



Lost Along the Way: A Centurion *Domo Britannia* in Bostra*

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses a not well-known funerary monument commemorating a centurion of British descent. IGLS 13.1.9188 records the centurion, T. Quintius Petrullus, ‘from Britain’, of the Third Cyrenaican Legion, who died aged 30 at Bostra in Arabia. This was a young age for a centurion and the article suggests that he had entered the army by a direct commission rather than risen through the ranks. Accordingly, he is likely to have belonged to a high-status family. The Bostra appointment was probably his first. The appointment is put into context alongside other similar equestrian career paths and the Jewish War during the reign of Hadrian is proposed as a possible occasion for the posting. In addition, the article examines this Briton alongside other Britons abroad.

*This article finds its origin in a simple query of Tacoma to Ivleva in the course of research for Tacoma and Tybout (forthcoming) about the reading of IGLS 13.1.9188. Ivleva in her turn discussed the inscription with Breeze. The three decided to join forces and to report their developing arguments into the present study. We would like to thank A.R. Birley, L.J.F. Keppie and R.S.O. Tomlin for their suggestions and comments. All mistakes and errors in the interpretation remain our own. The following abbreviations are used:

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i> (1888–)
<i>CAG</i>	<i>Carte archéologique de la Gaule</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1863–)
<i>Hild.</i>	F. Hild, <i>Supplementum epigraphicum zu CIL III: das pannonische Niederösterreich, Burgenland und Wien 1902–1968</i> (1968)
<i>IAL</i>	C.M. Ternes, ‘Les inscriptions antiques du Luxembourg’, <i>Hémecht</i> 17 (1965), 267–481
<i>IGLS</i>	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie</i> (1929–)
<i>ILS</i>	H. Dessau, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> (1892–1916)
<i>IK</i>	<i>Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien</i> (1972–)
<i>IKöln</i>	B. und H. Galsterer, <i>Die römischen Steininschriften aus Köln</i> (2010)
<i>ILBulg</i>	B. Gerov, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria repertae</i> (1989)
<i>ILJug</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia ... repertae et editae sunt</i> (1963–86)
<i>PME</i>	H. Devijver, <i>Prosopographia Militarium Equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum</i> (1977–93)
<i>P.Mich</i>	C.C. Edgar, A.E.R. Boak, J.G. Winter <i>et al.</i> , <i>Papyri in the University of Michigan Collection</i> (1931–)
<i>RHP</i>	B. Lörincz, <i>Die römischen Hilfstruppen in Pannonien während der Prinzipatszeit</i> (2001)
<i>RIB</i>	<i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i>
<i>RMD</i>	M.M. Roxan, <i>Roman Military Diplomas</i> (1978–)
<i>Tyche</i>	<i>Tyche. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i> (1986–)

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In the recent upsurge of epigraphic and archaeological studies of patterns of mobility in the Roman world, it is becoming increasingly clear that most mobility occurred within relatively restricted areas.¹ Every regional study produces roughly the same pattern.² People could and did move over relatively long distances, but normally they remained within a restricted area consisting of their own and neighbouring provinces.

At the same time, these studies also highlight exceptions, sometimes of people crossing the Empire from one end to the other.³ These occur most notably among the army, the imperial elite and personnel of the Roman administration, but traders and slaves also travelled considerable distances.⁴ In Roman Britain the most famous case is surely that of Barates of Palmyra.⁵ Such cases are extremely interesting and are, not without reason, discussed over and over again. But they also almost immediately raise questions of typicality. Exactly how unusual was Barates in his move from Palmyra to Britain?

A pendant of sorts to Barates is in fact available. It concerns movement in the opposite direction, from Britain to the Near East. In 1982 Maurice Sartre published a short and fragmentary inscription from Bostra, in modern southern Syria.⁶ The text was slightly emended in 2013 by H. Solin and now reads as follows (FIG. 1):

*T(it)o Quintio | Petrullo | (centurioni) leg(ionis) III Cyr(enaicae) | dom(o) Britan(nia) | vixit
anni(s) XXX | et QVI[— — —] | FIL[— — —].*

For Titus Quintius Petrullus, centurion of *legio III Cyrenaica*, from Britain, who lived 30 years and ...

