, Caedicius, a centurion of the *primi ordines*, rallied the survivors under his command and prevented the Germanic tribes from besieging the survivors’ fortress until reinforcements could arrive with Tiberius.<sup>124</sup>

Centurions did not find themselves with command responsibilities only through emergencies, however, since it appears common for centurions to be formally granted commands of their own. Caesar had appointed his centurions to command individual

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<sup>121</sup>*Hist. 3. 56: peritissimis centurionum dissentientibus et, si consulerentur, vera dicturis.*

<sup>122</sup>*Ann. 12. 45-47.*

<sup>123</sup>*Cic. Balb. 34; Liv. 25. 37; 26. 2, 20, 37; 28. 14-35 passim; 32. 2.* Livy (25. 37) refers to Marcius only as an *eques* rather than a *primuspilus*. This impression seems confused, given Livy’s reference to his years of service and the low position of his birth (*quam pro fortuna in qua erat natus maioris*).

<sup>124</sup>*Frontin. Strat. 4. 7. 8.*

ships and naval squadrons in his maritime campaigns, both in Gaul and during the Civil Wars. This practice was formalized in the Imperial army to create the rank of *centurio classicus*.<sup>125</sup> Octavian, moreover, after his annexation of Africa in 42 BCE, placed a former centurion, C. Fuficius Fango, in charge of the province.<sup>126</sup>

The changing nature of Rome's military responsibilities during the Principate guaranteed many centurions the opportunity for extended independent military commands and special missions in which they were given tactical initiative.<sup>127</sup> In CE 22, for example, Junius Blaesus, the proconsul of Africa, split his legions into smaller units led by centurions who were ordered to hunt the insurgents of Tacfarinas. The aforementioned Casperius was likewise seconded to a garrison at the Roman stronghold at Gorneae during the Armenian crisis in CE 51. In this case, the centurion had a say in how to address a critical and immediate strategic situation.<sup>128</sup> *Primipili*, especially, exercised important military commands. Perhaps the best example is that of C. Velius Rufus. As a *primuspilus* in the Twelfth Legion Fulminata, he was put in command of a special detachment (*vexillatio*) formed from nine legions for Domitian's German campaign in CE 83. This was after he acted as the "army commander" (*dux exercitus*) in Africa, when he had been sent to crush Mauretanian resistance.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>*BG* 3. 14; *BC* 1. 57. *Classicus*: *ILS* 2231; *CIL* XVI 12, 14; Fink, *RMD* no. 204-205. Cf. D. B. Saddington, "Classes: The Evolution of the Roman Imperial Fleets" in *Companion to the Roman Army*, 211.

<sup>126</sup>Dio 48. 22. 1; App. *BC* 5. 3; Cic. Att. 14. 10. 2. Cf. Broughton, *MRR* II, 373.

<sup>127</sup>Richier, *Centuriones*, 539-545.

<sup>128</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 3. 74; Tac. *Ann.* 12. 45. Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 10. 27-28; Jos. *BJ.* 3. 59; 5. 43, 287-288.

<sup>129</sup>*AE* 1903, 368; *ILS* 9200; *I GLS* VI 2796. See also Tac. *Hist.* 1. 87; *CIL* VI 2589; II 6183; *ILS* 2287; 9193. On *primipili* in charge of military supply lines and harbours, see P. Kehne, "War and Peacetime Logistics: Supplying Imperial Armies in East and West" in *Companion*, 331.

By the Flavian period, moreover, the changing nature of campaigns, organization of enemies, and the desire to avoid uprooting and transferring whole legions had led the Roman army to rely increasingly on the use of *vexillationes*. These units varied in size and composition (including *auxilia*, *numeri*, and legionaries), could operate far from their parent unit, and were often placed under the command (*praepositus*) of centurions.<sup>130</sup> They were typically formed for both administrative and military operations. In the latter case, they were deployed for duties as varied as leading reinforcements to other legions, providing protection along lines of communication and garrisons, and surveillance.<sup>131</sup>

In discussing important qualities in military commanders, Onasander criticizes the hypocrisy of honouring soldiers for bravery regardless of their origins, yet picking commanders based on birth more than merit.<sup>132</sup> Some Emperors seem occasionally to have agreed with him, and we eventually find *primipili* given military commands of entire legions. Augustus' policy towards Egypt banned senators from occupying important political and military posts there. Instead of being commanded by legates and senatorial tribunes, therefore, the Egyptian legions were commanded by *primipilares*, who were second in power only to the prefect of Egypt (sometimes also *primipilares*).<sup>133</sup> By the beginning of the third century CE, such roles for *primipili* had become more

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<sup>130</sup> Southern, *The Roman Army*, 124. On sizes and functions of *vexillationes*, see Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 25-28; Campbell, *The Roman Army*, 78; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 197. Centurions sometimes commanded *vexillationes* with cavalry detachments. See Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, 25-30, 45. On the mixing and breaking of Roman military units, cf. M. C. Bishop, "Praesidium: Social, Military, and Logistical Aspects of the Roman Army's Provincial Distribution during the Early Principate" in *The Roman Army as a Community*, 111-118. For engineering tasks, see below, Chapter Six, 218-224.

<sup>131</sup> See evidence for centurions in charge of garrison at Gholiaia: *IRT* 918-919; *IRT* 920; *AE* 1979, 645; *MEFRA* 1982, p.911-19 = *LA* 1978-9, p.113-124; *AE* 991, 1620. Cf. R. Rebuffat, "L'armée romaine à Gholiaia" in *Kaiser, Heer, und Gesellschaft*, 227-259. See also evidence in appendix in E. Birley, "A Roman Altar from Old Kilpatrick" in *Roman Army Papers*, 79-83.

<sup>132</sup> Onas. *Strat.* 1. 22.

<sup>133</sup> Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 24. See above, n. 77 .



common. Known for his practical approach to the military, Septimius Severus, when forming three new legions early in his reign (I, II, and III Parthicae), drew his commanders from the *primipilares* rather than senatorial legates.<sup>134</sup>

According to Huntington, the education and attitudes required for officership are typically incompatible with the prolonged service of an enlisted soldier: the peculiar skill of the officer “is the management of violence not the act of violence itself.”<sup>135</sup> In Roman military culture, however, no such distinction was deemed necessary for the centurionate. From the Republic to Principate, centurions remained a crucial resource of military expertise, not only as individual combatants, but as officers who could give orders and maintain the cohesion of their unit in battle. The increasing use of smaller organizational units, mixed detachments, and garrisons during the Principate, moreover, required a large body of officers with a variety of either combat or leadership skills that only the centurionate could provide.

It must be remembered, however, that by the second century CE, as Augustus’ successors stabilized and consolidated the imperial frontiers, major campaigns became the exception rather than the norm. It is estimated that never more than half of the legions were ever involved in a full scale war.<sup>136</sup> This certainly gave potential centurions fewer opportunities to acquire operational or tactical expertise. Depending on the post, the duties and experiences of many centurions could often resemble those of a local bureaucrat more than a soldier. Such varied duties and levels of responsibility, moreover,

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<sup>134</sup>Dio 55. 24. 4. See Dobson “The *Primipilares*,” 142; Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 24; Smith, “Army Reforms,” 486-486. On increasing numbers of centurions occupying other commands, see A. R. Birley, “Commissioning of Equestrian Officers,” 11; Devijver, *The Equestrian Officers of the Roman Imperial Army*, 2 Vols. (Amsterdam, 1989-92), 335, n. 5.

<sup>135</sup>Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 13-18.

<sup>136</sup>Dobson, “The *Primipilares*,” 145.

pose the question as to whether or not the centurionate can be described as possessing a single, corporate identity. That the rank was distinct in status and duties from other legionary officers is clear, but were officers of such different backgrounds and engaged in such different tasks viewed as a single group?

#### 4.4.3 Corporate Identity

Martial, who seems to have counted several centurions among his circle of friends,<sup>137</sup> dedicates one of his epigrams to two *primipili*:

Here reposes Aquinas, reunited to his faithful Fabricius,  
who rejoices in having preceded him to the Elysian retreats.  
This double altar bears record that each was honoured with the rank of  
*primuspilus*; but that praise is of still greater worth which you read in this shorter  
inscription:  
“Both were united in the sacred bond of a well-spent life, and, what is rarely  
known to fame, were *amici*.”<sup>138</sup>

The inscription presents the idealized friendship (*amicitia*) expected by modern perceptions of the personal bonds between soldiers and esprit de corps. The term *amicitia* is especially common among Roman military inscriptions, and perhaps helped to generate a sense of military identity that transcended rank.<sup>139</sup> The term *frater* is similarly common to these military inscriptions. While this term can be taken in many senses (e.g., biological brothers, half-brothers, and heirs), it also often carried a sense of “friend” or

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<sup>137</sup>E.g., Aulus Pudens: Mart. *Epig.* 1. 31; 4. 29; 5. 48; 6. 58; 7. 11; 9. 81; 13. 69. See also 10. 26; 11. 3.

<sup>138</sup>*Epig.* 1. 93: *Fabricio iunctus fido requiescit Aquinus, / Qui prior Elysias gaudet adisse domos. / Ara duplex primi testatur munera pili; / Plus tamen est, titulo quod brevioris legis: / “Iunctus uterque sacro laudatae foedere vitae, Famaque quod raro novit, / amicus erat.”* Cf. Adams, “The Poets of Bu Njem,” 127.

<sup>139</sup>See M. Reali, “*Amicitia militum: un rapporto non gerarchico?*” in Le Bohec, ed., *La Hiérarchie (Rangordnung) de l’armée romain sous le haut-empire* (Paris, 1995), 35-37.

“comrade” in Roman military inscriptions.<sup>140</sup> This fraternity often endured beyond the soldier’s death, as fellow soldiers took care to provide for each other’s burial and commemoration.<sup>141</sup> That such fraternity could have existed among centurions, moreover, not only demonstrates that individual centurions formed bonds of friendship among themselves, but also describes a body of officers who, although engaged in increasingly diverse duties and comprising men of various backgrounds, nonetheless identified themselves according to their membership within a single, corporate body.

In modern military institutions, both the vertical and horizontal relationships that together comprise the “institutional bonding” between its members are defined in part by corporate identities among soldiers and officers. There is, as Marshall once put it, “an inherent unwillingness of the soldier to risk danger on behalf of men with whom he has no social identity.”<sup>142</sup> This was something that the Roman military understood well. By the last century of the Republic, many soldiers were now serving together in several campaigns over many years, often allowing them to form cohesive blocks with their own identity. Typically, this identity was defined by their service under a specific commander: the Valeriani (who served first in Asia under L. Valerius in 86 BCE, and continued to volunteer until returning with Pompey in 62), the Sullani, the Pompeians, and the Caesareans.<sup>143</sup> Many of Caesar’s legions acquired titles and epithets in the Gallic and Civil wars. Much like modern regiments, during the first century CE, these and other

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<sup>140</sup>S. Panciera, “Soldati e civili a Roma nei primi tre secoli dell’ impero” in W. Eck, ed., *Prosopographie und Sozialgeschichte* (Köln, 1993), 266; J. Keparová, “*Frater* in Militärschriften. Bruder oder Freund?” *Forum der Letteren* 109 (1986), 11-13.

<sup>141</sup>MacMullen “Legion” 226-227.

<sup>142</sup>*Men Against Fire*, 153. Cf. G. L. Siebold, “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion,” *AFS* 33.2 (2007), 287-288.

<sup>143</sup>Valeriani: App. *Mith.* 59. Sullani: Sall. *BC* 16, 28; Cic. *Mur.* 49. Cf. De Blois, “Army and Society,” 14.

titular legions developed their own reputations, traditions, and history that endured for several centuries.<sup>144</sup>

It was also during the late Republic and early Principate at the latest that we begin to see centurions increasingly defined as a distinct rank of officers within the legions. The roughly 660 centurions who served in Caesar's Gallic legions were defined as a category apart from both the tribunes and *milites*.<sup>145</sup> How Caesar's army is described as an entire group in *Alexandrian War* is revealing: "The legates, friends, centurions, and soldiers of Caesar" (*Caesaris legati, amici, centuriones militesque*).<sup>146</sup> It is also by Caesar that we find the earliest attestations of centurions such as L. Vorenus and T. Pullo, both on the cusp of becoming *primipili*, engaging in the kind of competitive ethos that becomes a hallmark for the rank. Centurions saw each other in their rank as natural competitors in courage and steadfastness, and this too encouraged their identification as a distinct group.<sup>147</sup>

Although many centurions during the Principate took on more administrative functions, they nonetheless remained a distinct group. This was especially true for *primipili*. While regular centurions enjoyed a pay and status distinct from both the *milites* and higher officers, by the reign of Claudius, posts such as the *praefectus castrorum*, or tribune of the Praetorian Guard, urban cohorts, and *vigiles*, became

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<sup>144</sup>Examples include Legio III Gallica, IIII Macedonica, V Alaudae, VI Ferrata X Equestris (later Gemina), XII Fulminata. See Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 136-139, 199-212; Goldsworthy "Community" 201. Cf. Stoll, "*De honore certabant et dignitate*," 110-118, 135.

<sup>145</sup>E.g., Caes. *BG* 1.39-41; 2. 25; 6. 39; *BC* 1. 39.

<sup>146</sup>Caes. *Alex.* 24.

<sup>147</sup>See above, Chapter Two, 73-77.

reserved solely for the pool of former *primipili*.<sup>148</sup> This career was specifically structured to distinguish *primipilares* from those officers who joined the military already at the equestrian rank.<sup>149</sup> That centurions who were promoted through the ranks often neglected to mention aspects of their earlier career suggests also that they too viewed themselves as a group distinct from the *milites*.<sup>150</sup> Even in non-military dress, legionary centurions were set apart from both soldiers and civilians.<sup>151</sup>

A corps of officers also can also possess distinct associations and traditions. The closest parallel to such associations in the Roman army were the social organizations (*collegia*) that developed in the legions of the Imperial period. While evidence for military *collegia* is limited, it is suggested that they were similar in function and purpose to their civilian counterparts, allowing individuals the opportunity to enjoy social circles they might not otherwise have had.<sup>152</sup> Military *collegia* appear, however, to have excluded regular *milites* and higher officers such as tribunes, but were established for such levels as *immunes*, *principales*, and centurions, and were organized by rank or function (e.g., *optiones*, *signiferi*, *librarii*), each with their own “club houses” (*scholae*). Septimius Severus especially encouraged the formation of *collegia*, and apparently

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<sup>148</sup>The *numerus primipilarium* or *e primipilaribus*. On this group, see Hyg. 6. Cf. Dobson, “The *Primipilares*,” 147.

<sup>149</sup>See Dobson, “Significance of the Centurion and ‘Primipilaris,’” 143-154, 162-178.

<sup>150</sup>See above, Chapter Two, n. 118.

<sup>151</sup>Quint. *Inst.* 11. 3. 138. See Appendix B.

<sup>152</sup>The earliest evidence for military *collegia* comes from CE 159 (*CIL* X 3344), while the latest is from CE 229 (*ILS* 2353). On military *collegia*, see M. Ginsburg, “Roman Military Clubs and their Social Functions,” *TAPA* 71 (1940), 151; A. Pegler “Social Organizations within the Roman Army,” *TRAC* 9 (1999), 37-43; S. P. Yébenes, *Collegia Militaria: Asociaciones militares en el Imperio romano* (Madrid, 1999), *passim*;

ordered that room be made for *scholae* in the camps and fortresses.<sup>153</sup> On a practical level, for those willing to pay their entry fees (*scamnarium*), they acted as military “mutual aid societies” by covering the cost of members’ burial and commemoration or providing for expenses incurred through promotion or retirement.<sup>154</sup>

Centurions were the highest-ranking officers to enjoy membership in their own *collegia*, and they possessed their own cult of *genii*.<sup>155</sup> Centurions sometimes referred to each other as colleague (*collega*), indicating a shared rank, and (occasionally) unit. An epitaph to Caecilius Septiminus, a centurion posted at Mainz is illustrative:

To Caecilius Septiminus, centurion of Legio XXII Primigenia Pia Fidelis, from centurion Aurelius Servatus, his *collega* and friend.<sup>156</sup>

This epitaph illustrates perhaps the most important function of the *collegia*: to administer a soldier’s affairs his death, particularly to collect funds from its members to pay for funeral and commemoration.<sup>157</sup> Whether or not they belonged to a *collegium*, centurions appear often to have taken care of their comrades’ burial and commemoration. In the following epitaph, for example, a centurion commemorates his friend at Dura-Europos:

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<sup>153</sup>*Milites* were banned from forming or joining military *collegia*: Marcianus, *Dig.* 47. 22. 1. Cf. Smith, “Army Reforms of Septimius Severus,” 497. *Scholae* could serve also as centres for the cult of Imperial *genii*. See Ginsburg, “Roman Military Clubs,” 155.

<sup>154</sup>Fees on entry: *ILS* 2354, 2438; *Veg. Mil.* 2. 20. Retirement: *ILS* 2445. supporting costs of transfer (*viaticum*): R. Cagnat, *L’armée Romaine d’Afrique et l’occupation militaire de l’Afrique sous les Empereurs* (Paris, 1913), 472.

<sup>155</sup>Cult of *genii*: *CIL* III 7631; XIII 6682. Cf. Stoll, “Religions of the Armies,” 461; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 256. Whether or no *primipili* could form their own *collegia* is unclear. Cf. Yébenes, *Collegia Militaria*, 250.

<sup>156</sup>*CIL* XIII 11835: Caecilio Septimini, 7(centurioni) leg(ionis) XXII Pr(imigeniae) P(iae) F(idelis), Aurelius Servatus, 7(centurio) collega et amicus. Compare with *CIL* III 265 and *P.Hibeh* II 276. See also *P.Hibeh* II 276. Cf. M. P. Speidel, “Centurions and Horsemen of Legio II Traiana” in *Roman Army Studies*, 233-235.

<sup>157</sup>The *actio procuratoria*. See examples in Yébenes, *Collegia Militaria*, nos. 17-20, and discussion at 252-253.

To the gods of the Underworld: To C. Iulius Rufinus, once centurion of Legio IIII Scythica, Caesius Domitianus, centurion and best friend, saw to it being done.<sup>158</sup>

In the absence of heirs, freedmen, or close family, a centurion was typically commemorated by his comrades of the same rank.<sup>159</sup> The relationships formed between centurions through military service could extend to other activities, including acting as guarantors for loans, and as executors and witnesses for wills.<sup>160</sup>

One practice in defining the centurionate as a corps of officers that is noticeably absent, however, is the lack of any evidence in the Roman legions for dining clubs or an “officer’s mess.” Such institutions have been fundamental to promoting comradeship, corporateness, conformity, tradition, and loyalty in British and Canadian regiments. The ἀγωγή system in Classical Sparta served a similar function, although it applied to all Spartiates rather than those of distinct rank.<sup>161</sup> We might speculate that the feasts and corporate rites for the *collegium*’s guardian *genius* served a similar function,<sup>162</sup> but these rituals lacked the consistent functions and associations of a modern mess.

Centurions were frequently transferred to serve under other legionary commanders. By the first century CE, very few remained in the same unit or place for

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<sup>158</sup>AE 1929, 181: C(aio) Iul(io) Rufino q(uondam) 7(centurioni) leg(ionis) IIII Scy(thicae). Caes(ius) Domitianus, 7(centurio) amico opt(imo) f(aciendum) c(uravit). Revised by M. Speidel, “Colleagues as Heirs: A Centurion of *legio IIII Scythica*” in *Roman Army Studies*, 129.

<sup>159</sup>This fits a pattern for soldiers of the same rank taking care of each other’s commemoration. See Speidel, *Ibid.*, 130. For examples of centurions, see *CIL* III 265; VI 2379; XIII 11835; *AE* 1966, 495; *ILS* 2599.

<sup>160</sup>E.g., *P.Oxy.* XII 1424 and *SB* XII 110421; *P.Col.* VIII 188. These are dated to the early fourth century, but there is nothing to suggest that this was not practiced earlier.

<sup>161</sup>Canadian/British system: Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 48-49; D. French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (Oxford, 2005), 124-128. On the ἀγωγή, see *Plut. Lyc.* 12. 2; *Xen. Const. Lac.* 5. 2.

<sup>162</sup>On social functions and *genius*, see Pegler, “Social Organizations,” 39-40; Yébenes, *Collegia Militaria*, 207-215; N. Pollard, “The Roman army as ‘total institution’ in the Near East? Dura Europas as a case study” in D. Kennedy ed., *The Roman Army in the East* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 211-27.

the duration of their career.<sup>163</sup> One of the products of this trend was a stronger distinction in the centurion's corporate identity. The frequent movement of centurions between legions, *vexillationes*, garrisons, and cities allowed them to form relationships with others of their rank across the Empire. It also served to set centurions apart from the soldiers under each of their commands – they were viewed more as interchangeable officers with relatively similar authority (although perhaps often with different skills and military backgrounds), identified by their charges according to their rank instead of specific person.<sup>164</sup>

Over the course of the late Republic and first two centuries CE, therefore, the centurionate appears to have developed into a distinct, corporate body within the legions. As we have seen, however, the rank was not socially homogenous – its members came from different backgrounds in wealth, education, and geographic origin. This practice suggests that unlike both the rank-and-file and higher officers in the legions, one's identification as a centurion was not defined primarily by social status. Nor were centurions during the Principate defined especially by a single, specific function, since they performed both combat and administrative roles. In fact, the feature that was crucial to defining the centurionate was also a key motivation to join the rank: its traditional prestige.

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<sup>163</sup>Centurions transferred to multiple legions: *ILS* 2653, 2656, 2658, 7178, 9200.

<sup>164</sup>Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 94-97; Dobson, "The Centurionate and Social Mobility," 101. According to Delbrück, *History of the Art of War II*, 162-163, it is through these transfers that "the unified spirit of the officer corps of the entire army was maintained and nourished." For examples of frequent transfers, see E. Birley, "Promotions and Transfers in the Roman Army II: The Centurionate" in *Roman Army Papers*, 206-219.



#### 4.4.4 The Tradition of the Centurionate

An important topic modern military studies concerns what factors determined the level of a soldier or officer's commitment to their organization.<sup>165</sup> Unfortunately, we possess no firsthand accounts from centurions or former centurions that hint as to why they might have wished to join the rank. While ancient authors often describe how rising or established members of the senatorial aristocracy desired legionary commands to boost their political capital at Rome or in the provinces, they saw no such need to elaborate on what motivated men to join the ranks of the centurionate – it seems that to them the reasons were self-evident. The silence of our sources makes evaluation of what motivated soldiers to join the centurionate largely speculative.

Despite the financial and social benefits centurions received on completion of service, many chose to remain in the legions, with their pension (*praemium*) seemingly deferred or, in the case of death while in service, defaulted.<sup>166</sup> Some doubtless remained in the hope of reaching the primipilate and the social advancement that came with it. Few reached this rank, however, and those that did were often elderly.<sup>167</sup> Even if one did not reach this position, however, remaining as a regular centurion could hardly be construed to be a misfortune, as long as one tolerated the military lifestyle. As major campaigns became less common and the legions settled into more constabulary roles during the second century CE, the duties became potentially less personally hazardous.

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<sup>165</sup>Cf. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 9, 14-15; Moskos, "Institutional and Occupational Trends in Armed Forces" in *The Military*, 15-26, esp. 18.

<sup>166</sup>On deferring the *praemia*, see Dobson, "The *Primipilares*," 144.

<sup>167</sup>See list in E. Birley, *Roman Army*, 219-221, where out of twenty longest-serving centurions known, only five became *primipilus*.

The financial incentives for a successful centurion certainly made the position attractive to members of the rank and file. Centurions were receiving two times the standard soldier's pay in the mid-Republic, and more than fifteen times the amount during the Principate, with *primi ordines* and *primipili* receiving even higher amounts. Centurions who received an honourable discharge (*honesta missio*), moreover, were granted rewards upon retirement (*praemia militiae*) according to a similar ratio. The material privileges of being a centurion are also readily apparent in ancient textual accounts.<sup>168</sup> The increase in pay for the centurionate during the Principate also helps to account for the number of direct appointees of *equites* directly from civilian life.<sup>169</sup> For many *equites*, steady and relatively generous pay, as well as the chance for later postings in provincial administration, likely made service as legionary centurions appealing.

The material benefits of service in the centurionate, therefore, were substantial, and doubtless motivated both experienced rankers and novice equestrians to seek the post. Centurions, however, were likely motivated by factors in addition to the material benefits acquired with the position. There were also benefits internal or intrinsic to the rank – goods that could not be acquired or enjoyed through any other practice but only through the experience of being a centurion.<sup>170</sup>

The goods unique to the centurionate must be considered with regard to the importance of the traditional ideals of the position discussed in the previous chapters. In

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<sup>168</sup>On centurions' generous pay, see below, Chapter Five, 175-181.

<sup>169</sup>Delbrück especially sees the Augustan period as marking the beginning of more direct recruitment to the centurionate from those of equestrian class. See *History of the Art of War II*, 166-167.

<sup>170</sup>MacIntyre contrasts "external goods," or those goods which can be acquired outside of a given practice, from "internal goods," which cannot be gained other than through a specific or similar practice. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., (Notre Dame, 1981; 1984, 2008), 188. Moskos & Wood, "Introduction" in *The Military*, 5, refer to the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in motivation.

entering any practice, one must relate not only to one's contemporary participants, but also to those who have come before – there is an “authority of tradition.”<sup>171</sup> This is especially true of military institutions. A modern corps of officers is a kind of institution in itself, each having its own history and personality. To join it requires that one be responsible not only in learning the required techniques and skills in leadership, but also in respecting the group's historical tradition and models; there is an authority of tradition in an officer corps to which its members must relate.<sup>172</sup> For the centurions during the Principate, this tradition was directly inherited from the Republic and civil wars: to be models of aggressive martial prowess and stern obedience and discipline. Even those who saw little combat and fewer major campaigns, or were perhaps too old to take an especially active role in combat, nonetheless wished to be seen as soldiers first.<sup>173</sup>

Praise for these models was plentiful and enduring. Steadfastness, obedience, and self-sacrifice had been characteristic ideals of centurions as early as in Polybius, to which qualities Caesar and writers of the Principate added personal bravery and leadership. Moreover, writers from this later period, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, established these qualities at Rome's beginnings, thus creating a “centurion tradition.” The semi-mythical Roman hero, Siccus Dentatus, explains how in battle against the Volsci in 453 BCE, he saved the reputation of the centurions:

With the standards captured by the enemy, I alone, on behalf of all, exposed myself to danger, recovered the standards for our cohort, drove back the enemy,

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<sup>171</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194.

<sup>172</sup>Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 8, 13-14. On traditions in ancient officership, cf. Naiden, “The Invention of the Officer Corps,” 38.

<sup>173</sup>Richier, *Centuriones*, 696-697.

and did not allow the centurions to incur undying shame, which would have made the rest of their lives more horrible than death....<sup>174</sup>

Similarly romantic descriptions of centurions' responsibilities in combat remain a motif among ancient authors well into the Principate.<sup>175</sup>

This military reputation expanded into a more social one in Rome. Livy has centurions play key roles in Rome's semi-mythological past.<sup>176</sup> Most notable is Verginius, the noble father of Verginia. As part of the so-called "Struggle of the Orders" between plebeians and patricians, in 449 BCE, this centurion was compelled to kill his own daughter rather than see her violated by the decemvir, Appius Claudius. Verginia is cast as a new Lucretia, the victim of a tyrant's lust, and Verginius as a new Brutus, the righteous avenger.<sup>177</sup> Valerius Maximus later singles out centurions when discussing the importance of recognizing merit and character in leading Rome rather than only social class: "the elite of the city will not be resentful if a centurion's courage is shown among their extraordinary brilliance."<sup>178</sup> The family of Augustus apparently agreed, since centurions were granted the special honour of bearing the torches to his funeral pyre.<sup>179</sup>

Centurions had to be mindful of the models and traditions of their institutional forbearers – a "centurion's ethos." Authors during the Principate promoted this ethos by retrojecting it deep into Rome's mythical past. Effectively, this tradition helped to define

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<sup>174</sup>Dion. Hal. 10. 36. 5: τῶν δὲ σημείων κρατουμένων ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, μόνος ἐγὼ τὸν ὑπὲρ ἀπάντων κίνδυνον ἀράμενος τὰ τε σημεία διέσωσα τῇ σπείρᾳ καὶ τοὺς πολεμίους ἀνέστειλα καὶ τοῦ μὴ περιπεσεῖν αἰσχύνῃ τοὺς λοχαγοὺς αἰωνίῳ, δι' ἣν θανάτου κακίων ὁ λοιπὸς ἂν αὐτοῖς βίος ἦν....

<sup>175</sup>E.g., Jos. *BJ*. 6. 81, 175; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 66; 15. 11; *Hist.* 3. 22; Florus 2. 26; Dio 68. 22b. 3.

<sup>176</sup>E.g., Dio. Hal. 6. 45; 9. 39-42; 11. 29-44; Liv. 1. 28, 52; 2. 27, 45; 2. 55; 3. 44-51, 69; 4. 34; 5. 55; 6. 14. See esp. 7. 13.

<sup>177</sup>Liv. 3. 44-47. Cf. Dion. Hal. 11. 29-37; Aur. Vict. *De Vir.* 21. 1.

<sup>178</sup>Val. Max. 3. 8. 7: *Non indignabuntur lumina nostrae urbis, si inter eorum eximium fulgorem centurionum quoque uirtus spectandam se obtulerit.*

<sup>179</sup>See above, Introduction, 1.

the centurionate as a corps of officers whose titles, duties, clothing, equipment, and decorations were later made to appear as “realized myth” within the Roman military of the Principate. Centurions became viewed as the guardians of the traditions of the Roman army.<sup>180</sup>

The centurionate, therefore, not only offered attractive material benefits and the hope of social advancement through reaching the *primipilate*, but also a position of great military prestige. Unlike the legates and tribunes, whose position in the army granted them the social prestige necessary to continue a career in other areas, the centurion was considered a *vir militaris* because he possessed a form of prestige that was based on long military service. Such prestige, moreover, was largely *internal* to the military community, and helps to account for why some centurions remained in service despite the poor odds of reaching the *primipilate*.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: The Centurion as *Vir Militaris***

Despite its comparatively complex organization and efficiency, the Roman army never developed a distinct corps of commanding officers. The chief criterion of the higher ranks was the candidate’s social status, with promotion determined at least as much by social connections as much as military skill or experience. Emperors discouraged Roman aristocrats from pursuing permanent careers in the military, and few represented themselves primarily according to their military service. Stoll makes the essential point: out of an army comprising roughly 300 000 legionaries and auxiliaries during the Principate, there were maybe 60-70 members of the senatorial class, and 550

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<sup>180</sup>Summerly, *Studies in the Legionary Centurionate*, 235. Lendon discusses at length the powerful influence of Rome’s past on its soldiers and officers. See *Soldiers and Ghosts*, passim, esp. 172-178, 280-289, 313. For “realized myth,” See Bourdieu, *Outline*, 163-165.

equites.<sup>181</sup> In lieu of a sizable corps of commanding officers, military experience and expertise was necessarily focused more at the level of the centurionate.

While social connections played a role in appointing men to the centurionate, military accomplishments, experience, and seniority also appear to have been more important to reaching its highest levels. The increasing use of cohorts and smaller military units required that many centurions needed to possess some expertise both as individual combatants and officers. Although the legions had no military academy, the majority of centurions were nonetheless veteran soldiers who developed their skills and knowledge through a great deal of practice.

The functions, social status, behaviour, and even age of some of these centurions during the Principate appear far removed from the characters glorified by Caesar primarily for their *virtus* and *disciplina*. This *idea* of centurions, however, endured and remained crucial to the rank's identity. When one considers the respect given to their long service and the relatively lavish rewards that also came with the position, moreover, one sees another important basis for the centurion's authority: the Roman soldier's own desire to be promoted to the centurionate. Vegetius later makes this point explicit when describing the envied status of the centurions, "for whom, according to ancient custom, great profits and honours were established, so that other soldiers from the entire legion would strive with ample effort and zeal to attain such vast rewards."<sup>182</sup> If at times only grudgingly, Roman soldiers likely submitted to their centurion because of the hope that,

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<sup>181</sup>Stoll, "Offizier und Gentleman," 150.

<sup>182</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 2. 7: *Quibus magnae utilitates et magnus honor esta ueteribus constitutus, ut ceteri milites ex tota legione omni labore ac deuotione contenderent ad tanta praemia peruenire.*

through consistent obedience and loyalty to him, they themselves might eventually join his rank.

