

MICHAEL P. SPEIDEL

CENTURIONS PROMOTED FROM BENEFICIARII?

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 91 (1992) 229–232

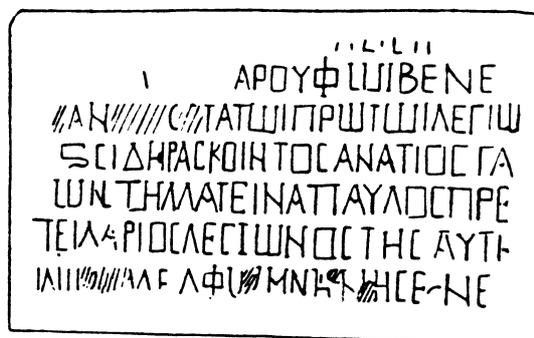
© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

CENTURIONS PROMOTED FROM BENEFICIARII?

In his classical Rangordnung, dealing with the career structure of the Roman army, A.v. Domaszewski recognized a middle group of junior officers in the legion, the signifer, optio and tesserarius which he called the tactical ranks. Above these he saw another, higher ranking group, mainly beneficiarii, whom he called Benefiziarchagen or Stabschagen, from whom one could rise to become centurion in a legion. Yet scholars rightly doubted the instances Domaszewski gave for the promotion of beneficiarii to centurions. A newly published collection of beneficiarii-monuments now offers again several such promotions, two of them clearly mistaken and others doubtful. They are discussed in the following.¹

1. Two high-ranking centurions from Beneventum

At Mourik near Aleppo in Syria a limestone block was found with the epitaph for a centurion in the sixth legion Ferrata. The block is broken above, and the first line of letters with the dead man's name is missing. The text has been drawn and published as follows:²



[- - -] + + + + + [- - -]
 [Cτελλατείν]α 'Ρούφωι βενε[φικ(ιαρίωι)]
 άν[τι(α)τήγου] <ά>[c]τάτωι πρώτωι λεγιῶ[νος]
 ς' Cιδηρᾶς Κόιντος 'Ανάτιος Γα[λλί?]-
 ων [C]τηλλατείνα Παῦλος πρε[ιμο]-

¹ A.v. Domaszewski, Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres, Bonn 1908, 2nd. ed by B.Dobson, Köln 1967, 33; 43; 83; doubted by D.J.Breeze, "The Organization of the Career Structure of the Immunes and Principales of the Roman Army", Bonner Jahrbücher 174,1974,245-292, esp. p.272. Collection: E.Schallmayer and others: Der römische Weihebezirk von Osterburken, I. Corpus der griechischen und lateinischen Beneficiariier-Inschriften des römischen Reiches, Stuttgart 1990, nos.701; 705; see also 700; 753; 822; 827.

² AE 1932,88 = IGLSYR IV, 1804 = Schallmayer 1990,701.

πειλάριος λεγιώνος τῆς αὐτῆ[ς]
 ἰδίω[ι] ἀδελφῶι μνήμησ ἐνε[κεν]

The drawing misleads insofar as at the end of each line about three letters are missing, hence the boundary of the epigraphic field must have been father right.

The deceased was *primus hastatus*, the third-highest of the legion's 59 centurions, which is all the more believable since his brother had reached the *primipilate*, the pinnacle of a centurion's career. A *beneficiarius*, however, in everyone's understanding ranked below centurion. This makes it unlikely that Rufus should have risen from that rank directly to the exalted position of *primus hastatus*, for is so, he would have leapfrogged 56 other centurions.³

Indeed, the rank of *beneficiarius* is not even mentioned in the inscription. The letters BENE[--- after the deceased's name signify instead his origin from Beneventum in southern Italy, for *Stellatina* is the voting tribe of Beneventum, and the name *Anatius* points to an Italian origin.⁴ The new reading not only does away with the most unlikely promotion from *beneficiarius* to *primus hastatus* but also with the otherwise unattested rank of *βενεφικιάριος ἀντιτρατήγου*.⁵

The inscription thus should read:⁶

[- - -] + + + + + [- - -]
 [Cτελλατείν]α ῥούφωι βενε[ουεν-]
 [τ]άν[ωι ἀκ]τάτωι πρώτωι λεγιῶ[νος]
 ς' Cιδηρᾶς Κόιντος Ἀνάτιος Γα[λλί?]-
 ὠν [C]τηλλατείνα Παῦλος πρε[ιμο]-
 πειλάριος λεγιώνος τῆς αὐτῆ[ς]
 ἰδίω[ι] ἀδελφῶι μνήμησ ἐνε[κεν]

The fact that we now can trace to Italy the origin of two high-ranking centurions in the Syrian sixth legion *Ferrata* helps us to understand the ethnic make-up of the late first- or early second-century officer corps. *Domaszewski* had insisted that throughout the first and the second century the legionary centurions, and especially their higher ranks, came from Italy. Later scholars could show a good number of centurions from the provinces as well. A full study of the subject is yet to be done and it will have to deal with this inscription.⁷

³ For the ranks of the legionary centurions see M.P.Speidel, *The Framework of an Imperial Legion*, Cardiff 1992.