The text should be dated somewhere in the second or third centuries. It commemorates a centurion of *legio III Cyrenaica* called Titus Quintius Petrullus, who died 30 years old. The missing part may have continued with his length of service (*et qui militavit ...*) or it may have commemorated a second person, perhaps a son (*et Quintio ... filio*).⁷ The epitaph must date from after A.D. 106, when Bostra became the main centre of the newly created Roman province of Arabia. Although there has been significant discussion, it seems that *legio III Cyrenaica* was stationed there right from the start, being transferred from Egypt.⁸

Although the text is short, it contains three elements which are worthy of comment: *Petrullo*, *dom(o) Britan(nia)* and *vixit anni(s) XXX*. To start with the second: despite the underdots the

¹ Among a great many publications in recent decades, see, for example, Clay 2007; Eckardt 2010b; Handley 2011; Kakoschke 2004; Noy 2001; 2010; Oltean 2009; Swift 2010.

² For Hispania see Haley 1991; Gaul – Wierschowski 1995; 2001; Lusitania – Stanley 1990; Raetia – Dietz and Weber 1982; Germania Superior and Inferior – Kakoschke 2002.

³ cf., for example, evidence on the presence of a woman of possibly North African descent in Roman York: Leach *et al.* 2009 and 2010; cf. also Swan 1992; Thompson 1972.

⁴ cf. also Woolf 2013, 363.

⁵ *RIB* 1065; 1171. On the occurrence of other migrants in Roman Britain, see works of Birley, E. 1988d; Chenery *et al.* 2011; Cool 2010; Eckardt 2012; Eckardt and Müldner forthcoming; Rowland 1976; Wilmott 2001.

⁶ *IGLS* 13.1.9188 (with photo), with short addendum in *IGLS* 13.2.9188. For the provenance, see ed.pr.: ‘*Conversé à l’entrée du grand couloir de la citadelle; provenance exacte inconnue*’. See Solin 2013, 281, cf. 275–6, for the new reading Quintio rather than Quintus, which exposes Petrullo (rather than Petrullus) as a *falscher Name* and implies that the case-ending of the name of the deceased should be altered from nominative to dative.

⁷ Following Sartre in the ed.pr. The alternatives do not affect the interpretation offered in this article.

⁸ Kennedy 1980, with previous literature on the complex reshuffling of legions in the region. According to Kennedy’s reconstruction, *legio III Cyrenaica* was temporarily back in Egypt in A.D. 119–23, and *legio VI Ferrata* temporarily took over its tasks.

