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ROMAN LEGIONARY CENTURIAL SYMBOLS

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## ROMAN LEGIONARY CENTURIAL SYMBOLS

This note is concerned with the symbols used to indicate the centuries, or centurions, in the Roman legionary cohort of the Principate. It is a sequel to three papers by M. P. Speidel<sup>1</sup>.

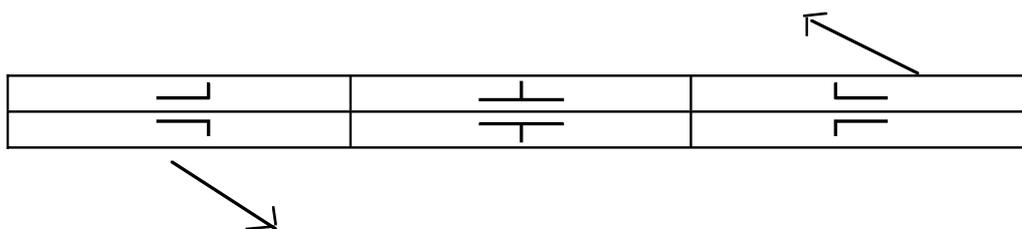
Symbols indicating different centuries appear most visibly in CIL VIII 2568 and 2569, and in CIL XIII 6801. They are in these forms: , , , , , . It does not take long to realise that if  represents the left, and  the right, then if they are put together we get  for the centre. The shapes suggest formations standing to the front (prior). Similarly,  and  put together give . This suggests formations standing to the rear (posterior). This gives us six forms which together provide symbols for six centuries:

These centuries are obviously in line of battle, the upper order to the front (prior), the lower to the rear (posterior). If we remember that the prime position, the position of honour, is to the right, we finish up with this sequence:

		
Hastatus Prior	Princeps Prior	Pilus Prior
		
Hastatus Posterior	Princeps Posterior	Pilus Posterior

This is the Battle Order (*acies*). When the legion moved off in Line of March (*agmen*), the (senior) right hand pair of centuries moved to the front, and the (junior) left hand pair to the rear:



The result is that in the line of march we have the three maniples in order:

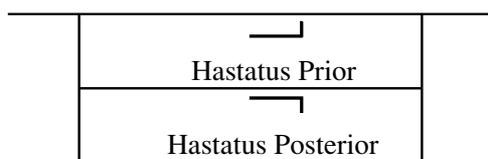

Pilus Prior

Pilus Posterior

Princeps Prior

Princeps Posterior

<sup>1</sup> *Epigraphische Studien* 13, 1983, 43–61; *Jahrb. RGZM* 33, 1986, 32–39; *Arctos* 24, 1990, 135–137 (reprinted together in M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies II (Mavors)*, 21–55).



It is important however that this line of march order is in no sense an order of precedence (see further below), but it *may* be the order normally used in military lists. This is at least suggested, although not finally proved, when we look at the evidence.

In CIL XIII 6801 (AD 204, from Mainz, and presumably XXII Primigenia), the fragment which survives either covers cohorts I and II, or a double cohort I. Fortunately, it does not matter which is correct, for present purposes, for the two columns appear thus:

1 } 2 { 3 { lost 4 } (  ? ) 5  6 	1 } 2 } lost 3 } (  ? ) 4  5  6 missing
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The surviving fragments of this inscription seem to fit the line of march order suggested above.

In CIL VIII 2568, of about AD 220<sup>2</sup> (III Augusta, Lambaesis), the centuries of cohorts IX and X which are represented fit the scheme suggested:

<u>coh. IX</u>	<u>coh. X</u>
1 	1 
2 	2 
3 } 4 } not represented	3  4 not
5 } 6 	5 represented 6 

Unfortunately, cohort VIII only partially corresponds with our scheme:

<u>coh. VIII</u>
1 lost
2
3 
4 
5  (!)
6  (!)

As is clear, something is wrong with the symbols for the fifth and sixth centuries. At least one of them must be wrongly recorded, since different centuries will not presumably have had the same symbol.

