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THE ΣΤΡΑΤΑΡΧΗΣ OF LEGIO VI FERRATA AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF CAMP PREFECTS AS VEXILLATION COMMANDERS


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In November 66, during the early stages of the Jewish War, Cestius Gallus was taking the outer suburbs of Jerusalem and would have captured the city forthwith, we are told, had he not been diverted from an immediate attempt, primarily by Turannius Priscus, a πρωταπεδάρχης (praefectus castrorum) in his army. Later attempts failed to take the city, and once Cestius had decided to withdraw, his army was quickly set upon by the rebellious Judeans and consequently suffered numerous casualties during the retreat, one of whom Josephus says was ‘Priscus’—this time, the στρατάρχης of the Sixth Legion. The two passages have often been overlooked, and the title στρατάρχης at BJ 2.544 has been translated both as legatus legionis and praefectus castrorum. Because of the varied interpretations of στρατάρχης, the above names, i.e. ‘Turannius Priscus’ and ‘Priscus’, have nearly always been dissociated as being those of different officers. However, an examination of the Bellum Judaicum and other evidence reveals that Josephus did not use the term στρατάρχης as the technical equivalent of any specific rank in the Roman army, but rather as a more general word for ‘commander’ or ‘leader’. The picture which emerges is that Turannius Priscus and Priscus were one and the same person, and that while this officer held the ‘rank’ of praefectus castrorum, (στραταπεδάρχης) ‘his assignment’ at the time of Cestius’s campaign was as the commander (στρατάρχης) of a vexillation from the Sixth Legion. This is significant, as the notion that camp prefects could even command legionary vexillations on campaign from as early as the first century has only recently been raised.

Unfortunately, we have no epigraphic or other literary evidence for the commanders of the Sixth Legion between c. 19 and 70, which might otherwise confirm or disprove a translation of στρατάρχης

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1 I would like to thank Dr. D.J. Breeze, Dr. B. Dobson, Dr. L.J.F. Keppie and the staff of the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Queensland for their helpful comments, without in any way committing them to the views expressed.
2 Joseph. BJ 2.531. All references which follow are from Josephus’s Bellum Judaicum unless otherwise stated.
3 2.544.
6 De Rohden ((or Dessau) in PIR1 T 299) argues that the two men are scarcely the same person (vix idem). This is also the tacit implication of Mason’s translation of στρατάρχης and στραταπεδάρχης (op. cit., 86–87); and likewise Liddell and Scott’s (op. cit., 1651 and 1653). Sadddington (op. cit., 249 and n. 19), in his chronological list of prefects, records the two names separately and states that “the relation of Priscus στραταρχῆς στάματος ἐκτοῦ του Τουρανίου Πρίσκου is not clear”. R. Syme (Praefecti Castrorum, Germania 16 (1932), 108–11, 109, n. 7), on the other hand, tentatively lists the officer at BJ 2.544 as ‘(Turannius?) Priscus’, while R. Saxon (Untersuchungen zu den Vexillationen des römischen Kaiserheers von Augustus bis Diokletian, Epigraphische Studien 1 (Cologne 1967), No. 12, n. 61), following Ritterling (Legio, in Pauly-Real-Encyclopädie, Vols. 12.1 and 12.2, ed. G. Wissowa (Stuttgart 1924–25), 1186–1838, 1257), views the two men as one and the same person, but without justification or comment on the relevance of this association.
as meaning *legatus legionis*. Our dilemma, moreover, is not alleviated by the fact that Josephus uses the term *στρατάρχης* on only one occasion, i.e. to describe the above Priscus. An appropriate starting point, therefore, is to examine the language which Josephus uses to indicate the rank of *legatus legionis*. Mason lists three words which are used by Greek writers for this rank, two of which appear in Josephus, i.e. ἔκγων and ταξιάρχος.8 While Josephus uses ἔκγων (leading) on a single occasion to indicate that Sextus Cerealis was the legate of the Fifth Legion,9 the word, in itself, is not the technical equivalent of *legatus legionis*, but instead relies solely on the context of the sentence to take on this meaning. Similarly, Josephus does not appear to use ταξιάρχος as a term for this rank either, but rather as a term for ‘senior officers’ in general (e.g. οἱ ταξιάρχοι πάντες).10