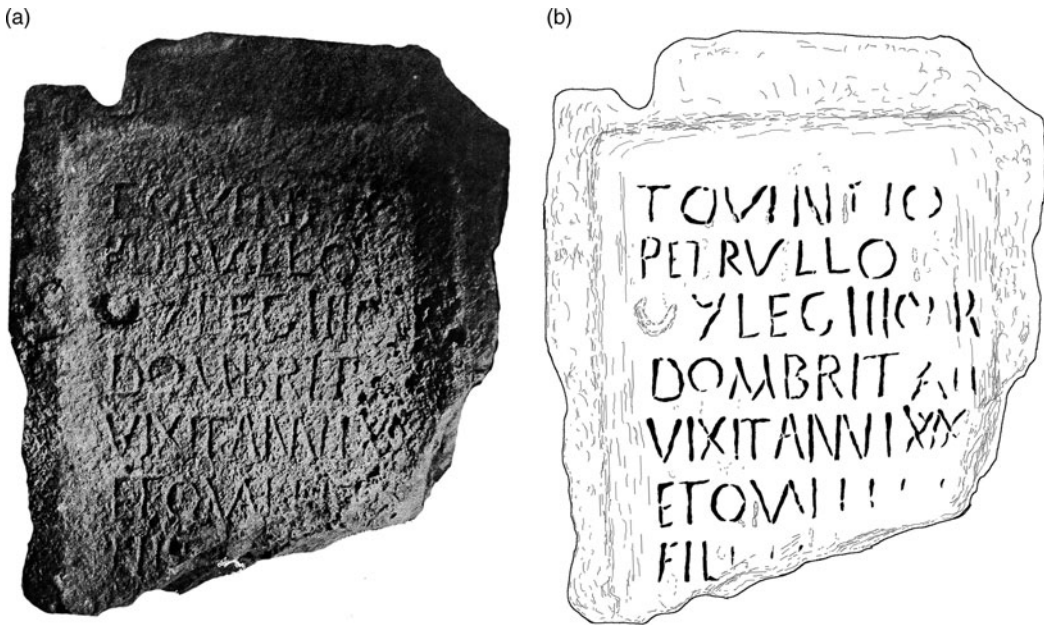


FIG. 1. (a) Tombstone of Petrullus found in Bostra; exact findspot is unknown; conserved at the entrance of the great corridor of the citadel. Dimensions: 0.46 by 0.59 m, 0.47 m deep. (Photo: M. Sartre, from IGLS 13.1.9188; retouching by Joep van Rijn); (b) Drawing of the tombstone of Petrullus. (Drawing by Roger Tomlin from a photograph)

reading *Britan()* can be regarded as reasonably certain, also in view of the fact that there are no plausible alternatives.⁹ *Britan()* might be expanded as *Britan(nia)*, the province, or perhaps as *Britan(nus)*, an ethnic name.¹⁰ It may be objected that *domo* is normally followed by a city, not a wider region, that a reference to *Britan(nia)* or *Britan(nus)* is normally preceded by *natio* and that the exact combination *domo Britan()* is unattested elsewhere.¹¹ But there are other cases in which *domo* does occur together with a region or a tribe rather than a city; in fact, such cases are on closer inspection not infrequent at all. They can be found everywhere in the Empire, including other areas in the Near East.¹² Although certainty cannot be obtained, it

⁹ In line 4 the reading *DOMBRIT* is certain. There is room for two additional letters, of which the first seems to be an A (traces of the lower part survive); what follows cannot be ascertained on the basis of the relatively dark photograph. In line 3 a flaw in the surface (in the form of a crescent-shaped depression) seems to have prevented the stone-cutter from beginning on the left margin. In line 5, the reading of the second X in *XXX* is somewhat more problematic and cannot be confirmed on the basis of the photo. A possible alternative might be *VIXIT ANN()* *LXX*, but there is neither horizontal bar of the L visible, nor is there enough space to accommodate it. Furthermore, as there is no room to accommodate more letters after *XXX*, and any other figure instead of the second X can only lower the already low age further, we are convinced that Sartre's reading is correct.

¹⁰ We owe the latter suggestion to Roger Tomlin. In what follows we use the former; the exact expansion does not affect our argument. Apart from one Christian inscription on a lid of a sarcophagus dated to the late fourth to fifth century A.D., the ethnic name *BRITAN(NUS)* is not attested elsewhere. *AE* 1939, 53 = *AE* 2004, 881 (Arelate): *Hic conditus iacet nomine Tolosanus Britannus natione proconsulis dolor*. More on *BRITAN(NUS)* as an ethnic name, see Matthews 1999.

¹¹ cf. for instance the following inscriptions recording individuals with *origo natione Britto*: *CIL* VI, 3301 (Rome); *CIL* VI, 32861 (Rome); *CIL* VI, 3279; *Il.Jug*–2, 679 (Solin, Croatia); *CIL* XIII, 1981 (Lyon, France). For discussion on the meaning of *natione Britto*, see Ivleva 2014 and forthcoming.