This status within a legion's command structure conferred additional social responsibilities on centurions, since they also played a key role in integrating soldiers into the legions and helping to define their expectations and status. As a corps of middle-ranking officers, moreover, the centurions had to balance their own duties and loyalties to the soldiers under their command with those owed to their superiors. The next chapter will address this challenge, and demonstrate that the centurion's intermediate position between higher and lower ranks was crucial to preserving the Roman army's cohesion.

## Chapter 5: The “Middle” Rank

### **5.1 Introduction**

Social status was traditionally understood to define one’s prospects, loyalties, and relationships in the Roman world. During the Principate, however, the legionary centurionate posed a problem to this ideology. The behaviour, supposed intentions, and abilities of centurions were often not able to be described according to comfortable and traditional categories of social status, since their rank was not defined primarily by these criteria. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, moreover, the shifting demands on the Roman military during the Principate led to an increase in status for centurions. They were given greater command responsibilities and accorded significant increases in pay and social prestige. Although centurions were still praised for the traditional behaviour and military virtues that characterized them during the Republic, they became starkly distinguished in status from the *milites* whom they commanded, while also outranking even certain equestrian officers.

The centurions’ perceived status in the legions, however, is directly relevant to another important issue: their responsibilities and loyalties to both their superiors and the soldiers under their command. Modern authors too have wrestled with how to categorize the relative status and sympathies of these officers, both within and outside the legions: were centurions clearly regarded by their contemporaries as socially and ideologically closer to the “mob” (*vulgus*) of soldiers, or to the aristocratic leadership and the emperor?



Several recent studies have favoured the latter, arguing that, particularly during the Principate, “a chasm opened up between the centurions and their former comrades.”<sup>1</sup>

The increase in pay and privileges granted to centurions was intended to make them more loyal to the regime than the soldiers by strengthening the tie between them and the emperor. Keppie goes so far as to describe centurions of the Principate as “bastions of conservatism, averse to innovation and change.”<sup>2</sup>

The previous chapters have explored how legionary centurions were often expected to occupy an intermediate position between several military types: disciplinarians and “natural fighters,” combat and staff officers, commissioned and non-commissioned officers. This chapter explores evidence for the impact of this position on the centurions’ various social relationships and obligations within the legions of the Principate, and argues that centurions occupied a similarly intermediate status within Rome’s military hierarchy. On the one hand, textual evidence suggests that their duties and increased pay and status during the Principate left their interests and loyalties more often with the higher officers and emperor than the common soldier. They are sometimes portrayed as hostile to the rank and file, as officers whose potential wealth made them conservative supporters of the regime and a great bulwark against any disloyalty or collective resistance.

On the other hand, textual evidence also associates centurions strongly with the *milites*, and epigraphic and archaeological sources suggest that their relationships with

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<sup>1</sup>S. G. Chrissanthos, *Warfare in the Ancient World: From the Bronze Age to the Fall of Rome* (Westport, 2008), 168-169. Cf. Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 102-104. K. Raaflaub, “Die Militärreformen des Augustus und die politische Problematik des frühen Prinzipats” in G. Binder ed., *Saeculum Augustum I* (Darmstadt, 1987), 269; M. A. Speidel, “Sold und Wirtschaftslage der römischen Soldaten” in *Heer und Herrschaft*, 432.

<sup>2</sup>*Making of the Roman Army*, 179.

soldiers were defined by strong spatial proximity and social bonds. This traditional association between centurion and soldier was defined not just through combat or other military missions, but also through the layout of living quarters in legionary marching camps and fortresses. Although centurions were increasingly distinguished from the *milites* in pay, prestige, and prospects during the Principate, several practices developed in order to maintain some of their traditional connection with the rank and file from the Republic.

This intermediate status between their superiors and the rank and file, moreover, placed centurions in the perfect position to perform another important role: the integration of soldiers into the Roman military community. Since many centurions were experienced, former members of the rank and file, they became responsible for training new recruits (*tirones*) and helping them to adjust to military life. The centurions' quarters and their physical presence in camp itself, moreover, helped to define their place and that of their soldiers within the legions' military hierarchy. Beyond the confines of the camp, centurions were also the functional head and symbolic representation of the *centuria*, the primary locus for recruitment, tactical deployment, and religious activities, and the unit with which soldiers legionaries identified themselves most closely. In some cases, lastly, the relationships and obligations between centurions and soldiers continued even after the end of military service through their settlement in veteran colonies. The combination of these specific various duties and traditions, therefore, suggests a strong concern in Roman military practices to integrate soldiers into the military community, and identifies the centurion as the primary tool to perform this role.

## 5.1 Pay and Privileges during Service

In addition to their dress and *vitis*, centurions were distinguished in status from the rank and file most obviously through their annual pay. This distinction developed markedly from Republic to Principate. Polybius states that the centurion of the second century BCE received twice the standard pay of the *miles*.<sup>3</sup> Caesar, who clearly understood the great potential of centurions to secure both military loyalty and political influence, set a new standard during the late Republic for generosity. When Caesar doubled the pay of soldiers in his own legions during the 40s BCE, he also increased the centurions' pay to five times that of the legionary.<sup>4</sup> It was during the Principate, however, that the centurionate acquired significant remunerative benefits. The evidence is unclear, but it appears that the centurion's pay rose to between fifteen to eighteen times that of the legionary by the end of the first century CE, with those of *primi ordines* rank receiving roughly thirty times the normal rate, and *primipili* sixty times. This ratio of pay, moreover, seems to have remained consistent throughout the Principate.<sup>5</sup>

Such a gap in potential wealth clearly distinguished the centurionate from the rank and file. Epigraphic and papyrological evidence of loans, contracts, and expenditure of cash by legionaries during the Principate show centurions spending on average ten to

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<sup>3</sup>Polyb. 6. 39. 12.

<sup>4</sup>App. *BC* 2. 102; Suet. *Caes.* 26. See Webster, *Imperial Roman Army*, 256-260; Patterson, "Military Organization," 99-104.

<sup>5</sup>Figures are conjecture. *Milites* are recorded earning 912 1/2 HS (3650 *asses*) per year under Augustus (Tac. *Ann.* 1. 17. 4), 1200 under Domitian (Suet. *Dom.* 7. 3), and 3600 under Severus and Caracalla (Herod. 3. 8. 4; 4. 4. 7; Dio 78. 36. 3). Later papyri (*P.Oxy.* VII 1047; *P.Panop.* 2. 197) indicate above ratios, which appear consistent with awarding of *praemia* to *milites* and centurions (Dio 54. 23. 1; Suet. *Cal.* 44). See Brunt, "Pay and Superannuation in the Roman Army," *PBSR* 18 (1950), 67-69; L. Wierschowski, *Heer und Wirtschaft: Das römische Heer der Prinzipatszeit als Wirtschaftsfaktor* (Bonn, 1984), 2-15, 228, n. 58; Speidel, "Roman Army Pay Scales," 372-375. Based on these figures, under Augustus, centurions annually earned 13500, *primi ordines* 27000, and *primipili* 54000. By the second century, the pay rates were raised to 18000, 36000, and 72000 HS, respectively, and presumably continued under the Severans. There was no increase again until under Severus (Herod. 3. 8. 4).

thirty times more than *milites*.<sup>6</sup> This potential wealth is illustrated in letters from Egypt in which centurions being transferred request that their wives take care to pack their many belongings and follow later. In one particular letter from third century Fayum, when a centurion advises his wife to join him, he reminds her to bring all of her gold jewellery.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to generous pay, centurions enjoyed many other luxuries and privileges that distinguished them from the *milites*, including allowances to keep slaves quartered with them in the legionary camp, and perhaps even multiple food rations.<sup>8</sup> Like the tribunes and legates and unlike the rank and file, moreover, centurions appear often to have possessed horses and ridden on horseback when their army or unit was on the march.<sup>9</sup> As early as the Republican period, rooms for lodging horses were either placed nearby or attached to the centurions' quarters in marching camps.<sup>10</sup> Beyond the practical advantage of travelling on horseback, the use of the horse was also a status symbol in the Roman world, associated with military ranks whose members were of equestrian or senatorial background. Some centurions chose to highlight this status visually in commemorative relief. They distinguished themselves from equestrian officers, however, by never depicting themselves on horseback in mid-gallop.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>See Tables 2 and 12 in Wierschowski, *Heer und Wirtschaft*, 49-62.

<sup>7</sup>A.S. Hunt & C.C. Edgar, *Select Papyri*, Loeb ed., (Cambridge, 1932; 1970), no. 155. See also *P. Oxy.* IX 1185. Cf. L. Allason-Jones, "Women and the Roman Army in Britain" in *The Roman Army as a Community*, 43. On centurions and marriage, see next page.

<sup>8</sup>For slaves in camp, cf. B. Hoffmann, "The Quarters of Legionary Centurions of the Principate," *Britannia* 26 (1995), 111. Papyri from late first century CE show that centurions were kept on separate rolls in food distribution, suggesting a greater ration. Cf. Fink, *RMR*, no. 10; Roth, *Logistics*, 22.

<sup>9</sup>See *PSI 729* for centurion during Flavian period who sold his horse to a cavalryman (*eques alae*).

<sup>10</sup>See Dobson, *The Army of the Roman Republic*, 156; Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 132.

<sup>11</sup>Visual commemoration of horses: Appendix A, figs. 10, 11, 15.

Centurions may even have been allowed to contract marriages. The consistency or legal applicability of the ban on regular soldiers from contracting marriages during the Principate is currently debated.<sup>12</sup> The ban has traditionally been attributed to the reign of Augustus, and, according to Herodian (3. 8. 4-5) was lifted by Septimius Severus.<sup>13</sup> The legal origin or specific stipulations of the ban, however, remain largely conjecture.<sup>14</sup> Archaeological evidence demonstrates at the very least that women were not physically banned from the legionary camp, and the size and layout of some centurions' quarters' suggest that women lived with them.<sup>15</sup> Centurions frequently refer to their "wives" (*uxores*) in letters and inscriptions, although this title does not technically designate their exact legal status.<sup>16</sup> Given the state of the evidence, no firm conclusion can be reached on the applicability of the ban to centurions, but it appears at the very least that many centurions had families dwelling with them inside the camp well before the apparent lift of the ban by Septimius Severus.

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<sup>12</sup>The debate concerning military marriages and women in the camp has become prominent in recent years. See esp. Phang, *Marriage*, passim, esp. 115-129; C. Van Driel-Murray "Gender in Question" in *Theoretical Roman Archaeology: Second Conference Proceedings*, P. Rush ed., (Aldershot, 1995), 3-21; E. Greene, "Women and Families in the Auxiliary Military Communities of the Roman West in the First and Second Centuries AD," PhD diss., (Chapel Hill, 2011).

<sup>13</sup>Ban during reign of Augustus: Campbell, "The Marriage of Soldiers under the Empire," *JRS* 68 (1978), 153-166; Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, 148. Dio refers to Claudius easing the ban in CE 44 (76. 15. 2). Cf. Smith, "The Army Reforms of Septimius Severus," 489-493.

<sup>14</sup>See Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C. – A.D. 235)* (Leiden, 2001), passim, esp. 115-129; James, "The Community of the Soldiers: A Major Identity and Centre of Power in the Roman Empire" in P. Barker et al. *TRAC 98: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archeology Conference* (1999), 14-25.

<sup>15</sup>See L. Allason-Jones, "Women and the Roman Army in Britain," in *Roman Army as a Community*, 43; Hoffmann, "The Quarters of Legionary Centurions," 110. M. Hassall, "Homes for Heroes: Married Quarters for Soldiers and Veterans," in *Roman Army as a Community*, 35; Hoffmann, "Quarters of Legionary Centurions," 110. For doubts, see Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C. – A.D. 235)* (Leiden, 2001), 131; R. Friedl, *Der Konkubinat in kaiserzeitlichen Rom: von Augustus bis Septimius Severus* (Stuttgart, 1996), 255.

<sup>16</sup>Inscriptions show centurions referring to *uxores*: *ILS* 2662; *AE* 1960, 28. See also above, n. %.

As discussed above, centurions apparently had no standard age of retirement during the Principate.<sup>17</sup> Although some centurions remained in service well into the old age, others who chose to end their service in the legions were well rewarded. While Roman commanders of the late Republic frequently arranged for grants of free land as rewards to their veterans, neither they nor the Senate ever instituted anything like fixed measures as a policy. Land seems to have been allotted generally according to rank and military achievements, as well as the arability of land itself.<sup>18</sup> Centurions were treated quite favourably in these ad hoc settlements. Caesar, for example, is credited with granting donatives to centurions at two to ten times the rate of those given to soldiers. In deciding to help Caesar during the Civil War, moreover, Domitius Ahenobarbus apparently promised troops forty *iugera* out of his own estates, and in proportion to every centurion and volunteer (*pro rata parte centurionibus evocatisque*).<sup>19</sup> Among Caesar's veterans, the average allotment was fifty *iugera*, while centurions acquired one hundred. This ratio was later doubled by Octavian and Antonius, who showed similar generosity.<sup>20</sup>

Augustus, however, attempted to regulate the amounts of money or land given to veterans on their discharge, and laid the responsibility for these payments on a designated imperial treasury (*aerarium militare*) rather than individual commanders. Those soldiers who served for twenty-five years obtained *honesta missio*. Upon retirement, they received *praemia* in the form of either cash (*missio nummaria*) or a plot of land (*missio*

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<sup>17</sup>See above, Chapter Four, 143-145.

<sup>18</sup>According to the Gromatici: Hyg. 114. 1; Sic. Flacc. 156. 9; Hyg. Grom. 176. 13; *LC* 214. 12; 216. 11; 232. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Caes. *BG* 8. 4; *BC* 1. 17. One *iugerum* is roughly half an acre.

<sup>20</sup>App. *BC* 4. 120; 5. 128; Plut. *Ant.* 23; Dio 43. 21. Cf. Smith, *Service in the Post-Marian Army*, 66-69; J. Patterson, "Military Organization and Social Change," 99-103; Brunt, "The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution" in *Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford, 1998), 271-272.

*agraria*), as well as various privileges (*emeritum*), such as exemption from tolls.<sup>21</sup> The exact amount of *praemia* for legionary centurions is never explicitly stated, but by at least the early Principate, *primipili* appear to have received fifty times the amount of the *miles*, and four times that of the regular centurion. This suggests that the ratio in *praemia* between centurion and *miles* corresponded roughly with that of each rank's annual pay.<sup>22</sup>

As early as the late Republic, some centurions had accumulated enough wealth from either donatives or spoils to possess equestrian status on retirement. This new reality led more conservative senators like Cicero to complain about centurions being eligible for the third decury of jurymen.<sup>23</sup> Even more shockingly for aristocrats at the time, some centurions were apparently even being allowed into the Senate.<sup>24</sup> This period of political turmoil in the Republic was hardly typical, but even centurions with less spectacular careers during the Principate might still have sons who reached the Senate. The Stoic senator, Helvidius Priscus, claimed a *primuspilus* as his father, while Suetonius claims that the emperor Vespasian's grandfather was a regular centurion and his father a *primuspilus*. Other senators during the early Principate are likewise recorded as having

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<sup>21</sup>Rewards were also described as *commoda emeritae militiae*. See Suet. *Aug.* 24. 2 and legal interpretations by Menander, *Dig.* 49. 16. 5. 7 and Modestinus, *Dig.* 49. 16. 3. 8. On Augustus' award of land and cash, see *RG* 16-17; Dio 54. 25. 5. Exemption from tolls: *CIL* XVI 12; *Cod. Theod.* 7. 20. 2. Privileges varied over time and according to rank. Cf. G. Wesch-Klein, "Recruits and Veterans," in *Companion*, 439-443.

<sup>22</sup>That is, twelve to fifteen times, or 300000 HS to 12000 HS. The *praemia* were increased under Caracalla (Dio 55. 23. 1; 77. 24. 1). See Dobson "The *Primipilares*," 141; Herz, "Finances and Costs," 308; Speidel, "Pay Scales," 373.

<sup>23</sup>*Cic. Phil.* 1. 19-20; 13. 3. See examples in *NS* 1893, 58 and *ILS* 6491 = *CIL* IX 1604 (Keppie, *Colonization*, Syll. nos. 24, 31). The wealth of centurions during this period, however, was likely far below the traditional requirement of 200 000 HS for service in the third decury. Cf. Keppie, *Colonization*, 108 with n. 41; E. Gabba, "Ricerche sull'esercito professionale Romano da Mario ad Augusto," *Athenaeum* 29 (1951), 171-173.

<sup>24</sup>*Cic. Ad Fam.* 6. 18. 1. Cf. *Div.* 2. 23; *Off.* 2. 29; Dio 42. 51. 5.

centurions as relatives.<sup>25</sup> The generous *praemia* given to centurions also allowed them to become cities' patrons or magistrates, and they are often found occupying important magistracies in municipal councils.<sup>26</sup> Municipalities seem to have had even higher expectations from local men who became *primipilares*. Indeed, Tiberius once had to punish citizens in the town of Pollentia who had held up and tried to extort money from a local *primuspilus*' funeral procession.<sup>27</sup>

In pay, privileges, and prospects, therefore, the legionary centurions were sharply distinguished from the *milites*. While centurions in the Republican period were former soldiers with perhaps a few advantages in pay and luxuries, those of the Principate were now much closer in economic status to the equestrian ranks – equestrians, as we know, frequently sought the position.<sup>28</sup> This rise in wealth, moreover, seems to have been widely recognized in the empire. Rabbinic texts speak of the vast financial rewards for centurions, while Juvenal, as part of his satire on Romans' unbounded greed, pokes fun at someone petitioning to join the centurionate.<sup>29</sup> The developing gulf in pay and benefits between centurion and the rank and file also apparently did not go unnoticed by Roman soldiers. Tacitus records complaints by soldiers against the need to bribe their centurions for furloughs or relief from unwanted fatigues. Apparently, soldiers once even demanded in CE 69 that Otho abolish the bribe that they customarily had to pay to centurions to

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<sup>25</sup>Priscus: Tac. *Hist.* 4. 5. Vespasian: Suet. *Vesp.* 1; *PIR*<sup>2</sup>, F 351. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 3. 75; *Hist.* 1. 84.

<sup>26</sup>E.g., *AE* 1982, 395; *CIL* II 4514, 5438; V 906, 7544; IX 2564; X 3903, 5064; XI 1603. Cf. Dobson, "The Centurionate and Social Mobility," 103-105; Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, 88; Ando, "The Army and the Urban Elite: A Competition for Power" in *Companion*, 373.

<sup>27</sup>Suet. *Tib.* 37. On wealth and status of this rank upon retirement, see Dobson, "The *Primipilares*," 139-141.

<sup>28</sup>See above, Chapter Four, 138.

<sup>29</sup>Rabbinic texts: Sifre Num., 11. 8-11, Balak 131. See Goodman, *State and Society*, 144. Juvenal: 14. 193-195. See also Horace. *Sat.* 1. 6. 72-74.



acquire furloughs. Otho, afraid of alienating the centurions in his rise to power, promised instead to pay them out of his own purse.<sup>30</sup>

While this gulf in status clearly distanced the centurionate from the rank and file, the centurion's traditional duties still required him to maintain a connection with his soldiers in other ways, since too wide a gulf between officers and the rank and file could engender the kind of resentment and poor discipline that broke out during the Rhine and Danube mutinies. For this reason, although the status of centurions rose during the course of the Principate, various traditional practices and expectations of the rank were maintained to ensure that centurions remained closely associated with the *milites*. For centurions to find this balance, however, was made all the more difficult by some of the challenges that the Roman military faced in recruitment.

Unlike the hoplites of many classical Greek *poleis*, who formed military units based on clan, family, common geography, or political citizenship within the polis,<sup>31</sup> Roman soldiers during the Principate seldom had such close social, political, and familial connections to one another. Army recruitment often cut across local identities and allegiances, since men were enrolled regardless of geographic, ethnic, or cultural origins. A Roman legion during the Principate could thus comprise a variety of soldiers: veterans and raw novices; volunteers and levies;<sup>32</sup> recruits who were integrated, equipped and

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<sup>30</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 1. 46, 58; *Ann.* 1. 17. Cf. Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 122; De Blois "Army and society," 24.

<sup>31</sup>See Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 201.

<sup>32</sup>Roman citizens remained legally liable for military service at least into the second century CE, especially during military emergencies on the frontiers (e.g., Dio 39. 39. 1; 40. 50. 1). Punishment for evading summons included enslavement and exile (*deportatio*). See *EJ*<sup>2</sup> 368; Suet. *Aug.* 25. 2; Fronto 2. 54; Plin. *Ep.* 10. 29-30; Veg. *Mil.* 1. 3; *Menen. Dig.* 40. 12. 29; *P.Oxy.* VII 1022; *ILS* 1068; 1098. On punishment generally for evading, see Suet. *Aug.* 24. 1; *Menen. Dig.* 49. 16. 4. 10-12. Cf. Brunt, "Conscription and Volunteering in the Roman Imperial Army" in *Roman Imperial Themes*, 188-214; Wesch-Klein, "Recruits and Veterans," 437; James, *Rome and the Sword*, 128.

trained together, or those who joined individually or in small groups over time as *supplementa*; soldiers recruited locally or those who came from farther regions across the empire. The challenge for the Roman army was to turn this host of individual soldiers into relatively loyal, cohesive military units. As the primary combat and disciplinary officers, the centurions had a key role to perform in this process, not only in training, disciplining, and leading legionaries in combat, but also in integrating them more socially into the Roman military community. This function of the centurionate encouraged soldiers to form strong bonds of loyalty both to their *centuria* and its commanding officer. This process began, moreover, with the recruit's entry into military life, and often continued long after.

### **5.3 Training and the Camp**

Like a drill sergeant, the centurions' strong association with military experience, harshness, and formal discipline made them obvious choices for supervising the training and drilling of military units. Their involvement in this activity, however, also had important social consequences. In modern armies, one of the first and most important experiences for new recruits is the period of military training. Weapons drills, marching, and other such activities not only assert discipline and sharpen martial skills, but can also strengthen social bonds, both between soldiers themselves and their officers.<sup>33</sup> By taking

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<sup>33</sup>On "muscular bonding" effects of drill and training, see W. H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, 1995), 116-120; Stoll, "Offizier und Gentleman," 146; A. King, "The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military," *AFS* 32.4 (2006), 493-512. On respecting rhythms, keeping pace, and not falling out of line, or the "fundamental virtue of conformity," cf. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 161. For doubts on the importance of drill and marching in Roman warfare, however, see Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 49-64.

a leading role in this training, legionary centurions were similarly given an important context in which to define their authority and integrate newer soldiers into their *centuria*.

The evidence for formal training in the legions during the Republic suggests that it was limited or left to the initiative of individual commanders.<sup>34</sup> In several of these cases, tribunes appear to have supervised the process, but it is clear that centurions functionally took charge of drills and weapons training.<sup>35</sup> This is illustrated best in Livy's account of the Second Punic War, when Cn. and P. Scipio sent centurions to King Syphax of Numidia to persuade him to become allies of Rome. In discussion with these centurions, Syphax was so impressed by their experience and attitudes toward discipline and battle-order that he agreed to the Roman proposal, but only if one of them could remain behind to serve as a military instructor (*magister rei militaris*) for his own foot soldiers.<sup>36</sup>

More formal training, however, seems to have developed during the Principate. Textual and papyrological evidence describes a four-month period of instruction (*tiroconium*) that new recruits were expected to undergo.<sup>37</sup> This initial training, however, should not be equated to the lengthy and structured environment of a modern military "boot camp." Authors during the Imperial period advocate rather that training be ongoing throughout one's entire service,<sup>38</sup> and it appears that primary supervision of this training remained the responsibility of the centurions and former *primuspilus*, the

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<sup>34</sup>E.g., Scipio Africanus: Liv. 26. 51. 4; Polyb. 10. 20. 2-3. Aemilius Paulus: Liv. 44. 34. 3. Marius: Plut. *Mar.* 34. 3. Pompey: Plut. *Pomp.* 64. 1-2. Tribunes: Liv. 26. 51; Polyb. 10. 20.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Horsmann, *Untersuchungen zur militärischen Ausbildung*, 53-55: "der centurio für alle Teile der Ausbildung zuständig war."

<sup>36</sup>Liv. 28. 48. 4.

<sup>37</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 2. 5. See Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 38-39.

<sup>38</sup>Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 2.16; Jos. *BJ* 3. 72-76; Arr. *Tac.* 40. This is supported later by Vegetius (*Mil.* 1. 27; 2. 23. 2-3).

*praefectus castrorum*.<sup>39</sup> Centurions themselves set the model by continuing their own training through drills in marching or fighting.<sup>40</sup> During the second century, more specialized training positions developed, and a number of centurions appear in the epigraphic record with the titles of *exercitator*, *doctor armorum/cohortis*, and *campidoctor*. Their specific duties and status, however, remain obscure.<sup>41</sup>

The locus in which training typically occurred was crucial to its social impact. The Roman military's attention to marching camps and other fortifications has been described by Luttwak as "the most characteristic device of the Roman art of war."<sup>42</sup> Their construction seems to have become a common practice by the mid-second century BCE at the latest.<sup>43</sup> The legions' proficiency in this activity impressed contemporaries such as Polybius to a degree that he described the process and layout in detail.<sup>44</sup> During the Principate, the increasingly static functions of legions ensured that camps and smaller fortifications became the soldiers' homes. Archaeological evidence demonstrates the increasing complexity and durability of these permanent fortifications, and ancient

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<sup>39</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 2. 4. 3-8; Jos. *BJ* 3. 5. 1. See also Tac. *Ann.* 13. 35; Veg. *Mil.* 1. 4, 11-14; Herod. 8. 1. 5. On training in general, cf. Webster, *Imperial Roman Army*, 116; Campbell, *The Roman Army*, 47; Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 14-18; Horsmann, *Untersuchungen zur militrischen Ausbildung*, 82-92.

<sup>40</sup>See Hadrian's praise of the centurions in speech to legion at Lambaesis above, Chapter Two, n. 23.

<sup>41</sup>E.g., T. Aurelius Decimus (*CIL* II 4083 = *ILS* 2416), T. Flavius Virilis (*CIL* VIII 2877 = *ILS* 2653). Centurions as *exercitatores* are most commonly associated with the *equites singulares Augustii* rather than the legions. See Veg. *Mil.* 3. 8. 11; *ILS* 2182, 2187, 2453. Centurions functioned as *campidoctores* in the fourth century, but the position appears to have become more prestigious by the fifth century. Cf. P. Rance, "Campidoctores Vicarii vel Tribuni: The Senior Regimental Officers of the Late Roman Army and the Rise of the Campidoctor" in A. S. Lewin & P. Pellegrini, eds., *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, (Oxford, 2007), 395-409, esp. 404-406.

<sup>42</sup>Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 55.

<sup>43</sup>Aeneas' first action upon arrival in Italy is to construct a camp (Verg. *Aen.* 7. 126-129). Camps are consistently constructed during the Second Punic War (Liv. 25. 37), and Plutarch (*Pyrrh.* 16. 5) claims that Pyrrhus was impressed by this activity. Earliest secure archaeological evidence is from mid-second century Spain. See Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 36-38, 44-51.

<sup>44</sup>Polyb. 6. 27-37.

authors of the Imperial period continued to emphasize their strength and importance to the Roman military.<sup>45</sup> Centurions were involved in almost all aspects of legionary camps and fortifications, from their construction and physical layout to the activities within them. The camp, therefore, crucially provided centurions with a context outside of battle where they might further define their relationship with soldiers under their command.

The strong tie between centurion, camp, and soldier began with the camp's construction. For marching camps of the Republic, Polybius asserts that while tribunes maintained overall supervision, the centurions superintended all physical details of construction of the camp and stockades for their respective maniples. It was also typical for commanders to send centurions ahead of a marching legion to survey and choose suitable position for the camp.<sup>46</sup> This was not only because of the centurions' experience, but also because the process of establishing a camp ("castramentation") was understood to be a disciplinary activity in itself.<sup>47</sup>

Roman commanders had long viewed constructive labour as a method to reassert discipline. Corbulo was especially famous for employing this tactic. In CE 47, for example, he ordered his men to dig a twenty-three mile-long canal between the Mosa and Rhine rivers.<sup>48</sup> This construction, moreover, was often the first and most important type of training for *tirones*. Accuracy in building one's portion of the fortifications

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<sup>45</sup>Cn. Domitius Corbulo apparently quipped (Frontin. Strat. 4. 7. 2) that "the pick was the weapon with which to beat the enemy" (*dolabra id est operibus hostem vincendum*). Josephus (*BJ* 3. 83-84) claimed that it seemed that cities sprang up on the spur of a moment. See also Veg. *Mil.* 1. 4; 1. 21. Cf. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 124-137.

<sup>46</sup>Polyb. 6. 34. 2; Caes. *BG* 2. 17.

<sup>47</sup>*Disciplina castrorum*: Polyb. 6. 33-38; Val. Max. 6. 1. 11; Suet. *Vesp.* 4. 6; Veg. *Mil.* 1. 1. Cf. Horsmann, *Untersuchungen zur militärischen Ausbildung*, 164-171, esp. 165.

<sup>48</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 11. 20. Marius had his men improve navigation on the Rhône when waiting to engage the Cimbri (Plut. *Mar.* 15). Cf. App. *Iber.* 86; Caes. *BG* 1. 42; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 35. On the disciplinary aspect of labour, see Horsmann, *Untersuchungen zur militärischen Ausbildung*, 164-186; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 67-70, 201-247; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 248-254.

emphasized individual responsibility for the security of the entire unit.<sup>49</sup> Since building these camps was both a form of *disciplina* and a phase of training, it was natural that centurions were heavily involved. They were expected to supervise the labour of their soldiers very closely, measuring construction with ten-foot rods to make sure that each soldier completed his allotted portion:

After this, it is then inspected and measured by the centurions, and anyone whose work has been negligent is punished. The recruit is therefore to be trained in this exercise so that whenever necessity demands it, he can fortify a camp quickly, securely, and without confusion.<sup>50</sup>

The centurion's disciplinary authority, therefore, was intrinsically tied to the physical construction of the camp.

This connection between the centurionate and the camp relates to another crucial locus in which the relationship between *milites* and centurions was defined: the physical space of the camp itself. Social and institutional divisions and hierarchies can often be established in spaces between people, things, and practices (e.g., men's versus women's quarters, public versus private space).<sup>51</sup> Thus, the position and size of centurions' quarters within legionary fortifications and camps could help to define the status of centurions relative to both their inferiors and superiors.

According to Polybius' descriptions, in the legionary marching camps of the second century BCE, centurions were quartered at either end of each manipule's line of

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<sup>49</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 1. 25. 1-5; 1. 4; Hadrian's speech at Lambaesis (see above, Chapter Two, n. 23) On training in general, see Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 93-123

<sup>50</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 1. 25. 2-3: *Post hoc a centurionibus fossa inspicitur ac mensuratur et uindicatur in eos, qui negligentius fuerint operati. Ad hunc ergo usum instituendus est tiro, ut, cum necessitas postulauerit, sine perturbatione et celeriter et caute castra possit munire.* On the measuring rod, see *Mil.* 3. 8. 13.

<sup>51</sup>On space as the principal locus for objectifying ideologies, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228; Bourdieu, *Outline*, 89. Cf. Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, 65, 107. For extensive discussion of Roman fortifications, see Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 166-220; Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 124-137.

tents.<sup>52</sup> This arrangement appears to reflect the physical position relative to their soldiers that centurions supposedly occupied in combat. Their tents were noticeably distinguished from the larger tribunes' quarters, which were attached not to those of the soldiers, but to the array of tents beside the legionary commander (the *praetorium*).<sup>53</sup> This layout might be as we would expect for centurions of the Republican period – they flanked their soldiers, with whom they were more closely associated in social status and functions than with the military tribunes.

During the Principate, however, when we begin to find evidence for more permanent Roman fortifications, there have been some subtle developments. It should be noted that much of the archaeological evidence for specifically legionary camps is limited to the western regions of the empire, particularly those in Britain and along the Rhine and Danube rivers. Moreover, there was no “standard” layout for permanent Roman fortresses. Each differed according to available local materials and topography, or the category of the unit stationed there (legion, *auxilia*, *numeri*, *classes*). What evidence there is, however, suggests that several features appear to have been common among legionary fortresses. Barrack blocks were now organized according to cohort rather than maniple, and were ten in number, each divided into the six rows of *centuriae*, and then divided further into eight-men *contubernia*. Placed at the end of each row of *contubernia* were the centurions' quarters.<sup>54</sup> This layout resembles the organization of Republican camps as described by Polybius, in that the centurions again lived adjacent to the row of

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<sup>52</sup>Polyb. 6. 30. 5. See Appendix C, Fig. 1.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 36-38.

