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Memoriam J. C. Mann

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New evidence from Ankara for the *collegia veteranorum* and the *albata decursio*

In memoriam J.C. Mann

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Abstract

A tombstone of a legionary centurion found in Ankara proves to be of wider and greater significance than was originally recognised. Not only does it offer valuable evidence for early local recruitment patterns into the Roman legions, but, more importantly, it supplies the fifth recorded reference in the entire Roman Empire for a *collegium veteranorum*, a fraternity of army veterans; and the fourth known record in the whole epigraphic corpus for the *albata decursio*, or ‘white parade uniform’.

Özet

Ankara’da bulunmuş olan bir lejyoner centuria komutanına (subay) ait mezar taşının başlangıçta tahmin edildiğinden daha da önemli olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu mezar taşı, Roma lejyonlarına, sanıldığından daha erken zamanlarda yerli asker alındığı bilgisini içermektedir. Ayrıca bu mezar taşı tüm Roma İmparatorluğu’nda *collegium veteranorum* (emekli askerler kulübü) hakkında kaydedilmiş olan beşinci belgeyi oluşturmakta ve tüm yazıtlar içerisinde bilinen dördüncü örnek olan *albata decursio* (beyaz tören üniforması) ödülünün kayıtlarını içermektedir.

Inscriptions, mostly funerary records, still form the largest single source of knowledge for the Roman army in Anatolia. Amongst other things, they often supply us with crucial evidence regarding what military units were present in the Anatolian provinces, and which of these supplied men for service in other parts of the Roman Empire. Occasionally, however, a Roman military inscription is found in the region that gives information of more than local interest. Such is the case with the funerary text for M. Julius Rufus, formerly a centurion in the *legio III Scythica*. It is carved in letters of an average 6cm high on one face of a large rectangular block, measuring 170cm by 70cm by 66cm. Currently displayed at the Roman Baths Museum in Ankara, its original location is unknown, but four specific details confirm it came from Ankara or the immediate vicinity: it was erected by a college of army veterans based in Ancyra; it is made of the local grey limestone; it is of a size and form well represented in the local epigraphic record; and last, but not least, it was seized from a group of Ankara-based antiquities’ thieves.

The text of the inscription reads:

*M(arco) Iulio M(arci) f(ilio) Fab(ia tribu) / Rufo
(centurioni) leg(ionis) III / Scy(thicae) secundo /
princ(ipie) priori // donis donato / ab divo
Vespasian[o] / et albata decursi[o]ne [[ab
imp(eratore) Domitiano]] / Collegium vetel(ranorum
qui An/cyrae consis/tunt / h(onoris) (vacat) c(ausa).*

In free translation: ‘To Marcus Julius Rufus, son of Marcus, of the Fabia (voting) tribe, a centurion in the Fourth Scythia Legion, in command of the second century in the second cohort; awarded (military) decorations by the deified Vespasian, and (also awarded) the white parade uniform by the emperor Domitian. The college of veterans instituted at Ancyra (has set up this monument) in his honour’.

The language of the inscription is fairly standard for its type, beginning with Rufus’ official nomenclature and a record of his voting tribe, although his *origo* is not mentioned. Then the name of the legion in which Rufus

