A Prefect of the ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria from Attaleia? IGR 3.777 re-assessed

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A now-lost acephalous inscription seen at Attaleia in Lycia-Pamphylia (modern Antalya, Turkey) in the late 19^{th} century gave the highly informative *cursus honorum* of an equestrian notable of that place¹. Superficially, his career was a relatively straightforward one, following a common path taken by other equestrians from Lycia-Pamphylia. Except, that is, for one of the offices he held, conventionally restored as 'prefect of an $\epsilon\theta\nu\sigma$ 0, Latinised here as an *ethnos Dromedariorum*. Such a prefecture was then and even now remains without parallel and in 1994 J. Spaul suggested this part of the text had been wrongly transcribed: he proposed that the reading $\epsilon\theta\nu\sigma$ 0 should be corrected to $\epsilon\nu$ 1, and that the man honoured was probably prefect of an *ala Dromedariorum*, specifically the *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria*2. However, Spaul did not elaborate any further on his reasoning for this suggestion or on how this emendation would affect or change our understanding of the man's service with the Roman *auxilia*. Hence this article, which tests Spaul's proposal by critically analysing this *cursus honorum*, and in doing so verifies that this equestrian from Attaleia was indeed one of the very few who ascended to the *militia quarta* as prefect of an *ala milliaria*3. In addition, though, by

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Lanckoroński 1890, 158, describes the inscription as being 'am boden in einer Ecke der Stadtmauer links vom Hadriansthor', but a recent and thorough attempt to record all the classical-period inscriptions of Attalaei failed to locate the text or recover any evidence as to its fate: I am extremely grateful to Nuray Gökalp for sharing this information with me.

² Spaul 1994, 105.

Birley 1988, 353-55, lists the then known cases, noting that only one in ten commanders of *alae quingenariae* might rise to the command of an *ala milliaria*. It has been calculated that only 3% of equestrian officers completed the *militae quartae*: Devijver 1973, 552 (= Devijver 1989, 56-72, 59).

such forensic analysis, it is now possible to offer a date for the text in the Severan period; to supply a more accurate reconstruction of this man's military career than that previously available; and last, but by no means least, argue that the man who was honoured by this inscription should be securely placed among the supporters of Septimius Severus at the outset of the Civil War of 193-194.

The text

As most recently recorded in the late 19th century⁴, and before its re-analysis by Spaul in the 1990's, the text was read as follows:

[Κρεπερήιον. γυμνασιαρχήσαντα] / καὶ νέων καὶ παίδων ἔπαρχον σπε[ίρας] / Βρετταννικῆς, χειλιάρχον λεγιῶ[νος ιε'] / Ἀπολλιναρίας, ἔπαρχον εἴλης πρ[ώτης] / Δαρδάνων ἔπαρχον ἔθνος Δρομ[---?--] / γένους συνκλητικοῦ, φίλον καὶ ἐ[π]ί[τρο]/πον γενόμενον τῶν Σεβαστῶν / Τ. Κρεπερήιος Φρόντων τὸν ἑα[υτοῦ] / πατέρα

This accepted and oft-repeated version of the text might be freely translated as:

[... Crepereius ... gymnasiarch] of both the youths and children, prefect of the *cohors Brittannica*, tribune of the *legio XV Apollinaris*, prefect of the *ala Dardanorum*, prefect of the *ethnos Drom...*, (member) of a senatorial family, who became a friend and *procurator* of the emperors. Titus Crepereius Fronto [honours] his own father⁵

Its date

Earlier discussions of the inscription have assigned it to either the Hadrianic or the Antonine period.⁶ This dating was based on the quite unsupported assumption that this Crepereius was a close relative and a near or even exact contemporary of L. Crepereius Paulus, another equestrian from Attaleia whose career is indeed securely dated to the Antonine period (see further, below). What is more, these earlier autopsies of the text have discounted or played down the specific use of the plural or multiple form 'emperors' in the closing lines by surmising that these refer to our Crepereius' service under a series of successive *principes*. Yet the text specifies 'the emperors', terminology that is more appropriate, it might be considered, of two (or more) concurrent rather than consecutive *principes*.

