

MICHAEL F. PAVKOVIČ

SINGULARES LEGATI LEGIONIS: GUARDS OF A LEGIONARY LEGATE
OR A PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR?

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SINGULARES LEGATI LEGIONIS: GUARDS OF A LEGIONARY LEGATE OR A PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR?

In a recent article Dr. N.B.Rankov discusses the famous inscription of Ti.Claudius Maximus from the village of Grammeni near Philippi in Macedonia. Rankov pays particular attention to the rank of *singularis legati legionis*, interpreted by Prof. M.P.Speidel in his commentary as a guardsman of the legionary commander. Rankov is likewise concerned with the implications that can be drawn from the existence of such guards for the legionary legates.¹ The substance of Rankov's argument is that mention of *singulares legati legionis* does not mean that Claudius Maximus was a bodyguard of the legate in his capacity as legionary commander but rather that the legate was at the time serving as a temporary governor for the province of Moesia.²

Rankov's hypothesis rests on two basic assumptions. The first is that there were extraordinary circumstances which caused the legate to be raised temporarily to the rank of governor. He places this unusual situation in the year A.D. 85 when the Dacians invaded the province and killed the consular governor, Oppius Sabinus.³ Rankov then argues that the governor's death meant heavy casualties amongst his guards, the *singulares*, which in turn necessitated the formation of a new guard unit for the acting governor. Claudius Maximus was chosen for service in the new guard, but the legionary legate was only an ad hoc governor, retaining his rank, and hence Maximus is styled *singularis legati legionis*.⁴

This leads us to Rankov's second premise, which concerns those officers with the right to *singulares*. Until the discovery of the inscription of Ti.Claudius Maximus, it was believed that only those men who were commanders of provincial armies had *singulares*. Maximus' rank of *singularis legati legionis*, however, led Speidel to suggest that men other than provincial governors could indeed have *singulares* and that the *singulares* of the legionary

¹ N.B.Rankov, "Singulares Legati Legionis: A Problem in the Interpretation of the Ti.Claudius Maximus Inscription from Philippi," ZPE 80,1990,165-175 (= N.B.Rankow 1990). The original publication of the inscription is by M.P.Speidel, "The Captor of Decebalus, A New Inscription from Philippi," JRS 60,1970,142-153 (=Speidel 1970) = Roman Army Studies I, Amsterdam 1984, Mavors I,173-187 (=Speidel 1984). Speidel further discusses the *singulares* in The Guards of the Roman Armies: an Essay on the Singulares of the Provinces, Bonn 1978, (= Speidel 1978).

I wish to thank Miss Caryl Corsi, Honolulu, for her help with this paper.

² Rankov 1990, esp. 167-175.

³ Rankov 1990,172-175.

⁴ Rankov 1990,174f.

legate were guards, albeit of a higher rank than the troopers of the legate's guard unit, the *equites legionis*.⁵

There are only two inscriptions which attest legionaries who give as their rank *singularis*; both are from Rome.⁶ The first is a soldier of *legio II Augusta*⁷ from Britain while the second is a legionary of *legio X Fretensis*⁸ from Judaea. Neither of these two soldiers says of which officer he was a *singularis*. Rankov argues that these men are more likely to have been attached to the *officium* of a governor, reasoning that their presence at Rome means they, like *frumentarii*, were employed by the governors as messengers to the capital.⁹ Rankov asserts that the structure of the Roman high command would only permit a governor, not a legionary legate, to communicate with the emperor at Rome, and he believes there was no difficulty in promoting a legionary to the post of *singularis consularis*, which was otherwise always held by auxiliaries. He further notes that soldiers from the *auxilia* are indeed known to have served in positions on the *officium* normally held by legionary troops.¹⁰

There is also the question of the *singulares* of the *legatus* of *legio III Augusta* in Numidia. After the publication of the career of Claudius Maximus, Speidel was able to argue that since legionary legates could also have a guard of *singulares*, the inscription of Anicius Faustus mentioning *eq(uites) sing(ulares) pr(ovinciae) Af(ricae)* did not have any implications for the status of the legate as governor. Therefore the text does not tell us that in A.D. 198/199 Numidia had been established as a separate province, but rather provides a *terminus post quem* for that event.¹¹

Rankov, however, noting the special status of the legates of *legio III Augusta*, explains the Numidian inscription differently. He proposes that sometime in the latter portion of the second century, the legates of *legio III Augusta* were, in essence, recognized as the

⁵ The view that only army commanders had *singulares* is held by Ph.Horovitz, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 17,1938,58 and H.-G.Pflaum, *Les procurateurs équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain*, Paris 1950,125f. For Claudius Maximus repudiating the earlier view, see Speidel 1970,144f. = Speidel 1984,175 and 179 and Speidel 1978,19-22. On the relationship of the *singulares legati legionis* to the *equites legionis* see Speidel 1970,144 = Speidel 1984,175 and Michael F.Pavkovič, *The Legionary Horsemen: An Essay on the Equites Legionis and the Equites Promoti*, Diss. University of Hawaii 1991,40 and 101 (= Pavkovič 1991).