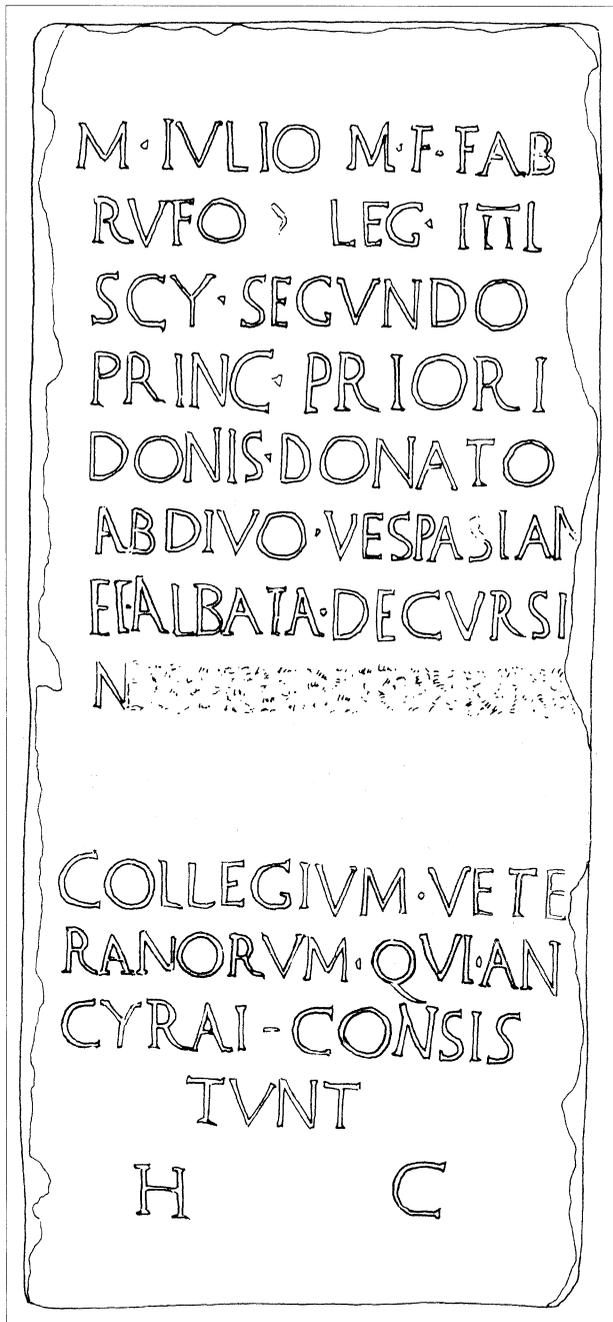


Fig. 1. The inscription (drawing by B. Claasz Cockson)

served is given, along with a statement of his highest military rank and a reference to the service awards he received from Vespasian and Domitian. The text subsequently concludes by stating that the Ancyran college of army veterans was responsible for erecting this monument in Rufus' honour, although somewhat unusually for the memorial of a military man, nowhere in the inscription is there any mention of Rufus' age at death or how long he was in military service. On the other hand, as Domitian's name was originally included in the text, then the inscription must date to his reign and

specifically to before 18 September 96, when Domitian was assassinated and his very existence proscribed through the process of *damnatio memoriae*, the consequence being that, as is the case here, his name was erased from most inscriptions on which it appeared. So far, so good, but three specific aspects about this inscription make it of more than average interest. The first two concern the intertwined matter of Rufus' origins and his military status at the time of his death; the last relates to the nature of the military award Rufus received from Domitian, the *albata decursio*, for this is one of the rarest and most obscure of all Roman military honours.

Something about our centurion's origins, to begin with, can be deduced to some extent from his nomenclature and affiliation. More specifically, he bears the imperial *nomen gentilicium* Julius, indicating that he was descended from a man who received Roman citizenship status for military service under Caesar or Augustus. However, those peregrines that 'won' citizen status on recruitment by Augustus were more usually assigned to the amorphous Pollia or Sergia voting tribes, and not to his own distinguished Fabia *tribus* (for example, Bosch 1967: 28–34, no. 49; but note Mann 1983: 73, for another view). In which case, our centurion is likely to have descended from a peregrine who enlisted or was conscripted into Caesar's army, but while the conjunction of the *nomen gentilicium* Julius and the Fabia *tribus* is often taken to indicate a man born in Italy (Kubitscheck 1889: 270), this was not always so; Ancyra itself, for example, provides a C. Iulius Severus of the Fabia *tribus* (Bosch 1967: 205–08, no. 158). Unfortunately, our centurion's cognomen of Rufus, 'the Red', is of little help in this matter, for it is one of the most common of the early imperial *cognomina* (Kajanto 1965: 30). Even so, as many legionary veterans returned to their place of origin on retirement, then given the circumstance that our Rufus was buried at Ancyra, we might reasonably presume he was an Ancyran by origin. Indeed, such a belief might be strengthened by the lack of a reference to Rufus' *origo* in the text, an unusual if not unparalleled omission on a memorial of Flavian date, for such would not be necessary if Rufus was indeed buried in his home town.