Indeed, the *opinio communis* would hold that a reference of this kind best fits the period 198-211, when Severus was joint emperor with Caracalla. Alternatively, it may be assigned to the twelve-month period beginning December/January 210/211, when Geta was advanced to imperial status shortly before Severus' death, subsequently sharing power with his elder brother until his assassination in December of 211. There again, the possibility that these joint emperors are Marcus Aurelius and Verus (161-169) cannot be entirely excluded. Even so, support for a Severan date in the case of this inscription might be found in the terminology it uses in its concluding lines, which state that Crepereius

⁴ Lanckoroński 1890 158 no. 9 = IGR 3.777. For earlier transcriptions, all essentially based on a record made in the early 1840's by H. P. Borrell, see Bailie 1846, 216 no. 221; Franzius 1853, 1157 p. 4340b; Le Bas-Waddington 1870a, no. 1364, with ibid 1870b, 332. A detailed account of H. P. Borrell, and the importance and reliability of his epigraphic records is provided by Whitehead 1999.

⁵ I am indebted to Asuman Coşkun Abuagla and Jacques Morin for their assistance with the text.

⁶ E.g., Pflaum 1960, 347-48 no. 147 - Hadrian or Antoninus Pius; Levick - Jameson 1964, 102 - 'sometime after 161'; and Devijver 1976, 306 C.254, with Devijver 1986, 162 (= Devijver, op cit (as note 4 [1989] 326) - Antoninus Pius.

'became' an imperial 'friend', directly associating this mark of imperial favour with his appointment as *procurator*: thus 'φίλον καὶ ἐ[π]ί[τρο]/πον γενόμενον τῶν Σεβαστῶν'. Phrasing of this kind on an honorific monument, specifically linking a degree of intimacy with one or more emperors and promotion to higher office, is only paralleled by two other inscriptions, one from the time of Caracalla and Geta, the other of early $3^{\rm rd}$ century date⁷. This timeframe was not coincidentally one that saw an overall rise in the number of *procuratores* drawn from the provinces⁸, and so when all is taken into account, the balance of probability points to a Severan date for this part of Crepereius' career.

The man commemorated

The Crepereii of Attaleia were ultimately of Sabine origin, but junior branches of the family appear to have spread as traders to Asia Minor (among other places) in the early 1st century BC, the Attaleian branch perhaps arriving there under Augustus⁹. Despite their origins as commercial adventurers, the inscription reports that the family of our Crepereius was of senatorial rank, quite possibly having reached that status during the later 1st century AD or soon after, Vespasian's reign having initiated a period when many 'provincials' of 'Italian' ancestry entered Rome's senior political and corporate body¹⁰. Either way, we might assume that the father of our Crepereius held senatorial status, even if our man did not attain that standing. Perhaps like several other members of senatorial families, he had shrewdly calculated that the well-organised equestrian career structure would provide him with far better professional and financial opportunities than the uncertainties attached to a position in the more politicised and publicly prominent Roman Senate¹¹. However, nothing is known of any earlier or later Attaleian Crepereii who entered the Senate, although T. Crepereius Fronto, the son of our man, may well have done so¹².

Social status aside, we might safely assume a family connection between our Crepereius and the equestrian L. Crepereius Paulus of Attaleia¹³. He was successively prefect of an unknown cohort, most probably in the eastern provinces¹⁴, then tribune of the *II Adiutrix* at Aquincum in Pannonia Inferior; and then prefect of the *ala I Cannenefatium* in Pannonia Superior, before ending his formal career as *procurator Augusti argentariarum Pannonicarum*. That office appears for the first time in the epigraphic record under Antoninus Pius, and it was replaced by that of *procurator argentariarum Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum* during the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Verus, providing a timeframe of sorts for his career¹⁵. Therefore, as our Crepereius reached the summit of his own official equestrian career in the Severan period, then he was quite probably a lineal descendant – perhaps even a grandson - of L. Crepereius Paulus¹⁶. Be that as it may, as far as the

⁷ Bruun 2001, 350.

⁸ Birley 1988, 196.

