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CEDO ALTERAM, OR THE PROBLEM WITH SOME AUGUSTAN CENTURIONS IN TIMES OF PEACE*

by

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ABSTRACT: The aim of my article is to explain the source of the problems with the Augustan centurions, which Tacitus described in the first book of the *Annales*. Through the analysis of the promotion system inherited from the Republican period, I have made an attempt to determine which characteristics might have helped a soldier to become a centurion. Tacitus mentioned a centurion named Lucilius, who was given the nickname '*Cedo alteram*' because of his habit of breaking a rod on the back of a legionary and then simply ordering another one. Lucilius and other unpopular centurions became the object of the soldiers' wrath after the outbreak of the mutiny in 14 CE. The question arises as to whether the violent reaction of the soldiers was only the result of the behaviour of some centurions, or whether the system of granting promotions during the reign of Augustus was deeply flawed, enabling people with mental problems to have a military career. To find the answer, I have also used some elements of military psychology which, however, should not be overestimated due to the historical and cultural distance between the events of 14 CE and modern conflicts. In my opinion, the mutinies of the legions stationed in Pannonia and the Lower Germany are good illustrations of some of the serious problems affecting the Augustan army.

In the well-known passage from the *Annales*, Cornelius Tacitus describes Lucilius, a centurion killed by the Roman soldiers who mutinied in Pannonia in 14 CE:

> ...et centurio Lucilius interficitur, cui militaribus facetiis vocabulum 'Cedo alteram' indiderant, quia fracta vite in tergo militis alteram clara voce ac rursus aliam poscebat[1].

Many scholars have already discussed in detail the events that sparked off this rebellion and contributed to the period of violent upheaval in the Roman army after the death of emperor Augustus[2]. In contrast, I would like to consider another

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[1] Tac. *Ann*. I 23, 3.

[2] On the mutinies of 14 CE, see in particular Gabba 1975: 76–91; Williams 1997; Malloch 2004; Pagán 2005; Woodman 2006; Salvo 2010. On Tacitus' presentation of the rebelling

problem, hitherto not addressed in scholarship: why a person like Lucilius, who was called '*Cedo alteram*' ("Give me another") by his subordinates and whose personal inclination for sadism was most probably known to his superiors, could still hold such an important military position. Tacitus also mentions centurions from the legions that mutinied shortly thereafter in Lower Germany (Germania Inferior) who were also engaged in excessive violence and were flogged for their actions[3] – a symbolic punishment for rank holders whose symbol was a vine rod (*vitis*) used for whipping (*verberatio*)[4]. The backlash from soldiers against such punishment in two provinces indicates that some centurions inclined toward brutality, so in this article I would like to investigate how they acquired such a fearsome reputation in the context of the rules of of military promotion.

Whatever it was that bred violence among Roman centurions, however, it was certainly not the supposedly harsh military discipline (*disciplina militaris*). A belief in the unusually severe discipline in the Roman legions remains perhaps the most widespread modern scholarly misconception about ancient warfare, despite the efforts of numerous classicists and historians (including William S. Messer, Jon E. Lendon, Simon James and Catherine Wolff)[5] who have been incessantly arguing since 1920 that the cohesion of the Roman army depended on the bonds of fraternity as well as training and not on the shared fear of commanders. Accordingly, Tacitus' account of Lucilius' behaviour cannot imply that his misdeeds were brought about by efforts to impose rigid discipline on his soldiers. Relevantly, the mutineers who served under Lucilius apparently did not ask for laxer discipline or lighter punishments, but for shorter military service and better pay, with centurions' cruel punishments mentioned only in passing: "Adstrepebat vulgus, diversis incitamentis, hi verberum notas, illi canitiem, plurimi detrita tegmina et nudum corpus exprobrantes"[6]. The passage quoted at the beginning of this paper suggests that centurions' excessive use of flogging was not part and parcel of military discipline, but rather a flagrant abuse of power over their subordinates.

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soldiers' personalities, see Kajanto 1970: 708–713. See also MacMullen (1984: 451–455) for a study on how Roman soldiers cooperated in similar situations.

[3] Tac. *Ann*. I 20, 1–2; I 32, 1.

[4] Harmand 1967: 330; Webster 1998: 130; Le Bohec 2001: 61; Cosme 2003: 339–348. The sole example of what is believed to have been a centurion's rod was found in the ruins of Flavia Solva in the province of Noricum; it is dated to the 2nd century CE. See Hannsjörg 2013: 231–240.