<sup>54</sup>E.g., at Inchtuthil and Caerleon (Appendix C, figs. 2-3). Cf. E. Shirley, *Building a Roman Legionary Fortress* (Charleston, 2001), 15; N. Hanel, “Military Camps, Canabae, and Vici: the Archaeological Evidence” in *Companion*, 407.

quarters for the *milites*. The size of the centurion's quarters, however, has become much larger. The earliest evidence from fortresses on the Rhine during the Augustan period has their quarters roughly double the size of the cramped eight-men *contubernia*.<sup>55</sup>

The centurion's quarters seem to have grown even larger during the Flavian period. While the average post-Augustan *contubernium* was a crowded 9m<sup>2</sup>, the average centurion's block now appears to have grown to a rather luxurious 230-259m<sup>2</sup>, with some close to double that size. This meant that the centurions' quarters in some camps comprised between thirty to forty percent of each entire barrack block.<sup>56</sup> The quality of building materials in centurions' quarters also improved. While their quarters' floors during the Augustan period were merely dirt, they later became made of timber by the reign of Claudius, and then concrete by the Flavian dynasty. By the second century CE, some centurions' houses possessed separate drainage outlets, heated brick floors and hypocausts, others even with painted plaster walls, and floor mosaics.<sup>57</sup> The houses for centurions of the first cohort (*primi ordines*), moreover, seem to have been even more splendid. At Inchtuthil and Nijmegen, their houses had central courtyards with exterior windows, and were not much smaller in overall size than those of the military tribunes.<sup>58</sup>

The increasing size of centurions' quarters is obviously connected with the growth of the rank in pay and status during the first two centuries CE. It is notable,

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<sup>55</sup>At Oberaden and Dangstetten. The doubled size of the quarters corresponds with Hyginus (127f. 1). Cf. Hoffmann, "The Quarters of Legionary Centurions," 134. See also Appendix C, Figs. 4a, 4b, 5a.

<sup>56</sup>Appendix C, Figs. 2-3. Centurions' quarters were roughly 230m<sup>2</sup> at Inchtuthil, but 400m<sup>2</sup> at Lambaesis. See B. Hoffmann, "The Quarters of Legionary Centurions," 111; Shirley, *Building*, 52; MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society," 227.

<sup>57</sup>Drainage outlets: Caerleon. Heated floors: Carnuntum, Vindonissa. Hypocausts: Carnuntum, Bonn, Regensburg. Mosaics: Bonn. Wall painting: Nijmegen, Caerleon. Cf. Hoffmann, "Quarters of Legionary Centurions," 118-121, 140; Shirley, *Building*, 64.

<sup>58</sup>See Appendix C, Fig. 6. Cf. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 174-179.



however, that while these quarters were now grander and more opulent, they nonetheless remained attached to the soldiers' barrack blocks. Moreover, in comparing positive features (e.g., windows, heating, freshwater basins, concrete floors) of centurions' houses with more negative (e.g., open drains, unlit rooms, crude latrines), it is clear that the best-quality quarters for centurions were consistently those located closest to *contubernia*.<sup>59</sup> The physical space of the centurions' quarters in camp, therefore, further defined their intermediate status in the legions between rank and file and commanding officers. While enjoying increased pay and some of the luxuries and status of a tribune, they nonetheless emphasized their bonds with the *milites* by locating their quarters beside the barrack blocks.

In addition to their housing, the mere physical presence of the centurions themselves in the camp helped to define the soldiers' activities and responsibilities. To withdraw all the centurions from a camp, for example, could be used as a disciplinary tactic against mutinous soldiers. In CE 69, soldiers of Legio I Germanica refused to accept Galba as Rome's new emperor and mutinied. While their legionary commander, Flavius Valens, fled and concealed himself, the *praefectus castrorum* (unsurprisingly, a former centurion) found a solution that brought the rebellious soldiers back into the fold:

[He] helped the situation by the device of forbidding the centurions to make the rounds of the pickets and of omitting the usual trumpet call to summon the soldiers to their military duties. The result was that they were all amazed, and they began to look at each other in perplexity, frightened by the simple fact that no one was in command.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Hoffman, "Quarters of Legionary Centurions," 139.

<sup>60</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 2. 29: *addit consilium, vetitis obire vigiliis centurionibus, omissis tubae sono, quo miles ad belli munia cietur. igitur torpere cuncti, circumspectare inter se attoniti et id ipsum quod nemo regeret paventes.*

The physical withdrawal of the centurions not only left the soldiers disoriented and disorganized, but also served to unravel the symbolic structure of the legionary camp, and how the soldiers defined themselves according to it.

The opportunities for the centurion to define his authority and acclimatize soldiers to military life in the camp, however, were limited by military developments during the Principate. Massive numbers of soldiers needed to be dispersed across a wide area in order to ease the burdens on local food and water supply. To supply the legionary camps and ensure communication between them and local communities also required extensive garrisoning, observation, and protection of transportation routes.<sup>61</sup> As the legions became less involved in major campaigns rather than dealing with smaller and diverse threats to the security of the frontiers, Rome's military manpower was increasingly spread over a very wide geographic area, with individuals assigned to all kinds of assignments, often for extended periods of time.<sup>62</sup> Annual rosters (*pridiana*) for a legion's available manpower demonstrate that a significant proportion of some legions' soldiers and officers were away from their parent unit, engaged in activities as varied as building projects, tax-collecting, and policing.<sup>63</sup> Cohorts, *centuriae*, and *contubernia*, even within a single fortification, could occasionally be mixed or dispersed.<sup>64</sup>

The legionary camp alone, therefore, was insufficient or too impermanent a context for fostering cohesion among its soldiers and for defining the centurions'

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<sup>61</sup>This is one reason why Caesar wintered his legions in separate locations within Gaul. See M. C. Bishop, "Praesidium: Social, Military, and Logistical Aspects of the Roman Army's Provincial Distribution During the Early Principate" in *Roman Army as a Community*, 112.

<sup>62</sup>Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy*, 61, described these as "low-intensity threats."

<sup>63</sup>These activities are addressed in more detail below, Chapter Six.

<sup>64</sup>M .C. Bishop, "Praesidium: Social, Military, and Logistical Aspects of the Roman Army's Provincial Distribution During the Early Principate" in *Roman Army as a Community*, 111-118; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 25.

relationship with them. As we shall see, however, other duties and aspects of the centurionate continued the process of defining the centurion's authority and loyalties to the military hierarchy beyond the confines of the camp.

## 5.4 Integration beyond the Ramparts

### 5.4.1 Self-Identification by Unit

Discussions on cohesion and integration of Roman soldiers in the legions have been strongly influenced by studies in military history. Marshall argued, for example, that the presence or presumed presence of comrades is essential to cohesion and combat motivation. Soldiers will fight better if integrated and maintained in small units rather than as individuals in a larger division.<sup>65</sup> Marshall's emphasis on the importance of the smaller, primary unit was adopted into perspectives on cohesion in Roman units – a Roman soldier would be unwilling to risk his neck for a group among whom he had no identity. The eight-soldier unit (*contubernium*), therefore, seemed the logical place for this sort of social bonding between *milites*.<sup>66</sup>

Doubts have been raised, however, to assigning too much emphasis on primary unit cohesion to combat motivation and military commitment, since factors such as individual leadership, ideology, religious belief, and concepts of honour or duty were also important.<sup>67</sup> There is little evidence, moreover, for a Roman emphasis on the identity and

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<sup>65</sup>Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 42, 65, 151-153.

<sup>66</sup>E.g., MacMullen, "Legion as society," 230; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 252-253. On *contubernia* seen as a mess unit, see Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 114.

<sup>67</sup>E.g., Bartov, *Hitler's Army*; S. J. Watson, "Religion and combat motivation in the Confederate armies," *JMH* 58.1 (1994), 29-55; J. M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, 1997); Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*; S. Wessely, "Twentieth-Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown," *JCH* 41.2 (2006), 269-286.

importance of the *contubernia*, or the small unit as a factor in combat performance.<sup>68</sup>

There are also objections against such emphasis on the importance of primary unit cohesion in military organizations in general, especially when it fails to account for the fact that soldiers might identify with several levels of units at the same time. Kellett, for example, notes that there is identification with the small unit in combat, but outside of combat it is more often with the company or unit with relative administrative, tactical, and disciplinary self-containment. An obvious example in the modern Canadian or British militaries is the regiment, which has its own colours, battle honours, dress, traditions, history, geographic location, or association.<sup>69</sup>

Another consideration, moreover, is to distinguish between cohesion and esprit de corps. Montgomery is credited with first distinguishing between the two:

Cohesion denotes the feelings of belonging and solidarity that occur mostly at the primary group level and result from sustained interaction, both formal and informal, among group members on the basis of common experiences, interdependence, and shared goals and values. *Esprit* denotes feelings of pride, unity of purpose, and adherence to an ideal represented by the unit, and it generally applies to larger units with more formal boundaries than those of the primary group.<sup>70</sup>

The emphasis on the regiment would seem more applicable to the Roman military, since it is widely recognized that the equivalently sized unit, the legion, supposedly possessed many of the characteristics of esprit Montgomery listed. The *centuria* too, however, was critical to defining a Roman legionary's identity and socializing him with his comrades.

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<sup>68</sup>E.g., Wheeler, "Battles and Frontiers," 644-648; Harris, "Readings," 304. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 254-259, 432.

<sup>69</sup>Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 44-49, 97. On structural and social weaknesses of the British regimental system, however, see French, *Military Identities*, passim. On overlapping loyalties and bonding, see Siebold, "The Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 277-288.

<sup>70</sup>Speech by Montgomery (1946), quoted in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 46. On identification primarily with the regiment and *esprit de corps*, cf. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 29-30.

The centurions who commanded this type of unit likewise were essential to this process, both functionally and symbolically.

The previous chapter argued that the *centuria* rather than the cohort was the chief tactical unit in the legions. It also seems to have been the chief unit of identification for soldiers. It was small enough to allow its members to form personal bonds with each other and their officers, yet large enough to require its own administration and supervisory officer. According to Vegetius, soldiers were even arranged in ranks for battle that corresponded with the order in which they were first enrolled into their *centuria*.<sup>71</sup> Inspections, soldiers' accounts, the issuing of commander's orders, requisitioning of supply (*annona*), and assigning of fatigues were all managed at the level of the *centuria*, and centurions appear to have had their own staffs for assisting them in carrying out these duties.<sup>72</sup> Archaeological and epigraphic evidence suggests, moreover, that the ownership of all kinds of equipment and materials, including small blades, bronze washers, and wooden tablets, was identified by which *centuria* it belonged to, usually by the name of the centurion himself.<sup>73</sup>

By the first century CE, although one's legion was a source of pride, Roman legionaries appear to have identified themselves most strongly by their *centuria*. It was the locus where camaraderie was formed and military practices were developed.<sup>74</sup> By the

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<sup>71</sup>Veg. *Mil.* 1. 26.

<sup>72</sup>Soldier's accounts: Fink, *RMR* 74. There is evidence that a legion had a *centurio frumentarius* chosen specifically for acquiring food supplies, under the supervision of the *primuspilus*, though the *tribunus laticlavus* might have done this for armies in the field. Cf. P. Kehne, "War and Peacetime Logistics: Supplying Imperial Armies in East and West" in *Companion*, 327-331; J. Roth, *The Logistics of the Roman Army at War* (Leiden; Boston; Köln, 1999), 88, 274; Richier, *Centuriones*, 537-538, 560-570.

<sup>73</sup>See *CIL* XIII 7060a, 10027, 11525; *AE* 1926, 11; 1946, 262; 1996, 1176.

<sup>74</sup>See analysis by Le Roux, "Armée et société," 263-264, on military epitaphs that highlight this level of identification.

early second century CE, the names of specific commanding centurions become commonly used to designate *militēs*. Official correspondence addressed to a *miles*, for example, could identify him by his centurion's name.<sup>75</sup> Dio claims, moreover, that by the reign of Domitian, soldiers inscribed the names of their centurions on their shields.<sup>76</sup> This was obviously useful for forming or reforming ranks in battle, but it also reaffirmed the unit to which the soldier belonged. Soldiers also identified themselves by their centurion in commemorative documents. Votive and dedicatory inscriptions by soldiers typically list their unit by identifying their centurion's own name. A votive dedication by a *miles* at Vindonissa from the Flavian period was supervised by one centurion:

To Silvanus, Lucius Flavius Burrus, *miles legionis* of Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis, in the *centuria* of Bettuuius Silo, willingly, gladly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.<sup>77</sup>

Such specific reference to one's officer during this period in all likelihood could only have been given with centurions, since the average soldier would likely have had ten or more legionary commanders during his service.

More strikingly, this pattern is common also to individual soldiers' funerary inscriptions, such as in this commemorative inscription found in Dalmatia for a soldier from the Julio-Claudian period:

L. Flavius Valens Heraclea, son of Lucius, of the Fabian Tribe, soldier in Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis, *centuria* of Iulius Priscus, lived for forty-two years, served for twenty-two in the *centuria* of Iulius Priscus, his heirs saw it to being done.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>E.g., *AE* 1996, 1127; *BRGK* XVII 104.

<sup>76</sup>Dio 67. 10. 1.

<sup>77</sup>*CIL* XIII, 11508 (Richier no. 128): Silvano L(ucius) Flavius Burrus miles leg(ionis) XI C(laudiae) P(iae) F(idelis) (centuria) Bettuui(i) Silonis, v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) l(aetus) m(erito). Cf. *CIL* XIII 6739, 7703. Cf. Table III in Richier, *Centuriones*, 87-95.

<sup>78</sup>*CIL* III 14999: L. Flavius L. f. Fab(ia) Valens Heraclea mil(es) leg(ionis) XI C(laudia) p(ia) f(idelis) (centuria) Iuli Prisci an(norum) XLII stip(endiorum) XXII (centuria) Iuli Prisci h(eredes) f(aciendum) c(uraverunt).

The mention of the commanding officer of his *centuria* goes together with his legion.

This formula for self-identification is found too in a commemoration of a soldier from second century Lusitania, in this case without any mention of his *origo* or voting tribe:

P. Valerius Flavus, soldier of Legio VII Gemina Felix, *centuria* of Iulius Germanus, lived for thirty years, lies here, may the earth lie lightly on you....<sup>79</sup>

Most centurions, in fact, are known to us only through their soldiers' references to their *centuriae* in commemorative inscriptions.<sup>80</sup>

Epigraphic evidence from the late second and early third centuries CE reveals several interesting changes to this practice. For example, a trend began for soldiers to refer to their *centuria* by the centurion's rank in his cohort (e.g., *hastatus prior*, *pilus posterior*) rather than personal name. In some cases, the sign for *centuria* is omitted entirely, since the rank of its commanding officer (e.g., *hastatus prior*) takes its place.<sup>81</sup> In other cases, the soldier's entire legionary cohort is identified through a shorthand reference to the commanding centurion.<sup>82</sup> This is likely reflective of the increasing tendency to disperse and mix legions into temporary expeditions and *vexillationes* over the course of the second century, making it more difficult to refer to specific centurions.<sup>83</sup> Regardless of whether or not these soldiers mentioned their centurion's name, however, it is noteworthy that the officer's rank itself came to personify the *centuria* during the

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<sup>79</sup> *CIL* II 5266: P. Valerius Flav(u)s miles leg(ionis) VII G(eminae) F(elicis) 7(centuria) Iulii Germani ann(or)um XXX h(ic) s(itus) e(st), s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis)....

<sup>80</sup> See also *AE* 1912, 188; 1925, 131; 1929, 192; 1955, 238; *CIL* II 2887; III 6747, 12071, 15196; VIII 2593, 3174; XI 6059; XIII 6840; *RIB* 157, 476. Especially useful are catalogues in Summerly, "Studies in the Legionary Centurionae" and Richier, *Centuriones ad Rhenum*. Cf. A. K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and its People* (London, 1994), 53.

<sup>81</sup> E.g., *CIL* III 6592: coh(ort)is II(secundae) hastati prioris.

<sup>82</sup> E.g., *CIL* III 195: 7(centuriae) pri(mi) pri(incipis) pri(or)is. For symbols assigned to the different centurions, see below, n. 83.

<sup>83</sup> Speidel, "The Centurion's Titles," *Epigraphische Studien* 13 (1983), 43-61.

Principate, and that soldiers strongly and consistently identified themselves with this level of unit.

A centurion conversely was expected to identify strongly with the soldiers whom he commanded. In addition to praising the centurions' stern discipline and obedience, as well as their individual bravery in combat, ancient authors often moralize about the centurions' responsibility to protect their soldiers. Caesar gives a speech to M. Petreius, a centurion at Gergovia who, badly wounded, attempted to save his soldiers:

At the same time he rushed into the midst of the enemy, and having slain two of them, drove the remainder a little from the gate. When his men attempted to aid him, "In vain," he said, "do you try to save my life, since blood and strength are already failing me. Get out of here while you still can, and retreat to the legion." Thus he fell fighting a few moments later, and saved his men by his own death.<sup>84</sup>

Caesar here lays another burden of officership on the centurionate: not only must they be exemplars of martial bravery and discipline, but they must also work to ensure the safety of their soldiers, and, if necessary, be willing to sacrifice themselves for them.<sup>85</sup> Plutarch takes the point the furthest, when he projects this attitude back to Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus, a commander in the Fourth Macedonian War (148-146 BCE). During a battle at Corinth, a centurion told Metellus that he might seize a fortification with the loss of only ten soldiers. Metellus sharply rebuked the centurion, asking him if he wished to be one of those ten.<sup>86</sup> While clearly an example of Plutarch's moralizing, his account still emphasizes the responsibility of centurions toward their soldiers. The centurion's

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<sup>84</sup>Caes. *BG* 7. 50: *Simul in medios hostes irrupit duobusque interfectis reliquos a porta paulum summovit. Conantibus auxiliari suis "Frustra," inquit, "meae vitae subvenire conamini, quem iam sanguis viresque deficiunt. Proinde abite, dum est facultas, vosque ad legionem recipite." Ita pugnans post paulum concidit ac suis saluti fuit.*

<sup>85</sup>See above, Chapter Two, 79-85.

<sup>86</sup>Plut. *Moralia* 201F-202.



responsibility and identification with his unit, however, is illustrated best in their religious roles.

#### 5.4.2 Centurion as Religious Representative

Tacitus has one soldier claim: “The soldier’s particular honour is in his camp – it is his *patria*, his *penates*.”<sup>87</sup> Tacitus here emphasizes two particularly relevant views towards the camp. First, it was the soldier’s community, his *patria*, of which he was a responsible member.<sup>88</sup> Second, in tying the camp to the Roman household gods, the *penates*, Tacitus makes explicit what all Roman soldiers and officer understood implicitly, that the camp possessed the religious significance of a community. It was a sacred space with its own shrines and with walls that furnished its boundaries.<sup>89</sup> A common form of punishment in the legions was to be expelled beyond the rampart walls for a period of time. This punishment had potentially physical consequences, since the transgressor was now exposed to the elements, bandits, or enemy soldiers. Its consequences, however, were also ideological because of the great shame of having been expelled both physically and symbolically from the community.<sup>90</sup>

Within this community, the *centuria* became an important locus for religious practice. The development of the cult of the *genii* during the Principate, for example, strengthened both the *milites*’ loyalty to the legions and the emperor but also their

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<sup>87</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 3. 84: *proprium esse militis decus in castris: illam patriam, illos penatis.*

<sup>88</sup>Josephus (*BJ* 3. 5. 2) equates the camp with a city with its own temple, while Vegetius (*Mil.* 2. 25) claims it has the strength and conveniences of a fortified city. Cf. P. Le Roux, “Armée et société en Hispanie sous l’Empire” in *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft*, 263.

<sup>89</sup>Goldsworthy, *Roman Army at War*, 149; Hegeland, “Roman Army Religion,” 1490-94.

<sup>90</sup>Expelled from camp: Frontin. *Strat.* 4. 18-23. Corbulo condemned Paccius Orfitus, a *primuspilus*, to bivouac outside the ramparts for attacking the enemy against orders (see above, Chapter Two, n. 126). Cf. Lendon *Empire of Honour*, 239.

identification with their *centuria*, and a sense of esprit de corps.<sup>91</sup> While there were cults to the *genius* of other sizes of unit, such as the legion and auxiliary cohort, the largest number of chapels, altars, and statues by far are those dedicated to the *genius centuriae* of the legion. At legionary camps such as Lambaesis, moreover, the chapel to the genius of the *centuria*, like the centurions' quarters themselves, was located directly beside the soldiers' living quarters, emphasizing the social and religious bond of this unit and its members.<sup>92</sup>

As an individual legion was a form of community, moreover, so officers and commanders acted as civic officials in presiding over religious ritual, acting as religious “intermediaries” between soldier, emperor, and gods. It was the task of legionary commanders, for example, to oversee major activities, such as auspices and augury before battle, or the conduct of celebration of the emperor's birthday.<sup>93</sup> Beyond the major religious rituals, however, were a host of more “everyday” religious activities. It was in this field of religious practices that the centurions performed a key role.

In the shift towards the use of smaller-sized military units and garrisons for varied assignments later in the Principate, moreover, centurions were usually the senior-ranking legionary officers in the vicinity. This made them responsible for serving as the unit's leader in religious ritual and carrying out the tasks of religious officials.<sup>94</sup> Individual centurions are recorded offering prayers and votive dedications to various cults for the

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<sup>91</sup>Cf. Stoll, *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung*, 20-21.

<sup>92</sup>*CIL* XIII 7611; *CIR* 1360; *CIL* III 3457; AE 1905, 242. See Speidel, “Cult of Genii,” 1546. See also Appendix C, fig. 4a.

<sup>93</sup>See Stoll, “Offizier und Gentleman,” 139-141. On celebrations and ceremonies reinforcing individual commitment to an organization, see R. Machalek et al., “Suspending Routine Duty: The Sociological Significance of Military Holidays and Ceremonies,” *AFS* 32.3 (2006), 389.

<sup>94</sup>The centurion *als Kultfunktionär*. See Stoll, “Offizier und Gentleman,” 151-154.

safety and cohesion of their unit. These cults included (unsurprisingly) that of *Disciplina*,<sup>95</sup> but more popular seem to have been cults to *genius centuriae*, as well as aspects of Jupiter, such as *Depulsor* (“Averter”), and especially *Custos* (“Guardian”) and *Salutaris* (“Bringer of Health”).<sup>96</sup> That centurions especially honoured the latter two makes sense in regard to their own responsibilities and concerns as an officer – to discipline yet also preserve the health of the soldiers under their command.

Another common function was to lead the ritual dedication of an altar, as in the inscription established by a centurion and his unit in Noricum during the reign of Domitian:

To Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Hercules Saxanus, Sex. Donnius Vindex, Centurion of Legio X Gemina Pia Fidelis Domitiana and his fellow soldiers freely and deservedly fulfilled their vow.<sup>97</sup>

Centurions also oversaw the consecration of newly built structures. One dedicatory inscription, for example, shows a centurion inaugurating a new sanctuary to Jupiter Optimus Maximus Balmarcod at Deir el Kal’a:

To Jupiter Optimus Maximus Balmarcod, Marcus Verginius Bassus, centurion of Legio IIII Scythica, fulfilled his vow.<sup>98</sup>

This temple would have served soldier, civilian, and the veterans of the nearby colony at Beirut as a locus of religious activity.<sup>99</sup> By adopting the role of religious official,

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<sup>95</sup>See above, Chapter One, 43.

<sup>96</sup>*CIL* III 6456; 10389 = *ILS* 3025. *Custos* and *Salutaris* were also favoured by equestrian officers. See evidence in Birley, “Religion,” 1512, 1519-28.

<sup>97</sup>*CIL* XIII 7717: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Her(culi) Sax(ano) Sex(tus) Donnius Vindex (centurio) leg(ionis) X G(eminae) P(iae) F(idelis) D(omitianae) et commilitones v(otum) s(oluerunt) l(ibentes) m(erito). See also *CIL* XIII 8533.

<sup>98</sup>*ILS* 4328: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Balmarcodi M(arcus) Verginius Bassus (centurio) Leg(ionis) IIII Scyt(hica) vot(um) sol(vit). See also *CIL* XIII 7709, 7720, 8495; *AE* 1900, 161; 1928, 84; 1940, 217; 1979, 645; 1991, 1620. Cf. R. Rebuffat, “L’arrivée des Romains à Bu Njem” *LibAnt* 9-10 (1972-73), 121-134; Richier, *Centuriones*, 560-570.

therefore, centurions helped to define the soldiers' membership in the military community and acquired for themselves another form of personal authority.

The religious and institutional association between the soldiers and their centurions is apparent even with the highest rank of the centurionate, since the *primuspilus* was associated most strongly with the legionary eagle (*aquila*). Marius is credited with first assigning the *aquila* as the chief standard and symbol of the legion itself.<sup>100</sup> While the *aquila* itself was borne by the eagle-bearer (*aquilifer*), by the late Republic, this totem was most strongly associated with the *primipili*, and became a prominent visual motif on their commemorative reliefs during the Principate.<sup>101</sup> Juvenal, who uses the *vitis* as a metaphor for the centurion, similarly associates the *primuspilus* with the *aquila*, poking fun at how old one might have to be in order to “acquire the eagle” (i.e., become *primuspilus*).<sup>102</sup> In his work on the divination of dreams, Artemidorus Daldianus advises that when a man dreams of giving birth to an eagle, if he is not already of high social status, then he is destined to become a soldier and, eventually, *primuspilus*.<sup>103</sup> Losing the legionary *aquila* to an enemy was the ultimate disgrace for the Roman military, and when the *aquilifer* was killed or otherwise unable to bear the standard, it fell upon the *primuspilus* himself to do this.<sup>104</sup> This effort to save the *aquila* sometimes cost the *primuspilus* his life, as it did Atilius Verus in the second battle

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<sup>99</sup>Cf. Stoll, *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung*, 326. On the centurion's role in local building projects, see below, Chapter Six.

<sup>100</sup>Plin. *NH* 10. 5. Cf. Veg. *Mil.* 2. 6. 2.

<sup>101</sup>E.g., M. Paccius Marcellus (*CIL* IX 1005; *ILS* 2639) and M. Pompeius Asper (Appendix A, fig. 14). Cf. F. Coarelli, “Su un monumento funerario romano nell’abbazia di San Gulielmo al Goletto,” *DArch* 1 (1967), 46-71. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 178.

<sup>102</sup>See above, Chapter Four, n. 86.

<sup>103</sup>*Oneirokritika* 2. 20.

<sup>104</sup>Caes. *BG* 4.25; Liv. 25. 14; 34. 46; Dio 74. 6. 6; Frontin. *Strat.* 2. 8. 1-5.

of Cremona in CE 69.<sup>105</sup> The loss of the legion's *primuspilus* was devastating, but for Verus himself, it was preferable to the shame he would incur through the loss of both his and his legion's symbolic standard.

Because of its strong association with both Jupiter and the legion, moreover, the *aquila* was also considered a sacred object with its own spirit (*numen*). The "birthday" of the eagle (*natalis aquilae*) also represented that of the legion, and was made to coincide on the calendar with the birthday of the emperor himself. The *primuspilus* logically played a critical role in the religious and ceremonial activity.<sup>106</sup> *Primipili* frequently venerated the *aquila* in votive inscriptions, making dedications to the "honour of the Eagle" (*honos aquilae*). Moreover, *primipili* even seem to have evoked the *honos aquilae* in worshipping the *numina* of the emperor and the legion.<sup>107</sup> Just as centurions were required to take on religious functions on behalf of smaller units and expeditionary forces, the *primuspilus* occupied a key religious role for the members of the entire legion.

Recruitment and membership within the *centuria*, therefore, was the most important context for legionaries to form social bonds and for the centurion to define himself in relation to them. Outside of life in the camp, one's *centuria* remained a key unit by which soldiers identified themselves, both in combat and other types of military and religious activities. Centurions themselves were strongly associated with the unit and its members, and apparently took pains to emphasize these bonds. Even concerning the soldier's identification with the larger legion, it is noteworthy the officer most strongly

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<sup>105</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 3. 22.

<sup>106</sup>On religious nature of the *primipilate* and *aquila*, see also Veg. *Mil.* 2. 6. 2; 2. 8. 1. Cf. Stoll, *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung*, 269-271.

<sup>107</sup>E.g., dedications by Legio I Italica: AE 1935, 98; 1972, 526; 1982, 849; 1985, 735; 1988, 894. See also CIL XIII 6679, 6694; VII 103 = RIB 327. Cf. Hegeland, "Roman Army Religion," 1477; Dobson, *Primipilares*, 155-160.

associated with the legion's sacred symbol is none other than the most senior of centurions, the *primuspilus*. This association between soldier and centurion, moreover, could and often did continue beyond military service.

## 5.5 The Military Community

Military identities, associations, and relationships did not necessarily terminate with the conclusion of one's active service in the Roman legions, so that retirement from service offered another context in which centurions socially defined themselves and their soldiers. Many centurions, although upon retirement enjoying *praemia militiae* and prestige that were significantly greater than those of the *milites*, nonetheless continued to associate themselves with their former charges, often in ways that directly reflected their institutional relationships in the military.

Most of the available evidence for retired centurions and soldiers is epigraphic, and there are several challenges in evaluating it. First, the epigraphic habit for establishing stone funerary monuments for soldiers or officers like centurions only becomes visible in Italy by the middle to late first century BCE, primarily during the early reign of Augustus. Surviving epitaphs of ordinary soldiers are not numerous before Caesar's dictatorship, so that the evidence excludes most soldiers who were settled by either Sulla or Pompey.<sup>108</sup> Second, one finds significant variety in both style and textual description for epitaphs during the Principate. Styles usually conform to local traditions rather than any Roman "military standard," and there are often differences in information and style between an epitaph for soldiers who died in service (usually commemorated

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<sup>108</sup>Keppie, *Colonization and Veteran Settlement in Italy* (London, 1983), 44-46.

among comrades), and those who died having been long retired (usually commemorated among family and community).<sup>109</sup> This variety makes it more difficult to infer both the frequency and form in which centurions were settled among others of their rank or with soldiers under their command. In addressing retirement, therefore, we must again speak of trends or patterns rather than rules regarding veteran settlement.

The oldest and most traditional Roman method in rewarding veteran soldiers was to settle them in newly-established colonies (*coloniae*). By the late Republic, it became common practice for Roman commanders to settle veterans in such colonies either nearby an established community, or in an entirely new location, usually outside of Italy. These settlements continued to serve an important role, not only providing pools of veteran troops for certain commanders, but also in establishing a stronger Roman presence in the area. Augustus himself founded dozens of colonies, from modern Nîmes to Beirut,<sup>110</sup> and later emperors continued this tradition, establishing numerous colonies across the Empire. The process by which these colonies were established provides additional evidence for the relationship between centurions and their soldiers. Evidence shows that centurions continued to occupy an important position in the lives of the retired soldiers, and wielded civic authority in the new communities comparable to their military authority.

The evidence for how these colonies were established is limited mainly to remarks from ancient authors and soldiers' epitaphs. For those of Caesarean and Augustan foundation, we are fortunate, however, at least to have the charter for the

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<sup>109</sup>In Dalmatia, for example, out of thirty recorded epitaphs, only seven mention family associations of any kind. Epitaphs created in a family context likewise do not use the same formulae or record everything typical of a military epitaph. See J. J. Wilkes, "Army and Society in Roman Dalmatia" in *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft in der Römischen Kaizerzeit*, 328-331. See also Keppie, "Having Been a Soldier" in *Documenting the Roman Army*, 33-38.

<sup>110</sup>RG 16, 28. Colony as a "stronghold of Roman power" (*velut arcem suis finibus*): Liv. 10. 1. 7.

foundation of a Caesarean colony *Iulia Genetiva* at Urso (modern Osuna). It suggests that whoever acted as commissioner of the colony during the late Republic selected the first magistrates and priests of the settlement, as well as an *ordo* of up to one hundred local councillors (*decuriones*). The established minimum wealth requirement for entry into a municipal *ordo* was 100000 sesterces.<sup>111</sup> The combination of greater pay and allotment of land at retirement made centurions comparatively wealthy in these new communities. During this period, therefore, centurions occupied a large proportion of these magisterial positions, including the chief magistracies, such as the *duumvir*. Centurions also received comparatively larger plots of land when settled in colonies founded by Augustus, while many others were automatically enrolled into the *ordines* of their hometowns as decurions in order for Augustus to secure the communities' loyalty.<sup>112</sup>

The evidence from the late Republic and early Principate suggests that when veterans were settled *en masse* in *coloniae*, their organization, allotments of property, and political leadership reproduced the social hierarchy from the function and status of the ranks of tribune, centurion, and soldier from their military lives.<sup>113</sup> Tacitus later praised this policy:

For it was not [under Nero], as it once was, when entire legions were settled with their tribunes and centurions and soldiers of the same unit, so as to create a republic (*rem publicam efficerent*) through harmony and mutual affection....<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>*Lex. Urs.* Lxvi. On commissioner of colony, see: Cic. *Leg. Agr.* 2. 96. Cf. Keppie, *Colonization*, 97, 106.