⁴ For *Anatius* and his brother being Italians see B.Dobson, *Die Primipilares*, Köln 1978,29.

⁵ For *βενεφικιάριος ἀντιτρατήγου* see Schallmayer 1990, p.810.

⁶ The only discrepancy to the drawing is the rounded half-letter before the third gap in line 3 where one would expect an A. It seems the drawing is wrong here, for the shape of this "letter" matches none of the others.

⁷ Italians: *Domaszewski* 1908,83ff. Provincials: E.Birley, *The Roman Army. Papers 1929-1986* (= *Mavors IV*), Amsterdam 1988,189ff; idem "Some Legionary Centurions", *ZPE* 79,1989,114-129. See the overview given by Dobson in *Domaszewski* 1967, XXIIff.

Perhaps a mere coincidence is the fact that Beneventum was a veteran colony, settled in Augustus' early years by the very same sixth legion Ferrata.⁸

2. A beneficiarius in the ninth centuria of the pilus posterior

A newly found gravestone from Apamea in Syria shows in relief a beneficiarius with his lance as a badge of office. The inscription beneath is published as follows:⁹

D(is) M(anibus)
 Petro(nio) * Proculo * b(ene)f(iciario) *
 tri(buni) * leg(ionis) * II * P(arthicae) * S(everianae) * A(lexandrianae) * p(iae) * f(idelis) *
 f(elicis)
 a * > (centuria) VIII * pil(o) * post(eriori) * qui *
 vix(it) * annis XXXVII * m(ensibus) * VIII
 mil(itavit) * ann(is) * XVIII * Petro(nia) *
 Procla * filia * et * her(es) *
 et * Petr(onius) * Primus * frat(er)
 et * II * heres * b(ene) * m(erenti) * f(ecit) *
 curaverunt

The editor comments that the beneficiarius rose to become centurion in the rank of nonus pilus posterior. However, soldiers of the second legion Parthica were wont to indicate their centuria by its position in the battle order rather than by the name of the centurion.¹⁰ Petronius Proculus, the beneficiarius, therefore, was not a centurion but belonged to the centuria of the nonus pilus posterior. The inscription, then, should be read thus:¹¹

D(is) M(anibus)
 Petro(nio) Proculo, b(ene)f(iciario)
 trib(uni) leg(ionis) II P(arthicae) S(everianae) A(lexandrianae) p(iae) f(idelis) f(elicis)
 a(eternae), 7(centuria) VIII(nona) pil(i) post(erioris), qui
 vix(it) annis XXXVII, m(ensibus) VIII,
 mil(itavit) ann(is) XVIII. Petro(nia)
 Procla, filia et her(es),
 et Petr(onius) Primus frat(er)
 et II(secundus) heres, b(ene) m(erenti) f(aciendum)
 curaverunt.

⁸ CIL IX, p.137 and no. 1613; E.Ritterling, *Legio*, RE XII, 1924,1211-1829, esp. col. 1589; L.Keppie, *Colonisation and Veteran Settlement in Italy 47-14 B.C.*, London 1983,153-161.

⁹ Schallmayer 1990,705.

¹⁰ M.P.Speidel, "The Centurions' Titles", *Epigraphische Studien* 13,1983,43-61, as amended by idem, "The Names of Legionary Centuriae", *Arctos* 24,1990,135-137.

¹¹ To judge from the photograph there is, contrary to what the editor suggests, no ES at the end of line 7, only a leaf; nor can the F in line 9 be read f(ecit) since curaverunt follows.

The description of the centuria as the ninth in the pilus posterior suggests that by the third century the old battle lines of pili, principes and hastati had again acquired some function, very likely because of the growing tactical specialization of the legionaries (phalangarii, sagittarii, lanciarii, etc.) which then needed special places in the battle lines.¹²

Some beneficiarii may well have risen to legionary centurions,¹³ but if so, they were few,¹⁴ and they did not rise directly to high ranks.¹⁵ It seems unlikely, therefore, that they constituted a special group above the tactical ranks or that they were preferred in promotions to the centurionate.

University of Hawaii

Michael P.Speidel

¹² Speidel, Framework 1992.

¹³ E.g. CIL VIII 17626 = 10718 = Schallmayer 1990,753. However, the beneficiarius at Vazaivi commanded an exceptionally large post - the only one known to have mensores - and since centurions in Africa were often former commanders of outposts, the Vazaivi beneficiarius may have been promoted for this reason; see M.P.Speidel, "Becoming a Centurion in Africa. Brave Deeds and the Support of One's Men as Promotion Criteria", Roman Army Studies II, forthcoming.

¹⁴ CIL VIII, 9057 = Schallmayer 1990, 827 does not hold a vitis and thus lacks the rank of centurion, see M.P.Speidel, The fustis as a Soldier's Weapon, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Altogether impossible is the first-century career from beneficiarius to praefectus cohortis assumed for Mucius Clemens by Schallmayer 1990,700. It rests solely on the letter B, followed by a break in the stone.