At this point, it would be only right to concede freely that negative evidence of this specific kind does not provide 'proof' in itself. Indeed, it might be more seriously objected that aside from the reference to this memorial having been erected by a college of veterans, the text lacks any indication that Rufus had retired and returned to his assumed home town. The fact is, however, that epitaphs specifically recording legionary centurions as 'veterans' are exceedingly rare, for these men never relinquished their titles during their lifetime

(Richier 2004: 112). Aside from which, any remaining scepticism about Rufus' veteran status can be alleviated by other pertinent evidence and sound inference. For example, at the time Rufus died, his legion, the *legio III Scythica*, was on service in Syria, where it had been posted in 56/57 to assist in Corbulo's Armenian campaign (Speidel 1998: 166–67), and there is no logical reason for one of its serving members to be at Ancyra at that time. While it is true that Ancyra's epigraphic inventory includes the funerary monuments for serving members from a large number of legions, as a rule, all of these men were with one or other of the western legions and in Ancyra on their way to or from an eastern campaign: such is the case, for example, with Ulpus Maximus, of the *legio X Gemina*, at Vindobona, who died at Ancyra in 195 during Severus' 'Parthian' campaign (Bosch 1967: 277–78, no. 213). The only clear exceptions to this tenet, whereby there are records at Ancyra for serving members of an eastern legion, involve men from the *legiones XVI Flavia Firma* (for example, Bosch 1967: 133–35, no. 110) and *XV Apollinaris* (for example, Bosch 1967: 251–53, no. 187). These, however, were the consecutive garrisons of Satala in neighbouring Cappadocia, and the men concerned were most likely on detached duty to the governor's *praetorium* in Ancyra, most probably between ca. 71/72–113/114, when Galatia and Cappadocia were united as a single consular province.

To return to our Rufus, as he was a veteran, then he must have served the minimum regular legionary career of 25 years before he died. He could, however, have served for much longer, for there does not seem to have been any maximum length of service for centurions below the rank of *primus pilus*—indeed, some 20 centurions are known to have served for 40 years or more, the record being held by one Aelius Silvanus, with no less than 61 years (Birley 1963/1964: 21–33 = Birley 1988: 206–21). Such aside, it can be deduced that our Rufus probably entered the legions between 54 and 71, if he was to complete an absolute minimum of 25 years legionary service between Vespasian's death in 79 and Domitian's murder in 96. It could be that the lack of any recorded rank below that of *princeps prior* on Rufus' memorial signifies he was a member of the equestrian class who chose direct commission into the centurionate rather than following a 'normal' equestrian career (see Dio 52.25.7). However, while some equestrians did indeed prefer a career as a legionary centurion for financial and status reasons (Dobson 1972: 193–207), the probability is that Rufus had risen through the ranks, and won his centurionate through merit alone (Birley 1941: 62; Domaszewski 1967: xx–xxi). The lack of any recorded junior rank on the inscription does not nullify

this idea, for analysis has shown that the funerary records of centurions frequently omit the earlier posts these men held (Maxfield 1981: 184). Indeed, it is even possible that our Rufus served his entire military career in the *III Scythica*, and was perhaps not even promoted to the rank of centurion until after several years of service. One M. Sabidius Aemilianus Maximus, for example, served 20 years in the ranks of the *legio XI Claudia* before being made centurion (*L'anée épigraphique* 1937: 101).

No matter what his previous service record may have been, what is more significant is that our Rufus, a provincial by origin, even if not certainly from Ancyra, achieved the rank of centurion, *secundus princeps prior*, in the *III Scythica* during the Flavian period. This makes him something of a rarity, for very few provincials achieved such a status during the first century. Indeed, even though the *III Scythica* had been transferred from Moesia to the east in 56/57, it has been claimed, from the epigraphic record, that its centurions remained exclusively of an Italian or European origin until the early second century (Speidel 1998: 165–66, with 171 and 198). However, there are good reasons for suspecting that the available epigraphic record is biased, as the literary evidence indicates that Corbulo's army received a number of 'eastern' recruits, in 54 for example, from the regions 'adjacent' (*proxima*) to Syria, and again in 58, specifically from Galatia and Cappadocia (Tacitus *Annales* 13.7, 35; see also Josephus *de Bello Judaico* 4.5.15/37–38, for a group of recruits from Syria at about this time). The epigraphic record adds at least one man from Galatia who was recruited into the *legio XV Apollinaris* when it was serving in the east, from 62–71 (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 14358/20), and he was probably one of many, as in an average year, a legion required some 100 new recruits (Mann 1983: 59).