[5] Messer 1920; Lendon 2005, esp. pp. 169–178; James 2011, esp. pp. 22–24; Wolff 2012.

[6] Tac. *Ann*. I 18, 1. Cf. *Ann*. I 17, 2–3, in which passage Tacitus speaks about centurions soliciting bribes from the legionaries stationed in Pannonia. Paul Veyne (1997: 151) has pointed out that Roman society accepted this form of bribery as customary and that centurions mentioned in the *Annales* just took advantage of the opportunity given to them. Soliciting bribes for personal favours, however, differs fundamentally from centurions extorting a bribe from soldiers who had been sentenced to a flogging in exchange for waiving the sentence.

As mentioned above, the Roman disciplinary system prioritised fostering *esprit de corps* and promoting unit cohesion over bullying soldiers into obedience. Certain scholars have drawn striking and perhaps oversimplistic parallels between the Roman *contubernia* system (pairing soldiers to promote bonding) and the modern American "buddy" system; despite the obvious shortcomings of these far-reaching juxtapositions, placing these two bonding schemes in dialogue with one another highlights certain universals in military conditioning[7]. Modern military psychology emphasises that harsh discipline discourages soldiers, who respond better to commanders that promote unit solidarity and mutual trust among their troops: the peer pressure generated by comrades-in-arms improves soldiers' performance much more effectively than the fear of even the most severe punishment[8]. Surprisingly, any analysis of narrative sources referring to the late Republic and the early Principate showcases the fact that even well-integrated Roman legions still mutinied from time to time, implying that this type of insubordination did not result from excessive disciplinary measures[9].

A subset of scholars has argued that the nickname given to Lucilius by his subordinates reflects a more prevalent tradition of nicknaming particularly harsh centurions after rods, staffs and other tools used to discipline soldiers; nevertheless, evidence for this type of moniker remains scant. In the *Commentarii de bello Gallico*, Gaius Julius Caesar mentions a centurion named Publius Sextius Baculus (*baculum* means 'stick', 'rod') of the XII Legion, who between 57 (58?) and 51 BCE served under Caesar during the conquest of Gaul[10]. Baculus' *cognomen* might have been a nickname given by his fellow soldiers or, alternatively, it might have passed down to him from his ancestors. In Baculus' case, the *cognomen* appears to allude to the mark of his office, the rod-like *vitis*, with no other *cognomina* of that type appearing in the extant material. Lucilius' moniker, '*Cedo alteram*', might represent the custom of legionaries giving nicknames to their officers; remarkably, Lucilius' moniker appears to have become famous, a part of the lore of his legion. Discovering a tradition of nicknaming severe officers after instruments of discipline would enrich our limited understanding of Roman military culture; unfortunately, more evidence needs to come to light before one can argue for or against the existence of such nicknaming customs.

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[7] Smith 1990; Goldsworthy 1996: 252–256; Lendon 2005: 171.

[8] Moran 1966: 184; Kellett 1982: 92 f., 97-101; Marshall 2000: 43–46, 60; Holmes 2003: 294–297, 332 f.

[9] MacMullen 1984 still remains the best publication on this issue. Cf. Brice 2020.

[10] Caes. *BGall.* II 25, 1; III 5, 2; VI 39, 1. About Caesar's description of Baculus' brave deeds, see Horn 1961; Cowan 2007: 186, 200 f., 216. *OLD*: 223 (s.v. *baculum*): *baculum* roughly equals the Greek term βακτήριον, a rod used by officers of the Spartan army (Hornblower 2000: 61). It should be emphasised that no ancient accounts of the Roman army call a centurion's staff a *baculum*. Cf. Cic. *Verr*. V 142 (*baculum* as a lictor's rod).