<sup>2</sup> For the date of CIL VIII 2568 and 2569, see my *Legionary Recruitment and Veteran Settlement during the Principate*, 1983, 69.

In the three cohorts represented in CIL VIII 2569 (also of about AD 220), there are again some discrepancies:

<u>coh. III</u>	<u>coh. IV</u>	<u>coh. V</u>
1 } 2 { 3 { lost 4 } 5    ┌ 6    ┌ (!)	1 no symbol 2    ┌ (!) 3    ┌ 4    ┌ 5 lost 6    ┌	1 symbol lost? or 2    ┌ 3    ┌ or 3    ┌ 4    ┌ ----- (rest lost)

Here again, one of the two symbols in cohort V must have been wrongly cut, or wrongly recorded, while in cohort III, 5 and 6 cannot both be right.

Yet a further anomaly appears in a list in a document from Egypt<sup>3</sup>. Here, the symbols VIII ┌ in line 4 against the name of the centurion Cocceius Claudianus seems to be repeated in line 6, against the name of Redulius Optatianus.

This is obviously not a very satisfactory state of affairs. There are several possibilities

- 1) In some instances, the wrong symbol may have been carved on the stone, whether because of an error on the part of the man who drew up the list, or on the part of the stonecutter.
- 2) In some cases, it is perhaps possible that the symbols were wrongly read by those who recorded the inscriptions.

However, to explain apparent anomalies as “mistakes”, whether ancient or modern, is never desirable. On the other hand, some coherent and intelligible system must surely lie behind the evidence as it has come down to us.

Perhaps it may be profitable to consider other factors. Thus in CIL VIII 18065 = ILS 2452, of AD 161 (Lambaesis) appears a list of the centurions (presumably all the centurions) of III Augusta at that date, tabulated cohort by cohort. Cohorts II, III, IV, V, VII and X have the expected six centurions each<sup>4</sup>. Cohort IX has only five: presumably a centurion had left, and had not been replaced. But in Cohort VI appear eight centurions, and in Cohort VIII seven. Were extra centuries occasionally attached to cohorts, e.g. for training purposes, hence the appearance of anomalous symbols in CIL VIII 2568 and 2569? Perhaps there were supplementary centuries in some of the cohorts? Whatever the truth of the matter, it seems difficult to suggest any other coherent explanation of these symbols. The suggestions put forward are advanced for the purpose of testing and experimentation. Suggestions and comments would be welcome<sup>5</sup>.

#### Note on Precedence

No evidence has yet been produced to show that the centurions in cohorts II–X took precedence from their titles. As has long been known, the case with the first cohort is different. As CIL VIII 18072 = ILS 2446 demonstrates, seniority in the first cohort ran

<sup>3</sup> *Bull. soc. arch. Alex.*, vol. 5 (no. 20) 1924, 271.

<sup>4</sup> An evocatus is added at the end of coh. X

<sup>5</sup> In the meanwhile, it can be tentatively suggested that in CIL XIII 6681 we should interpret II ┌ as “the century of the pilus posterior of the second cohort”, and in IDR II, 326, II ┌ will represent the same century. The reading of CIL XIII 6683 (AD 234) from Mainz seems to include the symbols VII ┌, presumably princeps posterior of the seventh cohort.

1. Primus pilus
2. Princeps
3. Hastatus
- (4. Pilus posterior, usually absent<sup>6</sup>)
5. Princeps posterior
6. Hastatus posterior

If applied to cohorts II–X, this would give an order of battle sequence thus

3	2	1
6	5	(4)

But the scheme we have outlined above gives an order of battle sequence thus

5	3	1
6	4	2

This seems to confirm that the sequence found in the first cohort is no guide to the order of listing of centuries in CIL XIII 6801 and CIL VIII 2568 and 2569.

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<sup>6</sup> But see now J. C. Balty and W. van Rengen, *Apamea in Syria* (Brussels 1993) p. 45 no. 19, for a pilus posterior of the first cohort of II Parthica at Apamea.