⁹ For the non-Italian Crepereii, see Levick - Jameson, op cit, esp. 101-02, for the Attaleian branch.

¹⁰ Talbert 1984, 31-33.

¹¹ İbid, op cit 76-80.

¹² PIR(2), C.1569.

¹³ AE 1915.46 = Pflaum, op cit (1960) 345-47 no. 146 = Devijver, op cit (1976) 306-07, C.255.

¹⁴ Cf. Devijver, op cit (1986) 211 (= ibid, op cit [1989] 375).

¹⁵ Pflaum 1961, 1063.

Levick – Jameson, op cit 102, unaccountable identify L.Crepereius Paulus as the son of our Crepereius, but the son is clearly named Titus Crepereius Fronto in the inscription.

epigraphic record is concerned, our Crepereius was the last of the Attaleian Crepereii to reach more than local prominence – unless, that is, as noted above, his son, T. Crepereius Fronto, entered the ranks of the Roman Senate. The possible exception of the son apart, the only other recorded member of the south Anatolian branch of the Crepereii active in a later period would seem to be L. Crepereius Fronto, *agonothetes* at Oenoanda in northern Lycia-Pamphylia in the early 3rd century¹⁷.

His early career

As it survives, the text begins with a reference to our Crepereius having held the position of *gymnasiarch* in his home community. Given our ignorance as to how much has been lost from the beginning of the inscription we cannot say if this office was one of several local posts held by Crepereius or the only civic rank he had attained at the time the text was dedicated. Moreover, we cannot say if he performed this civic duty before or after his military service. The listing of a man's civil offices in Greek-language texts from Anatolia can occur both before and after details of his military career, and it is not always clear if the person concerned entered the *militiae equestres* prior to or following on from civic service in his own community. However, a slight majority of equestrians are known to have entered their *militia prima* aged at about 30 or so: 18 thus the possibility that Crepereius was *gymnasiarch* before his military service seems likely.

On the other hand, Crepereius' military career is quite clearly listed in the more usual ascending order of offices, with his first *militia* in the *auxilia*, followed by a legionary tribunate, and then his promotion to higher command. His *militia prima* was as prefect of a *cohors Britannica*, a unit that can be no other than the *cohors I Britannica* (*sic*) equitata¹⁹. If we are to take the regiment's epigraphic record at face value, primarily from those texts referred to as *diplomata*, the documents that best help us understand the history of the Rome's auxiliary units²⁰, it had a somewhat strange history. Beginning life in c. 69, with an initial posting to Britannia²¹, at which time it was evidently a normal quingenary cohort of 500 men, it was transferred to Pannonia before 80, and then doubled in size between 86-85 to milliary status, presumably in connection with Domitian's Danubian campaigns. Subsequently re-deployed in Moesia Superior and then (under Trajan) in Dacia, where it was later assigned to Dacia Porolissensis (under Hadrian), it had become quingenary again by 164 (most likely through combat loss on campaign or when one part was detached for service elsewhere), but was then re-formed as a milliary unit sometime before or between 212-216²². Milliary units were not assigned to men at the beginning of

¹⁷ Cf. Levick – Jameson, op cit 102 n. 58.

¹⁸ Birley 1988, 148-50, with 151-52; also Devijver 1974, 143 (= ibid, op cit [1989] 133).

¹⁹ The cohort is mistakenly identified as the III Britannorum in Pflaum, op cit (1960), 347, an error followed by Devijver, op cit (1986) 162 (= Devijver, op cit [1989] 326).

For those readers of Adalya unfamiliar with these epigraphic documents, a summary is available in an earlier issue: J. Bennett, 'The Roman Army in Lycia and Pamphylia', Adalya 10, 2007, 132-33. Briefly stated, they are the official copies of imperial constitutions certifying the award of Roman citizenship and the rights to a legal marriage (among other things) of individual time-served auxiliary soldiers,

²¹ Cf. Kennedy 1977, 253-54.