In certain cases, it appears that centurions' *cognomina*, previously interpreted as *nomina loquentia*, were in fact ancestral names with no relation to someone's personal character or rank. For example, Raffaele D'Amato claimed that the late Republican centurion Minucius Lorarius of the *Legio Martia* had the *cognomen* given to him during his life[11]. The Italian scholar linked the Latin term *lorarius*, 'a harness-maker'[12], to the item held by Minucius' representation on his funerary stele and asserted that the curved object was not a centurion's staff but a leather belt, the symbolic representation of the nickname. In my view, several arguments undermine D'Amato's interpretation. Firstly, traditional representations of a centurion's *vitis* include both straight and twisted specimens. Secondly, since Minucius obtained Roman citizenship and equestrian status due to his exemplary military service, it is highly unlikely that he would have celebrated his life's achievements on his funerary stele by exhibiting a leather belt, the symbol of the derisive nickname given to him by his subordinates, rather than by depicting a twisted vine staff, the symbol of his military rank and a testament to his rise in socioeconomic status. Thirdly, if Minucius' *cognomen* 'Lorarius' does in fact refer to harness-making, then it is equally probable that it was handed down from his ancestors, since, as I noted above, no irrefutable evidence exists of soldiers giving their officers nicknames that would become their *cognomina*[13]. Bearing in mind that voluntarily adopting such a nickname would be inconsistent with what we know about Minucius' life, I argue that D'Amato has misinterpreted his material. Nevertheless, even if we exclude Minucius' *cognomen* as an example of nicknames given by soldiers to their officers, the story of Lucilius (and perhaps also that of Baculus) suggests that similar monikers could have occasionally been given by soldiers to their centurions, which in turn implies that at least some holders of that military rank had a predilection for excessively harsh disciplinary measures.

Another explanation for Lucilius' behaviour retroactively identifies him as a sufferer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Today, it is widely acknowledged that combat stress presents a significant long-term threat to soldiers in active service, with abundant literature dedicated to recognising and alleviating its effects[14]. Jonathan Shay was first to search for accounts of PTSD symptoms in ancient Greek literary texts, with a particular focus on the Homeric corpus[15]. The scholarly community largely rejected Shay's hypotheses, since this

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[11] D'Amato 2011: 33. On the tombstone of Minucius Lorarius in general, see Franzoni 1982; Franzoni 1987: 46–48, no. 26; Keppie 1991: 115–121. *Legio Martia* was a *legio vernacula* organised in Italy at the end of Caesar's life: App. *BCiv*. III 69, 28.

[12] *OLD*: 1043 (s.v. *lorarius*).

[13] A few years ago I criticised D'Amato's view: Faszcza 2015: 18 f. (in Polish).

[14] See Trimble 1985; Young 1995; Weinstein, Salazar, Jones 1995; Jones 2006; Nash 2007.

[15] Shay 1991, 1994, 2002.

American psychiatrist has no philological training and frequently drew ahistorical analogies. Despite the criticism directed at Shay, many other scholars followed his example and began to retroactively diagnose ancient soldiers with PTSD: those studying the ancient Roman military, such as Aislinn A. Melchior and Kurt van Lommel, produced papers claiming to identify mental disorders in some legionaries[16]. Relevantly to Lucilius' case, Tacitus remains silent about the course of his military career or the number and nature of armed conflicts in which this centurion participated. Judging from biographies of other soldiers of his rank, Lucilius must have already been a veteran of several battles before he was promoted to the centurionate[17]. The question remains as to whether his assumed inclination for aggression should be identified as one of the symptoms of PTSD.

Military psychologists conducting research on the mental resilience of veterans of selected twentieth century conflicts (especially the wars in Korea and Vietnam) observed that intensive and enduring combat stress resulting in PTSD often manifests itself as an inability to cope with new conditions or situations, with concomitant stress turned into interpersonal aggression. Situations classified as stress-inducing included transfers to another type of unit or post, being entrusted with a new type of duties or adjusting to civilian life after discharge or retirement. Although not always comparable, diverse types of adaptive problems are among those symptoms of PTSD which manifest themselves most frequently[18]. Nevertheless, in Lucilius' case I maintain that the excessive flogging he engaged in stemmed not from his hypothetical "adaptive problems" but rather from his not being suitable to hold a military post with power over fellow soldiers.

Admittedly, mutineers appear to have experienced what one could classify as combat fatigue: Tacitus' accounts, even if embellished to provoke an appropriate rhetorical effect, clearly demonstrate that soldiers in that legion felt thoroughly exhausted from their experiences in the army, among which whipping was mentioned:

> At hercule verbera et vulnera, duram hiemem, exercitas aestates, bellum atrox aut sterilem pacem sempiterna[19].

It is significant that they primarily directed their aggression against centurions:

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[16] Melchior 2011; Lommel 2013.

[17] See Dobson 1972: 195–197. Centurions promoted from the ranks or *principales* had to have had at least several years of field service. Lucilius could have been a veteran of the Illyrian campaign, which was remembered as particularly fierce (Suet. *Tib*. 16, 1).

[18] Marmar, Horowitz 1988: 83; Young 1995: 158; Weinstein, Salazar, Jones 1995: 336 f.; Nash 2007: 58 f.

[19] Tac. *Ann*. I 17, 4. See also *Ann*. I 20, 1–2; I 32, 1.