Obviously Josephus employed another term for *legatus legionis* and this is ἠγεμόν.11 Of the eleven instances in which Josephus refers to legionary legates by name, ἠγεμόν is used on ten occasions.12 But on most occasions (26 in all) Josephus simply refers to anonymous ‘ἠγεμόνες’ under more senior commanders, such as Mark Antony, Vespasian, Mucianus and Titus.13 This use of the word is clearly meant to include the legionary commanders on most, if not all, occasions. Indeed, some of the best examples of the employment of ἠγεμόν for *legatus legionis* appear in Josephus’s description of the Roman army’s order of march into Galilee,14 and in his account of the organisation of the Jewish army along Roman lines.15 This aside, Josephus curiously uses the word ἔπαρχος – a term widely attested as the equivalent of *praefectus*16 – on a single occasion to describe Sex. Vettulenus Cerealis, the legate of V Macedonica.17

That Josephus is usually consistent in the terminology he employs for Roman army ranks is supported by the fact that he nearly always describes commanders above the rank of legionary legate, such as Vespasian, by the term *στρατηγὸς*18 and those below the rank by terms such as ἔπαρχος (*praefectus*)19 and χιλίαρχος (tribune).20 Thus, if Priscus had been a legionary legate, we would expect Jose-

8 Mason, *op. cit.*, 191. The third term which is not used by Josephus is ‘μυριάρχος’ (see Polyaeusen, Strat. 1).
10 3.87. ταξιάρχος appears eight times in the *Bellum Judaicum*, each time in the plural, i.e. Roman officers: 3.84, 88; 5.121; and Judaean officers: 1.369, 461, 473; 2.258.
11 *Contra* Mason, *op. cit.*, 147f., who implies that, although ἠγεμόν is common on inscriptions and in literature for *legatus*, there are only a few examples in Josephus where it is used for *legatus legionis* (notably ἠγεμόν τέρμωτος: 2.510).
13 1.162, 198; 3.347, 532; 4.366, 377, 592, 603, 605, 624, 627; 5.118, 126, 349, 491, 502, 503, 511, 554; 6.71, 243, 255, 260, 266, 284; 7.6, 31, 123.
14 3.122.
15 2.578. Not surprisingly, Josephus also employs ἠγεμόν to describe a number of other leading personages, e.g. Jewish generals or leaders: 1.308, 356, 491, 673; 2.78, 434, 568, 577; 3.19, 20, 26; 4.224, 235, 271, 318, 521, 525; 5.250, 290, 309, 391; 6.92, 361, 378, 380, 381; 7.118; 441. Roman governors and prefects: 1.398, 537, 617; 2.239, 493; 7.59, 220, 304, 433, 439, 441. Roman commanders in chief: 1.165; 3.32, 443; 5.87, 93.
17 3.310.
19 E.g. 2.450, 544; 3.122; 5.88. The same term is also used once for the Prefect of Egypt: 6.237, once for a Roman governor: 6.304 and once for the legate of *Legio V Macedonica*, see fn. 17.
20 E.g. 1.230, 234, 235; 2.11 bis, 244, 335, 544, 578; 3.59, 87, 122, 324, 325, 344, 346; 4.636, 640; 5.48, 503 bis; 6.131, 238.
plus to have described him as the ἤγειμόν (or perhaps as the ἐπάρχος) of the Sixth Legion. That he is not so described suggests that Josephus was not implying this rank by the use of στρατάρχης. We are still left, therefore, with the problem of what Josephus meant by στρατάρχης.

στρατάρχης is not a commonly attested word, surviving in only 67 literary and one epigraphic example,21 and an examination of its employment in a few of these cases will suffice to illustrate how Josephus most likely intended στρατάρχης to be understood. Regrettably, our sole epigraphic example is highly fragmentary and sheds little light on our understanding of the word:

- Κασιανοῦς δοῦξ ἴσχυ[ρός? ------]
  ἀνήρ στρατάρχης ἐν --------------
  ἱπποσταίς κράτιστος --------------
  δεινὸς νο . . -------------------.22

The inscription gives Cassianus the title of δοῦξ (dux), which is attested from as early as the reign of Domitian, and was originally used to denote the commander of an operation or the commander of vexillations.23 The fact that both δοῦξ and στρατάρχης appear on the same inscription appears to argue that they have quite different meanings, but just what the relationship is between the two is impossible to say.24 All we can say is that Cassianus was a seemingly capable officer who is mentioned both as dux and στρατάρχης.