²² The epigraphic evidence for the unit is summarised in Spaul 2000, 193, to which the following *diplomata* need to be added: RMD 225 (113/114), 226 (114), 351 (119), and 404 (151), all of these listing it with the '∞' symbol denoting milliary status; and RMD 287 (164), without that symbol, implying its then quingenary status.

their military career: thus Crepereius commanded the regiment sometime in the period c. 164-212/216, at which time it was in Dacia Porolissensis, probably at Cășei²³.

Crepereius' second *militia* was as *tribunus angusticlavius* with the *legio XV Apollinaris*. The legion had been dispatched from Egypt to Satala in Cappadocia in c. 119, where it essentially stayed for the rest of its recorded history²⁴. The lack of the *cognomen Pia Fidelis* in the legion's title on this text, a label adopted after the civil war of 193-194²⁵, should indicate that Crepereius was attached to it before 194. So it was probably before that year when Crepereius entered his *militia tertia*, as prefect of the *ala (I Vespasiana) Dardanorum*, a 500-man cavalry unit stationed in Moesia Inferior from at least 75/78 until 241 or later²⁶.

His later career

Up to this point, Crepereius' career as listed on the text follows the regular pattern of a capable man of equestrian rank. However, according to the transcript of the inscription, he was then appointed to a fourth prefecture as $\hat{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\rho\chi$ ος $\hat{\epsilon}\theta$ vος $\Delta\rho$ ομ[--?--], or prefect of an *ethnos Drom*[...]. As we have already seen, the now commonly accepted expansion of this is $\Delta\rho$ ομ[$\epsilon\delta\alpha\rho$ ίων]: thus the *ethnos Dromedariorum*, a tribe named for the dromedary camel. This emendation was originally suggested in 1908 by A. von Domaszewski (and then repeated by others) on the notion that the *ala I Vespasiana Dardanorum* was based in Cappadocia, Crepereius having been subsequently or simultaneously made supervisor of the 'schweifende Araber' of the Euphrates region²⁷. There is, in fact, no evidence at all that the *ala I Vespasiana Dardanorum* ever saw service in Cappadocia, the garrison of which in the relevant period is well-attested thanks to literary and epigraphic sources²⁸. More to the point, no such *ethnos Dromedariorum* is attested in the historical record, and no other *ethne* are recorded as being named for an animal of any kind.

However, the early Roman Imperial army did include one unit of *dromedarii*, 'camelriders', namely the *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria*: thus Spaul's suggestion that this part of the inscription was wrongly transcribed and should instead be read as $\hat{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\rho\chi$ oc ϵ "($\lambda\eta$ c $\lambda\rho$ o μ [ϵ 0 μ 0 μ 0) Could that indeed have been the case? At first sight it seems highly unlikely that the several well-regarded scholars who have previously reproduced this inscription in their publications may have made such an error. However, the fact remains that none of them actually saw it except for Lanckoronski - and even he had difficulties in reading what was before him and admitted how he relied to a great

²³ Cf. Spaul, op cit (2000) 193; also Petolescu 2002, 86-87.

²⁴ Wheeler 2000, 293-305.

As argued by Wheeler, op cit, 269-70.

The epigraphic evidence for the unit is summarised in J. Spaul, op cit (1994) 102, to which the following *diplomata* must now be added: RMD 209 (75/78), 337 (97), 349 (118/119), 241 (127), 399/165 (145), and 270 (146). Note also CIL 6.31164 (= Speidel 1994, 88-89, no. 63), a dedication from Rome intrinsically dated to 2-viii-241, set up by thirteen men transferred to the equites singulares 'EX ALA PRIMA DARD(anorum) PROV(inciae) MOESIAE INFERIORIS'

²⁷ Domaszewski 1908, 136 n. 13.

²⁸ E.g., Spiedel 2007, 73-90.