> Repente lymphati destrictis gladiis in centuriones invadunt: ea vetustissima militaribus odiis materies et saeviendi principium[20].

As evidenced by other passages in Tacitus' work, legions stationed in Pannonia and Germania Inferior at that time included units consisting of veterans[21], at least some of whom had been through major physical or emotional traumas, or were simply experiencing weariness. Nevertheless, I do not believe that scholars can glibly diagnose these ancient Roman veterans with PTSD; even if we assume that modern and ancient troops have/had similar physiological reactions to combat stress, we should also emphasise that modern Western culture holds views on combat and killing very different from those prevalent in Roman times and, as a result, we cannot confidently assess how legionaries' cultural backgrounds affected their reactions to combat fatigue[22]. In the case of Lucilius, we cannot altogether rule out the possibility that his violent behaviour came from his suffering from some effects of combat trauma; such an interpretation, however, must always be grounded in traditional source analysis. Emphatically, Tacitus does not indicate that Lucilius engaged in excessive violence because of his past military experience. Certainly, the author could have had no personal interest in depicting the effects of combat fatigue or he may have remained unaware of its existence, but since he never linked Lucilius' behaviour to his past, what the text denotes must take precedence over any interpretive paradigms that could skew our perspective on the source material.

Furthermore, those who argue that a proportion of Roman centurions might have suffered from PTSD cannot adequately explain why Tacitus' Lucilius remains the sole centurion known by name who actively abused his subordinates, but he was emphatically not the only one against whom his legionaries rose[23]. To claim, extrapolating from Lucilius' behaviour, that the Roman centurionate invited or enabled soldiers with severe mental injuries would call into question the army's combat effectiveness; moreover, outliers unusual enough to warrant a mention in literary sources, such as Lucilius, do not accurately reflect the behaviour of an average centurion. Since we know next to nothing about the past campaigns and combat experiences of Lucilius and his fellow centurions, we

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[20] Tac. *Ann*. I 32, 1.

[21] Tac. *Ann*. I 26, 1–2; I 35, 2–6.

[22] Ancient authors describing military engagements in a narrative form were not unduly concerned with faithfully representing the atrocities of war, their focus being on emulating the literary conventions of the day; accordingly, they had little to say about soldiers' everyday lives and what little we know about them does not allow us to retroactively diagnose soldiers with symptoms of PTSD. Admittedly, including input from military psychologists in research projects on ancient armies may open new research avenues, but such input should always be carefully embedded in the context of cultural history, as Lendon (2005) has demonstrated. Cf. Lommel 2013: 174–177. On the general role of cultural backgrounds in military psychology, see Marshall 2000: 78.

[23] Tac. *Ann*. I 20, 1–2; I 23, 2; I 32, 1.

cannot recreate their biographies and consequently we cannot retroactively diagnose them with PTSD: another explanation must be found for Tacitus' references to violent Augustan centurions.

To set Lucilius' case in context, we may use the works of Caesar and his followers to reconstruct the general rules regarding the promotion of soldiers to the centurionate in the late Republican Roman armies. Both earlier and later authors agree in stressing that centurions of the late Republic were selected according to bravery shown in battle[24]. Occasionally, a common soldier set himself apart through an act that deserved a spectacular promotion: Caesar narrates that he promoted Cassius Scaeva by 42 ranks in 48 BCE[25]. Promoting the bravest soldiers made Roman centurions lead by example and inspire their fellow soldiers; by comparison, modern armies also tend to draw their commanding officers from soldiers who show leadership potential[26].

Nevertheless, certain scholars studying the Roman army have argued that the practice of rewarding bravery with promotions only began shortly before the 2nd century BCE, when the Greek historian Polybius of Megalopolis described the expectations commanders held for prospective centurions in a following manner:

> βούλονται δ' εἶναι τοὺς ταξιάρχους οὐχ οὕτως θρασεῖς καὶ φιλοκινδύνους ὡς ἡγεμονικοὺς καὶ στασίμους καὶ βαθεῖς μᾶλλον ταῖς ψυχαῖς, οὐδ' ἐξ ἀκεραίου προσπίπτειν ἢ κατάρχεσθαι τῆς μάχης, ἐπικρατουμένους δὲ καὶ πιεζομένους ὑπομένειν καὶ ἀποθνήσκειν ὑπὲρ τῆς χώρας.
>
> They wish the centurions not so much to be venturesome and daredevil as to be natural leaders, of a steady and sedate spirit. They do not desire them so much to be men who will initiate attacks and open the battle, but men who will hold their ground when worsted and hardpressed and be ready to die at their posts.
>
> (Polyb. VI 24, 9; transl. by W.R. Paton)