The surviving literary evidence of στρατάρχης, on the other hand, is far more helpful. Herodotus, Philo and Zonaras each use στρατάρχης in the sense of a ‘general of an army’.25 This use of the word appears to support Liddell and Scott’s suggested translation of στρατάρχης, i.e. ‘general of an army’, and, in a Roman context, Mason’s translation as ‘legatus legionis’. But Philo elsewhere uses στρατάρχης as a word to describe God, or to denote a religious ‘leader’ of the people, such as Moses.26 Obviously a translation of ‘general’ in these circumstances is inappropriate, and consequently casts doubt on the intended meaning of the earlier examples just cited, in which a translation of ‘commander’ or ‘leader’ fits equally well. However, it is Philo’s use of the word to describe the events leading up to the arrest of A. Avilius Flaccus (prefect of Egypt c. AD 32–38), which perhaps gives us the greatest insight into its use. Bassus, the centurion sent to effect the arrest, was anxious for military support upon his arrival and ordered one of the soldiers on duty in Alexandria to show him the house of the ‘στρατάρχης’, here clearly standing for the praefectus castrorum Aegypti,27 which elsewhere is recorded in Greek as the στρατοπεδάρχης τῶν ἀπὸ Ἀλεξανδρείας δύο ταξιμάτων.28 Of central importance is the fact that Philo came from a wealthy family in Alexandria and lived all of his life under Roman

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21 The word στρατάρχης is notably missing in the works of: Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Appian, Plutarch, Dio Cassius and Arrian. Although it survives in only one epigraphic example in relation to the command of soldiers, it is also attested on 15 occasions as a proper name, e.g. IG XII 1, 46.

22 Inventaire Thessalonique 16, 8. Cf. IG X 2, 45.

23 See ILS 9200; 1141–2; R.E. Smith, Duc, Praepositus, ZPE 36 (1979) 263–278, 273f.

24 Cf. C. Velius Rufus (ILS 9200), who is described both as ‘dux’ and ‘praefectus vexillariorum’.

25 Hdt. 3.157; 8.44; Philo, De Virtutibus 77; In Flacc. 111; Zonar. 8.21; 11.15 (covering Dio Cassius, Fragments of Book 13 and 64.10).

26 Philo, De Decalogos 53; De Vita Mosis 2.273; De Praemii et Poenis 95.

27 In Flacc. 111: γενομένης δ’ ἐσπέρας, ἢ μὲν ναὸς προσάσθη, ὡ δὲ βάσσος μετὰ τῶν ἑδίων ἀποβάς προσῆ, μὴ τε γνωρίζων τινα μὴτε γνωρίζομεν ὧτο τοῦ, στρατιωτὸν δὲ τινα τῶν ἐν τοῖς τετράδιοις φυλάκων καθ’ ὁδὸν εὐρων κελεύει δείκνυσιν τὴν στρατάρχου. The praefectus castrorum Aegypti was in charge of the double camp at Alexandria, see B. Dobson, Praefectus Castrorum Aegypti – a reconsideration, Chronique d’Egypte 57, No. 114 (1982), 322–37, 237; D.B. Saddington, Early Imperial Praefecti Castrorum, Historia 45/2 (1996), 244–252, 245.

28 6.238.
rule.\(^{29}\) He, therefore, must have known the technical title of the military commander in Egypt.\(^{30}\) But it may well be that the use of such a technical and specifically Roman term like στροφεποδόρχης, with its implication of a camp commander, would have been less relevant to his Greek readers,\(^{31}\) and so Philo instead has Bassus refer to this officer as the στρατάρχης – clearly not meaning legatus legionis – but something more like ‘the military commander’.