²⁹ Spaul, op cit (1994) 105.

extent on previous transcripts to reconstruct the text³⁰. In addition, we need to note that all of these authorities - Lanckoroński included - were writing in ignorance of the fact that a very few equestrians followed their third military prefecture with a fourth, as prefect of an *ala*, a detail established for the first time in 1949³¹. Thus Spaul's suggested emendation would certainly make better sense especially as - although Spaul did not remark on this point - from the time of Hadrian onwards, suitably experienced equestrian commanders could progress from the *militia tertia*, as prefect of an *ala*, into the *militia quarta*, in charge of an *ala milliaria*³². This is logically the case here, Crepereius following his term with the *ala I Vespasiana Dardanorum* with command of the *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria*. It was the only regiment of this kind at this date³³, and its history is obscure, to say the least³⁴, but it does feature on four *diplomata*, two for Arabia, of 141/142, and of 145; and two for Syria, of 153, and of 156/157³⁵. The *ala Dromedariorum* recorded in Greek and Nabataean graffiti between Mada'in Sālih and Al Ulā in the Hidjāz is presumably the same unit³⁶, and likewise the *ala ... Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum* recorded on a dedication from Palmyra set up in the 150's³⁷.

The *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria* was one of only nine or so *alae milliariae* in existence, and promotion to this command points to Crepereius being an exceptionally skilled military officer³⁸. Although equestrians of provincial origin seem to have been especially favoured for such commands³⁹, it could be, then, that Crepereius' command of the *ala I Vespasiana Dardanorum* in Moesia Inferior coincided with Severus' bid for power in 193. Furthermore, it could be that he and his cavalry – then in Moesia Inferior - were part of the force Severus sent to Byzantium as the *exercitus Illyricus*. Such a combination of circumstances might well explain why Crepereius was awarded the prestigious command of the *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria*, for Severus is known to have handsomely promoted those senior officers among the Danubian garrisons who supported his attempt for the purple⁴⁰. Indeed, his reign opened a period when social rank, as senator or equestrian, counted for little when it came to advancing men to positions of senior command. Absolute loyalty was required, and so Severus' revolutionary decision to place his three new legions, the *I-III Parthicae*, along with his two new eastern provinces, of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia, under trusted equestrians rather than

³⁰ Cf. Lanckoroński, op cit, 153 and 158 no. 9.

³¹ Birley 1949, revised as Birley, op cit (1988) 147-164.

³² Birley, op cit (1988) 158-159.

³³ The four other units of Roman camelry known to have existed are attested no earlier than the late 4th century. They are: the ala Antana Dromedariorum at Admatha (Notitia Dignitatum Oriens 34.17); and the alae I Valeria Dromedariorum at Precteos, III Dromedariorum at Maximianopolis, and II Herculia Dromedariorum at Psinaula (Notitia Dignitatum Oriens 31.37, 48 and 54).

³⁴ Cf. Spaul, op cit (1994) 104-105, with Dabrowa 1991, 364-366.

³⁵ Cf. Weiß – Speidel 2004, 257, for a review of the relevant diplomata, two of which, those of 145 and 153, remain unpublished.

³⁶ Seyrig 1941a, 218-223; also Speidel 1977, 703-04 (= ibid, 1984, 246).

³⁷ Seyrig 1941b, 234-235; also Weiß – Speidel, op cit, 257.

³⁸ Birley, op cit (1988) 354, 'Military ability ... was the one thing which mattered when it came to selecting one praefectus equitum out of ten for this key appointment' (that is, as prefect of an *ala milliaria*).

³⁹ Birley, op cit (1988) 353-55.

⁴⁰ Birley, op cit (1969) 35 (= ibid, op cit [1988] 35).

senatorial *legati Augusti*⁴¹. Certainly, Crepereius' promotion to the rare command of an *ala milliaria* would fit such a context, in which the new emperor elevated an equestrian to a senior military prefecture in return for his unquestionable loyalty and past service. It would have been an entirely natural gesture in the circumstances, especially as it might be expected that Severus already anticipated the need for a reliable and trusted commander in charge of Rome's sole unit of camelry, presumably then still stationed in Syria, for his projected *expeditio Mesopotamena*.