According to Caesar, what made a good centurion was no longer steadfastness and calmness – as Polybius claimed – but boldness and bravado. The scholarly consensus holds that this change resulted from the popularisation of cohorts at the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st century BCE. Centurions were moved to fight in the first line and became "battering rams" intended to break the enemy's ranks[27]; accordingly, they suffered heavy casualties[28], because their

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[24] Wegeleben 1913: 5 f.; Radin 1915: 303–306; Harmand 1967: 328–333; Goldsworthy 1996: 182; Cowan 2007: 133 f. Cf. Parker 1926: 45 f. and 1958: 31–35 (about the internal gradation and the role of commanders in promoting centurions).

[25] Caes. *BCiv.* III 53, 3; Suet. *Iul*. 68, 4; Plut. *Caes*. 16, 2.

[26] Marshall 2000: 40 f., 114, 173; Holmes 2003: 340.

[27] Adcock 1940: 21; Harmand 1967: 338–342; Goldsworthy 1996: 182; Sabin 2000: 11; Lendon 2005: 302.

[28] E.g. Caes. *BGall.* II 25, 1; VII 51, 1–2; *BCiv.* I 46, 3–4; III 69–71; III 99, 1; *BAlex*. 43, 1–3. Cf. Tac. *Ann*. XII 38; *Hist*. III 22.

badge of office, a transverse crest (*crista transversa*) placed on their helmets, attracted the enemy's gaze[29]. Frequent deaths necessitated a rapid turnover of personnel in the centurion corps, and the new recruits rarely received any systematic training as commanders or combat leaders. Drawn from particularly bold legionaries, centurions would thus gradually become Rome's "battle champions". Even though our information on this shift in promotion practices comes chiefly from Caesar's *Commentarii*, which may not always accurately depict whole units of the Republican Roman army[30], it appears that the centurionate in the 1st century BCE did undergo the changes specified above.

The correctness of Polybius' statement, however, is open to some doubt. In Roman military culture, courage has always meant more than steadiness, as evidenced by numerous examples[31]. Perhaps Polybius meant to comment upon the uneasy balance between *virtus* and *disciplina* in the Roman army of that period: relevantly, Lendon claims that, until the 1st century BCE, experienced centurions restrained young, glory-seeking military tribunes who often exposed troops to unnecessary danger; the subsequent change in the centurions' role from restraining to inciting perhaps paralleled concurrent changes in the character of the military tribunate[32]. Lendon's conjecture appears convincing, especially in the light of the dearth of 1st-century tribunes names mentioned in the context of combat achievements, which from that point on was mainly associated with centurions. Relevantly, even before the 1st century BCE, some centurions were known for their boldness: for example, Lucius Siccius Dentatus, the archaic archetype of heroic soldier, willingly participated in one-on-one duels in front of armies[33]. From the Republican period onward, the sources, collected by Stephen P. Oakley, speak of numerous military single combats involving centurions[34]. Data concerning the 1st century centurionate indicates that many soldiers of that rank engaged in daredevil military exploits that went against the spirit of military discipline. When Caesar described the extraordinary achievements of his legionaries, those distinguished enough to feature in his writings were usually centurions. In the words of Charles S. Smith, a centurion became more than a level-headed superior: "a first-class fightin' man"[35].

In the early Imperial period, single combats still remained popular in the Roman army[36], even if sources from that period rarely describe soldiers' individual accom-

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[29] See Durry 1928; D'Amato 2011: 34 f.

[30] On the specifics of Caesar's narration on soldiers' deeds, see Rambaud 1953: 295–301; Harmand 1967: 349–383; Keppie 1984: 96 f.; Palao Vicente 2009.

[31] Lendon 2005: 172–211; McDonnell 2006: 12–71. See also Harris 1979: 9–53.

[32] Lendon 2005: 229 f.

[33] Dion. Hal. *Ant.* X 37, 3; Val. Max. III 2, 24; Plin. *NH* VII 101; Gell. II 11, 3; Fest. 208 L.

[34] Oakley 1985.

[35] Smith 1928: 17.