Now, it is true that an unknown proportion of the men recruited in the east for Corbulo's army were probably *peregrini*, who were given citizenship on enlistment. However, Galatia had by then been a Roman province for more than seven decades, and so would have a nucleus of Roman citizens eligible for formal recruitment into legionary service. Thus if our Rufus entered military service in about 54, he could well have been among the *orientales* recruited under Corbulo. If so, he need not have been the only Roman citizen of Anatolian origin who joined the legions at this time. C. Coesius Florus, for example, who was the *primus pilus* of the *III Scythica* at about the same time as Rufus was serving in that legion, and who was subsequently *praefectus castrorum* of the *legio XI Claudia pia fidelis*, quite probably came from Caesarea in Cappadocia, a province since 17. Such at least can be inferred from the fact that Florus was buried there along with members of his

immediate and extended family, including his father-in-law, Granius Bassus, an ex-centurion in an unknown legion (*L'anée épigraphique* 1984: 893, with 894 and 895; but see Speidel 1998: 187, where an Italian origin is preferred for Florus; also note Speidel 1980: 732–35 = Speidel 1984: 48–51 for other probable Anatolian recruits to the legion, if not necessarily of this date).

So far, then, it has been shown that our Rufus was most probably of provincial origin, and quite probably from Ancyra itself, and also that he is likely to have entered legionary service in connection with Corbulo's Armenian campaign. Having retired and settled in Ancyra, and apparently wifeless, or a childless widower, he seems to have remained alone for the rest of his years. Such was not an uncommon fact of life for many legionary veterans, for their natural temperament and their conditions of service made them unlikely family men (Tacitus *Annales* 14.27). The consequence was that the burial and memorialisation of such men was usually the duty of their slaves, who were generally manumitted at the same time (for example, Bosch 1967: 328, no. 268). In the case of our Rufus, however, the duties of his burial and his memorialisation were assumed by the *collegium veteranorum* 'constituted at Ancyra'. This is one of the more important features of this particular inscription, for it provides us with only the fifth epigraphic record for one of these associations, the others being from Aquileia (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 5: 784), Ateste (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 5: 2475, of 161–167 or later) and Carnuntum (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 11189, probably after 210, as it includes the formula *devotus numini maiestatique*; and *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 11097 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 7245 = *L'anée épigraphique* 1983: 768).

The *collegia veteranorum* remain one of the least known social institutions connected with the Roman army. What evidence there is suggests they were an analogous organisation to the so-called burial clubs or *collegia funeraticia* of serving legionary *ordinarii*, and that the *collegia veteranorum* naturally developed wherever there was a suitably large group of settled veterans (Liebenam 1890: 297–308; Ginsburg 1940: 151; and Vegetius 2.20). Indeed, we might safely assume that the Ancyran *conveterani* who buried one Aurelius Aesclepiades, a veteran of the *legio IIII Flavia* (Bosch 1967: 330, no. 271 = French 2003: 142, no. 40), were also members of the same *collegium* that honoured our Rufus. Such apart, the specific origins of this type of association are uncertain, although they are likely to be a logical consequence of the growing tendency — already attested under Nero — of combining a number of veterans from more than one legion and resettling them as a single group in a place where an increase in

population was deemed necessary (Tacitus *Annales* 14.27: see also Pflaum 1960: 86, for the practice at the beginning of Vespasian's reign). More significantly, however, is that although the *collegia veteranorum* are generally considered to be a development of the mid-second century AD (Keppie 1973: 12 = Keppie 2000: 243; and Keppie 1983: 110), the memorial to our Rufus proves that they already existed under Domitian. As such, therefore, their formal institution may well have been encouraged by one or other of the Flavian emperors.