<sup>112</sup>Caes. *BC* 1.17; App. *BC*. 5. 128; Dio 49. 14. 3. Cf. Hyg. 114. 1; Sic. Flacc. 156. 9; Hyg. Grom. 176. 13; *LC* 214. 12; 216. 11; 232. 2. Cf. Keppie, *Colonization and Veteran Settlement*, 92, 106, and Sylloge at 212-223.

<sup>113</sup>Le Roux, "Armée et société," 273.

<sup>114</sup>*Ann.* 14. 27: *Non enim, ut olim, universae legiones deducebantur cum tribunis et centurionibus et sui cuiusque ordinis militibus, ut consensu et caritate rem publicam efficerent....*



This form of settlement had made it easier for M. Antonius to recruit Caesar's veterans following his death into cohesive military units in a short amount of time. Cicero claims that Antonius told men to get back into training, with their drilling and equipment to be supervised by the colony's *duoviri*.<sup>115</sup> These "leaders of the army" (ἡγεμόνες τοῦ στρατοῦ) in the colonies, as Appian refers several times to them, can only be centurions. Indeed, Antonius eventually formed his bodyguard exclusively from this group of centurions, "because they had qualities of leadership and were skilled in war."<sup>116</sup>

Tacitus, however, contrasts this ideal establishment when he assesses *coloniae* established under Nero and his successors:

Strangers among one another, drawn from different companies, without a leader or any mutual goodwill, were suddenly gathered together, as if from an entirely different race of mortals, resembling a crowd rather than a colony.<sup>117</sup>

Tacitus' contrast is exaggerated. Grants of *missio agraria* by Augustus' successors appear largely to have continued as massed settlements in veteran colonies rather than individual land grants (*viritim*). New *coloniae*, predominantly in the western provinces, continued to be established, albeit in varying frequency, by almost every emperor over the next two centuries.<sup>118</sup> There is abundant epigraphic evidence, moreover, that entire

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<sup>115</sup>Cic. *Phil.* 2. 100; *Att.* 14. 21. 2; 14. 20.

<sup>116</sup>App. *BC* 3. 5: . For ἡγεμόνες τοῦ στρατοῦ, see *BC*. 2. 125; 5. 16. On likelihood of *duoviri* and leaders being centurions, see Keppie, *Colonization*, 52, 105. Centurions of colonies founded by Sulla earlier led their fellow veterans in support of Catiline (*Sall. Cat.* 59. 3).

<sup>117</sup>*Ann.* 14. 27: *sed ignoti inter se, diversis manipulis, sine rectore, sine adfectibus mutuis, quasi ex alio genere mortalium repente in unum collecti, numerus magis quam colonia.*

<sup>118</sup>*Coloniae* were founded by Claudius (Camulodunum, Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium); Nero (Antium, Tarentum); Vespasian (Scupi); Domitian (Sirmium, Lindum Colonia); Nerva (Glevum, Sitifis); Trajan (Timgad, Poetovio, Ratiaria, Vetera); Hadrian (Italica, Oecus); M. Aurelius (Faustinopolis?). Cf. Keppie, "Colonization and Veteran Settlement in Italy in the First Century A.D." *PBSR* 52 (1984), 77-114; R. F. J. Jones, "A False Start; the Roman Urbanization of Western Europe," *WA* 19.1 (1987), 47-57; C. Ando, "The Army and the Urban Elite," 372; Wesch-Klein, "Recruits and Veterans," 444.

legions formed solid blocks within the colony, or were at least distributed in adjoining settlements.<sup>119</sup> Only rarely does the evidence imply that they were mixed together as Tacitus suggests, and these cases are primarily found in prior *coloniae* that accommodated successive settlements of legionaries over time.<sup>120</sup>

Centurions continued to be favoured as the new community's leading magistrates. Nero, for example, founded several colonies, including Antium, where he compelled many *primipili* to take up residence.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, archaeological evidence from Tingad, the *colonia* founded by Trajan, reveals that allocation of land favoured centurions and other officers compared to legionaries. While such evidence is scanty, it appears these conditions of settlement led some veteran soldiers to become tenants on the land of their former military superiors.<sup>122</sup>

Cases of settling veterans *en masse* and creating colonies *ex nihilo*, however, appear to have diminished by the reign of Hadrian. Studies have suggested several possible reasons for this trend. Most practically, the increasingly static deployment of legions along the frontiers furnished the emperor with less free, newly-conquered land to give away. Many retiring soldiers and officers during this period, moreover, seem to have preferred to receive their *praemia* in cash, while others simply might have wished to remain in the region where they had served rather than be uprooted to a foreign land. The result of this trend was increasing settlement in the *canabae* that grew nearby the

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<sup>119</sup>Cf. N. K. Mackie, "Augustan Colonies in Mauretania," *Historia* 32. 3 (1983), 342

<sup>120</sup>E.g., Scupi. Cf. A. Mocsy, *Gesellschaft u. Romanisation in der röm. Provinz Moesia Superior* (Budapest, 1970), 70.

<sup>121</sup>Suet. *Nero* 9.

<sup>122</sup>Tingad: E. W. B. Fentress, *Numidia* (Oxford, 1979), 130. Centurions as landlords: L. Foxhall, "The Dependant Tenant: Land Leasing and Labour in Italy and Greece," *JRS* 80 (1990), 104; MacMullen, "Legion as a Society" 452.

legionary camps.<sup>123</sup> Even in these situations, however, retired centurions remained an important social presence. For military tribunes, either of senatorial or equestrian rank, military service was by and large a temporary occupation before involvement in other political or social positions. This fact, combined with their relatively few numbers in the legions, would likely have left centurions generally as the highest-ranking, former legionary officers in nearby military communities.

On the whole, it appears that many legionary soldiers and officers during the Principate decided to preserve the identities and bonds that they had formed in the context of military service. Centurions accordingly, whether in local municipalities, *coloniae*, or *canabae*, maintained a civic and social status relative to veterans that was comparable to their military status on active service. It is thus worth questioning whether or not this social and symbolic proximity between centurions and their soldiers might have worried Roman military authorities. While important to strengthening bonds between the higher officers and the soldiers, excessive closeness between centurions and *milites* might also have caused centurions to identify themselves more closely with their soldiers than commanders. This problem has obvious implications to a broader question about the centurionate, as to whom they associated themselves with more closely – the commanders or the rank and file – and whether or not this association could lead to instability and mutiny.

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<sup>123</sup>B. Dobson & J. C. Mann, “The Roman Army in Britain and Britons in the Roman Army,” *Britannia* 4 (1970), 196-197; Mann, *Legionary Recruitment and Veteran Settlement during the Principate* (London, 1983), 32, 58. Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 182.

## 5.6 The Centurion's Loyalties

One of the oldest challenges for armies and their military officers, especially those occupying the middle ranks, is how to find the right balance between showing care and affection for their soldiers, yet without running the risk of identifying themselves too much with them. Wellington, for example, considered that “gentlemen” alone were fit to lead soldiers of the early nineteenth century British army, but too wide a gulf in social status and bearing between an officer and a soldier generated poor discipline, since officers who were too aloof could not exercise close control. On the other hand, the officers of a tactical unit must, in the end, represent a coercive, higher authority, to whom both they and their soldiers owe their final loyalty.<sup>124</sup> This issue of hierarchical distinction has remained a concern in developing the structure and ideologies of modern armies, as Kellet states:

Even the officers who lived with their platoons tended to think like the enlisted ranks and to minimize their contacts with higher echelons. Thus, their response to orders involving high risk became uncertain.<sup>125</sup>

As mentioned above, the traditional view among scholars of the Roman military is that centurions during the Republic were more reflective of the rank and file in their worldviews, whereas during the Principate centurions saw their interests increasingly more closely tied with the legionary command and the emperor. During the Republic, while Rome's aristocracy might praise centurions for their military qualities, their members nonetheless associated the rank more closely with the *milites*. Cicero, for

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<sup>124</sup>Turner, *Gallant Gentlemen*, 150; Janowitz & Little, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 103.

<sup>125</sup>*Combat Motivation*, 103.

example, praised a lost *primuspilus* as a “noble of his own class” (*nobilem sui generis*).<sup>126</sup> In depictions of early Roman history by writers of the early Principate, centurions are consistently portrayed as siding with the plebs against the patricians in the “Struggle of the Orders.” Volero Publius, a centurion described as a “champion of the plebs,” fought the senatorial aristocracy to help create the Plebeian Tribal Assembly.<sup>127</sup> Another centurion, Verginius, is credited with leading the charge to overthrow the *decemviri* in 451 BCE after an aristocrat violated his daughter. Livy compares these events with the rape of Lucretia and the overthrow of the monarchy in 509 BCE.<sup>128</sup>

While Republican authors such as Caesar or Polybius often distinguished between centurions and higher-ranked officers in both their duties and loyalties, the argument goes, authors during the Principate tend to group centurions and military tribunes together. Tacitus especially separates centurions from the greed and of the mob (*vulgus*), as he describes disobedient or crass soldiers during the Rhine and Danube mutinies. Praiseworthy are those exemplary centurions who stringently enforce discipline, in contrast to those such as Clemens, whose “favourable qualities made them popular with the mob.”<sup>129</sup>

This interpretation, however, somewhat oversimplifies the evidence concerning centurions’ loyalties and character, or at least many ancient authors’ perceptions of them. Livy distinguishes the character of centurions from that of the *milites* during the

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<sup>126</sup>Cic. *Att.* 5. 20. Cf. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 230-231.

<sup>127</sup>Dion. *Hal.* 9. 39-42; Liv. 2. 55.

<sup>128</sup>See above, Chapter Three, n. 177.

<sup>129</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 1. 28: *alii bonis artibus grati in vulgus*. See also *Ann.* 1. 17-20, 66; 13. 18; 14. 27; *Hist.* 1. 36, 80; 2. 5-7; 4. 19; Vell. *Pat.* 2. 20. 4; Plut. *Galba.* 18. 4. Cf. Smith, *Service in the Post Marian Army*, 68. MacMullen, “The Legion as a Society,” 234. On Tacitus’ characterization of soldiers as *vulgus*, see Kajanto, “Tacitus’ Attitude to War,” 712.

Republic. He does this most clearly when he condemns a centurion's rape of a captive woman in 149 BCE as characteristic of "the lust and greed of a soldier" (*libidinis et avaritiae militaris*) rather than that of a centurion.<sup>130</sup> Even later during the Principate, when the centurions' pay and status rose greatly, it is clear that the senatorial aristocracy remained prejudiced against non-equestrian centurions. This attitude is most prominent in the speech to Augustus by Maecenas that Dio contrives, that although equestrian centurions who had been directly commissioned to the rank could become senators, those centurions who had initially served as rank and file soldiers, and had only become equestrians upon retirement, should be barred, and in no way considered of the same social status.<sup>131</sup> Although eager to praise centurions as models of Roman discipline, loyalty, and bravery, the members of Rome's aristocracy were careful to avoid regarding them in any way as equals in status or abilities to those of equestrian or senatorial birth.<sup>132</sup>

Finally, while centurions do indeed bear the brunt of soldiers' anger in several mutinies recorded by Tacitus, that is far from sufficient evidence for concluding that they were generally conservative and averse to change. There are many examples in Tacitus and other ancient accounts where centurions not only side with revolting soldiers against the emperor, but even appear as the prime movers of the action. This was certainly the case in the civil wars of CE 69, when both soldiers and officers of several legions contested the legitimacy of the reigning emperor and sought to raise their own

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<sup>130</sup>See above, Chapter Two, n. 28.

<sup>131</sup>Dio 52. 25. 6. Cf. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 230-231; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 16.

<sup>132</sup>See Isaac, "Hierarchy," 394-395.

commanders to the purple.<sup>133</sup> The disloyalty of some centurions to their commanders or emperor became infamous. Caligula's assassin and former legionary centurion, Cassius Chaerea, murdered him because he evidently could no longer bear the vain emperor's insulting behaviour towards him.<sup>134</sup> While Caracalla might have called his centurion bodyguard "the lions," his teasing of one particular centurion, Julius Martialis, led the officer to murder him.<sup>135</sup> While the loyalties of many centurions during the Principate often did indeed lie with the imperial regime, to whom they owed their livelihood and prospects, these loyalties remained subject to specific relationships. In general, centurions seemed to have looked out for their own interests, and placed themselves on the sides of either the soldiers or aristocracy depending on the circumstances.

The relationships between centurion and soldier were similarly complex. Centurions during the Principate unquestionably enjoyed great privileges and status in the legions. This position made many centurions envied and others hated by the rank and file, while their uninvited entry into higher social and political circles generated complaints among the aristocracy. Their various functions both during service and after it, however, reveal also a sense of obligation of the centurion toward his soldiers. As Reali has pointed out, concepts of *amicitia* in the Roman military helped to define relationships among *milites*, but also between them and members of higher ranks like the centurionate. *Amicitia* implied a vertical as well as horizontal sense of "friendship," in

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<sup>133</sup>Sen. *De Ira*. 1. 18; Suet. *Dom.* 10; Tac. *Hist.* 2. 60; Dio 62. 24. 1; Dio 78. 4. 1. Cf. Summerly, *Studies in the Legionary Centurionate*, 229. For examples of the centurions' inconsistent behaviour in CE 69, see Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 107-108.

<sup>134</sup>See above, Chapter Two, n. 30.

<sup>135</sup>His successor, Macrinus, suffered a similar fate from a centurion. Cf. Herod. 4. 13. Dio 79. 5; 79. 40. Dio's account of Martialis is slightly different, in that Martialis is awaiting his promotion to the centurionate, but is persistently spurned by Caracalla.

which military relationships could be emotional or affective, but also obligatory and reciprocal.<sup>136</sup> In this aspect of Roman military culture, James' interpretation of the role of patronage in structuring military authority is perhaps appropriate.<sup>137</sup> The social relationship between a centurion and his soldiers corresponded less with a master and his slaves than a patron and his clients.

### **5.7 Conclusion: Between *Vulgus* and *Nobilitas***

Even for ancient authors, who associated social status so closely with abilities and expected behaviour, centurions seem to have been difficult to classify. On the one hand, especially during the Principate, the pay and benefits for centurions during service, as well as their gratuities and prospects afterwards, sharply distinguished them from the rank and file. On the other hand, while the social status of legionary centurions rose, they were expected to maintain a strong association with their soldiers. Whether in combat, military training, religious activities, and civic life during retirement, centurions demonstrated both practical and symbolic obligations toward their soldiers.

This chapter has argued that because centurions occupied this intermediate position between aristocratic commander and common soldier, it made them ideal candidates for integrating legionaries into the Roman military hierarchy and helping to develop their sense of identity in the military community. Many modern studies of the Roman army have long noted the importance for aristocratic commanders to find the right balance between familiarity and detachment with their soldiers in order to earn their

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<sup>136</sup>Reali, "*Amicitia Militum*," 35-36. On different kinds of military bonding, see also Siebold, "The Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 287.

<sup>137</sup>See above, Chapter Four, 131-132.



respect and obedience. Phang, for example, discusses how Roman commanders' performance of certain symbolic acts (e.g., sleeping on hard ground, placing themselves near the battle) could help to bridge the gap between themselves and the soldiers, and foster a sense of pride and unity for their legion. Lendon, meanwhile, acknowledges that since the Roman military community comprised men of widely different social origins and expectations, the "military opinion-community" was fragile, requiring commanders to emphasize both a broad sense of *nobilitas* as well as some "grime and spit."<sup>138</sup>

What can be added here is that centurions also performed this critical social role, and in a far more immediate way, since they themselves *inhabited* the intersection between *vulgus* and *nobilitas*. While Juvenal might quip in his Fourteenth Satire about a Roman seeking easy wealth by "petitioning for the *vitis*," he immediately adds: "See to it that Laelius notes your uncombed head and hairy nostrils, and admires your broad shoulders!"<sup>139</sup> Although centurions' loyalties were expected to lie with the emperor and commanding officers, their position equally relied on the support of the rank and file, and many centurions went out of their way to demonstrate it – even in their appearance. This position between the soldiers and commanding officers, moreover, had consequences so their relationships and functions outside of the military communities. The next chapter will explore how the centurionate was crucial not only to defining Roman military authority within the legions, but also among Rome's imperial subjects.

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<sup>138</sup>Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 95; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 241-243.

<sup>139</sup>Juv. 14. 193-195: *sed caput intactum buxo narisque pilosas / adnotet et grandes miretur Laelius alas.*

## Chapter Six: Military Representatives of Rome

### 6.1 Introduction

Among the accounts recorded in the New Testament of the miraculous healings performed by Jesus of Nazareth, one concerns a centurion based in Capernaum, a community near the Sea of Galilee. The unnamed centurion appealed to Jesus to heal his sick servant, and Jesus replied that he would come:

The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but speak only the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” Jesus was amazed at what he heard, and he told his followers, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.”<sup>1</sup>

This story is the first among many prominent encounters between local inhabitants and centurions in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> It illustrates that to the writers of these texts, the centurion was understood to be not only an important local Roman officer, but a symbol of Roman military and imperial authority.

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<sup>1</sup>*Matthew* 8:5-10: ἀποκριθεις δὲ ὁ ἑκατόνταρχος ἔφη Κύριε, οὐκ εἰμι ἰκανὸς ἵνα μου ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃς: ἀλλὰ μόνον εἰπὲ λόγῳ, καὶ ἰαθήσεται ὁ παῖς μου: καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπός εἰμι ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν [τασσομένου], ἔχων ὑπ’ ἑμαυτὸν στρατιώτας, καὶ λέγω τούτῳ Πορεύθητι, καὶ πορεύεται, καὶ ἄλλῳ Ἔρχου, καὶ ἔρχεται, καὶ τῷ δούλῳ μου Ποίησον τοῦτο, καὶ ποιεῖ. ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐθαύμασεν καὶ εἶπεν τοῖς ἀκολουθοῦσιν Ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν, παρ’ οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὗρον. See also *Luke* 7:1-10.

<sup>2</sup>Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee*, 142, n. 136, proposes that this centurion is more likely to be Herodian than a Roman soldier, since no Roman legions would have been based in Galilee. Legionary centurions, however, often served in regions without legions. See also Alston, “The Ties that Bind: Soldiers and Societies,” in *Roman Army as a Community*, 191, n. 61.

The previous chapters have demonstrated the centurions' pivotal role in defining important practices of the Roman army – discipline, combat, officership, the training and social integration of soldiers – that are strictly military in nature, and largely internal to the functioning of the legions. Another important concern of the Roman army, however, was the nature of its relationship to nearby civilian inhabitants, or what in modern terms might be described as an aspect of Roman civil-military relations. It is important, therefore, to approach the centurions not just as warriors, but as political and administrative instruments.

Opinions regarding the degree of interaction between the Roman army and local inhabitants have varied. On the one hand, scholars have sometimes described the Roman army as a “total institution” or “closed community,” a socially and culturally isolated polity sealed off from the civilian society outside, where one’s civilian identity was replaced by a corporate military identity, with its own customs and codes of behaviour.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, many studies have challenged this perception, arguing that the boundary between the world of the camp and that outside was not as rigid as presumed. Archaeological evidence from the Principate demonstrates that soldiers in the legionary camps developed strong relationships with people in nearby *canabae*, and many soldiers were quartered outside the camp.<sup>4</sup> The extensive monitoring by the Roman military of major transportation routes and strategic sites along the frontiers through a network of forts and garrisons, moreover, suggests that the Roman frontiers (*limes*) should be

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<sup>3</sup>E.g., MacMullen, “The Legion as a Society,” 226; B. Shaw, “Soldiers and Society: The Army in Numidia,” *Opus* 2 (1983), 133-159; Pollard, “The Roman army as ‘total institution,’” *passim*; I. Hayes, “Introduction: The Roman Army as a Community,” 8.

<sup>4</sup>See study by van Driel-Murray above, Chapter Five, n. 12.

understood better as a series of routes for supply and communication than a rigid zone that divided military from civilian, or Roman from barbarian.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the Roman army's many responsibilities beyond defending Roman or allied territory from military threats guaranteed that its members interacted with local populations who were both friendly and hostile to Rome. The legions that were stationed along the *limes* of the empire were not always engaged in prolonged conflict with foreign enemies and some soldiers seldom if ever took part in major campaigns, but were detailed instead to other, "less military" activities.<sup>6</sup> From the reign of Augustus onward, the army was by far the largest and most complex state-run institution, and its hundreds of thousands of members were assigned to all kinds of civil duties, including provincial staffing, engineering and construction, policing, diplomacy, and taxation.

The presence of the Roman military at the periphery of the empire has long attracted the interest of scholars, who have written extensively on the social activities of Roman soldiers and their relationships with non-Roman inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars, such as Luttwak or Mattern, have examined evidence of Roman military activities along the frontiers with an eye towards formulating a Roman "imperial policy."<sup>8</sup> In these cases, however, the focus is on the activities of the Roman emperor and aristocracy to an extent that overlooks the logistical and geographic realities of Rome's empire. There is little

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<sup>5</sup>Cf., Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 47-48; Bishop, "Praesidium," 113-117; Hassall, "Homes for Heroes," 39. Stoll, "'De honore certabant et dignitate,'" 106-136.

<sup>6</sup>R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1963), v, goes too far in claiming, "many a recruit need never have struck a blow in anger, outside of a tavern," but he conveys the essential point.

<sup>7</sup>See esp. collected essays in Birley: *The Roman Army*; Breeze and Dobson, *Roman Officers and Frontiers*; M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies*; M. A. Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft*. Still useful is Domaszewski's *Die Rangordnung*.

<sup>8</sup>Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy*, passim; Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy*, esp. 113-116.

evidence of instructions from the emperor for decisions that out-posted officers and their garrisons faced on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, even the local governor and legionary commanders appear as very distant individuals. The evidence suggests, rather, a great deal of regional decentralization and local initiative in military affairs, where middle-ranking officers such as centurions were essential to defining and asserting Roman imperial authority.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter begins to address this oversight by examining broadly the specific roles of legionary centurions in Roman civil-military relations. While several studies have noted centurions assigned to specific duties in imperial administration, including directing provincial governors' staffs or maintaining local security in the province of Egypt, the evidence has typically been approached piecemeal.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, this chapter combines the evidence for several of the centurions' non-military activities during the Principate in order to present a broader analysis of their role in imperial administration. This discussion necessarily remains cursory, since the limitations of our sources preclude observing specific centurions over a period of time or examining any one activity in great detail. Papyri, stone stelai, and literary accounts often suggest rather than confirm centurions' relationships with local inhabitants, and illustrate activities that might only belong to specific parts of the empire rather than the whole.<sup>11</sup> In examining the non-military activities of centurions, therefore, depth must often be sacrificed for scope.

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<sup>9</sup>Cf., Goodman, *State and Society*, 141. A. K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and its People* (London, 1994), 17-18, 23. See also R. Talbert's review of Mattern in *AJPh* 122. 3 (2001), 451-454.

<sup>10</sup>See, for instance, Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung*, 29-39; Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army*, 431-435; Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt*, 86-96.

<sup>11</sup>For instance, a majority of legal petitions to centurions are from the Fayum, and there is debate over whether this is the result of archaeological contexts or practice. See Whitehorne, "Petitions to the Centurion", 155-169.

The primary purpose in adopting this broad approach, however, is to demonstrate how centurions served as important intermediaries between Rome's military and its civilian inhabitants. In analyzing this relationship, this chapter follows the model for political relations adopted by Alston. In this model, the Roman Empire comprised a series of sub-polities – social, political, and cultural groups often overlapping and interacting with one another – that were “loosely bound together by the imperial polity.” As the largest and most versatile Roman institution across the empire, the Roman military was crucial to integrating the imperial and sub-polities.<sup>12</sup> This inter-polity relationship depended a great deal on individual interactions between Roman officials and local populations: centurions were at the heart of this interaction. This chapter, therefore, argues that through their activities in local administration, engineering, diplomacy, policing, and judiciary, centurions were in a position where, to Rome's subjects, allies, and even enemies, they were the most recognizable and immediate representation of Roman imperial authority.

## 6.2 Engineers

The absence of major conflicts in a given region of the empire allowed Roman governors to use the legions' vast manpower for all kinds of engineering projects. Both legionary and auxiliary troops were frequently detached to *vexillationes* in order to mine precious minerals, haul stones at quarries, acquire timber, or assist in building and repairing structures.<sup>13</sup> The legions offered more than just manpower for hard labour,

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<sup>12</sup>Alston, “The Ties that Bind: Soldiers and Societies” in *Roman Army as a Community*, 176-178.

<sup>13</sup>Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 63-4. For more on Roman quarrying, see J. C. Fant, “Quarrying and Stoneworking” in J. P. Oleson ed., *Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World* (Oxford, 2008), 125-126.

however, since they also possessed soldiers with a variety of technical skills. Legions were equipped with their own carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, arrowsmiths, coppersmiths, roof-tile-makers, stone-cutters, ditchers, glass-fitters, and sappers.<sup>14</sup> Such personnel were essential to have on hand to assist in building camps, siege engines, towers, bridges, and roads. Some legionaries, especially officers, were skilled in more specialized fields of engineering, including architects (*architecti*), surveyors (*mensores*, *agrimensores*, *gromatici*), and hydraulic engineers (*libratores*). They were in especially high demand on the northern frontiers, where such skills were often non-existent among the civilian inhabitants. In many respects, the army was the most important resource in the empire for technical knowledge and labour.<sup>15</sup>

Legionary centurions were in a natural position to perform a key role in these military building projects. Their traditional duty in supervising the construction of marching camps provided them with useful technical experience. Even more useful were their traditional military authority and experience in commanding smaller units of soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Centurions thus functioned often as both technical experts and supervisors for all kinds of engineering projects. They are attested in commanding detachments formed to acquire raw building materials for military construction.<sup>17</sup> More commonly, they

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<sup>14</sup>Most of these men were *immunes*. See above, Chapter Four, 138.

<sup>15</sup>MacMullen, "Roman Imperial Building in the Provinces," *HSCP* 64 (1959), 214, aptly called the army a "technical school for the entire empire." Cf., Domaszewski, *Rangordnung*, 25-26; Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army*, 276; Cuomo, "A Roman Engineer's Tale," *JRS* 101 (2011), 160-161.

<sup>16</sup>Importance of both technical and managerial skills: Cuomo, "A Roman Engineer's Tale," 160. On marching camps, see above, Chapter Five, 186-189.

<sup>17</sup>E.g., *TV* II. 316; *CIL* XIII 7703. For more examples of centurions in charge of these types of detachments, see table in Richier, *Centuriones ad Rhenum*, 539-40, 553-560.

commanded both legionary and auxiliary *vexillationes* formed to build strategic structures.<sup>18</sup>

During the second century, especially from the reign of Marcus Aurelius onward, we see a marked growth of “imperial building projects” in which army units were typically employed. Some structures were intended primarily for military logistics, but scholars have seen an additional, more symbolic attempt by Rome to assert its imperial authority.<sup>19</sup> The construction of guard towers (*burgi*, or Gr. σκόπελοι), for example, is seen not only to have helped to monitor local inhabitants and protect supply routes, but to serve also as a symbolic reminder of Roman power, and a warning to potentially hostile neighbours. Since legionary centurions often oversaw their construction and supervised their sentinels, they ascribed their own names and those of their unit and legion through dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>20</sup> Following the cessation of a campaign against Germanic tribes across the Danube and Rhine Rivers, for example, Commodus ordered the laborious construction of *burgi* at frequent intervals along the great rivers. An inscription from a *burgus* in Upper Germany details its construction:

To Jupiter Optimus Maximus, on account of the completion of the tower, the *vexillatio* of First Cavalry Cohors I Equitata Sequannorum et Rauracorum, under the command of Antonius Natalis, Centurion of Legio XXII Primigenia Pia Fidelis, fulfilled their vow willingly, happily, and deservedly.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>It was not uncommon for legionary centurions to be placed in charge of a cohort of the *auxilia*. See E. Birley, “A Roman Altar from Old Kilpatrick and Interim Commanders of auxiliary units” in *Roman Army Papers*, 221-231, including list of other examples on 227-230. For other strategic building, see *CIL* III 199-201; *ILS* 8716a.

<sup>19</sup>See Ulpian, *Dig.* 1. 16. 7. 1. On imperialist and post-imperialist arguments on the role of Roman provincial building, see Cuomo, “A Roman Engineer’s Tale,” 153-156.

<sup>20</sup>See *CIL* III 3653; *P.Fay.* 38. Cf., Bowman, *Life and Letters*, 22; Pollard, “The Roman army as ‘total institution’,” 214; C. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford, 2012), 224-225.

<sup>21</sup>*CIL* XIII 6509 = *ILS* 2614: I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximimo) vexil(latio) coh(ortis). I Seq(uannorum) et Raur(acorum) eq(uitatae) sub cur(a) Antoni(i) Natalis (centurionis) leg(ionis) XXII P(rimigeniae) P(iae) F(idelis), ob burg(um) explic(itum) v(otum) s(olvit) I(ibens) I(aetus) m(erito).



Other military engineering projects offered a less confrontational image, demonstrating instead Roman stability and generosity through structures that supported local religious, political, and commercial activities. These projects could range from the building of walls, roads, and canals to more complicated structures like arches, porticos, aqueducts, temples, and basilicas, which were often constructed in tandem with local civilian labour.<sup>22</sup>

Here too dedicatory inscriptions preserve the names of individual centurions who were directly appointed by provincial governors to oversee important projects. Governors in provinces that lacked legionary garrisons could appoint auxiliary officers to command the detachments, but might also simply request legionary centurions from nearby provinces. In a Dalmatian monument from CE 173, we find one such centurion in charge of a construction detachment:

During the consulship of Severus and second consulship of Pompeianus, the Temple of Father Liber and Libera, which had become dilapidated, was restored and had its portico augmented by the First Belgian Cohort, under the command of Fl. Victor, Centurion of the Legio I Adiutrix Pia Fidelis.<sup>23</sup>

Since Dalmatia no longer had its own legionary garrison during this period, Victor was apparently transferred from Legio I Adiutrix Pia Fidelis, based nearby in Upper

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<sup>22</sup>Centurion Pomponius Victor oversaw restoration of city walls at Mada'in Saleh in late second century. See L. Nehmé et al., "Hegra of Arabia Felix" in *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris, 2010), 299-305. Basilica: Statilius Taurus at Syene (*CIL* III 6025=*ILS* 2615). See B. Isaac & I. Roll, "Legio II Traiana in Judaea", in *ZPE* 33 (1979) 149-156. See also *CIL* XIII 8201=*ILS* 4312, for centurion restoring temple at Cologne, in CE 211. On working with local civilian labour, see MacMullen, "Roman Imperial Building," 32-48.

<sup>23</sup>*CIL* III 8484 = *ILS* 3381: Templum Liberi Patris et Liberae vetustate dilabsum restituit coh(ors) I Belgicae adiectis porticibus, curam agente Fl. Victore (centurionis) leg(ionis) I Ad(iutricis) P(iae) F(idelis) Severo et Pompeiano II c(onsulibus).

Pannonia.<sup>24</sup> Emperors themselves even transferred specific centurions to take charge of major projects, as Caligula did in delegating a *primuspilus* to survey the digging of a canal across the Corinthian isthmus.<sup>25</sup>

In distinguishing between the different types of soldiers in the American military during the mid-twentieth century, Janowitz asserted that professional soldiers, especially those deemed to be “heroic leaders,” cannot accept the self-image of an engineer.<sup>26</sup> Such a distinction, however, would not have been understood in the Roman legions of the Principate, which were far less compartmentalized and specialized in their activities than a modern army. Indeed, virtues like *patientia* and *virtus* were common to both soldiers and engineers, and an officer’s involvement in local benefaction was something to be advertised with pride.<sup>27</sup> Some centurions who survived their terms of service and involved themselves in civic affairs after their retirement even found other outlets for their technical interests and abilities. Oescus, a veteran colony in Lower Moesia, honoured a retired centurion and local citizen during the early third century CE:

To T. Aurelius Flavinus, son of Titus, of the Papirian Tribe, *Primipilaris* and Chief of City Magistrates of the colony of Oescus, Town Councillor of the cities of the Tyrani, Dionysiopolitani, Marcianopolitani, Tungri, and Aquincenses, patron of the guild of engineers (*patronus collegii fabrum*), honoured by the Great and Divine Antoninus Augustus with 50 000 HS and 25 000 HS and promotion for his bravery against the hostile Carpi, and deeds successfully and courageously

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<sup>24</sup>The last legion in Dalmatia (III Flavia) was moved by Domitian to the Danube for the war against Decebalus in CE 86. See Birley, “A Roman Altar,” 225; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, 196.