[36] E.g. Joseph. *BJ* VI 82–89; VI 168–179.

plishments in detail, although the works of Tacitus and Flavius Josephus are notable exceptions. Some passages, however, suggest that such brave feats were celebrated: during the reign of Tiberius, Valerius Maximus collected and cited examples of Roman acts of courage, including military duels from the past, closely related to *virtus* as one of the determinants of *Romanitas*[37]. Significantly, Josephus' account implies that, from the mid-first century CE onwards, Roman commanders also began to fight in battle in person according to an archaic custom, which was a reversal of the trend that was current at the time[38].

Another type of evidence that lends support to the view that centurions were expected to participate in battle concerns military awards and marks of honour given in the Imperial army. Roman military decorations (*dona militaria*), handed to legionaries in appreciation of individual acts of bravery, encompassed crowns (*coronae*), decorations (*phalerae*), bracelets (*armillae*), torcs (*torques*) and other types of awards[39]. From the second half of the 1st century CE onward, merit badges were given according to newly established criteria that took into account the recipients' rank[40]. Funerary reliefs of centurions and awards mentioned in their commemorating inscriptions clarify that members of this rank belonged to a battle-hardened elite. The said criteria most probably reflected an average number and type of awards granted to a common centurion in the period before the practice of awards was standardised. Since centurions were expected to fight at the heads of their units, just like in the late Republic, they had many chances to distinguish themselves in battle and to win awards; commendable achievements of former centurions in turn inflated the value of honours given to their successors after the standardisation of the decorating customs[41].

The mass of circumstantial evidence presented above suggests that centurions of the early Imperial Roman army were to inspire their subordinates through personal example by engaging in battles. Inspiring others, however, depended on the personal relationships a given centurion established with his troops. Some centurions of equestrian origin joined the army without any service in the military; hence, centurions promoted from lower ranks were particularly eager to show valour and prove that they deserved their elevated status[42]. Regardless of the careers of individual centurions, early Imperial centurions as a group gravitated toward and socialised with commanders and senior officers: more often than not they neither stressed their links to soldiers of lower ranks nor acted as their

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[37] Val. Max. III 2, 1–3, 2 *ext*. 9; Wiedemann 1996; McDonnell 2006: 49.

[38] Lendon 2005: 233–260.

[39] On various types of Roman military decorations: Maxfield 1981: 67–100; Linderski 2001.

[40] Maxfield 1981: 136–141 (in general), 184–209 (on centurions).

[41] Maxfield 1981: 185–200.

[42] See below in this article.

representatives[43]. Perhaps this severing of the rapport between some centurions and their subordinates underpins the palpable change in the common soldier's opinion of the centurionate, which as a class disassociated themselves from their subordinates and/or former peers by harshly punishing their minor misdeeds – but if this was indeed the case, when did this shift occur?

I argue that the deterioration in relationships between centurions and their subordinates in the legions coincided with and mirrored other changes happening in the Roman army of the late Republic. Centurions in the Republican army traditionally received twice the amount of pay and number of awards given to ordinary legionaries[44]; in the 1st century BCE the pay inequality increased to the point that, in comparison to an ordinary legionary, a centurion's salary was five[45], ten[46], or even twenty times bigger[47]. After being discharged, veteran centurions also enjoyed a higher social status[48]; Lucius Cornelius Sulla and Caesar even dared to appoint centurions as senators, which stirred up a major scandal among the members of the *nobilitas*[49]. This sudden and meteoric rise in the importance of centurions uprooted the social hierarchy in the army: as a group, the centurions had the ear of Caesar and of the future emperor Augustus, who even sent centurions as envoys to negotiate with the Roman senate[50]. Although Augustus thoroughly reformed and professionalised the Roman army[51], he did not address the glaring discrepancy between the centurions' formal rank and their overinflated power and impact. In the eyes of the ordinary legionary, the centurions became aloof and easily goaded members of the commanding elite, as events of 14 CE and preceding years demonstrated beyond all doubt.

According to surviving sources, soldiers probably first turned against their centurions when two legions stationed in Cilicia mutinied in 51 BCE. When Marcus Tullius Cicero, appointed as the new provincial governor, arrived in Cilicia, he encountered a situation which he described in the following manner:

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[43] Schmitthenner 1960: 4 f., 9 f.; Aigner 1974: 150 f.; de Blois 1987: 16. Cf. Tac. *Ann*. I 23, 4, although the example mentioned by Tacitus concerns a centurion who was not entirely willing to present the postulates of soldiers.

[44] Polyb. VI 39, 12–13; Liv. XXXIII 23, 7; XXXIV 46, 2; 52, 4; XXXVI 40, 12; XXXVII 59, 3; XXXIX 5, 14; 7, 1; XL 34, 2; 43, 5; 59, 2; XLI 7, 1; 13, 6; XLV 40, 5; 43, 4.

