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The Names of Legionary Centuriae

M.P. SPEIDEL

Most legionary centuriae were named after their commander. A few however, especially in the third century, were named after their cohort and their rank. When reading the abbreviated names of such centuriae, most scholars add the word *cohors*. Hence names of centuriae like *7 VIII h. pr.* and *7 VIII p. poster.* were read *7(centuria) (cohortis) VIII(nonae) h(astati) pr(ioris)* and *7(centuria) (cohortis) VIII(nonae) p(rincipis) posterior(is)*.¹

Having shown that the old-fashioned centurions' titles like *quintus princeps posterior* or *sextus hastatus prior* were still in use during the empire, I concluded in an earlier paper that there was no need to insert the word *cohors* in the names of the centuriae.² I still think this is correct. However, in a well-researched, useful article in *Arctos* 22 (1988) Christer Bruun pointed out a newly found career of a centurion of whom it is said *fuit ordine in sexta hastatus posterior*. Bruun suggested that in this one case and two other, similar ones, one should insert *cohors*, after all, and read *fuit ordine in sexta (cohorte) hastatus posterior*.³

¹ See M.P. Speidel, *The Centurions' Titles*, *Epigr. Studien* 13 (1983) 43-61, nos. 27 and 5.

² *Ibid.* The use of the old centurions' titles shows up again in an inscription from Satala: T.B. Mitford, *Further Inscriptions from the Cappadocian Limes*, *ZPE* 71 (1988) 167-178, no. 2.

³ Chr. Bruun, *Caligatus, tubicen, optio carceris and the Centurions' positions; Some Remarks on an Inscription* in *ZPE* 71 (1988), *Arctos* 22 (1988) 23-40. The inscription is published by Mitford 1988, no. 12.

No doubt, Bruun is right in that the feminine ending of *sexta* implies a feminine noun to be understood. That word, however, should be *centuria* rather than *cohors*, to judge from a papyrus published not long ago, mentioning in 248 a soldier of the Egyptian legion II Traiana ἑκατονταρχίας δευτέρας ἀστάτου πρώτ[ου],⁴ i.e. *centuria secunda hastati prioris*.

Likewise, Prof. J.-Ch. Balty, Brussels, informs me that the correct text of an inscription from Apamea/Syria is *7 NONA PRI[N] POSTERI* which surely is to be read: *7(centuria) nona pri[n](cipis) posteri(oris)*.⁵

No doubt, this was a pattern,⁶ and it becomes clear that during the third century, an increasing number of legionary *centuriae* were identified by their number and place in one of the six battle lines (*ordines*):⁷

Battle lines	Centuriae				
	5	4	3	2	1
pili	pilus prior pilus posterior	pilus prior pilus posterior	pilus prior pilus posterior	pilus prior pilus posterior	pilus prior
principes	princeps prior princeps posterior	princeps prior princeps posterior	princeps prior princeps posterior	princeps prior princeps posterior	princeps prior princeps posterior
hastati	hastatus prior hastatus posterior	hastatus prior hastatus posterior	hastatus prior hastatus posterior	hastatus prior hastatus posterior	hastatus prior hastatus posterior

⁴ K.A. Worp, SPP XXII 80: Revidiert, Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer, Wien 1983, 368ff. The editor, following the traditional scheme, thinks *centuria* was written for *cohors* by mistake.

⁵ CIL III 187 = IGLS 1372. See my article, quoted above, no. 1.

⁶ It includes, as the Apamea inscription suggests, all *centuriae* of *legio* II Parthica. In my paper, quoted above, the ordinal numbers should thus be put in the feminine, in all cases save nos. 4, 6, 22, 25, 26, where centurions themselves are meant.

⁷ For battle lines as *ordines* see Veg. mil. 3,14. From the point of view of the 'Rangordnung' these lines are 'Staffeln' (A. v. Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*, Köln 1967², 90ff.) or 'Rangklassen' (K. Strobel, *Bemerkungen zur Laufbahn des Ti. Claudius Vitalis*, *Tyche* 2 [1987] 203-209; Idem, *Ein neues Zeugnis zur Rangordnung im römischen Legionszenturionat der Kaiserzeit*, *Epigr. Anat.*, forthcoming).

Since the cohorts were lined up next to each other, the class and number of the centuriae stayed the same: the second centuria of the hastatus posterior is the same as the hastatus posterior centuria of the second cohort. It was the point of view that changed: the battle line mattered now more than the cohort. The reason for this change must have been the increasing specialization of the lines as each came to wield weapons different from those of the others.⁸

An interesting sidelight is shed thereby on the origin of legion II Parthica. When drafts from various legions were called up for campaigns and had to fight together, the different vexillationes needed to be classed by their battle field role. They thus referred to themselves in terms like *7(centuriae) VI(sextae) ha[st(ati) pr(ioris)]*, or *7(centuria) VIII(nona) h(astati) pr(ioris)*.⁹ Hence legion II Parthica which named all its centuriae by number and line, is likely to have been raised from such a mixed field army during Septimius Severus' first Parthian war.¹⁰

⁸ Thus Hadrian in his speech at Lambaesis addressed first the two battle lines of the pili (Dessau 9133; the men, not the centurions are meant). Even greater specialization: Veg. mil. 2,15: 3,14; E. v.Nischer, in: J. Kromayer, G. Veith, Heerwesen und Kriegführung der Griechen und Römer, München 1928, 523; E. Wheeler, The Legion as Phalanx, Chiron 9 (1979) 303-318; Speidel 1983, 50.

⁹ IDR II 327 and 328; Speidel 1984, nos. 23 and 5. Compare the identification of vexillations by cohorts: M.P. Speidel, Roman Army Studies I, Amsterdam 1984, 65-75. For field armies put together from drafts see E. Ritterling, s.v. legio, RE XII (1924) 1211-1829, esp. col. 1303ff.

¹⁰ For the origin of legion II Parthica see now D. Kennedy, The Garrisoning of Mesopotamia, Antichthon 21 (1987) 57-66. Legion II Traiana may also have been raised thus: see Speidel 1984, 47 for its pattern in naming centuriae; see further CIL III 151 and J.C. Mann, The Raising of New Legions, Hermes 91 (1963) 483-489, esp. 485; G. Forni, ANRW II:1 (1974) 380ff. and 388.