<sup>25</sup>Suet. *Cal.* 21. See also *ILS* 2612 = *I. Pan.* 39. Other centurions in dedicatory inscriptions for roads and canals: *CIL* III 200, 201.

<sup>26</sup>*The Professional Soldier*, 21-22, 46.

<sup>27</sup>E.g., *CIL* VIII 2728 = *ILS* 5795, which commemorates Nonius Datus, whose efforts as a *librator* for the colony of Saldae was described by the heading: “*Patientia, Virtus, and Spes.*” Cf., K. Grewe, “Tunnels and Canals” in *Oxford Handbook of Engineering*, 330-333; Cuomo, “A Roman Engineer’s Tale,” 159-160.

accomplished. Cl. Nicomedes, Town Councillor of the Tyrani (made this) for his very worthy friend. Place given by decree of the Town Councillors.<sup>28</sup>

Flavinus' military honours show that he was clearly no novice on the battlefield, yet his interest in engineering was great enough that his patronage of the local guild of engineers is advertised.

In assuming a leading role in these projects that constructed or restored walls, community temples, aqueducts and other infrastructure, centurions inscribed their names in dedications in order to portray their piety and generosity, as well as that of their legion and the emperor, to the welfare of the community. These projects could be viewed by Rome's subjects in different ways. On the one hand, such projects could be perceived as the manifest of Roman oppression and decadence. Rabbinic texts record a disagreement over Roman rule:

Rabbi Judah began and said, "How fine are the works of this people! They have made market-places, they have built bridges, they have erected baths." Rabbi Jose was silent. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai answered and said, "All that they have made they made for themselves; they built market-places to set harlots in them; baths to rejuvenate themselves; bridges to levy tolls for them."<sup>29</sup>

Tacitus also famously admits that Roman buildings such as bath houses promoted "culture" while bonding local populations to servitude.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, several dedicatory inscriptions from the Roman provinces of Africa, Syria, and Dalmatia during the late second to early third centuries praise

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<sup>28</sup>*ILS* 7178; *AE* 1961, 208: T. Aurelio fil(io) T(ito) Papir(ia) Flavino primipilari et principi ordinis col(oniae) Oesci, et buleutae civitatu[m] Tyranorum, Dionysipolitanorum, Marcianopolitanorum, Tungrorum et Aquincensium, patron[o] college(i) Fabr(um), honorat[o] a divo Magno Antonino Aug(usto) HS L millia n(ummum) et XXV [et] gradum promotionis [ob] alacritatem virtu(tis) adversus hostes Ca[r]pos] et res prospere et va[l]ide ges]tas. Cl Nicom[edes] buleuta civitatis [Tyra]norum amico dign[issimo]. l(oco) d(ato) d(decreto) d(decurionum).

<sup>29</sup>*Shabbat* 33b, cited in Cuomo, "A Roman Engineer's Tale," 154, trans. By R. Fréchet in M. Hadas-Lebel's *Jérusalem contre Rome* (Les Editions du Cerf, 1990), with discussion 380-387.

<sup>30</sup>*Agric.* 21.

centurions for their personal generosity in repairing or constructing temples and other public buildings from their own money.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the best known textual depiction of such thanks to a centurion's benefaction is recorded in the New Testament. In Luke's account of the meeting between the centurion at Capernaum and Jesus mentioned at this chapter's outset, local Jewish elders actively encouraged Jesus to meet with him:

When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us."<sup>32</sup>

Whether viewed as sinister or beneficial, Roman building projects were undeniable manifestations of Roman imperial power. Centurions, with both their own technical skills and experience in supervising detachments of men, clearly offered a valuable pool of officers which the army and local magistrates could employ for such projects. Their substantial involvement and memorialization in the building and restoration of imperial structures helped to cast them among local communities as the emperor's immediate military representatives.

### 6.3 Diplomats and Special Agents

The centurions' activities in Roman diplomacy provided an important context for direct interaction with inhabitants both within and outside the empire; curiously, these remained unexplored in modern scholarship.<sup>33</sup> This diplomatic role appears primarily to

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<sup>31</sup>Africa: *CIL* VIII 1574; *AE* 1933, 33 (reign of M. Aurelius). Syria: see A. H. M. Jones, "Inscriptions from Jerash," *JRS* 18 (1928), no. 10; *IG* III 1017. Dalmatia: *CIL* III 8484 = *ILS* 3381.

<sup>32</sup>*Luke* 7:4-5: οἱ δὲ παραγενόμενοι πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν σπουδαίως λέγοντες ὅτι ἄξιός ἐστιν ᾧ παρέξῃ τοῦτο, ἀγαπᾷ γὰρ τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν καὶ τὴν συναγωγὴν αὐτὸς ᾠκοδόμησεν ἡμῖν.

<sup>33</sup>For a general discussion of Roman diplomacy, see F. Millar, "Government and Diplomacy in the Roman Empire during the First Three Centuries," *IHR* 10.3 (1988), 345-377, esp. 348, n. 5, with bibliography.

have comprised two duties. The first was to escort important individuals across Roman boundaries or dangerous territories. A common opportunity for this task occurred when foreign dynasts or hostages were to be brought to meet a Roman military commander or magistrate, as occurred early in CE 54, after a failed attempt by King Vologaeses of Parthia to invade Armenia. Having finally withdrawn, Vologaeses entrusted some of the leading members of the Arsacid family as hostages to a centurion named Insteius.<sup>34</sup> In CE 72, When King Antiochus of Commagene was accused by the governor of Syria, L. Caesennius Paetus, the king fled to Cilicia rather than face Roman legions in battle. Paetus consequently ordered one of his centurions to apprehend Antiochus, and escort the king in chains to Rome.<sup>35</sup>

Escorting individuals of such status would obviously have been a great honour for a centurion, and worthy of commemoration. An inscription commemorating the extraordinary career of the centurion C. Velius Rufus, for example, advertises among his many great honours and positions his appointment under Vespasian to escort Parthian hostages:

To C. Velius Rufus, son of Salvius, *primuspilus* of the Legio XII Fulminata, prefect of *vexillationes* from nine legions: I Adiutrix, II Adiutrix, II Augusta, VIII Augusta, IX Hispana, XIV Gemina, XX Victrix, XXI Rapax, tribune of Thirteenth Urban Cohort, (commander?) of army of Africa and Mauretania sent to crush the peoples who dwell in Mauretania, decorated by Emperors Vespasian and Titus in the Judaeen War with *corona vallaris*, necklaces, ornaments, armbands, *corona muralis*, two spears, two standards, and in the war involving the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatians, against whom he participated in an expedition through the kingdom of Decebalus, King of the Dacians, also decorated with a *corona muralis*, two spears, two standards, Procurator of Emperor Caesar Augustus Germanicus for the province of Raetia, with right of capital punishment. He was despatched to Parthia and conveyed Epiphanes and

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<sup>34</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 13. 6-9. See also Jos. *AJ* 19. 308; Liv. 24. 48.

<sup>35</sup>Vespasian later overruled the order and had Antiochus brought to Greece instead. See Jos. *BJ* 7. 238. On Paetus' authority in Syria, see PIR<sup>2</sup> C173.

Callinicus, sons of King Antiochus, back to the Emperor Vespasian, together with a great number of *tributarii*. M. Alfius Olympiacus, son of Marcus, Fabian Tribe, *aquilifer*, veteran of the Fifteenth Legion Apollinaris (set this up).<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, centurions were granted authority to serve as envoys. During the Republic, this function appears typically to have required centurions during military campaigns to convey important messages or negotiate on behalf of a Roman military commander who possessed *imperium*. According to Livy, this function of centurions existed as early as the Middle Republic. Roman generals in Spain, for example, apparently used centurions as legates to entreat King Syphax of Numidia to join Roman forces against Hannibal during the Second Punic War. Aemilius Paulus similarly sent centurions to communities in Epirus to gain their support against Perseus of Macedon during the Third Macedonian War.<sup>37</sup>

This function of legionary centurions appears to have become more common during the Principate. When on military campaign or stationed near the eastern frontiers, centurions were frequently appointed to represent Roman legates in communication with foreign dynasts. Common communications included the discussion of Roman treaty terms, request for military support, and admonishment against a dynast's perceived intentions. In CE 62, for example, the Roman legionary commander in Syria, Cn.

Domitius Corbulo, sent a centurion named Casperius to treat with King Vologases of

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<sup>36</sup>AE 1903, 368; ILS 9200: C. Velio Salvi f. Rufo, p(rimo)p(ilo) leg(ionis) XII fulm(inatae), praef(ecto) vexillariorum leg(ionum) VIII. I adiut(ricis), II adiut(ricis), II Aug(ustae), VIII Aug(ustae), VIII Hisp(anae), XIII gem(inae), XX vic(tricis), XXI rapac(is), trib(un) coh(ortis) XIII urb(anae), duci exercitus Africi et Mauretanicus ad nationes quae sunt in Mauretania comprimendas, donis donato ab imp(eratore) Vespasiano et imp(eratore) Tito bello Iudaico corona vallar(i), torquibus, fa[le]ris, armillis, item donis donato corona murali, hastis duabus, vexillis duobus et bello Marcomannorum Quadorum Sarmatarum adversus quos expeditionem fecit per regnum Deceballi regis Dacorum corona murali, hastis duabus, vexillis duobus; proc(uratori) imp(eratoris) Caesaris Aug(usti) Germanici provinciae Pannoniae et Dalmatiae, item proc(uratori) provinciae Raetiae ius gladii. Hic missus in Parthiam Epiphanem et Callicinum, regis Antiochi filios, ad imp(eratorem) Vespasianum cum ampla manu tributariorum reduxit. M. Alfius M. f. Fab(ia) Olympiacus aquilife(r) vet(eranus) leg(ionis) XV Apollinar(is).

<sup>37</sup>Syphax: See above, Chapter Five, n. 36. Perseus: Liv. 45. 34.

Parthia: Casperius “in strongly worded terms” (*ferocius*) advised him to withdraw from Armenia.<sup>38</sup> While centurions on the eastern frontier might treat with great dynasts, those on the western and northern frontiers during the Principate usually addressed lesser, local magistrates or tribal chieftains. During the revolt of the German Batavi in CE 69-70, for example, when the local legionary commander was besieged at Xanten, he sent centurions to various Gallic communities to persuade them to raise emergency auxiliaries and money for Rome.<sup>39</sup>

This duty of representing one’s commander was entrusted to centurions even in negotiations with other Roman legions during times of political upheaval. During the civil wars of CE 68-69, for example, Fl. Sabinus, brother of Vespasian and consul for 69, was besieged on the Capitol by forces in support of Vitellius. Sabinus sent a *primuspilus* to Vitellius who condemned him for this outrage and advised him to recall his partisans. Vitellius, apparently chastened, sent the same centurion through a secret palace exit, so that he, as a “mediator for peace” (*internuntius pacis*), would remain unharmed during his return to Sabinus.<sup>40</sup>

Centurions appear also to have been appointed by emperors themselves to represent directly their authority to mediate local disputes. In CE 19, for example, when Tiberius was concerned about another dynastic dispute in Thrace, he sent a centurion to order the two dynasts competing for the throne to demobilize their troops and begin

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<sup>38</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 15. 1-5. See also Tac. *Hist.* 4. 37, 57.

<sup>39</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 4. 37. Cf. *Hist.* 4. 57. See also *Hist.* 2. 58, in which Cluvius Rufus, governor of Baetica, sent centurions to secure support of Mauretanian tribes in favour of Vespasian during the civil war of CE 69.

<sup>40</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 3. 69-70. Cf. *Hist.* 1. 67; 2. 8; *Ann.* 12. 46.

negotiation.<sup>41</sup> Although many of these appointments were ad hoc, the centurion's representation of imperial authority could be formalized as an official imperial messenger (*stator*). This position seems to have been reserved to senior centurions and *primipili*, such as C. Arrius Clemens, who proudly commemorated his official role as *stator* for Trajan.<sup>42</sup>

In describing Roman diplomacy and “foreign relations,” Millar has raised the point that there is no evidence of long-term ambassadors or a permanent bureaucracy that maintained formal diplomatic relations between Rome and foreign dynasts and chieftains.<sup>43</sup> The responsibility for ad hoc diplomatic relations, therefore, must have been left with local Roman governors and his military forces. In such cases, centurions were especially useful.

First, to serve as an envoy or escort was important, yet often perilous work, and we hear of few high-ranking imperial officials being risked on such missions. In case the point needed to be stressed, the only high official of an emperor sent to treat with a foreign enemy was Tarrutienus Paternus, *ab epistulis* of M. Aurelius in CE 170, who was captured and treated poorly by the Cotini.<sup>44</sup> Emperors and legates required a representative who would be respected, yet perhaps was less critical a loss if killed or captured through treachery. Centurions' intermediate rank, combined with their reputation as tough and capable soldiers, made them ideal – or, rather, idealized – for this role. This idealization is illustrated best in an incident during Trajan's Parthian

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<sup>41</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 2. 65-7.

<sup>42</sup>*ILS* 2081. For more on *statores*, see Domaszewski, *die Rangordnung*, 28, 48, 73, 82.

<sup>43</sup>Millar, “Government and Diplomacy,” 364-368.

<sup>44</sup>Dio 72. 12. 3.



campaign, when King Meharaspes of Persia betrayed and imprisoned in the city of Adenystrae a delegation led by a centurion whom Trajan had sent to negotiate terms. Dio appears to enjoy recalling the consequences of such Parthian treachery, since the centurion (characteristically) escaped, freed his soldiers, killed the Parthian garrison commander for his treachery, and opened the city to Trajan's advancing army.<sup>45</sup>

Second, centurions and other military officers were perhaps in a better position to deal with non-Greek or Latin-speaking peoples (e.g., Marcomanni or Iazyges) beyond the *limes* than high-ranking officials dispatched from Rome.<sup>46</sup> A rare title found among military inscriptions is that of *interprex* or *interpres*, roughly translated as “interpreter” or “negotiator.”<sup>47</sup> The exact functions of the position are not described, but the earliest attestation of this position belongs to a centurion, Q. Atilius Primus. An Italian-born centurion during the reign of Claudius, he apparently had learned German dialects in order to serve in Pannonia as both an interpreter and negotiator between his legion (XV Apollonaris) and the Quadi.<sup>48</sup> As soldiers were increasingly recruited locally during the Principate, we can expect that some centurions would be invaluable as negotiators in such languages.

The great scope of diplomatic situations that Rome faced in the provinces and frontiers, including conflicts and alliances with foreign peoples, dynastic disputes, and

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<sup>45</sup>Dio 68. 22b. 3.

<sup>46</sup>See Millar, “Government and Diplomacy,” 372: “The notion that any high-status Romans ever learned to speak any of the Germanic, Celtic, Thracian, or Iranian languages...can be safely dismissed...”

<sup>47</sup>E.g., *interprex Dacorum*: AE 1947, 35; *Germanorum*: CIL III 10505; *Samatarum*: CIL III 14349; at Damascus: IGRR III 1191.

<sup>48</sup>AE 1978, 635. See T. Kolnik, “Q. Atilius Primus – *Interprex Centurio und Negotiator*: eine bedeutende Grabinschrift aus dem I. Jh. U. z. im Quadischen Limes-Vorland,” AAASH 30 (1978), 61-75. On the *interprex*, see D. Peretz, “The Roman Interpreter and His Diplomatic and Military Roles.” *Historia* 55.4 (2006), 451-470.

revolts, often required quick responses from local Roman governors and officials. Since the centurions' varied duties and assignments often brought them into regions far away from major cities and legionary camps, we might assume they were in an ideal position both to assess the situation on the ground, providing a crucial source of information to the governor, and to form relationships and trust with local peoples that could prove critical during times of unrest.<sup>49</sup>

During the later Principate, we find evidence for a new institution: the *frumentarii*. To call them the Roman "secret service" goes too far, but they appear to have acted as the emperor's special agents, conveying important messages and carrying out executions, arrests, domestic espionage. They were placed under the command of a senior, former legionary centurion, the *princeps peregrinorum*, when in Rome.<sup>50</sup> In giving this position to a centurion, the emperors appear to have continued a traditional practice in which centurions themselves acted as the personal agents of Roman commanders and emperors. This practice had its roots in the Republic, when they were depicted as useful agents for ambitious Roman politicians. During the civil war between Sulla and Marius' supporters, Cinna was slain by a centurion who supported the young Cn. Pompeius.<sup>51</sup> When Sulla himself was dictator in 81 BCE, he sanctioned a centurion to butcher Lucretius Ofella, a political rival.<sup>52</sup> Caesar, who consistently praised the

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<sup>49</sup>Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 95.

<sup>50</sup>This title derives from the camp of the *frumentarii*, the *Castra Peregrinorum*. For examples of this centurion, see *CIL* II 484; VI 354, 428, 1110, 3325, 3326, 3327, 30423. Cf., Rankov, "The Governor's Men," 30; Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman World*, 152-163.

<sup>51</sup>Cinna: Plut. *Pomp.* 5.1. Pompey himself was murdered in Alexandria by a centurion formerly under his command. See Caes. *BC.* 3. 85; App. *BC.* 2. 84; Dio 42. 3.

<sup>52</sup>Plut. *Sull.* 33. According to Sallust (*Hist.* 1. 55. 21), the centurion himself suggested and organized the proscription.

bravery and hardiness of his centurions in his histories, eventually made them the backbone of his bodyguard when he was dictator.<sup>53</sup>

The role for centurions as feared bodyguards became especially important during the civil wars that followed Caesar's assassination. M. Antonius seems to have been the first to employ a praetorian guard entirely of legionary centurions,<sup>54</sup> and Cicero's diatribes against Antonius refer to several of these "belligerent and burly" (*pugnaces et lacertosos*) officers.<sup>55</sup> Octavian similarly employed them to form his guard during this period. After his victory over Antonius' forces at Mutina in 43 BCE, Octavian sent several centurions ahead to Rome obtain payment for the army and a consulship for himself. When the senate balked at these demands, one centurion, Cornelius, was said to have grasped his sword's hilt and threatened, "This will make him consul if you do not."<sup>56</sup> Centurions were also portrayed as the chief assassins in the proscriptions of the newly-formed triumvirate. Appian's dramatic account of the slaughter noted at least twenty such murders, including, of course, that of Cicero.<sup>57</sup> His account of the murder of Salvius, a *tribunus plebis*, is typical of this role for centurions:

When soldiers burst in while the feast was going on, some guests froze in a chaotic fright, but the commanding centurion ordered them to stay still and

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<sup>53</sup>Cic. *Div.* 2. 9. For Caesar's centurion's as allies and political agents, see Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 70.

<sup>54</sup>Appian's claim (*BC* 3.5; 3.50) that the bodyguard was six thousand in strength is excessive. Cicero (*Phil.* 1.8; 8.3; 8.9) states that Antony surrounded himself with centurions and awarded the *virii fortissimi* among them. See Keppie, *Legions and Veterans*, 102.

<sup>55</sup>*Phil.* 8.9. On the loyalty of Caesarean veterans to his successors, see Cic. *Att.* 14.5.2; 14.6.1; 14.9.2; 14.10.1; 14.13.6; 14.17.6; 15.5.3; *Phil.* 10.15-19; 11.38; Plut. *Brut.* 25.4; Dio 44.34.1. See also De Blois, "Army and Society," 17. For veteran colonies as recruiting grounds, see Keppie, *Colonization and Veteran Settlement*, 52.

<sup>56</sup>Suet. *Aug.* 26: *Hic faciet, si vos non feceritis*. Cf. App. *BC* 3.86-88. Plutarch (*Caes.* 29), however, attributes this line to one of Caesar's centurions in 49 BCE, demanding that Caesar's command in Gaul be extended.

<sup>57</sup>App. *BC* 3.26; 4.12-30. Cf. Plut. *Cic.* 48; Dio 47.11.1-2; Livy, *Epit.* 120.

remain quiet. Then, snatching Salvius where he was by his hair, the centurion drew him as far as he needed across the table, cut off his head, and ordered the guests to stay where they were and make no disturbance, unless they wished to suffer a similar fate. They remained in this way even after the centurion's departure, bewildered and speechless, sitting by the tribune's decapitated body, until the middle of the night.<sup>58</sup>

Ancient writers intensified this thug-like portrayal of centurions who served emperors during the Principate. Both legionary and Praetorian centurions appear frequently in the hostile accounts of the “bad emperors.” Tiberius had a centurion murder the last of Augustus' grandchildren, Agrippa Postumus, and reportedly ordered another to beat Agrippina the Elder savagely.<sup>59</sup> Gaius secretly sent a centurion to Alexandria to arrest A. Avilius Flaccus, the prefect of Egypt, while others under Gaius play a prominent role in Seneca's writings, in which the Stoic praises those who calmly faced the centurions as they came to men's homes in order to drag them off to death. (Seneca himself was told to end his life by a centurion sent by Nero).<sup>60</sup> Tacitus records a centurion being dispatched from Rome in CE 70 to trump up charges and then summarily execute L. Piso, the proconsul of Africa.<sup>61</sup>

Centurions continued to be used as special agents of the emperor well into the second and third centuries CE. A centurion and decurion assassinated the usurper Avidius Cassius, in Syria in CE 175. In the tumult that preceded Septimius Severus' rise

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<sup>58</sup>*BC. 4. 17*: ἐσδραμόντων δὲ ἐς τὸ συμπόσιον τῶν ὀπλιτῶν οἱ μὲν ἐξανίσταντο σὺν θορύβῳ καὶ δέει, ὁ δὲ τῶν ὀπλιτῶν λοχαγὸς ἐκέλευεν ἡρεμεῖν κατακλιθέντας, τὸν δὲ Σάλουιον, ὡς εἶχε, τῆς κόμης ἐπισπάσας ὑπὲρ τὴν τράπεζαν, ἐς ὅσον ἔχρηζε, τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπέτεμε καὶ τοῖς ἔνδον αὐθις ἐκέλευεν ἀτρεμεῖν, ὡς ἔχουσι, μὴ θορύβου γενομένου πάθοιεν ὅμοια. οἱ μὲν δὴ καὶ οἰχομένου τοῦ λοχαγοῦ τεθηπότες ἀναυδοὶ μέχρι βαθυτάτης νυκτός, τῷ λοιπῷ τοῦ δημάρχου σώματι συγκατέκειντο.

<sup>59</sup>Postumus: Tac. *Ann.* 1. 6; Dio 57.3.6; Suet. *Tib.* 22. Agrippina: Suet. *Tib.* 53. See also Suet. *Tib.* 60, where Tiberius orders a centurion to beat a man near to death for blocking his litter.

<sup>60</sup>Philo *In Flacc.* 13.109-15; Sen. *De Ira* 3. 19; *De Tranq.* 14. 7-10; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 61. Other prominent victims of centurions included Caligula's wife, Caesonia (Suet. *Cal.* 59); Agrippina Minor (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 8); Octavia, former wife of Nero (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 64)

<sup>61</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 4. 49.

to power, potential contenders employed one named Aquilius, who was described as a “notorious assassin of senators.”<sup>62</sup> The extent of textual evidence that records centurions as bodyguards, thugs, and assassins is remarkable, and certainly offers a more sinister, less noble image of them compared to those idealized elsewhere in battle. It also attests to their increasingly important association with the emperor during the Principate.

If centurions’ involvement in local building projects only hinted at their status as important representatives of Roman imperial authority, then their function as escorts, envoys, and special agents of the emperor made it explicit. For a community’s town council, a tribe’s chieftain, a major foreign dynast, or a potentially disloyal Roman official, legionary centurions served as powerful representatives to communicate Roman imperial authority.

#### **6.4 Police**

The Roman army was the empire’s sword and shield, carrying out raids and major campaigns against foreign enemies, and defending the boundaries of the empire from invasion. Not all threats to internal security, however, came from major invasions; small barbarian raids, riots, banditry, and crimes of all sorts were a constant problem in most provinces, especially in less developed regions. Although Rome typically preferred communities to police themselves, the task of protecting the great expanse of Rome’s territory and communication routes, as well as the need to guard and regulate travel between harbours, communities, mines, quarries, and other important sites, lay far beyond local capabilities. While the Roman army never deployed a level of organization

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<sup>62</sup>*HA, Did. Iul. 5.8: notus caedibus senatoriis.* Centurions are frequently portrayed as assassins in the *Historia Augusta: Did. Iul. 5. 1; Pesc. Nig. 2. 5; Elagab. 16. 2.* For use by Caracalla, see Dio 77. 3. 2-4; 78. 2. 2.

similar to a modern police force, we nonetheless find during the course of the Principate that it adopted more of a constabulary role, in which soldiers and officers were heavily involved in preserving local law and order.<sup>63</sup> How to interpret evidence for policing in the Roman world is complex and lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Several points can be made, however, concerning evidence for centurions acting as agents of local security, and how this activity again illustrates their role as important representatives of Roman authority to local inhabitants.

The foremost concern of occupying legions was to provide static defense against banditry and barbarian raids. Legionary soldiers and *auxilia* were posted to smaller garrisons (*stationes* or *praesidia*) that were established in sparsely populated or under-exploited areas, often near important lines of communication and trade. By the age of Trajan, we find out-posted soldiers designated as *milites stationarii*. These soldiers could remain in a given area for short periods of time, while others might serve there for months or years.<sup>64</sup> They seem to have had many functions, including apprehending bandits, protecting public or imperial property, and reporting the movements of hostile peoples nearby. They were most commonly employed in securing roads and lines of communication, not only to protect travellers from assault or robbery, but also to monitor and control traffic.<sup>65</sup> In addition to this group were a category of soldiers posted to administrative stations: the *beneficarii consularis*. Although originally attached to the local governor's staff, they became over the course of the second century CE an

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<sup>63</sup>Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 262-263; Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 56-57, 175-185; MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian*, 58-59; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 431-435.

<sup>64</sup>The earliest attestation of them is at Mons Claudianus in CE 108-117 (*O.Claud.* 60). See Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 207-211.

<sup>65</sup>See V. Maxfield, "Ostraca and the Roman Army in the Eastern Desert" in *Documenting the Roman Army* (2003), 166-167. See also *TV II*, 242.

institution in their own right, with privileged immunity from certain military duties. Their primary task, however, was not policing, but regulation of traffic, customs, and taxes.<sup>66</sup>

Vulnerable points along major roads were given *burgi* with their own detachments of men (*burgarii*). These outposts could be quite numerous. By the reign of M. Aurelius, they were established between fifteen to thirty minute intervals (by horse) on the road between Bostra and Damascus in Syria.<sup>67</sup> Since centurions were the legions' chief disciplinary officers and were experienced in commanding *vexillationes*, they were logical candidates for commanding these vulnerable outposts. While the distinction of "garrison commander" (*curator praesidii*) is often not indicated in epigraphic and papyrological evidence, where it is listed, centurions and decurions predominate. Clearly, there could not have been sufficient legionary centurions to command every outpost, so that decurions and lower-ranking officers such as *principales* are found more commonly in command of *burgi*.<sup>68</sup> Most *praesidia* and other more important garrisons, however, seem typically to have been under the command of centurions. In Egypt, garrison commanders near the wealthier and more important Lower Nile region were all legionary centurions.<sup>69</sup> Such a post was occupied by the centurion Annius Rufus, who was appointed directly by Trajan to supervise the valuable imperial mining center at

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<sup>66</sup>J. Nelis-Clément, *Les Beneficiarii: Militaires et administrateurs au service de l'empire (1er s. a.C. – VIe s. p.C.)* (Paris, 2000), 24-25; Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 163, 203-205.

<sup>67</sup>Tertullian (*Apolog.* 2. 8) noted that military posts of this sort were stationed throughout the empire for tracking down bandits. For road between Bostra and Damascus, see *IG III* 1121-2, 1114, 1195, 1261, 1290; *AE* 1984, 921. Cf., Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 134-135; Goodman, *State and Society*, 142.

<sup>68</sup>A. H. M. Jones, "The Urbanization of the Ituraean Principality", *JRS* 21 (1931), 268; Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 136.

<sup>69</sup>Maxfield, "Ostraca," 163-164.

Mons Claudianus.<sup>70</sup> As with their engineering activities, legionary centurions could also be transferred to serve in provinces without legionary garrisons.<sup>71</sup>

Another aspect of the centurion's role in maintaining security was to monitor certain transportation routes that were important for trade and security or received heavy traffic. Centurions based along important routes in Egypt demanded that travellers acquire and present specific passes in order to proceed. Dozens of ostraka from the reign of Trajan, for example, describe centurions granting passes to all those taking the road to and from Mons Claudianus:

Quintus Accius Optatus, Centurion, greets the *curatores praesidii* of the *Via Claudiana*: allow this Asklepiades to pass.<sup>72</sup>

Centurions stationed at such posts served a role similar to the *beneficiarii*, collecting tolls on trade goods or acting as imperial tax collectors (*exactores tributorum*). Several of them are recorded exacting an eight-*drachmae* harbour tax at Alexandria,<sup>73</sup> while a badly damaged imperial rescript from Caracalla to Thuburbo Maius (Africa Proconsularis) likewise contains details concerning the regulation of tolls at a garrison there commanded

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<sup>70</sup>*ILS* 2612 = *I. Pan.* 39: Annius Rufus 7 leg. XV Apollinaris praepositus ab optimo imp. Trajano operi ma[r]morum monti Claudiano, v. s. [I]. a. For legionary centurion *curatores* near the Nile Delta, see *CIL* III 6025=*ILS* 2615.

<sup>71</sup>See Plin. *Ep.* 10. 77.

<sup>72</sup>*O. Claud.* 48: Κουίντος Ἀκκίος Ὀπτάτος (ἐκατοντάρχη) κουράτορσι πραισιδίων ὁδοῦ Κλαυδιανῆς χαίρειν. πάρες Ἀσκληπιάδην (ε?). See also *O. Claud.* 49; *IGRR* 1260; *SEG* XV 867; *O. Claud.* 359.

<sup>73</sup>*P. Oxy.* 1185; Fink, *RMR*, no. 9.



by a *primuspilus*.<sup>74</sup> Centurions are also commonly attested in Talmudic scripts as collecting taxes from farmers and travellers alike.<sup>75</sup>

The centurion's potential personal wealth and role in regulating trade and taxes made them potentially useful business partners. Papyri from the Babatha archive, for example, describe various loans and transactions between centurions and local men in early second century CE Judaea, at Ein Gedi. Magonius Valens, a centurion in command of the First Infantry Cohort of Thracians that was stationed at the *praesidium* at Ein Gedi, engaged in lending money to a Judah, a local non-Roman citizen.<sup>76</sup> Other financial accounts recorded in papyri demonstrate that these kinds of commercial relationships were common in nearby Egypt.<sup>77</sup>

Among centurions' more active policing roles, in a context where they interacted with local inhabitants, was their service as a kind of local sheriff. The rise in frequency of banditry during the early third century led to an increasing reliance on the military and the appointment of special local commanders (*praepositi*). Centurions and *primipilares* appear to have been favoured for these ad hoc appointments, particularly in Italy.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>The garrison was responsible for accepting the lead seals (*symbola* or *symbolika*) that were used to record tolls paid on all imported goods. For discussion of the inscription, see MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian*, 58-59. By the second century, only one legion and several *auxilia* were responsible for protecting Africa Proconsularis, Numidia, and both Mauretaniae. See M. Speidel, "Legionary Cohorts in Mauretania: The Role of Legionary Cohorts in the Structure of Expeditionary Armies" in *Roman Army Studies I*, 65-75.

<sup>75</sup>E.g., Tos. Demai vi 3. See D. Sperber, "The Centurion as a Tax-Collector," *Latomus* 28 (1969), 186-189; Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 287. For other examples of centurions as *exactores*, see *CIL* XI 707; *ILS* 2705; *IGRR* I 1183; Suet. *Cal.* 40.

<sup>76</sup>*P. Yadin*. 11. Cf., Adams, "The Poets of Bu Njem," 133; Goodman, *State and Society*, 142; N. Avigad et al., "The Expedition to the Judaeian desert, 1961," *IEJ* 12 (1962), 167-262.