[45] Hirt. *BGall.* VIII 4, 1.

[46] Caes. *BGall.* IV 8, 1.

[47] Plut. *Pomp*. 33, 5; App. *Mithr*. 104, 490.

[48] E.g. Caes. *BCiv.* II 18, 4; Cic. *Phil*. 1, 20.

[49] Cic. *Ad Att*. XIV 10, 2; Cass. Dio XLVIII 22, 3; Oros. V 21, 3. It remains unknown by which means the representatives of the plebs (no matter whether *urbana* or *rustica*) could receive such a promotion. Unfortunately, our understanding of the plebeian culture and value system is insufficient. See Flaig 2003: 17–31; Dupont 2000: 9 f.

[50] Suet. *Aug*. 26, 1; Plut. *Pomp*. 58, 2; *Caes*. 29, 6.

[51] See especially Raaflaub 1980; Gilliver 2007; Speidel 2009; Cosme 2012; Eck 2017.

> Cumque ante adventum meum seditione quadam exercitus esset dissipatus, quinque cohortes sine legato, sine tribuno militum, denique etiam sine centurione ullo apud Philomelium consedissent, reliquus exercitus esset in Lycaonia, M. Anneio legato imperavi, ut eas quinque cohortes ad reliquum exercitum duceret coactoque in unum locum exercitu castra in Lycaonia apud Iconium faceret[52].

In his earlier letter addressed to his friend Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero imparts that the soldiers rebelled because the previous governor had frozen (and might have seized) their pay[53]. Centurions were not, however, with their subordinates when Cicero arrived in the province. Was the soldiers' anger also directed against their centurions, as in 14 CE? It is hard to find another explanation, because the general principles of military service were the same for centurions as for all soldiers, so they could not have been demobilised as a whole group and simply returned to Rome with the previous governor. So apparently they were not in the garrison because they might have felt threatened. In situations of unrest, no matter what the cause, the anger of soldiers could easily spread to everyone by whom they felt they had been offended. It seems, therefore, that the mutiny of 14 CE was not the first example of military unrest during which centurions could have feared for their lives. Cicero did not provide information on any sort of lynching, so the unrest probably did not end in bloodshed on this occasion.

One explanation for the growing rifts in the Roman army concerns how new centurions were inducted into the rank. In the final years of the late Roman Republic, the centurionate was opened up to equestrians joining the army without first having served as ordinary legionaries[54], and similar drafting practices were also in use in the Principate. Unsurprisingly, a growing split opened up between centurions promoted from the ranks of legionaries and new equestrian recruits who were made centurions on their arrival. The former group had to serve as *beneficiarii*, *cornicularii* and/or *optiones* before gaining the promotion, whereas the latter did not and thus enjoyed a more direct career path[55]. Both categories also differed with regard to the conditions they needed to fulfil before rising to the most important rank within the centurionate, i.e. the primipilate[56]. Predictably, equestrian centurions had less combat experience and could not easily relate to their subordinates. A regular promotion path in the Roman army ensured that soldiers got relevant combat and organisational experience that was

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[52] Cic. *Ad fam*. XV 4, 1.

[53] Cic. *Ad Att*. V 14, 1.

[54] *BHisp*. 25.4–7. Equestrian centurions could have also been mentioned in *BAfr*. 54, 4–6.

[55] Parker 1926: 47–51; Sander 1954: 88–100; Breeze 1971 and 1976; Webster 1998: 116; Wesch-Klein 1998: 22, 30 f.

[56] Dobson 1972: 198–206; Wesch-Klein 1998: 22; Dobson 2000: 141–147. On the ranks of Imperial centurions, see von Domaszewski 1967: 80–120; Le Bohec 2001: 43 f.

an asset when they ascended to the ranks of the centurionate: for example, holding the position of a deputy centurion (*optio*) for several years acquainted one with the duties of the superior one would eventually replace. Relevantly, extant military inscriptions from the Augustan period do not confirm that, at least in that period, every soldier promoted to the centurionate had to have held several positions before being promoted[57]. In other words, certain newly-minted centurions had never held any important offices before their promotion and had to learn everything as they went along, with some doing better than others.