στρατάρχης, therefore, should not be translated as a technical term which equates to a specific Roman military rank, such as legatus legionis or praefectus castrorum, but with a more general meaning, such as ‘commander’ or ‘leader’, and this is what Josephus has done in relation to Priscus. Shortly after informing us that Turranius Priscus held the rank of στρατοπεδάρχης (praefectus castrorum), Josephus gives us the additional information that he (Priscus) had fallen during the retreat from Jerusalem and emphasises the importance of this loss by telling us that Priscus was, at that time, the στρατάρχης (‘commander’ or ‘leader’) of the Sixth Legion. In this regard, it is important to remember that the whole of Legio VI Ferrata did not accompany Cestius on the campaign.

In preparation for the expedition, Josephus informs us that Cestius assembled the whole of Legio XII Fulminata and 2,000 vexillation-soldiers (ἐπιλέκτοι) from each of his other legions, in addition to numerous auxiliaries. The identity of the other legions which provided troops is regrettably still somewhat uncertain, but it is generally accepted that a vexillation of VI Ferrata did participate.\(^{32}\) Thus, when Josephus describes Priscus as the ‘commander of the Sixth Legion (στρατάρχης τάγματος ἐκτού), what he really meant was that Priscus was the commander [of the vexillarii] of the Sixth Legion (στρατάρχης [ἐπιλέκτοι] τάγματος ἐκτού).\(^{33}\)

Although we have a reasonable amount of evidence for the commanders of what could loosely be termed ‘legionary vexillation-groups’ (i.e. two or more vexillations under the one commander),\(^{34}\) we have very little information on the men who actually commanded individual legionary vexillations on


\(^{30}\) Cf. praef. castr. Aegy. (Dobson, op. cit., 325); praef. ex(er)citu qui est in Aegypto (CIL. III 6809 = ILS 2696): praefecto stratopedarcì (AE 1954, 163).

\(^{31}\) I am indebted to Prof. R.D. Milns for this suggestion. Although Goodenough (op. cit., 31) may indeed be correct in his view that Philo probably wrote Against Flaccus as a warning for Flaccus’s successor, it is likely that Philo also intended it to be read by his Jewish supporters at large.


\(^{33}\) Tacitus (Hist. 3.22) is also guilty of leaving out this type of detail, referring to the First, Fourth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth legions at Cremona in 69 as if they were present in full strength, when he elsewhere (2.100) informs us that there were only vexillations from these legions in the Vitellian army. Moreover, the evidence suggests that when a legatus legionis was given an independent mission away from the main army, the number of soldiers which were assigned to his command and deemed appropriate to his rank was normally between 3,000 and perhaps 5,000 men, e.g. 3,000 men (3.289), 3,600 men (3.307), 4,000 legionary vexillarii plus auxiliaries (Tac. Ann. 6.41).

\(^{34}\) E.g. legates: Tac. Ann. 6.41; Hist. 1.61; 2.83; 4.24; CIL IX 2457 (= ILS 1076); Tribunes: XIX 3602 (= ILS 950); ILS 9200. Just how individual legionary war-vexillations were organised is still unclear, but is the subject of a forthcoming paper.
campaign. Until quite recently, the accepted theory was that, prior to the Marcommanic Wars, only senatorial officers could lead these detachments, i.e. the commander of the legion (the legatus legionis) and his second in command (the tribunus laticlavii). However, the career of M. Clodius, an equestrian tribune placed in command of vexillarii from Legio V Macedonica at some time under Claudius or Nero, clearly shows that equestrians were also considered suitable for these commands. Since Clodius and other tribuni angusticlavi i like him were on the fourth level of seniority in the legionary chain of command, we should not be surprised to find that the third in command of a legion was also eligible for the command of vexillarii on campaign.