<sup>77</sup>*P. Oxy.* XII 1424. See also *P. Col* X 287

<sup>78</sup>E.g., *ILS* 9201; 2769. A centurion was given the task of capturing the great bandit of Italy, Bulla Felix, in CE 206-207. Cf., Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 135-136.

Provincial governors or military commanders could also order centurions to summon or detain people who were accused of criminal activities or were required for legal proceedings. Late in CE 198, for example, Gemellus Horion, an Egyptian man from Arsinoe, petitioned Calpurinus Concessus, the *epistrategos* of his region. He asked Concessus to contact the local centurion to bring an accused man to court, so that Horion's charges against him could be heard.<sup>79</sup>

In the view of Roman authorities during the Principate, even the mere presence of a legionary centurion in a given community or region was thought to deter potential problems among a local populace. Trajan, for instance, ordered the governor of Lower Moesia to transfer a single legionary centurion to Byzantium, apparently in order to discourage disturbances there caused by a high influx of traffic.<sup>80</sup> Nor was such a transfer confined to gatherings of Roman subjects or allies. In addition to appointing centurions to construct *burgi* along the Danube following a treaty with Marcomanni in CE 180, Commodus apparently also stipulated that the tribe's members could not assemble as they wished in any part of the country, but only once per month, and only in the presence of a legionary centurion.<sup>81</sup>

As Trajan's rejection of Pliny's own request to send a centurion to the city of Juliopolis in his own province of Bithynia demonstrates, however, Roman authorities appear to have been wary of placing undue burdens on military manpower and resources.<sup>82</sup> The Roman legions neither supplanted nor reduced the need for local

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<sup>79</sup>*P.Mich.* IV. 625. For other examples recorded in papyri, see Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 86-87.

<sup>80</sup>*Ep.* 10. 77.

<sup>81</sup>*Dio* 73. 2. 4.

<sup>82</sup>*Plin. Ep.* 10. 78.

civilian policing. Epigraphic evidence from the Gallic provinces shows that local magistrates and officials such as “prefect of the watches” (*praefectus vigilum*) continued to function in local policing roles.<sup>83</sup> The unique system of police offices (e.g., στρατηγός, ἀρχιφυλαξ, εἰρήναρχαι) in cities in Asia Minor not only continued but also became compulsory liturgies for local citizens.<sup>84</sup> The Roman army’s presence in Egypt did not diminish the multi-layered system of magistrates and officials (e.g., στρατηγός, νυκτοφύλαξ, παραφύλαξ) of local security there.<sup>85</sup>

Dio Chrysostom compared the soldiers and emperor to shepherds whose task it was to guard the imperial flock.<sup>86</sup> The relationship between the Rome’s military and its imperial subjects, however, was hardly so congenial. Soldiers and other local Roman officials were characterized by their brutality and greed, and supposed agents of policing themselves were committing the crimes. As Juvenal quips, “who will guard the guards themselves?”<sup>87</sup>

Evidence of local resentment toward Roman military officials is widespread, and centurions certainly were no exception. While their policing activities might occasionally earn centurions thanks for deterring criminal acts and providing some small measure of security along transportation routes, they might equally make them hated. Providing security and monitoring traffic and trade, for example, could inevitably put centurions at odds with local merchants and travellers. As collectors of taxes and tolls in both

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<sup>83</sup>E.g., *CIL* XII 3166; XIII 1745; *AE* 1992, 1216. See also *Apul. Met.* 3. 3.

<sup>84</sup>See C. Brélaz, *La sécurité publique en Asie Mineure sous le Principat (Ier-IIIème s. ap. J.-C.): Institutions municipales et institutions imperiales dans l’Orient romain* (Basel: 2005), 90-122, 335-381;

<sup>85</sup>See Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 92-95. On the continuation of these and other local policing officials, see Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 66-75/66-82, 163-164.

<sup>86</sup>Dio Chrys. 1. 28-29.

<sup>87</sup>Juv. 6. 347-348: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

communities and the numerous *burgi* along major roads, centurions occupied a position resented by local merchants, and it is not difficult to imagine the grumbling of travellers in having to provide passes to and from centurions along the major regional roads.<sup>88</sup>

Centurions also often appear to have been characterized by their use of violence against civilians unjustly and apparently with impunity. One of the more dramatic examples of this problem occurs in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, when the transformed protagonist and his master are stopped on the road by a centurion, who asks in Latin where they are going:

[My master], ignorant of the Latin language, pressed on in silence. The soldier was unable to control the insolence that came naturally to him, and considering my master's silence as contempt, threw him off my back while striking him with the *vitis* that he held. The gardener humbly replied that he could not understand what was said because he was ignorant of the language. Switching to Greek, the soldier said: "Where are you taking that ass?" The gardener replied that he was going to the next town. "But I have need of its labour," he said.<sup>89</sup>

The centurion's behaviour fits with Epictetus' warning not to resist the "military requisitions" of Roman soldiers: "For if you do, you'll take a beating and lose your mule anyway."<sup>90</sup> In one letter to Hadrian, a merchant similarly complained that, while travelling through Britannia, a centurion had beaten him severely and without provocation. He also complained that he had been unable to approach the other

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<sup>88</sup>See Goodman, *State and Society*, 142.

<sup>89</sup>*Met.* 9. 39: *alias Latini sermonis ignarus, tacitus praeteribat. Nec miles ille familiarem cohibere quivit insolentiam sed indignatus silentio eius ut convicio, viti quam tenebat obtundens eum dorso meo proturbat. Tunc, hortulanus supplicue respondit sermonis ignorantia se quid ille diceret scire non posse: ergo igitur Graece subiciens miles "Ubi" inquit "Ducis asinum istum?" Respondit hortulanus petere se civitatem proxumam. "Sed mihi" inquit "Operae eius opus est."*

<sup>90</sup>*Disc.* 4. 1. 79: εἰ δὲ μή, πληγὰς λαβὼν οὐδὲν ἤττον ἀπολείς καὶ τὸ ὄναριον.

centurions of that unit about his problem.<sup>91</sup> Talmudic texts, often hostile against Rome, criticize legionary centurions as both violent and powerful:

It is like a man who stands up in the market place and defies a town councillor. Those who heard him said to him, “You utter fool, you defy the town councillor? What if he wanted to beat you or tear your clothes, or throw you in prison? What could you do to him? Or if he were a centurion (*qitron*), who is greater than him? How much more so?”<sup>92</sup>

Members of the Roman military might just as often have been a source of criminality as its obstacle. The repeated attempts by Roman authorities to stop such behaviour show that local Roman authorities did care about the problems caused by Roman soldiers and officers, but they also demonstrate a problem that was endemic and never solved. This is at least partly because in issuing edicts and assigning manpower and resources, the emperor and local Roman authorities appear to have been far more concerned with suppressing sedition and the impact of banditry or unruly provincials on Roman authority than in dealing with local complaints of petty crimes and assaults.<sup>93</sup>

While military policing might have been intended primarily to maintain Roman control over a region, however, the evidence demonstrates that many citizens nonetheless chose to take advantage of Roman presence and seek redress for local crimes. Likewise, although attitudes toward Roman soldiers could be quite hostile, we nonetheless also find evidence of *stationarii* and the centurions who commanded them being well liked by local communities. Statue bases at Aphrodisias praise centurions “for serving honourably

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<sup>91</sup>*TV* II 344.

<sup>92</sup>*Sifr. Deut.* 309, trans., by Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, 137. Cf., Goodman, *State and Society*, 143.

<sup>93</sup>James, *Rome and the Sword*, 158-168. For further examples of local complaints and attitudes to Roman soldiers, see Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 186-194, 228-238.

and courageously in the province of Asia.”<sup>94</sup> The security and protection offered by centurions appear positively in texts of the New Testament. Paul of Tarsus, for example, was grateful for the security provided by centurions. In several occasions he was protected by centurions from being lynched by locals and flogged by Roman officials. One centurion mentioned by name, Julius, is particularly praised in Acts for being kind to Paul when escorting him to Rome, and even preventing him from being killed by Roman soldiers after they were shipwrecked.<sup>95</sup>

From the perspective of the Roman emperor and governors, the reasons for assigning centurions to duties in local policing were obvious. Their reputation for loyalty to the emperor, discipline, and fierceness in battle were as clear a message as Rome could send to a group or individual that no sedition or military actions would be tolerated. For more serious problems of banditry, kidnapping, or raiding, moreover, the military experience of centurions would be invaluable. For local populations, however, centurions were also characterized by their despised role in collecting taxes and well-earned reputation for thuggery. The strong attitudes toward centurions presented in the textual evidence, whether hostile or favourable, equally demonstrate the impact of their involvement in policing among local populations.

## **6.5 Judicial Representatives**

The Roman military was often involved in local legal affairs, and here too legionary centurions were crucial intermediaries between Rome and local populations. In

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<sup>94</sup>*MAMA* 8. 508; *SEG* XXXI. 905: ἀγνώως καὶ ἀνδρείως ἀναστραφέντα ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἀσίας ἔθνει. See Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 219.

<sup>95</sup>*Acts* 21: 31-6, 22: 22-30, 23: 16-23. For Julius, see *Acts* 27-28.

addition to summoning, apprehending, or escorting persons, centurions are attested personally investigating local crimes of all kinds in a specific region. Papyrological evidence from Egypt is again invaluable in illustrating this practice. One letter from second century Fayum, for example, records a centurion's efforts to deal with a property dispute regarding crops:

From Centurion Domitius Julianus: on receipt of my first letter, you should not have ignored my summons, but come to me and informed me to whom belonged the crops that have caused the dispute. Now, on receipt of this second letter, come to me, since the advisors of the magistrate, Heron, are making accusations against you.<sup>96</sup>

In some circumstances, centurions were designated by a Roman magistrate to perform certain functions or judge specific cases.<sup>97</sup> The first recorded example of this designation comes from the reign of Gaius, in which the governor of Dalmatia appointed several centurions to act as *iudices dati*.<sup>98</sup> Centurions with such a designation typically seem to have been required to mediate legal disputes between communities (and kingdoms). M. Coelius, for example, was appointed by a later governor of Dalmatia to represent him in judging a boundary dispute in Dalmatia:

L. Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus, *legatus pro praetore* of C. Caesar Augustus Germanicus, appointed M. Coelius, Centurion of Legio VII, as mediator between the Sapuates and Lamatini, in order to establish boundaries and set up markers.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>*SB* VI 9290; π(αρά) Δομιτίου Ιουλιανού (έκατοντάρ)χ(ου). ἔδει σε καί τὰ πρώτα γράμματα λαβόντα μή ἀγνωμονῆσαι, ἀλλά ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ἐμέ καί δι[ι]δάξαι, πρὸς τίνα οἱ καρποί, περὶ ὧν ἦν ἡ ἀμφισβήτησις, ἀνήκουσι: καὶ νῦν δὲ τὰ γράμματα ταῦτα λαβὼν ἐλθὲ πρὸς ἐμέ. λείαν γάρ σε οἱ προνοοῦντες Ἡρώνας τοῦ ἐξηγητοῦ αἰτιῶνται. πρ(ιδίε) νον(ας) ιυν(ιας).

<sup>97</sup>On centurions as *iudices dati*, see esp. Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 431-435. For other investigative titles, see *SB* 9238; 9657; *SP* XXII 55; *IGRR* III 301; *RIB* 152=*ILS* 4920; *AE* 1950, 105; 1953, 129; *CIL* XIII 2958. Cf., Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 175-185.

<sup>98</sup>*CIL* III 9832 = *ILS* 5949.

<sup>99</sup>*CIL* III 9864 = *ILS* 5950: L. Arruntius Camil[us] Scrib[on]ianus leg(atus) propr(aetore) C. [C]ae[s]aris Aug(usti) Germanici, iudicem dedit M. Coelium (centurionem) leg(ionis) VII inter Sapuates et [La]matinos, ut fines [reg]eret et termin{o}s pon(eret).

Even the emperor himself could appoint a centurions local judges or mediators. Tacitus credits Casperius, the aforementioned centurion who had treated with Vologaeses, for being assigned by Claudius to negotiate a truce in CE 52 between the king of Armenia, Mithridates, and the Iberian Prince Radamistus. Antoninus Pius similarly assigned a centurion to deal with a boundary dispute in Latium.<sup>100</sup>

Strictly speaking, unless officially appointed as *iudices dati*, centurions did not themselves have the authority to make legal decisions. With centurions placed among civilians to engage in policing roles, however, they inevitably acquired informal or *de facto* legal authority. Papyri from Egypt and other eastern provinces reveal that by the reign of Trajan, civilians were frequently appealing to centurions directly rather than to local governors, and that these centurions do not seem to have hesitated in tackling the cases on their own authority.<sup>101</sup> Petitions were made to centurions concerning all types of crimes, including contract disputes, attempted murder, assault, and robbery.<sup>102</sup> The latter two are most commonly attested, and the following case from Arsinoe during the reign of Septimius Severus is typical:

To the *centurio stationarius* of the region, from Statornilos, son of Aamattios, and Ptolemaios, son of Turannos, both from the metropolis:

My lord (κύριε), while we were returning from the temple, some brigands rushed out, attacked and overpowered us, and beat me to my knees. For a long time we

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<sup>100</sup>Casperius: Tac. *Ann.* 12. 44-46. See also above, Chapter Four, n. 122. Latium: recorded on a boundary stone in Ardea. See Campbell, *The Roman Army*, no. 206. For an example of a centurion acting as *iudex datus* in a dispute between two soldiers, see *FIRA*<sup>2</sup> III, 190-191. On other centurions in boundary disputes, see MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian*, 62, n. 38.

<sup>101</sup>See *BGU* 1. 36; 3. 908; *P.Ryl.* 2. 81; *P. Sijp.* 15.

<sup>102</sup>For contract disputes, see *P. Oslo* II 30; *SB* 10308; *P. Mich.* X 582. Assault: *P. Ryl.* II 141; *P. Oslo.* II 21; *P. Treb.* 2.304; *P. Mich.* 3.175. Robbery: *P. Mich.* 3.175; *P. Osl.* 2.21; *SB* 6952; *BGU* 157, 515; *P. Gen.* 16; *P. Oxy.* 2234. Murder: D. Feissel & J. Gascou, *Documents d'archives romaines inédits du Moyen Euphrate* (1989), 558; *P. Tebt.* II 304. Especially useful are the collections by Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 88-90; Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 175-185; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, 431-435.



lay like corpses. They stole from Ptolemaios a cloak (a very fine cloak), and glass flask, and from me, a ring.<sup>103</sup>

This case illustrates that centurions acting as local magistrates were sometimes implored first to apprehend and then judge criminal suspects. In one remarkable case, a farmer from Theadelphia complained that his wife stole some of his property, and then eloped with another man. He petitioned a centurion at Fayum specifically both to summon them and judge the case as soon as possible.<sup>104</sup>

As discussed above, however, a common context in which centurions might be compelled to issue legal judgments involved abuses by members of the Roman military. Abuses by soldiers toward civilians such as robbery, intimidation or assault were frequent, despite the efforts of the imperial administration to curb them.<sup>105</sup> Although centurions were often responsible for receiving petitions and accusations concerning improper behavior by members of the military, it was likely not an easy thing for an aggrieved civilian to petition them – particularly if it was another centurion who was the accused).<sup>106</sup> Under Hadrian, soldiers were not to be summoned from their legions and forced to travel long distances “without good reason,” especially not merely for the purpose of giving evidence.<sup>107</sup> Even if a plaintiff managed to arrange a hearing with a

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<sup>103</sup>*SB VI 9238*: [τ]ῷ [ἐ]πι[ι] τῶν τ[ό]πων σ[τ]ατιωναρίῳ. πα[ρὰ] Σατορνείλου Ἀματίου καὶ Πτολεμαίου Τυράωννου ἀμφοτέρων ἀπὸ τῆς μητροπ[ό]λεως. ἡμῶν, κύριε, ἀναλύοντ[ων] ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱερ[ο]ῦ, ἐπῆλ- θαν ἡμῖν [κα]κοῦργ[οί] τι[ν]ες συσπευδόντες καὶ ..[?]χ.μετακα..... συνκρατή[σαντες ἡ]μᾶς ἀντ[?] ἀνδ[?] ? ]χη κα[ί] ἐμὲ ἔτυψαν εἰς τὰ γόνατ[ά] μου καὶ εβ[?] ]υγτα [?] ἔτι πάλαι ἡμεθα νεκροί, [καί] ἐβάσταξαν τοῦ Πτολ[εμ]αίου ἀμικτόριον κ[αί] λεπταμικ[τό]ριον καὶ ὑα[λ]οῦν ἀμπούλ[λ]ιον, καὶ ἐ[μο]ῦ βασιδιδιον δακτύ[λιον] ?]νον ταυ[?]ηταιση.η. [?]. διευτύχει.

<sup>104</sup>*P.Heid.* 13. See also *P.Gen.* 16; *P.Tebt.* 2. 333; *BGU* 2. 522; Euseb. *HE* 6. 41. 21. Cf. J. E. G. Whitehorne, “Petitions to the Centurion: A Question of Locality,” *BASP* 41 (2004), 155-169.

<sup>105</sup>Juv. 16. 7-12. See also Campbell’s collection in *The Roman Army*, 174-180; *SP* 221; *P. Oxy.* 240; 2234; *SB* 9207; *OGIS* 609; *CIL* III 12336; Ulpian, *Dig.* 1. 18. 6. 5-7.

<sup>106</sup>E.g., above, 239-241.

<sup>107</sup>Callistratus, *Dig.* 22. 5. 3. 6.

centurion, accused soldiers were to be tried in a military camp, often by centurions appointed to the case. Roman authors saw the potential problems in this system. Juvenal depicts a grim situation for the plaintiff in his Sixteenth Satire:

To those desiring recompense a judge with hobnailed shoes is appointed  
before hefty-calved jurors seated at a great bench,  
According to the ancient laws of the camp and tradition of Camillus  
That no soldier may be tried beyond the ramparts  
And far from the standards. “How just it is,” you think,  
“That a centurion sentence a soldier – nor will justice  
Fail me, if I lodge a complaint.”<sup>108</sup>

The legal scene depicted by Juvenal was likely not uncommon. While the criminal acts committed by soldiers could develop into a broader breakdown in military discipline, it is difficult to imagine many cases of centurions handing over comrades in their unit or garrison to civilian authorities on account of the complaints of local merchants. The soldiers likewise would have been unlikely to report centurions who procured a little extra food or gifts for them through illegal means.<sup>109</sup>

One could of course appeal to other Roman officials, such as *beneficiarii*, who appear commonly to have received local petitions.<sup>110</sup> As with policing duties, moreover, centurions and other Roman officials do not appear to have supplanted or been in jurisdictional conflict with local civilian officials. In Egypt, for example, στρατηγοί continued to receive petitions and there is little evidence of conflict between them and Roman military authorities. In fact, it appears to have been common to petition multiple

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<sup>108</sup>Juv. 16. 13-19: *Bardaicus iudex datur haec punire uolenti / calceus et grandes magna ad subsellia surae / legibus antiquis castrorum et more Camilli / seruato, miles ne uallum litiget extra / et procul a signis. Iustissima centurionum / cognitio est igitur de milite, nec mihi derit / ultio, si iustae defertur causa querellae.*

<sup>109</sup>On patronage of officers, see James, “Writing the Legions,” 40-44. On the moral duty between officers and soldiers or sailors to protect each other from civil courts, see Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 225.

<sup>110</sup>See Nelis-Clément, *Les Beneficiarii*, 227-243.

authorities simultaneously – a “blanket effect” to increase the likelihood of receiving an audience or recompense. One letter from Philadelphia in CE 236, for example, records a petition to a decurion, centurion, and local στρατηγός.<sup>111</sup>

Whatever the opinions of individual centurions’ skill in jurisprudence, if a plaintiff’s prospects were so patently hopeless, it would be difficult to explain the mass of petitions that we find issued to local centurions. During the second and early third centuries CE, centurions posted among communities across the empire appear to have developed *de facto* legal powers, including the ability to summon litigants or witnesses, interrogate, grant bail, issue subpoenas, assign civilian arbiters, and themselves offer judgment.<sup>112</sup> This quasi-magisterial authority developed for several reasons. Through their military duties in the legions, many centurions were personally experienced in judging acts of indiscipline and other transgressions. The appointment of centurions by imperial governors to their *officia* or as *iudices dati* confirms this expectation. If needed, centurions could also seek advice from their own *consilia*.<sup>113</sup>

From a more practical perspective, centurions already had the authority to detain and hold criminals, and were posted to regions that were often isolated from the seat of the provincial governor and his *comites*. For many rural dwellers, centurions were the chief source of Roman authority to whom they might even think to appeal concerning such legal issues. The product of this development was yet another context where, for

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<sup>111</sup>*P.Harr.* 2. 200. Cf. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman World*, 214. On relationship between centurions and local Egyptian officials, see Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 92-93.

<sup>112</sup>Davies, *Service in the Roman Army*, 56.

<sup>113</sup>See *FIRA* 3.64, a document which discusses a centurion’s decision over a disputed inheritance. For a centurion’s typical staffing at a *praesidium*, which often included *beneficiarii*, and *cornicularii*, see also Roth, *Logistics*, 274.

many inhabitants of the empire, centurions were the most immediate and authoritative representatives of Rome.

## 6.6 Regional Administrators

One of the most important roles of the Roman army during the Principate was to provide soldiers and officers to serve as members of the provincial staff (*officium*) of imperial governors (*legati Augusti pro praetore*), procurators, and proconsuls.<sup>114</sup> While the evidence is insufficient to describe a standard composition or method of forming an *officium*, there seem to have been some common practices.<sup>115</sup> In the imperial provinces where legions were stationed (comprising roughly three quarters of the empire during the Principate), a primary task of the *officium* was to administer the army. The staff's members were largely drawn from the legions, comprising roughly 100-150 soldiers and officers.<sup>116</sup>

The *officium* was largely managed by special staff centurions, of whom there were at least several types that appear to have been distinguished by function rather than grade. Their exact duties, however, are difficult to elucidate. The *exercitatores*, for example, are recorded in charge of the cavalry and infantry bodyguard of governors and the emperor.<sup>117</sup> Centurions described as *stratores* are attested commanding *auxilia* in

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<sup>114</sup>When addressing his army in Africa in CE 128, Hadrian stated that his *legatus legionis* had told him that the chief centurions (*primipilares*) had been compelled to send one cohort each year to serve the proconsul (*CIL* VIII 2532, 18942 = *ILS* 2487). On proconsuls employing an *officium* similar to that of imperial legates, see A. H. M. Jones, "The Roman Civil Service (Clerical and Sub-Clerical Grades)" *JRS* 39 (1949), 44-45; Richier, *Centuriones*, 549-552.

<sup>115</sup>The primary study on this topic is by Domaszewski, *Rangordnung*, 29-39.

<sup>116</sup>See Rankov, "The Governor's Men: The *Officium Consularis* in Provincial Administration" in *Roman Army as a Community*, 16-20, 25; Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, 263-264.

<sup>117</sup>See above, Chapter Five, n. 41.

senatorial provinces where no legions were stationed.<sup>118</sup> While these two centurions' duties were obviously military in nature, the most important staff centurion was the *princeps praetorii*. There is again no explicit description for these centurions, but they are attested being attached to the governor and his headquarters, and likely carried out various administrative functions, such as supervising the governor's staff and acting as liaisons to local armed forces. They appear also to have had greater authority than other centurions, and possessed their own staff.<sup>119</sup>

In imperial provinces where legions were stationed, staff centurions seem generally to have been selected locally. The practice was flexible, however, and centurions could be transferred to provinces without permanent legions from those nearby. For example, as governor of Bithynia during the reign of Trajan, Pliny the Younger was ordered to transfer ten *beneficiarii*, two cavalymen, and one centurion out of his own legionary cohort to help form the staff of Gavius Bassus, the new prefect of nearby Pontic Shore.<sup>120</sup> Just as in choosing other members of their *officium*, newly-appointed governors could also select centurions whom they knew or had worked with before. Pliny himself was on very friendly terms with a former *primuspilus*, Nymphidius Lupus, and was so trusting of the man's advice that he recalled him from retirement to

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<sup>118</sup>*Strator*: CIL II 4114; VIII 2749, 7050; XIII 6746, 8150, 8203. Cf. Domaszewski, *Rangordnung*, 97-98; Richier, *Centuriones*, 548-549.

<sup>119</sup>On the *princeps*, see ILS 2283; IGRR III 1230; CIL XIII 8187; VIII 2586; AE 1916, 29. See also *P.Oxy.* XIV 1637, where one is described as περίκιπτος τῆς ἡγεμονίας. In contrast to Domaszewski, Rankov, "The Governor's Men," 18-20, suggests that they were attached to the governor's headquarters rather than his staff, and are inferior to a *cornicularius*. Richier, *Centuriones*, 550-552, is unsure. On staff (*adiutores*), see ILS 2448, 4837.

<sup>120</sup>*Ep.* 10. 21. Pliny also transfers ten *beneficiarii* to the procurator Viridius Gemellinus (10. 27-8).

advise him during his governorship of Bithynia.<sup>121</sup> Such patronage was apparently a common enough practice that Tacitus praised his father-in-law, Agricola, specifically for being opposed to appointing centurions to his *officium* according to personal likings or private recommendations.<sup>122</sup>

The centurionate was an ideal resource for a governor's *officium*. A reasonable level of literacy was obviously required for such positions, and as discussed in Chapter Four, the centurions' military duties ensured that most were literate.<sup>123</sup> The necessary logistical and clerical skills required for centurions to administer their *centuriae*, moreover, could easily be adapted to a governor's use, and the authority of their rank made them natural candidates to command other military members of the *officium*.

The most important consequence of this function of centurions, however, was opportunity given to them to gain administrative experience. During the Principate, this experience led centurions to acquire their own staff and direct authority to manage a specific region of the empire on their own. The earliest known example of such an appointment occurred during the 30s BCE, when Octavian placed C. Fuficius Fango in charge of the province of Africa following a truce with his rival, S. Pompey.<sup>124</sup> Fango's appointment was a case of expediency during a time of political instability, but the practice itself became common during the Principate.<sup>125</sup> By CE 100, we find an inscription for a district centurion based at Luguvalium (modern Carlisle), Annus

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<sup>121</sup>*Ep.* 10. 87. Pliny had served with him when he was a military tribune. Fronto (*ad Pium* 8) similarly plans to employ a friend with military skills from Mauretania, Iulius Senex, but it is unclear whether he was a centurion. See *PIR*<sup>2</sup>, I 367.

<sup>122</sup>*Tac. Agr.* 19. 2.

<sup>123</sup>See above, Chapter Four, 139-140.

<sup>124</sup>*Dio* 48. 22. 3. Cf., *Cic. Att.* 14. 10. 2.

<sup>125</sup>Vespasian similarly appointed centurions in city garrisons before marching west in CE 69 (*Jos. BJ* 4. 442).

Questor, who is described officially as *regionarius*.<sup>126</sup> Unlike the title of *stationarius*, which could designate any rank of out-posted soldier or officer, *regionarius* appears to have been reserved for legionary centurions alone. Evidence for these “district centurions” (Gk. ἐπὶ τῶν τόπων), increases during the second and third centuries.

Unlike the title of *praepositus*, moreover, which designated a centurion with a temporary command for a specific task, the district centurion seems to have been a long-term assignment with broad duties maintaining law and order in a given region, usually in areas at the periphery of the empire and far from the seat of the governor.<sup>127</sup>

The appointment of *regionarii* appears to have been ad hoc, in that not every region had them. There is also no clear indication of how long a typical tenure might have been, but one district centurion at Koranis during first century CE remained in the post for at least four to five years.<sup>128</sup> Centurions appear to have distinguished themselves from other centurions by this title, as shown by this second century inscription from Bath:

This sacred place that has been destroyed by insolence, C. Severius Emeritus, *centurio regionarius*, restored to the Virtue and Numen of Augustus.<sup>129</sup>

This practice was not particular to any one province or region, since we find evidence of such centurions across the empire, from Britain and Pannonia to Phrygia and Egypt, well into the third century CE.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>TV II 250.

<sup>127</sup>Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 222-223.

<sup>128</sup>P.NYU, inv. 69. See also P.Thomas 5. Cf., Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 187-188.

<sup>129</sup>ILS 4920 = RIB 152: Locum religiosum per insolentiam dirutum Virtuti et N(umini) Aug(usti) repurgatum reddidit C. Severius Emeritus (centurio) reg(ionarius).

<sup>130</sup>Britannia: RIB 583, 587. Gallia Lugdenensis: CIL XIII 2958. Pannonia: AE 1944, 103; 1950, 105. Noricum: AE 1953, 129. Phrygia: IGRR III 301. Egypt: P.Oxy. I 62. Cf. For other examples of *regionarii*, see CIL III 7449, 7633; AE 1957, 326; 1969/70, 577. See also examples in Africa in Rebuffat, “L’armée romaine à Gholiaia,” 228, 244-245.

Tacitus records a speech by Julius Civilis, the leader of the Batavian revolt in CE 69, in which he exhorts his troops by cataloguing some of the evils of Roman rule:

“For we are no longer regarded as allies, as we once were, but slaves! When does a governor with *imperium*, although his retinue is arrogant and burdensome, ever come to us? Instead, we are delegated to prefects and centurions.”<sup>131</sup>

As Civilis’ speech illustrates, in serving as the highest local representatives of Roman authority, these centurions had the potential to earn great hostility from the inhabitants. Another incident recorded by Tacitus emphasizes the former. A revolt by the Frisians in Lower Germany in CE 28 occurred when a *primuspilus*, who had been appointed as *regionarius* to govern the Frisians, particularly earned their wrath by his liberal interpretation of their required tribute to Rome.<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand, centurions appointed to administer a region might also earn the thanks and admiration of the local inhabitants. Aulus Instuleius Tenax, a centurion placed in command of a *praesidium* by Vespasian during the civil wars, was publicly honoured at Askalon for his kind treatment of the town during the reconstruction after the Jewish revolt:

The people and council of Askalon (set this up) for Aulus Instuleius Tenax, Centurion of Legio X Fretensis, on account of his kindness.<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, at Aire (south of Damascus) during the reign of Commodus, a centurion was honoured for acting as “benefactor and founder of the Airesians” (εὐεργέτης Αἰρεσιῶν

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<sup>131</sup>Tac. *Hist.* 4. 14: *neque enim societatem, ut olim, sed tamquam mancipia haberi: quando legatum, gravi quidem comitatu et superbo, cum imperio venire? tradi se praefectis centurionibusque.* See also *Hist.* 4. 15, for *primipilus* Aquilius in charge of Roman soldiers on an island in the Rhine delta at the revolt’s outset.

<sup>132</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 4. 72. See also Tac. *Hist.* 4. 14; 12. 45.

<sup>133</sup>*SEG I 552*: ἡ βουλή{ι} καὶ ὁ δῆμος Ἰστολήιον Τένακα ἑκατοντάρχηρ λεγιῶνος δεκάτης Φρετησίας, εὐνοίας ἕνεκα. Tenax was likely a *primuspilus* centurion, since he had achieved this position with Legio XII Fulminata in CE 65, according to *CIL III* 30.



καὶ κτίστης) for constructing from his own funds a temple to Tyche. *Regionarii* are commonly praised for their role in guaranteeing local commerce and trade against corruption and brigandage, such as the centurion acclaimed at Pisidian Antioch for maintaining justice and peace.<sup>134</sup> The evidence suggests that district centurions played a prominent role in local religious benefaction, especially in constructing and restoring altars and temples. These services combined with their functions as local religious representatives in the legions may have helped to form connections between Roman soldiers and local communities.<sup>135</sup>

The increasing use of district centurions during the Principate should be understood as the logical development of the participation of these officers in so many facets of imperial administration. Considering the many tasks to which centurions were already assigned within a given region, from building projects and tax-collection to policing and judicial responsibilities, it was natural for local governors to rely on them to administer smaller regions of the empire themselves. By being posted far from their legionary camps and performing all kinds of administrative tasks, moreover, centurions were brought directly into the communities and daily activities of local inhabitants. While the evidence is scarce, it appears again that local attitudes toward centurions were mixed. Depending on the circumstances, centurions could be portrayed as symbols of brutality and oppression, yet also as guarantors of a measure of peace and prosperity. In sum, centurions were the embodiment of local attitudes towards Rome itself.