Returning to our Rufus, it will be observed that his epitaph does not specify what military awards he received from Vespasian, or even his rank at the time. However, *dona militaria* are wartime honours (see Maxfield 1986: 33), and, during the Flavian period, the minimum award for a *miles* or a centurion was a combination of *torques*, *armillae* and *phalerae* (Maxfield 1981: 186 and 216–17). Rufus' awards are likely to have been at least the same, probably for his service in the Judaeen War (for example, Maxfield 1981: 189–90), or perhaps the invasion and annexation of Commagene in 72/73 (for example, *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 14387(ii) = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 9198 = *Inscriptiones Graecae Latinae Selectae* 6: 2798). The honour that Rufus received from Domitian, however, the *albata decursio*, the right to 'parade in white', is something very different from the *dona militaria* Rufus received from Vespasian. Indeed, until very recently, there were exactly two inscriptions known that mentioned this award, both of them recording centurions from Baalbek, one of them receiving the honour from Nero (L. Antonius Naso: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 14387(i) = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 9199 = *Inscriptiones Graecae Latinae Selectae* 6: 2781 = Dobson 1978: 203–04, no. 75), the other from Domitian (M. Antonius Hoplo: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 14387(ii) = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 9198 = *Inscriptiones Graecae Latinae Selectae* 6: 2798 = Dobson 1978: 218, no. 95). Then in 1996, a third inscription listing a centurion awarded the *albata decursio* by Trajan surfaced during building work in Beirut (Cn. Julius Rufus: *L'anée épigraphique* 1998: 1435; Ghadban 1997: 214–23), and which, with our Ankara Julius Rufus, provides us with exactly four references to the *albata decursio* in the entire Roman epigraphic record. To put that figure into a more explicit context, these four texts represent a scant 1.4% of the 277 epigraphic documents known to list Roman military awards as of ca. 1980 (Maxfield 1981: 264–70).

Even without considering any later discoveries, therefore, it is evident that for a centurion to be *honorato albata decursione ab imperatore*, to 'receive from the emperor the honour to parade in a white uniform', was one of the rarest and consequently most obscure marks

of distinction available to him. Quite what it signified, however, is unclear, although in Roman civil society, the wearing of white clothing had specific symbolic associations (see Aulus Gellius 3.4.1; Horace *Satires* 2.2.60–62; Martial 14.135 (137), 4.2; Dio 62.4.2, 75.4; Herodian 8.7.2). The Roman army likewise also associated the wearing of white clothing with formal and festive occasions, as we see in the aftermath of Vitellius' victory at Cremona (Bedriacum) in 69, for he entered Rome not as a conquering general, but in civilian dress, while his *praefecti castrorum*, their tribunes, and his senior centurions, were all dressed *candida vestis*, in 'white costume' for the event (Tacitus *Historiae* 2.89). Similarly, the *pompa* held by Gallienus in 262 to commemorate his *decennalia* featured an entire parade of *albato milites*, 'soldiers (dressed) in white', marching immediately behind the senators and the equestrian *ordo* (*Historia Augusta, Gallieni duo* 8.1). Likewise, when Honorius married in 398, *candidus interea positus exercitus armis* ('soldiers in white, who had laid down their weapons') took part in the ceremony (Claudian *Epithalamium* 295). It is clear, therefore, that the wearing of white by the Roman military — whether the gleaming *candidus* or the less bright *albata* — was associated with specific formal and festive occasions.

This naturally brings us to the question of what colour clothing was usually worn by Roman soldiers. This is something that, like religion and politics, is best avoided in polite society, and yet while the matter itself demands more discussion than is appropriate here, it cannot be entirely ignored if we are to comprehend anything at all about the significance attached to the 'white parade uniform'. That said, it must at once be conceded that the factual and literary evidence is frankly inconclusive. On the one hand, the only surviving texts for the early Imperial period clearly associate soldiers with red clothing (for example, Martial 14.129; Plutarch *Brutus* 40.3; *Historia Augusta, Claudius* 14.5); on the other, it has been claimed on iconographic and economic grounds that they wore white, and more specifically, an off-white (*albus*) rather than the bleached white (*candidus*) used by candidates for public office (for example, Fuentes 1987: 51–60). It might seem that there is little to choose between the two possibilities — assuming, of course, that there was such a thing as a Roman uniform tunic (Coulston 2004: 143–48). If, however, Roman soldiers did indeed generally wear white tunics, then it would surely be pointless for the literary sources to draw attention to 'soldiers dressed in white' on the occasions when they did so. Similarly, if all Roman soldiers usually wore white, then it would make no sense at all for an honorary or funerary record to

indicate that a man had been personally distinguished by being *honorato albata decursio ab imperatore* ('honoured by the emperor with the white parade uniform'). Consequently, even if we allow for the possibility that the right to parade in a white uniform also entailed the right not to wear armour or to bear arms in such a parade, it follows that if there ever was a 'normal' Roman uniform tunic colour, this was anything but white.