No surviving information indicates that equestrian centurions asserted any kind of class superiority over ordinary soldiers, analogous to officers in the British Army in the 18th and 19th centuries[58]. Lucilius and the other violent centurions mentioned by Tacitus did not abuse their troops because they considered them inferior: in fact, all these centurions were most probably drawn from the pool of ordinary legionaries who had been promoted. Their excessive violence towards their subordinates might have stemmed from the general acceptance of officer brutality in the Roman army, since many of them did not receive promotion until fairly late in their lives, which deprived them of the necessary command experience. Since we have very few surviving records on the dishonourable discharge of centurions (*missio ignominiosa*), it appears compelling that centurions' superiors often turned a blind eye to their faults, including any excessive disciplinary actions directed at their subordinates.

As an aside concerning the findings of military psychologists, American researchers have found that up to 2% of all soldiers cannot feel fear, which is a serious mental disorder: civilians with the same condition often show a particular inclination to violence and crime[59]. Soldiers who cannot experience fear will be very effective in combat, but they will not build interpersonal relationships or reliably perform administrative duties. In times of war, sociopaths who would otherwise endanger others may become celebrated war heroes. Was Lucilius a cognitively-challenged person who could only express himself through acts of violence? In times of war, even emotionally unstable individuals with no talent for leadership might find themselves being promoted to positions of power, especially if they could boast of battle achievements that the Romans paid special attention to.

Relevant to that point, one could also examine the mutiny of 14 CE in the light of how the early Imperial and late Republican Roman armies selected individuals for promotion to a higher rank. Prioritising daring exploits and feats of bravado as the main criteria for being promoted, where such individuals would become

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[57] Wesch-Klein 1998: 21. See also von Domaszewski 1967: 28–50, 80–112; Breeze 1971 and 1976 about the establishment of the military promotion path in the 2nd century CE.

[58] Oman 1912: 195–207; Holmes 2001: 157–181.

[59] Grossman 1995: 5–8, 44, 131 f.

feared cohort leaders, would funnel into the centurionate all those who, apart from their aggression and combat skills, had no ability to command. Effective on the battlefield, such soldiers could easily break an opponent's ranks, but they did not know how to win their subordinates' loyalties or perform administrative duties in times of peace. The '*Cedo alteram*' case could therefore represent one outgrowth of the predominantly negative selection scheme for promoting soldiers to the centurionate. Lucilius could have been one of those fearless "battle champions". As a centurion, he demanded obedience and disciplined with brutality, because those were the only methods he knew, and this contributed to the outbreak of unrest as service conditions deteriorated. His behaviour went against the spirit and law of military discipline: unfortunately for him, Roman legionaries stationed in Pannonia were so loyal to one another that they turned *en masse* against their centurions, who received no support in the face of their soldiers' wrath. Lynched by rioting soldiers, Lucilius was just as much an architect of his own fate as he was a victim of a faulty promotion system that gave him power over others which he should never have been given.

Lucilius could simply have been one of those "battle champions" who was not fit for command, but was promoted because he was highly effective in battle. Tacitus mentions him due to his anomalous and abusive acts, which were condemned by his subordinates. Surviving sources relate that many soldiers who rebelled in that legion evaded punishment, perhaps being pardoned due to having been pushed to their limits by their overbearing officer. Nevertheless, certain standards had to be maintained: the ringleaders of that mutiny were summarily executed and it is not impossible that Lucilius' killers ultimately met the same fate[60].

In the light of these incidents and the growing unrest within the early Imperial army, I would like to argue that the dysfunctional promotion system probably directly influenced the subsequent establishment of a progressive promotional scheme in which a centurion promoted from the ranks first had to gain some necessary experience by holding other preparatory offices. Accordingly, Lucilius' case showcases the fact that such a reform was long overdue. Scholars of the Roman army often contextualise the bloody mutiny of 14 CE as a result of concurrent political tensions and link it to deteriorating relations between Germanicus and Tiberius. Meanwhile, the said mutiny could just as well have been linked to the faulty promotion system that elevated emotionally scarred or damaged soldiers who should never have received a position of responsibility. Roman military institutions, which are often superficially divided into "Republican" and "Imperial", evolved over time. The Augustan army shared more features with the late Republican legions than with the troops under the Flavians or Trajan; a shift from the late Republic to the early Principate did not mean that the military

[60] Tac. *Ann*. I 29, 4–30, 1 (on the execution of the leaders of the mutiny).

abandoned its Republican heritage. I firmly believe that the events of 14 CE can be explained by the negative selection procedures used to promote soldiers to the centurionate in the Roman military, and that such schemes can be elucidated through the findings of modern military psychology. Soldiers like '*Cedo alteram*' Lucilius could serve in the Augustan legions because the centurionate prioritised fearless and brash fighters over capable leaders and administrators.

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