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<sup>134</sup>Aire: *SEG* XXXIX 1568. Antioch: *IGRR* III 301. Similar thanks to nearby *regionarii*: *IG* III 1116-17; 1120-22, 1128; *SEG* 39, 1568. On similar gratitude for *regionarii*, see Stoll, *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung*, 71: „Einige der *centuriones* werden sich entsprechende Ehrungen dadurch verdient haben, dass sie als *regionarii* für ein Florieren von Wirtschaft und Handel durch Eindämmung des in ihren Aufgabenbereich fallenden Räuberunwesens gesorgt hatten.“

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 297-298, 334-336. On religious activities, see also above, Chapter Five, 197-199.

## 6.7 Conclusion: Intermediaries between Rome and its Subjects

During the Principate, the Roman army evolved into an important organ of imperial administration, with both its soldiers and officers called upon to fulfill a variety of civil duties. The increasingly dispersed deployment of legions along the frontier and the use of *vexillationes*, moreover, ensured that Roman soldiers and outposts were typically far removed from the local governors and commanders, so that middle-ranking officers such as legionary centurions were relied on to manage Rome's affairs along the *limes*. Their experience in military logistics and in commanding smaller units of men made them ideal candidates for supervising detachments and ensuring efficient work in building projects. In addition, as provincial staffers and imperial envoys, centurions were important points of contact between a Roman governor or emperor and local inhabitants, both friendly and hostile. Their local authority occasionally translated into constabulary and legal responsibilities, guarding transportation routes and communities against both internal and external threats, and judging disputes as a *de facto* magistrate. The logical extension of these duties was the development of the *regionarii*, at which point they became the highest Roman authority in a given area.

In describing the interaction between the Rome's military and its imperial subjects, James states how contact "ranged from the murderous and oppressive to the commercial, the amicable and the matrimonial." This description seems to fit opinions of the centurionate well. Rabbinic text lists the specific representatives of Rome from whom the Jews would eventually exact vengeance: consuls, imperial legates, centurions,

senators, and *beneficarii*.<sup>136</sup> That centurions are indicated among this group is telling of the kind of hostility that they might incur from local inhabitants. In contrast to this hostile text, however, accounts in the New Testament portray centurions in a positive light. In addition to the centurion at Capernaum who is thanked for rebuilding a synagogue and praised by Jesus for his faith, it is also a centurion who, at moment of Jesus' death, is credited as the first Roman to recognize Jesus' divinity, declaring, "Truly, this man was the Son of God."<sup>137</sup> Cornelius, another centurion based in Caesarea, is praised in Acts as an upright, God-fearing man, generous both in his prayer and almsgiving. He received a vision from an angel to send for Simon Peter, and is credited as the first gentile to be baptized by the apostle.<sup>138</sup>

As with the centurions' military characterizations as both brutal disciplinarians yet courageous leaders, non-Roman opinions of them could vary to the extreme. For the writers of early Rabbinic literature, who were mindful of the Romans' brutal suppression of Jewish revolts during the late first and early second centuries, the centurion represented Roman oppression and injustice. To the authors of the Gospels and early proponents of Christianity, however, who were eager to win support from local Roman authorities and to demonstrate to gentiles the appeal of the young religion, centurions were instead desirable candidates to be portrayed as early converts. While these characterizations are in stark contrast, both nevertheless demonstrate that among many local inhabitants of the eastern provinces, centurions were understood to be crucial

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<sup>136</sup>Sifre Deut. 317. Cf., Goodman, *State and Society*, 151.

<sup>137</sup>*Matthew* 27:54: Ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος. Cf., *Mark* 15: 39. Compare with *Luke* 23: 47: Ὅντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν.

<sup>138</sup>*Acts* 10.

representatives of Roman authority. Whether appreciated or hated, they could not be ignored.

The previous chapters have emphasized the centurion's intermediate position in Roman military culture, between discipline and aggression, combat and staff officer, commissioned and non-commissioned, aristocratic commanders and rank and file soldiers. Matthew's portrayal of the centurion from Capernaum as a Roman officer being under authority (ἐξουσία) yet also possessing it, stresses another essential point. The centurion's intermediate status and rank within the Roman military hierarchy translated into an intermediate position in Roman civil-military relations. In the Roman army's role of integrating the center and periphery of the empire, centurions were a crucial point of intersection.

## **Conclusion: The Intermediate Officer of the Roman Military**

To be imbued in the spirit and essence of this practice, to make use of, to arouse, and to absorb the forces that it requires; to penetrate the practice completely with understanding; to gain confidence and ease through exercise; to give oneself completely, and to transform from a man into the role which has been appointed to us: that is the military virtue of the army in the individual.<sup>1</sup>

This statement has been taken (and sometimes translated) to mean the “the virtues of the individual,” describing the ideals of officership on which a successful military is based. The emphasis, however, is explicitly on military virtues *in* the individual.

Clausewitz’s concern here is how military virtues and assumptions are internalized and manifest themselves in the individual’s outlook and behaviour, and affect an army’s cohesion, combat performance, and identity.

In broad terms this dissertation has similarly explored how Roman military virtues and assumptions became manifested in a specific rank of the legions: the centurionate. That the centurions’ duties were important during the Republican and Principate is well established by modern authors, but none has sought to explain comprehensively this rank’s broader *role* in the legions, or what its functions, careers, expectations, and idealizations can tell us about Roman military practices. The limitations of evidence – the lack of a centurion’s diary, officer manual, or any complete

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<sup>1</sup>Clausewitz, *On War*, 187: „Von dem Geiste und Wesen dieses Geschäftes durchdrungen sein, die Kräfte, die in ihm tätig sein sollen, in sich üben, erwecken und aufnehmen, das Geschäft mit dem Verstande ganz durchdringen, durch Übung Sicherheit und Leichtigkeit in demselben gewinnen, ganz darin aufgehen, aus dem Menschen übergehen in die Rolle, die uns darin angewiesen wird: das ist die kriegerische Tugend des Heeres in dem einzelnen.“

records of an individual careers, to name a few – require an analysis that is broad both in scope and quality of sources, and often leaves us with a frustratingly incomplete picture. Adopting such a wide array of sources from different regions and periods, however, does allow us at least to form a “portrait” of the rank, one which clearly illustrates that the centurionate was functionally and symbolically central to the culture, organization, and activities of the Roman legions.

The centurionate was important to expressing Roman attitudes toward military service. On the one hand, positive Roman military virtues such as forbearance, obedience, bravery, and fierceness were defined through the centurionate in several ways, from the clothing and equipment visualized in commemorative relief, or the duties in legionary discipline and combat leadership of Roman literary tradition. On the other hand, the centurionate also served to represent the “darker side” of the Roman legions. The extortion and rough treatment that centurions inflict on their own soldiers, as well as their apparent talent as thugs and assassins, help to illustrate the fears and reservations of the Roman aristocrat and provincial alike toward the danger of soldiers and their use in the empire. The centurionate, therefore, seems often to have represented the best and the worst traits of Roman soldiers.

Although innovative sociological and philological approaches to *disciplina* have generated more complex, cultural interpretations to understanding why Roman soldiers obeyed their commander and officers, I demonstrate that Roman attitudes towards military punishment cannot be easily taken to reflect modern ones, and that physical violence in this context requires methodical analysis of its political, institutional, and especially religious implications. Similarly, while many studies emphasize the more

cultural, aggressive features of the behaviour of Roman soldiers and commanders in combat, I argue that calculation or individual judgment on the part of the legion's middle-ranking officers must not be minimized; aristocratic commanders were not the only officers capable of considering the impact of their actions. In relation to both these points, models for Roman military or civil institutions will benefit from greater caution when applying modern categories of legitimacy or military authority. These categories have been useful in the past to framing discussion of Roman military organization, but they now appear to be inflexible in moving beyond a dichotomy between force and persuasion that is more apt to Greek thinking than Roman.

The centurionate, moreover, occupied also a key position in the command structure of a legion. The rank originally developed during the Republic as a way to promote experienced Roman soldiers, thus rewarding loyalty and skill while producing a level of tactical command that was needed in the use of both maniples and cohorts in battle. During the Principate, however, with the expanding use of smaller military units and the assignment of manpower to tasks of imperial administration, centurions acquired a far greater number of duties and opportunities for independent commands, with increased status, pay, and benefits to match. This development led to the rank becoming an important representative of imperial authority at the local level. The centurionate was also a key component of the Roman military's social hierarchy. Since the centurionate changed during the Principate to comprise both former *milites* and direct appointees from equestrian backgrounds, it was a major point of social intersection in a military whose ranks were otherwise starkly distinguished by social status. This made the rank central

not only to a legion's administrative organization and combat performance, but also to its social cohesion and the self-identification of its soldiers.

Although the wide-ranging approach of my dissertation has addressed many topics in Roman military studies, several of them in particular demand greater attention and would prove fruitful in further discussion of both Roman military and social practices. The fourth chapter, for example, raised the problem that despite the Roman military's reputation for tactical proficiency and discipline, the legion relied on surprisingly few levels of command, even by ancient standards. The function of tribunes in battle was limited and ill-defined, leaving essentially no degrees of command between general and centurion, particularly in the use of the cohort during the Principate. If the legion is best described as comprising many *centuriae* rather than few cohorts, this point raises important questions for how the legion actually functioned in pitched battle. To answer these questions, a study must analyze in detail textual sources on Roman military warfare not just concerning the methods used to deploy legionaries in battle, but also for existence of communication between units and their flexibility after the commencement of battle.

The sixth chapter also discussed the centurions' many civic activities among local military and civilian communities, particularly his religious role, which ranged from dedicating altars and leading his unit in cultic activities, to restoring and constructing new religious structures out of his own money as a form of benefaction to local communities and veteran colonies. This role needs to be investigated further in context with recent approaches to Roman civil-military relations that are only briefly addressed in the chapter. Prominent among these are Oliver Stoll's work on how the religious functions



of Roman officers served as link between military and civilian communities, and Cuomo's in-depth analysis of Roman building projects that consider the potential goals of the supervisor or dedicant in advertising his achievements in construction as well as the perspectives of the local inhabitants. Both of their approaches share a similar focus in understanding the role of Roman military officers in local infrastructure and civic life across the empire. Since centurions were active participants in the religious life in local communities, a study that analyzes in detail centurions' roles in public building and benefaction will help us to understand better the relationships between the military and non-military communities at the periphery of the empire.

The conclusions of this dissertation also demonstrate an approach to consider in future studies on Roman military culture. The fact that so little attention has been given to such an important organizational feature of the Roman military as the centurionate illustrates a disproportionate focus in scholarship on aristocratic perspectives and goals, and how they determined soldiers' attitudes toward discipline, behaviour in combat, political loyalties, religious activities, social identity, and interaction with Rome's imperial subjects. This excessive focus on a "mass versus elite" dichotomy is more conducive to dialogues on Greek political or military institutions than Roman. The centurion's intermediate status, seen in so many aspects of his roles in the Roman military, demonstrates instead the prominence of the middle rank in Roman military practices. Indeed, the Roman legions arguably represent a military force in which skill, experience, and prestige were *focused* in the middle rank.

Additionally, studies of Roman military history that focus on its intermediate ranks can consider recent trends in military history. Earlier studies on combat

motivation, military commitment, obedience, and professional identity shifted focus away from the paramount importance of the general and battle tactics to the perspective of individual soldiers in combat and how cohesion is encouraged among the members of the primary unit.<sup>2</sup> More recent studies, however, have emphasized instead the role of leadership at the junior level in determining soldiers' attitudes toward motivation, performance, leadership, and identity. As Kindsvatter states in his analysis of the American soldier, this intermediate position was an immensely important yet difficult one, because such an officer was expected simultaneously to take care of his soldiers and be willing to sacrifice himself for them, yet also was the "the final representative of coercive higher authority," required to exact obedience from them and punish transgressions.<sup>3</sup> This unique position ensured that junior leaders' behaviour and attitudes create the norm for their soldiers to follow. These leaders, good or bad, are the exemplars of their military institution. Indeed, as Moskos and Wood have similarly argued in their analysis of commitment in the modern professional army, "immediate leaders *are* the institution to their subordinates."<sup>4</sup>

I suggest that this focus on the role of junior leadership in defining military attitudes and practices should be applied to studies of Roman military culture. To the *milites* who chose to join and serve in the legions, the centurionate was the most immediate form of military authority, the highest rank to which one could aspire, and it was through this rank that military skills, habits, and doctrines were transmitted. Study

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<sup>2</sup>See above, Introduction, n. 17, and Chapter Five, 191-193.

<sup>3</sup>Kindsvatter, *The American Soldier*, 235.

<sup>4</sup>Moskos & Wood, "Institution Building" (emphasis added), 287.

of the centurionate, therefore, provides a fresh and potentially rewarding approach to understanding Roman military practices.

Appendix A: Visual Imagery

Fig. 1

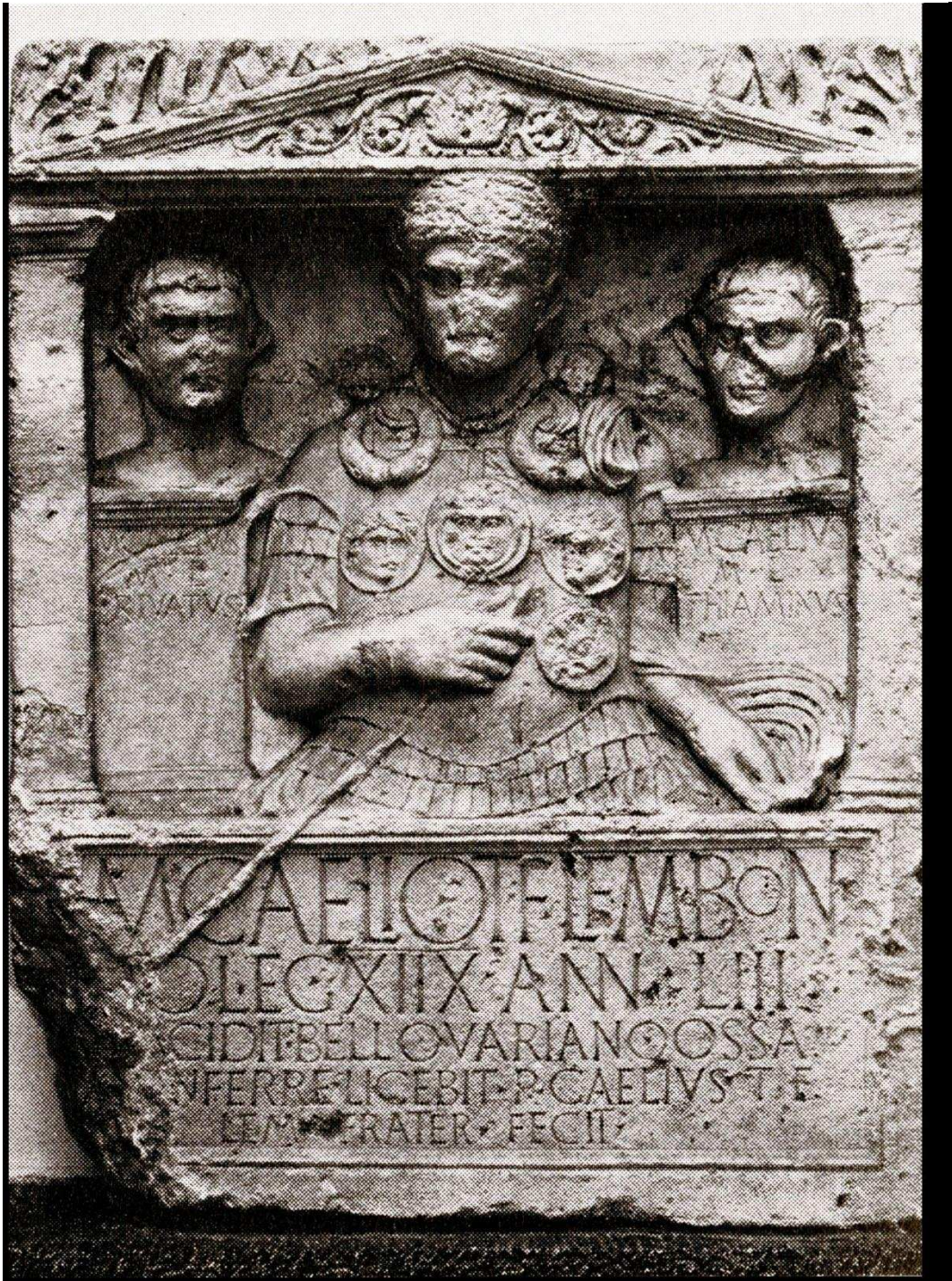


Minucius Lorarius (AE 1982, 395)

Middle 1st century BCE

**Note:** Wearing tunic and cloak; *vitis* in right hand; *pugio* attached to belt  
Image from Franzoni, tav. XIII, 1

Fig. 2



M. Caelius, (*CIL* XIII. 8648; *ILS* 2244 *AE* 1952, 181)

Early 1st century CE

**Note:** *Vitis* in right hand; *torques* and *phalerae* attached to cuirass; *armillae* at wrists; *paludamentum* at left shoulder

Image from Franzoni, Tav. XXXII, 2

Fig. 3



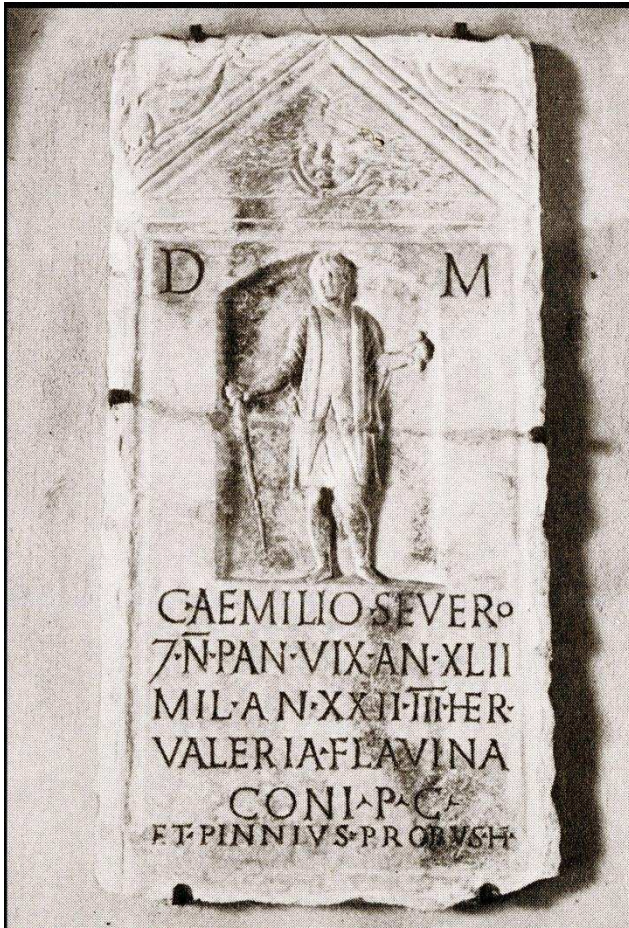
Q. Sertorius Festus (*CIL* V 3374)  
Middle 1st century CE  
**Note:** *vitis* in right hand; scale armour with *phalerae* and *torques*, *corona aurea* on head; *paludamentum*  
Image from Franzoni, tav. XVI, 1

Fig. 4



M. Favonius Facilis (*RIB* 200)  
1st Century CE  
**Note:** *vitis* in right hand; wearing padded garments as armour; *paludamentum*  
Image from Birley, (1980), Fig. 4

Fig. 5



Aurelius Mucianus (Istanbul, Arch  
Mus. Inv. No. 116)  
First half of 3rd century CE  
**Note:** *vitis* in right hand; greaves  
Image from Pfühl Taf. LV, 303

Fig. 6



C. Aemilius Severus (*CIL* XI 340)  
Late 2<sup>nd</sup> to early 3rd century CE  
**Note:** *vitis* in right hand; greaves  
Image from Franzoni, tav. XXI, 3

**Fig. 7**



Unnamed Centurion (Scrinari no. 348)  
3rd century CE  
**Note:** sword at left; greaves  
Image from Franzoni, tav. V, 4

**Fig. 8**

Unnamed Centurion (Gabelmann no. 112)  
Late 3rd century CE  
**Note:** staff-like *vitis*; greaves  
Image from Franzoni, tav. XXVIII, 3



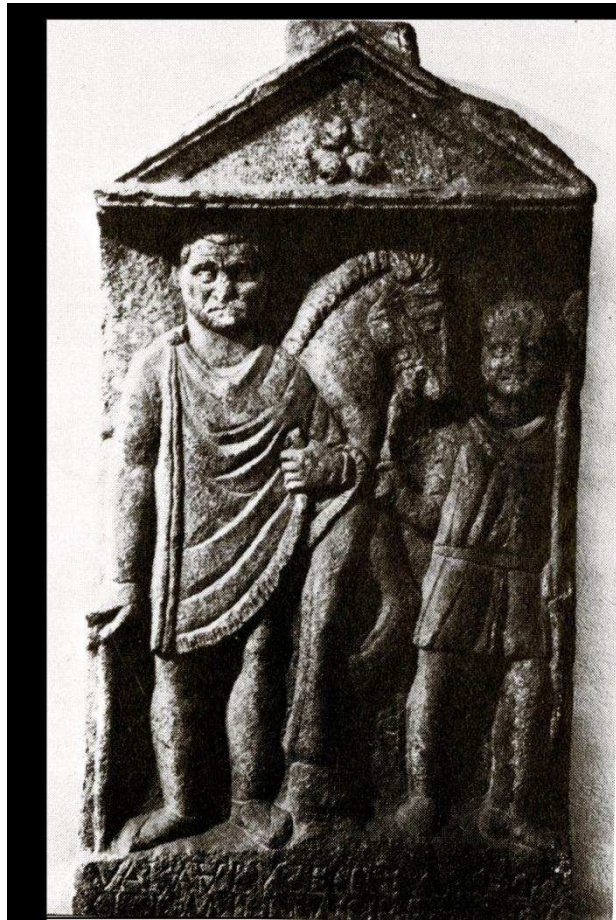


**Fig. 9**



M. Aurelius Nepos (*RIB* 491)  
3rd Century CE  
**Note:** *vitis* at right; *sagum*  
Image from Birley (1980), Fig. 5

**Fig. 10**



Valerius Aulucentius (*CIL* V 940)  
Late 3rd century CE  
**Note:** *vitis* at right; *sagum*  
Image from Franzoni, Tav. IX, 2

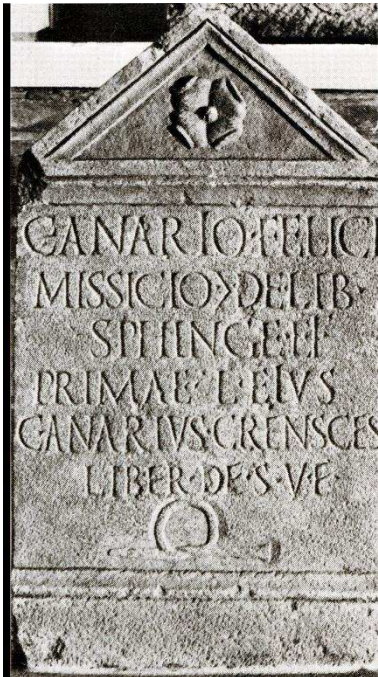
Fig. 11



Flavius Augustalis (*CIL* V 914)  
3rd century CE

**Note:** *vitis* in left hand; *sagum*  
Image from Franzoni, Tav. VIII, 1

**Fig. 12**



C. Anarius Felix (Montanari, No. 10)  
 Middle 1st Century CE  
**Note:** “Coiled” *vitae* at bottom  
 Image from Franzoni, Tav. XX, 1

**Fig. 13**



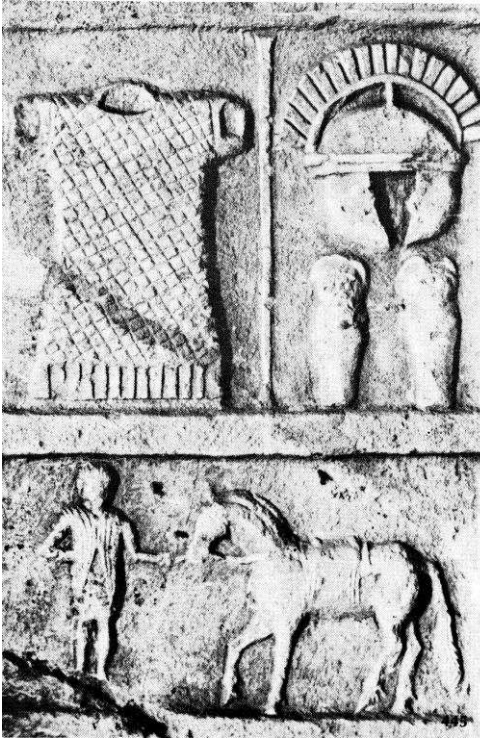
M. Creperius Primus (Montanari, No. 2)  
 Middle 1st Century CE  
**Note:** “Coiled” *vitae* at center  
 Image from Franzoni, Tav. XX, 2

**Fig. 14**



M. Pompeius Asper (*CIL* XIV 2523; *ILS* 2662)  
 Late 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE  
**Note:** *Aquila* at center; *torques*, *phalerae*, and greaves at bottom  
 Image from Maxfield (1981), Pl. 12a

**Fig. 15**



T. Calidius Severus (*CIL* III 11213; *ILS* 2596)

Early to Middle 1st Century CE

**Note:** Ring mail, greaves, transverse crest, and horse

Image from Robinson, Pl. 445

**Fig. 16**



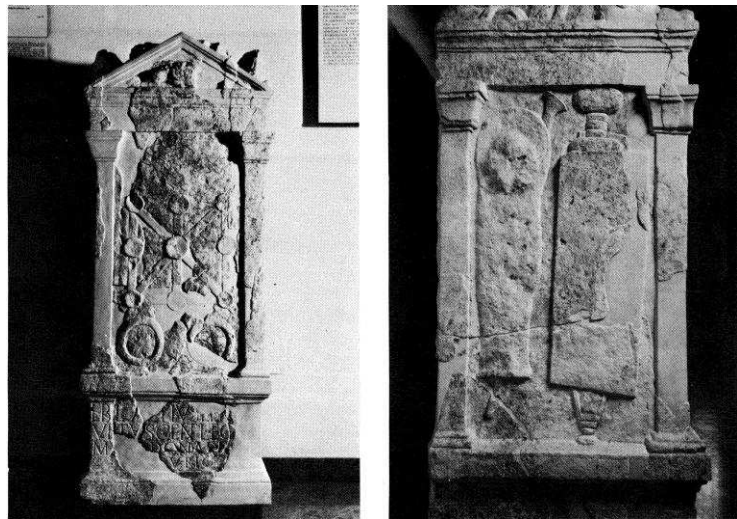
Unnamed Centurion (Dütschke V, no. 978)

Early 1st Century CE

**Note:** greaves at bottom

Image from Franzoni, Tav. XXVIII, 2

**Fig. 17**



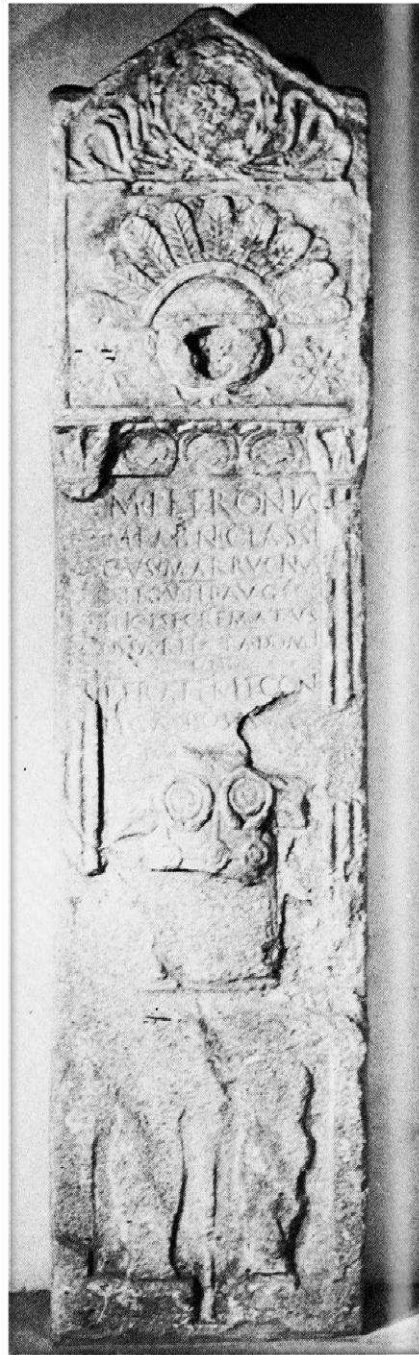
L. Blattius Vetus (*AE* 1893, 119)

Early to Middle First Century CE

**Note:** *phalerae* and *torques* at left; greaves at right

Image from Franzoni, tav. XV, 1-2

Fig. 18



M. Petronius Classicus (CIL III 4060)  
Early to Middle 1st Century CE  
**Note:** transverse crest at top;  
*phalerae* at center; greaves at bottom

## Appendix B: Clothing, Arms, and Armour

### **Clothing**

The basic dress of the centurion matched that of the *milites*. The primary garment during the Republic and Principate was the sleeveless, wool tunic (*tunica*), held together at the waist by the belt (*balteus* or *cingulum militare*). The basic form of the *tunica* appears to have been maintained into the Principate, and according to Quintilian, centurions were distinguished by fitting their *tunica* so that it did not drop below the knees.<sup>1</sup> The colour of these tunics is debated. While the long-standing view adopted by historical re-enactors favours a deep red, it is also possible that soldiers wore white tunics and centurions alone wore red, in order to distinguish them in battle.<sup>2</sup> On special military occasions such as triumphs or religious processions, however, centurions appear to have worn more formal white tunics (*candida vestis*).<sup>3</sup>

Centurions also wore a cloak over their tunics. During the Republic, this was typically the standard soldiers' cloak (*sagum*), a rectangular, reddish-brown garment draped around the neck and fastened at the right shoulder by a brooch (*fibula*). The dedication to Minucius Lorarius from this period illustrates how the *tunica* and *sagum* are combined.<sup>4</sup> During the Principate, however, centurions are often depicted wearing the larger, more ornate cloak, the *paludamentum*. This cloak was worn by officers of

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<sup>1</sup>Quint. *Inst.* 11. 3. 138.

<sup>2</sup>See N. Fuentes, "The Roman Military Tunic" in M. Dawson ed., *Roman Military Equipment: The Accoutrements of War, Proceedings of the Third Military Research Seminar; British Archaeological Report* (Oxford, 1987), 41-75.

<sup>3</sup>G. Sumner, *Roman Military Dress* (Stroud, 2009), 18-29, 117-118. On centurions' white dress in triumphs, see Tac. *Hist.* 2. 89.

<sup>4</sup>Appendix A, fig. 1. A variation on the *sagum* was the cape (*paenula*), which was slightly larger, circular, and folded. See Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 68; Sumner, *Roman Military Dress*, 72-89.

equestrian and senatorial rank, and distinguished them from the rank and file.<sup>5</sup> Later funerary monuments from the third century, however, suggest that centurions still occasionally wore the more functional soldiers' cloak.<sup>6</sup> Centurions appear additionally to have worn padded leather garments both under and over their armour. This includes the linen or leather strips (*pteryges*) made famous in Hollywood films. The *pteryges* were attached to the armour, both at the shoulders or below, forming a "skirt" over the bottom of the tunic, and are depicted in several monuments to centurions.<sup>7</sup>

Roman centurions adopted different footwear depending on the period. During the Republic, they appear to have worn enclosed boots (*calcei*), evidence of which is more common for higher officers in the army. By the Principate, however, centurions wore the newer strapped boots (*caligae*) that were now standard for all soldiers. These *caligae* were hobnailed to offer greater grip on soft ground, although they slipped more easily on rock or smooth surfaces.<sup>8</sup>

## Arms and Equipment

From the Republic to the late Principate, legionary centurions appear consistently to have borne the same arms as the *milites*. These included the heavy javelin (*pilum*), which came into use during the third century BCE at the latest and became the chief weapon of the legionaries for centuries. They also bore the standard short sword of the Republic and early Principate, the *gladius*, as well as the longer sword of the late second

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<sup>5</sup>See examples of *paludamentum* in Appendix A, figs. 2-4. On distinction between soldiers' cloak and those of senior officers, see Liv. 7. 34. 15. Cf., Sumner, *Roman Military Dress*, 72-73.

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Appendix A, figs. 8-12. See also *HA Pertinax*, 8. 2-4.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., Appendix A, figs. 3-4, 9.