It must be concluded, therefore, that just as our inscriptions testify, and Tacitus confirms, the privilege of wearing a white uniform while on parade was a rare personal gift from a reigning emperor to an exceptionally small number of serving centurions. True, that right could be extended to other soldiers on specific festive occasions, for example, the *decennalia* of Gallienus and the marriage of Honorius. This does not mean, however, that Severus extended the privilege to all centurions, and that Gallienus granted it to all legionaries, as has been recently claimed (Bohec 1994: 193, 198). Although these assertions have reached almost canonical status (for example, French 2003: 151; Petolescu 2001/2002: 285, no. 6), they have no basis in fact: the one derives from a misreading of Herodian 3.8.5, regarding Severus' military reforms; the other is a misunderstanding of the circumstances surrounding Gallienus' *pompa*.

More to the point, there can be no denying that in the early Imperial period at least, the wearing of a white parade uniform was an honour of unusual distinction and restricted to centurions alone. Indeed, one clue to its significance as a military honour might be sought in the social customs of the period, for while there is no clear evidence for all-embracing clothing laws as such, it is generally accepted that for official events, clothing of a pure or near white colour was reserved for officials of the equestrian order and above. This being so, then, as both Domaszewski (1902: 512) and Ruggiero (1904: 1552–53) observed, the wearing of the *albata decursio* on a formal occasion placed those centurions thus honoured on the same social status level as any equestrian official. At least temporarily, that is, for it is most unlikely that the right to the *albata decursio* conferred full equestrian status on those who received it, much as that would simplify an explanation of the award. After all, if we interpret the terminology on a strict basis, then the recipient of the *albata decursio* could only wear this white clothing while on parade. More to the point, while one recipient of the *albata decursio* was perhaps subsequently elevated to the equestrian order (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3: 14387(i) = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 9199 = *Inscriptiones Graecae Latinae Selectae* 6: 2781 = Dobson 1978: 203–04, no. 75), the *albata decursio* is not included among the decorations received

by the two other recorded cases of centurions who were likewise elevated to this order (L. Gavius Fronto: *Revue des Études Grecques* 61 1948: 201, no. 19; M. Tillius Rufus: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 10: 5064 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 2667).

None of this, of course, brings us any nearer to making any firm statement concerning the basis on which a man received the 'honour from the emperor of the *albata decursio*'. However, all four known recipients were legionary centurions, and at least three, and probably all four, of them had previously received the absolute minimum military awards appropriate to their rank in the lower grades of the centurionate, the only possible exception being the Beirut Julius Rufus, as we do not know exactly when he received his awards. Moreover, in the three cases where these awards are specified, the recipient concerned had also been awarded at least one military *corona*, the gold crowns awarded for especially distinguished service (Maxfield 1981: 185). To which we might add that at least two of these men were further honoured after receiving the honour of the *albata decursio* by being promoted to the *primi ordines*: the career of the Beirut Julius Rufus is unclear on this point, although the Ankara Julius Rufus evidently did not reach this status.

The extraordinary significance attached to the *albata decursio* is clear. Yet in only one case, that of the Beirut Julius Rufus, can the award be associated with a known military campaign, in his case Trajan's Parthian War. From this it might be deduced that the *albata decursio* was not a *donum militaria* in the strict sense, received for bravery on the field, but that it should instead be associated with some specific personal service to a reigning emperor, although in what capacity must remain a mystery. Even so, the possible status of the *albata decursio* as a wartime award cannot be entirely excluded. Indeed, given the anomaly that apparently exists whereby all centurions up to and including the *primi ordines* were eligible for exactly the same scale of military awards, regardless of their seniority (Maxfield 1981: 185–86, 200), then it is just possible that the *albata decursio* filled a clear gap in the existing rank-related structure that controlled the granting of such decorations.

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