In a recent paper, Saddington has noted that camp prefects could be assigned to the command of vexillations (plural) on campaign during the first century. But although his conclusion, in the view of the present writer, is quite correct, his statement is based on the example of Aeternius Fronto, the στρατοπεδάρχης τῶν ἀπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρειας δύο ταγμάτων, who commanded the detachments drawn from Egypt for Titus’s campaign in Judaea. This office was clearly far more senior than the average post of praefectus castrorum in the legions outside Egypt, and cannot be used as evidence that all camp prefects were eligible for the command of vexillations. Indeed Dobson pointed out some twenty years ago that camp prefects were employed as the commanders of vexillations. His statement is based on three epigraphic examples, two dating from the latter half of the second century and the other from the late third. However, the identification of Turranius Priscus in this role shows that camp prefects from the legions outside Egypt were commanding war-vexillations in the first century. This is further supported, moreover, by other literary evidence, which is given here for clarity’s sake, along with the epigraphic evidence cited by Dobson. The provinces and dates listed indicate where and when the detachments were operating.

1. Pannonia

Interea manipuli, ante coeptam seditionem Nauportum missi ob itinera et pontes et alios usus, postquam turbatum in castris accepera, vexilla convellunt . . . praecipua in Aufidie-num Rufum praefectum castrorum ira . . .

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35 Tribunes: XIV 3612 (= ILS 1025); ILS 9491? and CIL VI 3505? Cf. M. Speidel, Princeps as a Title for Ad Hoc Commanders, Britannia 12 (1981), 7–13, for the commanders of legionary vexillations in the early third century, all of which appear to be connected with ‘work or garrison-vexillations’, see Saxer, op. cit., Nos. 125, 224, 284, 285, 287 and 300.


39 Saddington, op. cit., 244f.

40 5.44; 6.238. Cf. AE 1937, 236 and PIR² L 287.


42 It is not surprising, therefore, that this example pertains to the commander of a vexillation-group (i.e. Fronto commanded detachments from both III Cyrenaica and XXII Deiotariana), and not to the commander of an individual vexillation, as Priscus was. The presence here of such a senior officer in charge of only 2.000 vexillarii seems puzzling. But this is perhaps explained by the fact that he was not only in command of a vexillation-group, but he was, no doubt, also acting as a military adviser on the staff of the prefect of Egypt, Tiberius Alexander, who also accompanied Titus on the same campaign.

43 B. Dobson, Die Primipilares (Cologne and Bonn 1978), 71.

44 Tac. Ann. 1.20.
2. Germany. AD 14
*at in Chaucis coeptavere seditionem praesidium agitantes vexillarii discordium legionum, et praesenti duorum militum supplicio paulum repressi sunt. Iussert id M. Ennius castrorum praefectus...* 45

3. Britain. AD 51
*praefectum castrorum et legionarias cohortes exstruendis apud Siluras praesidiis relictas circumfundit.* 46

4. Armenia. AD 58
...Corbulo, ne inritum bellum traheretur utque Armenios ad sua defendenda cogeret, excindere parat castella, sibique quod validissimum in ea praefectura, cognomento Volandum, sumit; minora Corneli Flacco legato et Insteio Capitoni castrorum praefecto mandat. 47

5. Judaea. AD 66
Turranius Priscus – στρατάρχης [ἐπιλέκτων] τάγματος ἐκτοῦ (see above).

6. Italy (?), Raetia and Noricum. c. AD 167–180?
...praepositi(us) v[exillationum] per Ital(iam)? et Raet(iam) et Noric(um) [bello | Germanico?, praefectus] kastr(orum) Leg(ionis) II Trajanae Fortis, primo pilo... 48

7. Lower Germany. c. AD 190
[I(ovi O(ptimo)] M(aximo) et Gen[io vexillationis] Leg(ionis) I M(inerviae) P(iae) F(idelis)... pro sal(ute) | imp(eratoris) M(arci) Aur(elii) Com(modi) Aug(usti) sub | Clau[tus]... 49

8. Gallia Lugdunensis. late third century
...L(ucius) Artorius C(aesar) C(ondobocianus) praef(ecto) Leg(ionis) VI Victrici, duci leg(ionum) [duaru]m Britannianarum adversus Arm[oricano]s... 50

The evidence as a whole is not abundant, but it does show that camp prefects were commanding detached forces on campaign from as early as AD 14. Promotion to the rank of praefectus castrorum was considered an additional distinction to those who had already reached the primipilate, 51 and men of such seniority and experience are not likely to have been overlooked for such responsible positions. Indeed,

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45 Tac. Ann. 1.38. Saxer (op. cit., No. 3) cites this example under his list of war-vexillations, but without commenting on the significance of Ennius’s rank, and while at the same time arguing that legionary war-vexillations could only be commanded by senatorial officers before Marcus Aurelius (*ibid.,* 120). See Dio 55.33, where Manius Ennius is mentioned as the garrison commander of Siscia in Pannonia in AD 8.