⁶ Rankov 1990,167, regarded two other inscriptions, CIL III 14178 and IGLS 178, as too vague to be considered.

⁷ CIL VI 3339.

⁸ CIL III 3614.

⁹ Rankov 1990,166ff. The proposed use of a *singularis* rather than a *frumentarius* is never satisfactorily explained.

¹⁰ Rankov 1990,167f., citing an auxiliary *beneficiarius* from Cappadocia on the staff of a governor (IGR III 130).

¹¹ M.P.Speidel, *Historia* 22,1973,125ff. and Speidel 1978,20ff. Speidel, based on Tac.Hist. 4,48, suggested that these *equites singulares* formed the legate's guard and that the proconsul in Carthage had similar troops.

governors of the territory and so were permitted the staff of a provincial governor, including *singulares*.¹²

Rankov thus tries to dispel the notion of *singulares* for the *legati legionis*. At first glance, his thesis seems convincing. There are, however, several points of detail concerning the *singulares*, *equites legionis* and the Roman command structure which undermine the substance of his argument.

The first point to be discussed concerns the raising of new guard units of *singulares* for a governor in the wake of some disaster like that suffered by Oppius Sabinus in A.D. 85. Rankov's argument that many or even most of Sabinus' *singulares* would have been killed is certainly possible. Many guardsmen probably died defending their commander.¹³

A difficulty lies in using legionaries such as Ti. Claudius Maximus for the reconstituted guard. In particular, there are two main problems: the first is administrative, the second tactical. A strong argument can be made against the use of legionaries as *singulares consularis* based on what is known of these guard units. The provincial *singulares* were recruited from auxiliaries; of the eighty or so documents known for the *singulares consularis*, not one shows a man drawn from the legions.¹⁴ If, however, circumstances were so extraordinary that Claudius Maximus and some of his fellow legionaries were recruited as *singulares*, we should certainly expect some title which would have more clearly defined this unique position, especially given the detailed nature of the inscription. Rankov argues that *singularis legati legionis* is really the only title Maximus could have borne given the unusual situation of his commander being acting governor.¹⁵ Several examples are known in which soldiers refer to themselves as *singulares* of a province.¹⁶ Certainly if Claudius Maximus had called himself *singularis exercitus Moesiaci* he would have used a mere three additional letters yet added a much larger degree of precision, something about which he was obviously concerned.

Moreover, Maximus' rank presents a problem for his service in a newly constituted unit of governor's *singulares*. Usually a trooper who held the post of *eques singularis consularis* was recruited as either an *eques alae* or *eques cohortis*. But Maximus held the rank of *quaestor equitum* for the legionary horsemen. Even if he were transferred into an ad hoc unit of *singulares*, he would have had to have held a position higher than that of *singularis*, otherwise the transfer would have meant a demotion and a pay cut, perhaps nearly 50%.¹⁷

¹² Rankov 1990,171f.

¹³ For example, Maxentius' *equites singulares* who perished with their emperor. For the death of Maxentius and his horseguards, see now M.P.Speidel, "Maxentius and his *Equites Singulares*," *Classical Antiquity* 5,1986,253-263, esp. 257ff.

¹⁴ For example, the eighty-three inscriptions, papyri, and literary references collected in Speidel 1978.

¹⁵ Rankov 1990,174.

¹⁶ Speidel 1978, nos. 19, 45, 68, and 75, although the last is doubted by Rankov.

¹⁷ An *eques singularis* would have been paid at most 350 denarii per year: see, M.A.Speidel, *JRS* 82,1992,92-87; cf. M.P.Speidel, *JRS* 63,1973,141-147 = Speidel 1984,83-89 and Speidel 1978,36. The pay of

Yet the inscription does not provide any indication that Maximus held a rank other than *singularis legati legionis*. This seems to imply that he ranked higher than a trooper in the governor's guard.

There is reason to believe that even if he had held a position in a newly constituted guard for an ad hoc governor, Claudius Maximus could have used the title *singularis consularis* to avoid any confusion. An example can be found in the inscription of a *singularis* from Raetia.¹⁸ The inscription, from the third century, mentions a *singularis consularis* of the governor. While Raetia had been given a legion sometime earlier, its governor still held only praetorian rank. Nevertheless, the soldier called himself *singularis consularis* so that his rank and unit are not in doubt, viz., he served in a governor's guard. A similar example can be drawn from the *beneficarii* of Noricum. An inscription from the second half of the second century attests a *beneficiarius consularis* for the province's praetorian governor.¹⁹

The question, then, is why, if he could have used other more recognizable terms, did Claudius Maximus choose the very expressive wording *singularis legati legionis*? The answer must be that it represented a different position from that of a governor's guardsman, viz., Maximus served as a member of the legionary legate's guards.

There are also tactical grounds on which we must reject the presence of legionaries among the *singulares consularis*, even if we admit certain military exigencies. The formation and equipment of legionaries and auxiliaries were sufficiently different to make the amalgamation of the two types of soldiers highly unlikely, if not impossible.