This hypothesis finds some support in that Crepereius was one of a very few of whom it could be claimed on an public inscription that he 'became' a 'friend' of the emperor(s), and, moreover, one of only six or so ordinary members of the equester ordo known to have been styled this way⁴². A public announcement of this kind could well have been considered as constituting lese majeste, unless, that is, there was some substance behind it. True, the expression φίλον or 'friend' of an emperor, is somewhat ambiguous in its meaning, although it is generally supposed to indicate a person who was a member of the imperial consilium: either way, it was almost certainly only used in inscriptions with official approval⁴³. On the other hand, it has been noted elsewhere that the specific terminology employed here - 'φίλον καὶ ἐ[π]ί[τρο]/πον γενόμενον τῶν Σεβαστῶν' - implies that Crepereius could claim the title of 'friend' in connection with elevation to an imperial procuratorship, his last known official position in the scheme of things. 44 Yet while promotion from the military to an administrative position may well account for the use of the term $\phi(\lambda)$ in a formal way on this inscription, this seems unlikely to be the only explanation for such an expression of intimacy. Personal and ostentatious fidelity as well as skill and ability undoubtedly played a major part in the way that individual equestrians rose to higher rank in the Imperial military and civil career structure.

Unfortunately, the inscription does not indicate in what capacity or where Crepereius performed his procuratorial duties. Such negligence (or reticence) seems somewhat inexplicable in this otherwise detailed *cursus* – unless, that is, it was thought unnecessary to provide such information as it would be familiar to all. Thus the province in which our Crepereius may have begun and quite possibly ended his career in the imperial civil administration may have been his own, as *procurator provinciae Lyciae et Pamphyliae*⁴⁵. After all, even as early as the reign of Augustus, men were sometimes appointed as *procurator* in their own region⁴⁶.

Review

The career of this equestrian officer and member of the Crepereius family of Attaleia, as it was recorded on an inscription from that place, can thus be reconstructed as follows. To start with, he reached the peak of his official career, as an imperial *procurator*, at a

⁴¹ Cf. Birley, op cit (1988) 195-96.

⁴² Bruun, op cit, 347, with n. 17.

⁴³ Bruun, op cit, 345-347.

⁴⁴ Bruun, op cit, 350: 'one gets the impression that a similar procedure lay behind becoming amicus and becoming procurator.'

⁴⁵ Pflaum, op cit (1961) 1075.

⁴⁶ Cf. Marcus Pompeius of Mytilene, procurator of Asia under Augustus: Strabo 13.2.3 (618).

time when there were two (or more) joint-emperors, most probably Severus and Caracalla, and/or Geta; or Caracalla and Geta. He quite likely entered the *militiae equestres* after service in at least one local civic office, that of *gymnasiarch*. His first post was as prefect of the *cohors I Britannica equitata*, a unit then stationed in Dacia Porolissensis, probably at C şei. His second was as *tribunus angusticlavius* with the *legio XV Apollinaris*, then at Satala in Cappadocia, his assignment to that unit almost certainly being in the decade or so immediately preceding 194. Crepereius was then promoted to his *militia tertia* as prefect of the *ala I Vespasiana Dardanorum*, which at that time was in Moesia Inferior. This sequence of commands, with service in the Eastern and Danubian provinces would seem to be characteristic for those men from Lycia-Pamphylia who experienced the first three stages of the equestrian military career⁴⁷.

It can be conjectured that Crepereius played a minor but significant role in the events of 193/194, perhaps as a participant with his unit in the *exercitus Illyricus*. He then seems to have been rewarded for his loyal service in these critical years by the rare promotion to a fourth *militia*, as the prefect of the *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum Palmyrenorum miliaria*: the unit was then likely to have been stationed in Syria, allowing for Crepereius to have played a part in Severus' *expeditio Mesopotamena*. Sometime around or after 198, and certainly before 211, Crepereius was formally allowed to style himself as a 'friend' of the ruling emperors, this honour coinciding with his appointment to a position in the imperial administration as *procurator*, perhaps as *procurator provinciae Lyciae et Pamphyliae*. He is the last known member of the Attaleian Crepereii to reach more than local importance, although a Crepereius is reported as *agonothetes* at Oenoanda, also in Lycia-Pamphylia, during the 3rd century.

⁴⁷ Cf. Devijver, op cit (as note 6, 1986) 211 (= Devijver, op cit [as note 4, 1989] 375).

Abbreviations

Levick – Jameson 1964

Petolescu 2002

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