<sup>8</sup>Minucius Lorarius (Appendix A, fig. 1) is depicted wearing *calcei*. On centurions wearing hobnailed *caligae*, see Juv. 16. 13; Jos. *BJ* 6. 81.

to early third centuries CE, the *spatha*. Centurions were initially distinguished, however, from legionaries by sheathing their sword at their left, rather than right side.<sup>9</sup> Centurions additionally are more often depicted bearing a large dagger (*pugio*) on their belt.<sup>10</sup>

Most distinctive among the centurion's equipment, of course, was their *vitis*. As it was described in literature and represented visually during the Principate, the instrument was waist-high and straight, with a knobbed end. Two commemorative inscriptions from Ravenna from the first century CE, however, depict a coiled or "knotted *vitis*," perhaps suggesting the living branch on which the tool was based.<sup>11</sup> The instrument seems to have grown longer and more staff-like during the early third century CE, reflecting its more symbolic than practical use as a disciplinary tool.<sup>12</sup>

## Armour

Centurions in many cases bore armour similar to that of their soldiers. Most basic was the shield (*scutum*). During the Republic, it was ovular and made primarily of plywood and animal hides. It was later studded with iron bosses and strips, and made more rectangular in shape during the Principate. It served both centurion and soldier for centuries.<sup>13</sup> Centurions wore the same helmets as the rank and file, from the

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<sup>9</sup>E.g., Appendix A, figs, 1-6. The earlier *gladius Hispaniense* was tapered, but was phased out during the first to second centuries CE by a parallel-edged blade. *Spathae* appear more popular beginning with the Antonine period. See Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 78-83, 130-134.

<sup>10</sup>Appendix A, figs. 1, 4.

<sup>11</sup>Appendix A, figs. 12-13. These two examples come only from Ravenna.

<sup>12</sup>Later staff-like appearance: Appendix A, figs. 5-6, 8, 11. On the *vitis* and its development, see C. Franzoni, *Habitus Atque Habitudo Militis: monumenti funerari di militari nella Cisalpina Romana* (Rome, 1987), no. 15, 19, 59; Pfühl & Mobius, *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs*, (Mainz am Rhein, 1977), nos. 302-303, 305, 308; Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 120.

<sup>13</sup>Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 61-63, 91-95, 137-139.



“Montefortino” and “Coolus” types of the Republic, to the “Imperial Italic” or “Imperial Gallic” types of the Principate (figs. 2-4).

Types of body armour were less standardized. During the early-middle Republic, the cheapest and most basic form of armour borne by many legionaries was a simple, brass breastplate (*pectorale*) formed by one large disc or by several fastened together. Centurions and those soldiers of higher property qualification, however, more often bore scale armour, or the more flexible and expensive ring mail.<sup>14</sup> During the late Republic and early Principate, these latter types became more common. First century CE monuments to centurions Q. Sertorius Festus and T. Calidius Severus show examples of the scale mail and ring mail, respectively.<sup>15</sup> During the late first century to third centuries CE, legionary body armour appears to have been dominated by the so-called “*lorica segmentata*,” a heavier cuirass of iron and leather strips fixed together with copper-alloy fittings that offered better protection to the chest and shoulders (fig. 1). Centurions, however, are conspicuously never depicted or described wearing this form of armour, nor the muscled cuirass of higher officers, but appear to have maintained use of the scales or mail.<sup>16</sup>

The commemorations to M. Caelius and M. Favonius Facilis also depict centurions wearing some kind of garment (leather or reinforced linen?) over their torso. It is unclear, however, whether such garments were worn in addition to scale or ring mail, or served as their primary protection, like a padded jack or jerkin. Facilis’ monument,

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<sup>14</sup>Polyb. 6. 23. Cf., Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 63-64.

<sup>15</sup>Appendix A, figs. 3, 16.

<sup>16</sup>The *lorica segmentata* become rarer during the third century CE, probably because of the cost and complexity of their construction. Cf., Robinson, *The Armour of Imperial Rome*, 147-169; Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 170-173.

moreover, also depicts the use of the leather reinforcements worn over top of the armour at the waist and shoulders.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, some centurions appear to have worn a leather harness with overlapping straps. These straps evidently were used to suspend one's military decorations, such as *phalerae* and *torques*.<sup>18</sup>

Centurions primarily distinguished themselves from their soldiers, however, through two additional features of their armour. First and foremost was the transverse crest (*crista transversa*) borne on their helmets, which served to distinguish the centurion in the confusion of battle and to emphasize his height and fierceness.<sup>19</sup> Earlier crests were attached through small, separately cast knobs attached to the top of the helmet, while later crests favoured a detachable, U-shaped holder attached to the crest box.<sup>20</sup> The material of the crest itself seems to have varied, including both the earlier (goose?) feathers and later horse-hair crests that are ubiquitous in Hollywood films. Both kinds are depicted in monuments to centurions from the first century CE, T. Calidius Severus and M. Petronius Classicus.<sup>21</sup>

Another form of armour that distinguished the centurion from both his soldiers and superior officers were greaves. While officers and certain soldiers of the auxiliary cavalry bore them, greaves are unique to centurions in the legionary infantry. They are commonly depicted in visual commemoration to centurions and, in the cases where only military equipment is depicted, such as on the epitaphs of of T. Calidius Severus, M.

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<sup>17</sup>Appendix A, figs. 2 and 4. On garments as armour, see Sumner, *Roman Military Dress*, 170-175.

<sup>18</sup>Appendix A, figs. 2-4, 14, 17-18. Cf. Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, 92-95.

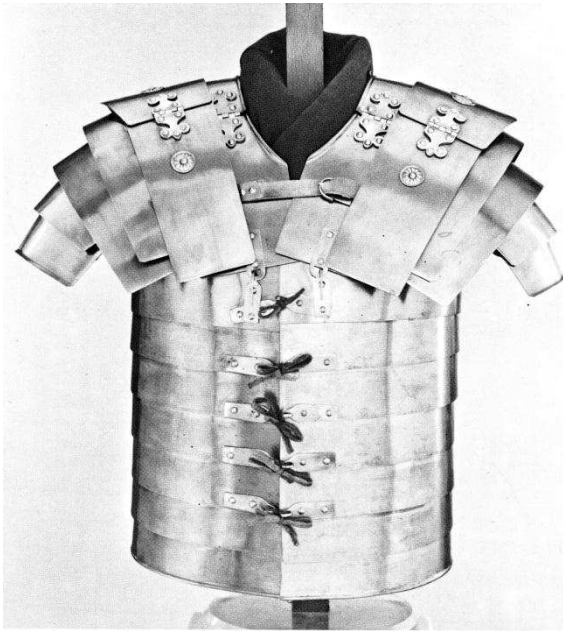
<sup>19</sup>See above, Chapter 2, n. 38.

<sup>20</sup>Robinson, *The Armour of Imperial Rome*, 140-143.

<sup>21</sup>Appendix A, figs. 15 and 18.

Petronius Classicus, and L. Blattius Vetus, they are highlighted along with the centurion's crest and *dona militaria*.<sup>22</sup>

**Fig. 1**

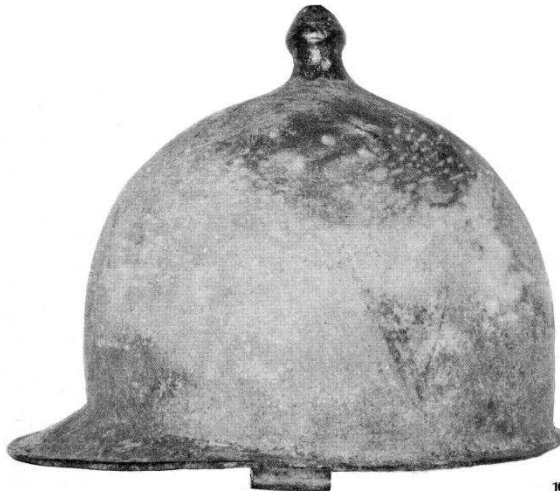


*Lorica Segmentata* (Reconstruction)  
First Century CE  
Image from Robinson, Pl. 191

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<sup>22</sup>See Appendix A, figs. 16, 18, and 20. See also figs. 3, 4, and 6. Cf., Robinson, *The Armour of Imperial Rome*, 187-188. There is one case in surviving evidence for *milites* wearing greaves found in the Adamclisi metopes. See Bishop & Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, 86, n. 46.

**Fig. 2**



Montefortino Type  
Middle-late Republic  
Image from Robinson, Pl. 10

**Fig. 3**



Coolus Type  
Late Republic to first century CE  
Image from Robinson, Pl. 41

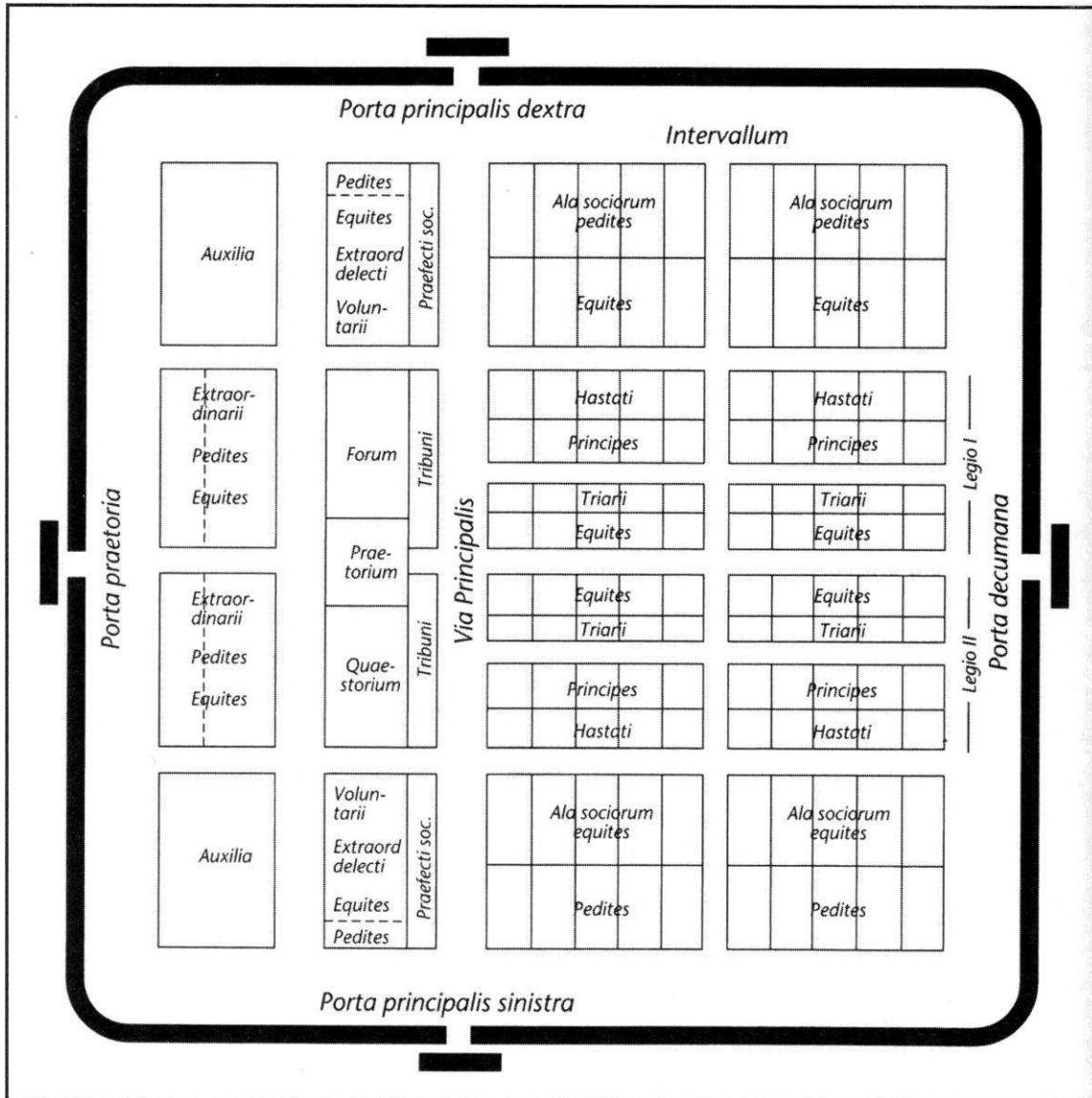
**Fig. 4**



Imperial Gallic Type  
First century CE  
Image from Robinson, Pl. 100-101

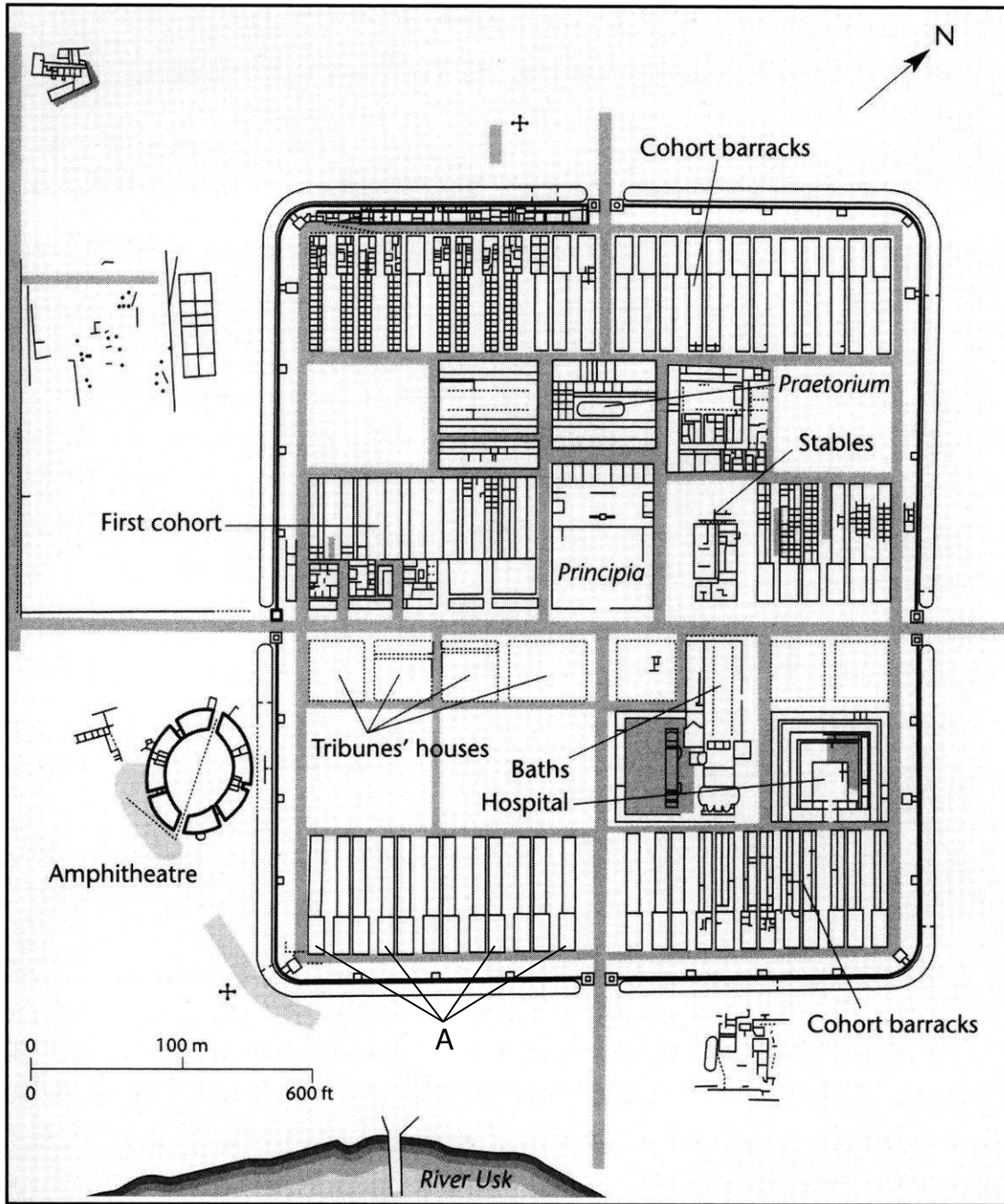
Appendix C: Centurions' Quarters

Fig. 1



Polybius' plan for legionary camp during middle-Republic (not to scale)  
Image from Roth (2009), Fig. 14

Fig. 2

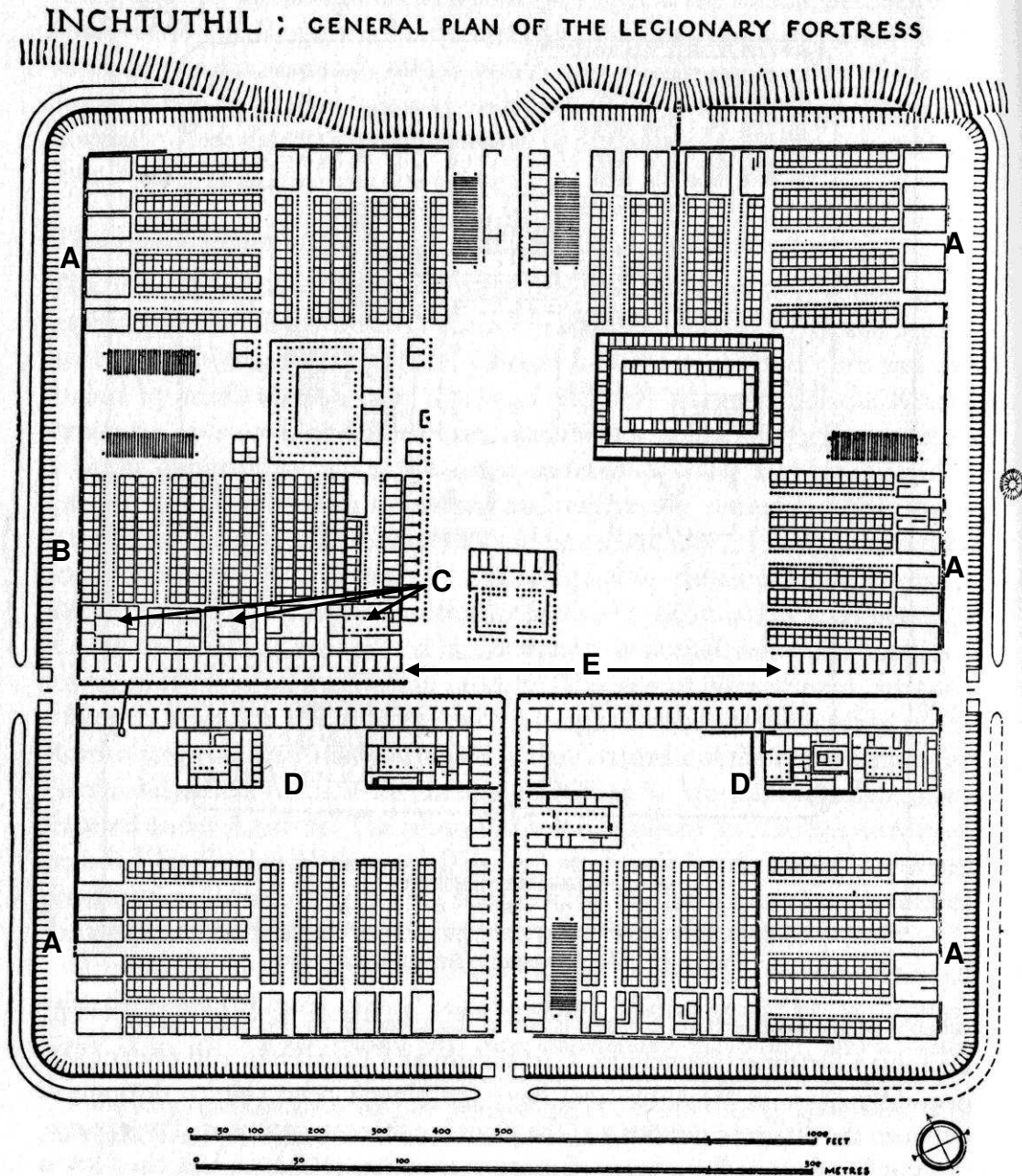


Recreation of Caerleon (Wales), f. late first century CE

Image from Roth (2009), Fig. 41

**Note:** Centurions' quarters (A) visible at end of each row of barracks near walls; note also row of larger quarters for the *primi ordines* and *primuspilus* of first cohort by western wall

Fig. 3



Plan for Inchtuthil (Scotland), late first century CE

Image from Webster (1969), Fig. 34 (adapted)

A: standard barrack blocks

B: first cohort barracks

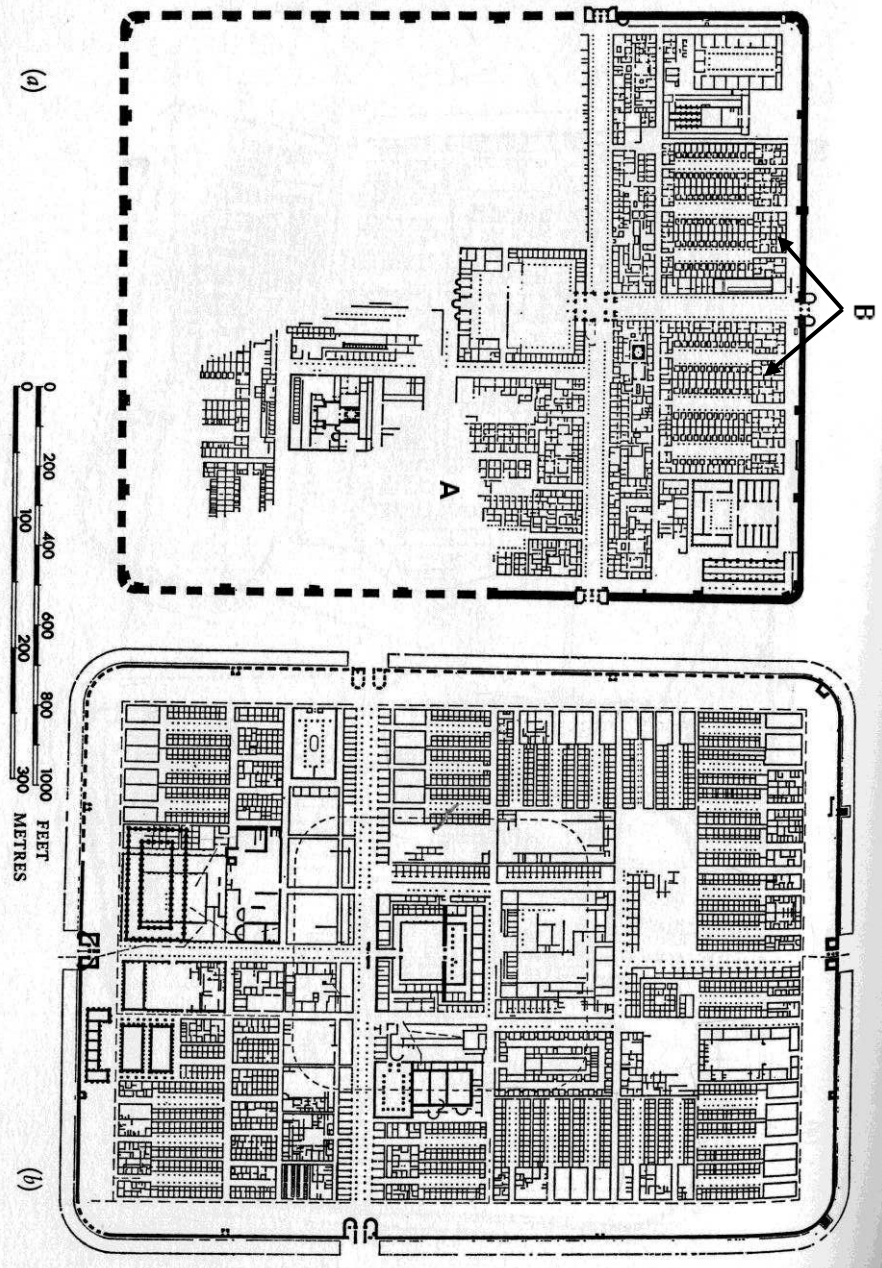
C: *primi ordines* quarters

D: military tribunes' quarters

E: Barrack store houses

**Note:** similarity in layout of barrack blocks with fortress at Caerleon, with centurion quarters at end of barrack block, and greater size of *primi ordines*' quarters at centre-left

Figs. 4a and 4b



(a)

(b)

Lambaesis (Algeria), f. early first century CE

Image from Webster (1969), Fig. 35a

A: first cohort

B: regular centurions' quarters

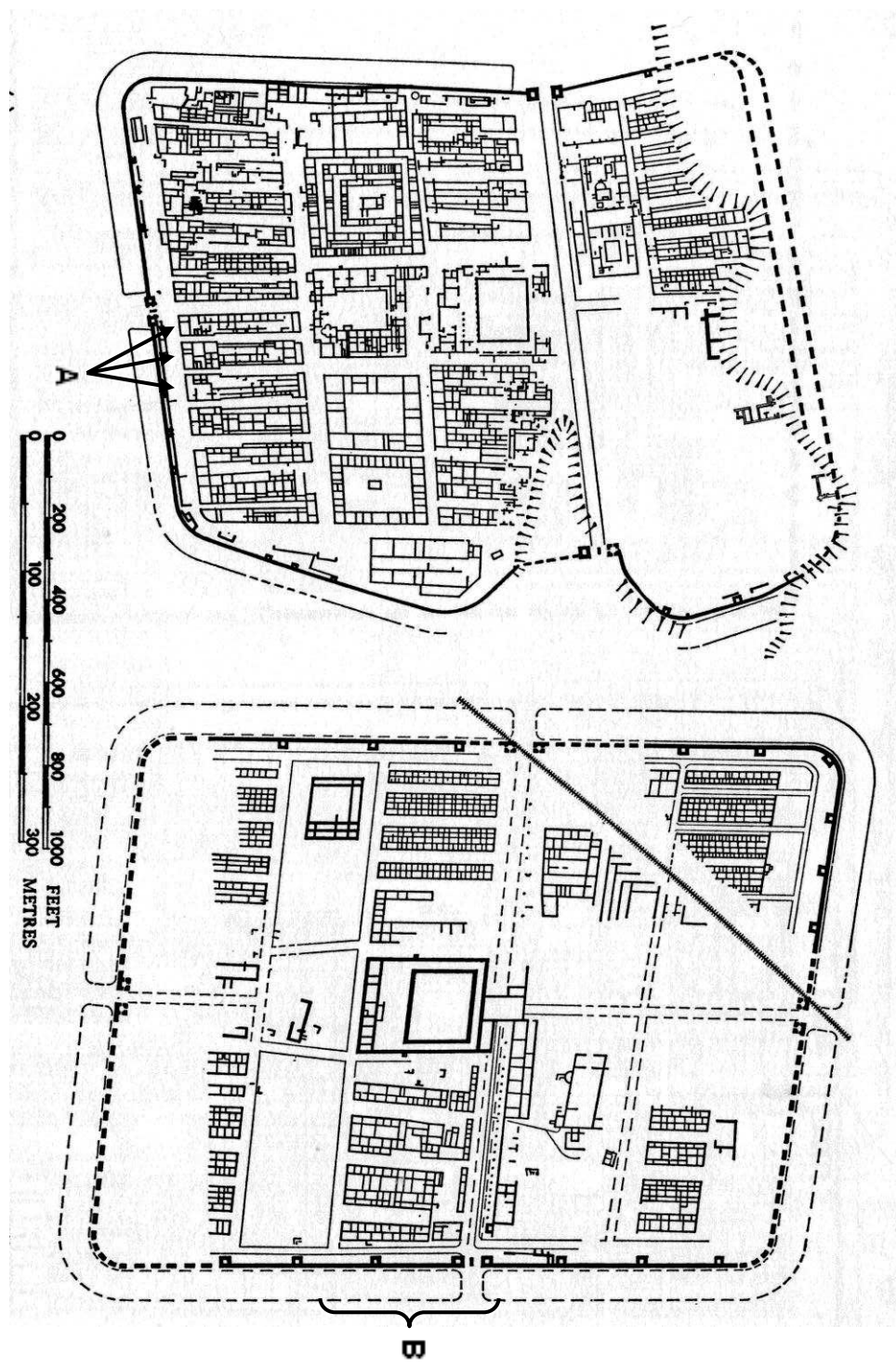
Note: number of rooms in each centurion's quarters

Novaesium (Germany), f. late first century BCE

Image from Webster (1969), Fig. 35b



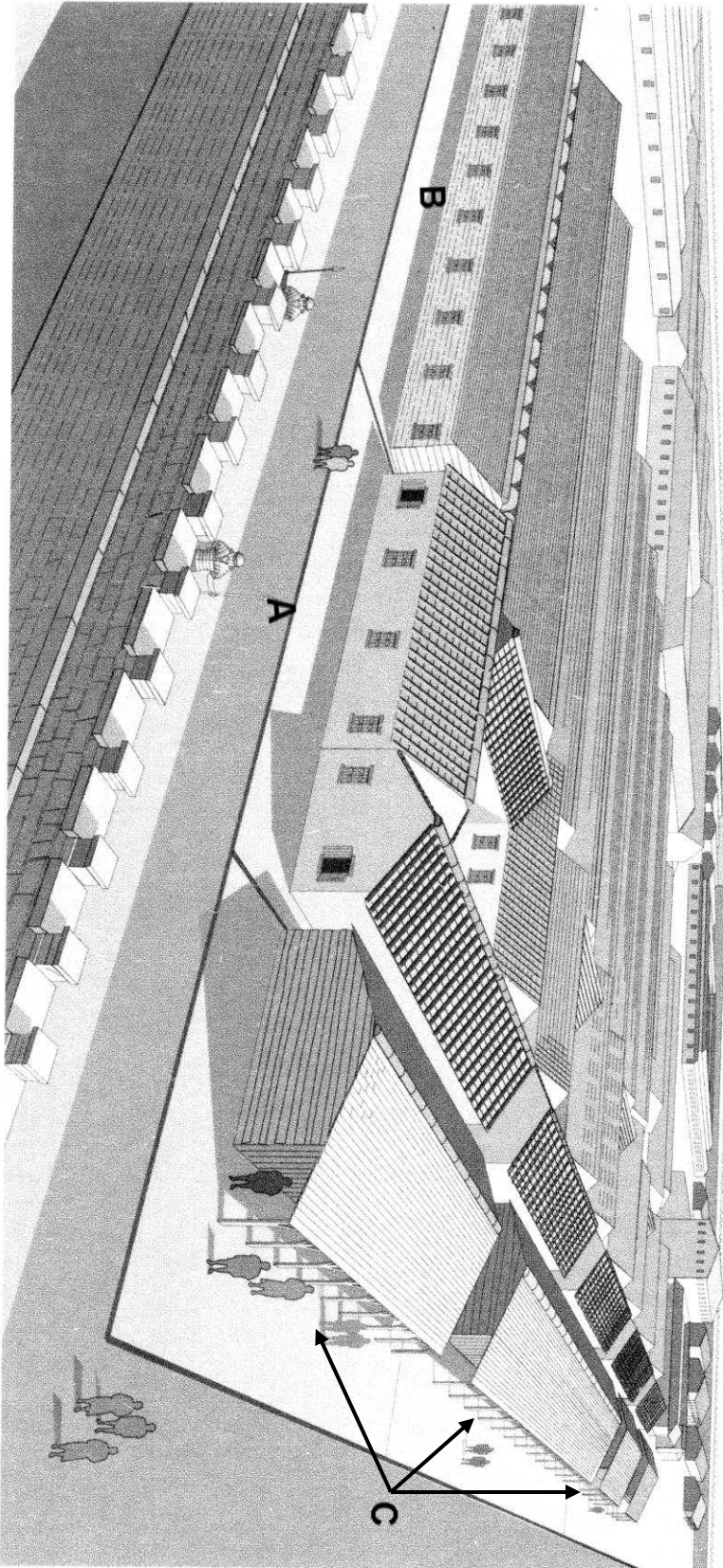
Figs. 5a and 5b



Carnuntum (Austria), f. early first century CE  
Image from Webster (1969), Fig. 37a  
A: centurions' quarters

Lauriacum (Austria), f. second century CE  
Image from Webster (1969), Fig. 37b  
B: first cohort

Fig. 6



Recreation of *primi ordines*' quarters from Inchtuthil  
Image from Shirley (2001), Fig.  
A: *primi ordines*' quarters  
B: barrack block of first cohort  
C: barrack store houses  
Note: central courtyards and proximity to barrack blocks at left and store houses are right; compare with plan of first cohort block at Inchtuthil above

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