The battle formation used by the legions was based on the use of *centuria* formed in battle-lines, occasionally armed with different weapons, and on cohorts. The legionary *acies* was formed up in battle-lines in which the *centuriae* of the legion dictated in which rank the soldiers stood while the cohorts placed the *centuriae* along the length of the battle-line. The *centuria* would also have dictated the weapons with which its troops were to be armed.²⁰

By contrast, the tactics of the *auxilia* must have been much simpler. One reason lies in the organization of the auxiliary forces, whose largest unit was the cohort. While there may have been some weapons specialization within auxiliary cohorts, the size of the basic unit

the junior officers of the *equites legionis* was probably at 600 *denarii* per year: Pavkovič 1991,64-70, esp. 68ff.

¹⁸ III 5938 & III 11493 = Speidel 1978 no. 13.

¹⁹ AE 1929,37 = E.Schallmayer, *et al.*, *Der römische Weihebezirk von Osterburken I. Corpus der griechischen und lateinischen Beneficiarius-Inschriften des Römischen Reiches*, Stuttgart 1990, nr. 217..

²⁰ For the use of cohorts in the creation of legionary detachments: M.P.Speidel, "Legionary Cohorts in Mauretania. The Role of Legionary Cohorts in Expeditionary Armies," ANRW II.10.2,1982,850-860 = Speidel 1984,65-75. Battle-lines and the importance of *centuriae* within the line: *idem*, *The Framework of an Imperial Legion*, Caerleon 1992 = *The Fifth Annual Caerleon Lecture*, 12-24.

and the lack of the complicated centurial organization of the legion would have prohibited the use of a legionary style infantry *acies*.²¹

The difference in the armament of the legionaries and auxiliaries is well known. Tacitus graphically described the differences in weaponry: *et si auxiliaribus resisterent, gladiis ac pilis legionariorum, si huc veterent, spathis et hastis auxiliarum sternebantur*.²² The equipment carried by the majority of legionaries and auxiliaries reflects their differing battlefield roles: the legionaries acted as the heavy infantry of the battle line, while the auxiliary troops served as flanking and screening forces.²³ Such variation in armament would have made it difficult for the formation of a guard unit from both legionaries and auxiliaries.

The distinction drawn between legionary and auxiliary troops thus far applies mostly to infantry, whereas Claudius Maximus was a horseman. Certainly, the *equites legionis* could have been more easily worked into a unit with auxiliary horsemen since they had similar tactical units, formations, and weapons.²⁴ But the legionary horsemen were already a guard unit, and there is no reason to have them form a new unit with auxiliaries. Indeed there is an instance which may parallel the situation of Maximus' commander. This occurred when Fabius Valens went off to salute Vitellius as emperor at Cologne in A.D. 69.²⁵ In that instance, Valens took with him as an escort his *equites legionis* in addition to auxiliary horsemen.

Given these administrative and tactical problems, it seems best to retain Ti.Claudius Maximus among the ranks of the legionary legate's guardsmen. If he served as *singularis legati legionis*, as now seems likely, what were his duties? The legionary legates already had guard units, the *equites legionis*.²⁶ The two units must have had different functions. I suggest that the legionary cavalry served as a battlefield guard unit and mobile reserve while the *singulares* functioned as a more personal guard, a genuine bodyguard. A similar institution is known from the imperial guardsmen: the *speculatores* who formed a personal

²¹ Similar weapons specialization is implied in Arrian, Ekt. 14, where one hundred men (one *centuria*) from the detachment of *cohors III Cyrenaica* formed a bulwark for lighter armed troops, armed with spear and shield, while other soldiers of the same unit appear equipped as archers in Ekt. 18.

²² Tac., Ann. 12,35.

²³ For the influence of equipment on tactical role, see J.C.N.Coulston, "Three Legionaries from Croy Hill," in J.C.N.Coulston, ed., *Military Equipment and the Identity of Roman Soldiers*, Oxford 1988 = BAR International Series 394,1-29, esp. 11f. See also P.Connolly, "The Roman Fighting Techniques Deduced from Armour and Weaponry" in V.A.Maxfield and M.J.Dobson, *Roman Frontier Studies* 1989, Exeter 1991,358-363.

²⁴ For the units of the legionary horsemen that were similar to the *turmae* of the auxiliaries, see Pavkovič 1991,36-45; weapons: *op.cit.*, 77-86; formations: *op.cit.*, 44f. and 99f. Admittedly, legionary and auxiliary horsemen fought together at times: Tac., Ann. 4,73; cf. Pavkovič 1991,148.

²⁵ Tac., Hist. 1,57.

²⁶ The function of the legionary horsemen as the guard of the *legati legionis* is discussed in Pavkovič 1991, esp. 94-103.

bodyguard within the Praetorian cohorts.²⁷ While it is not possible to argue that Maximus was a *singularis* of a legionary commander with absolute certainty, it still seems the most likely explanation.

Hawaii Pacific University

Michael F.Pavkovič

²⁷ For the *speculatores* in Rome, M.Durry, *Les cohortes prétoriennes*, Paris 1938, 108ff. and 138f.