48 CIL VI 31871; B. Dobson, 1978, *op. cit.* 263, no. 147; Saxer, *op. cit.,* No. 121. *Contra Domaszewski, op. cit.,* 136, who sees this command only as a result of the turmoil of the Marcommanic Wars.

49 CIL XIII 7946. See also CIL XIII 8016 which describes Sabinus Nepotianus as *praef. cast.*; and B. Dobson, 1978, *op. cit.* 71.


when it came to the choice of which officer a legionary legate (perhaps aged in his early 40s) might choose to command a vexillation for a campaign, it is important to remember that many of his junior officers, i.e. the senatorial tribune and perhaps many of the equestrian tribunes, were aged somewhere between 18 and 24, and that at this age they were not always responsible individuals. By contrast, the camp prefect was probably aged in his 40s or older and possessed a great deal of experience, and in many instances was likely to have been the better choice, despite any humble origins. Moreover, when a legion was called upon to supply two or even three separate war-vexillations at more or less the same time, it is only logical that the third-in-command of the legion must at least have been considered for the command of one of these detachments, provided he could be spared from his usual responsibilities. It is now clear, therefore, that all of the legionary officers above the primuspilus, i.e. the tribuni angusticlavii, the praefectus castrorum and the tribunus laticlavius were utilised by legionary legates as the commanders of war-vexillations from early on in the first century.

In conclusion, there is no longer any reason to view ‘Turranius Priscus’ and ‘Priscus’ as separate persons, simply because of the use of the term στρατάρχης. The evidence from Philo and others shows that this word was not used as the technical equivalent for any particular rank in the Roman army, but rather as a more general word for ‘commander’ or ‘leader’. It is therefore attested both for an officer in charge of two legions (i.e. A. Avilius Flaccus) as well as for one in charge of only a portion of a legion (i.e. Turranius Priscus). Although our extant sources provide only a limited number of examples of non-senatorial officers in command of legionary vexillations on campaign, there is enough evidence to suggest that camp prefects could be assigned as the commanders of war-vexillations if the situation justified it, and indeed the extensive wars and campaigns of the first century may even have necessitated their employment.

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52 See Tac. Agric. 5.1, where Agricola, upon reaching the rank of a tribunus laticlavius, apparently stood out in the post because he took the position seriously, unlike other young officers who saw it as a chance for fun and self-indulgence.

53 See Vegetius, Epit. Rei Milit. 2.10: ‘is (i.e. the praefectus castrorum) post longam probatamque militiam peritissimus omnium, legebatur . . .’

54 During April 69, legio XXII Primigenia was widely dispersed over four different locations through the provision of vexillations, i.e. a vexillation of the legion appears to have still been in Rome after being recalled from Nero’s proposed eastern expedition (CIL XI 1196; Tac. Hist. 1.6 and 31; Suet. Galba 20); another vexillation from the legion had been dispatched with Caecina in January (Tac. Hist. 1.61); the eagle of the legion then accompanied Vitellius when he left Cologne between late March and early April (Tac. Hist. 2.57 and 100); and yet there was still a further vexillation from the legion left at Mainz after Vitellius’s departure (Tac. Hist. 4.24). See also, legiones V Macedonica, X Fretensis, XII Fulminata and XV Apollinaris (and possibly IV Scythica) which each provided a vexillation for Mucianus’ march west in mid-August 69 (Joseph. BJ 3.65; 5.41–43), and then later provided additional vexillations when Vespasian despatched Virdius Geminus to suppress a revolt in Pontus c. November–December 69 (Tac. Hist. 3.47f.).

55 B. Dobson has informed me via correspondence that he does not believe that primipili ever commanded war-vexillations, and that such commands were only assigned to primipilares and more senior officers.