¹² From the Near East come *RHP* 115 (Apamea) for *domo T(h)racia*; *AE* 1958, 240 (Hatra) for *dom(o) [Nu]midia*. Elsewhere e.g. *IKöln* 26 (Germania Inferior) *domo Dalmatia*; *CIL* XIII, 2311,5b (Lugdunensis) *d(omo) Sur(ia)* (twice);

seems unlikely that Petruillus hailed from a colony in Britain as it might be expected that such a prestigious *origo* would be cited.

The cognomen Petruillus is rare.¹³ The name occurs on a number of brick stamps found in Germania Inferior, Germania Superior and Belgica. Of further relevance are two inscriptions from Dijon and from Luxemburg.¹⁴ The other names which occur alongside it have a distinctive Celtic flavour and the name Petruillus in all likelihood should be placed in the same linguistic context.¹⁵ There are apart from the Bostrian inscription no other Petruilli known with Roman citizenship.

This inscription seems thus far not to have been noticed by scholars who have studied the occurrence of Britons abroad.¹⁶ Petruillus is to date the second centurion of British descent we know of (discussed below), apart from the three questionable cases of Titus Flavius Virilis,¹⁷ Flavius Britto¹⁸ and Aurelius Nectoreca.¹⁹

CIL III, 3271 (Pannonia Inferior) *domo Hispano*; *CIL* III, 3324 (Pannonia Inferior) *d(omo) Africa*; *CIL* III, 3680 (Pannonia Inferior) *domo Africa*; *AE* 1993, 132 (Pannonia Inferior) *domo T(h)racia*; *Tyche* 2013, 10 (Pannonia Superior) *do(mo) Iud(a)ei*; *Tyche* 2013, 6 (Pannonia Superior) *domo Iudaeus*; *CIL* III, 4379 (Pannonia Superior) *do(mo) Africa*; *CIL* III, 4459 (Pannonia Superior) *domo Ger(mania) sup(eriore)*; *Hild.* 162 (Pannonia Superior) *domo Maurit(ania)*; *CIL* III, 7503 (Moesia Inferior) *domo Bithyna*; *ILBulg* 309 (Moesia Inferior) *domo [C]app(adocia)*; *CIL* III, 7728 (Dacia) *do(mo) Macedonia*; Speidel 1994, 732 (Rome) *domo Thracia*; Speidel 1994, 680 (Apulia and Calabria) *domo Thraciae*; *AE* 2010, 1620 (Galatia) *dom(o) Pann(onia)*; *IK* 55, 1128 (Cappadocia) *domo Hispani[a]*. Cf. *CIL* III, 6085 (Asia) *domo Liguria*. For a civilian example *CIL* III, 3583 (Pannonia Inferior) *domo Africa*.

¹³ Lőrincz (2000, 136) and Mócsy (1983, 220) list three instances in Belgica.

¹⁴ *CIL* XIII, 5557 (Divio, mod. Dijon): *Monimentu[m] Roxtani Petruilli*. *IAL* 103 (Luxemburg-Fetschenhof, Belgica): *Suaricate) coniugi Masc(u)lus et Petruillus fili(i) v(ivi) f(faciendum) c(uraverunt)*. While the lettering of the former inscription is very crude, that of the latter is remarkably careful.

¹⁵ Solin 2013, 275–6. For Roxtanus of *CIL* XIII, 5557, see *AE* 1905, 216 (Intaranum, Lugdunensis, mod. Entrains-sur-Nohain): *Quintae Roxtanorigi[s] uxori Mansuetus R[ox]tanoricis f[ilius] donavit* (note that virtually the same text appears as *CIL* XIII, 11269 from the same place: *Quintae Roxtanorig(is) Coti fili(ae) uxori Mansuetus R(ox)tanorigis donavit*). For the name Suarica of *IAL* 103 see *CIL* XIII, 05532 (Divio, mod. Dijon): *D(is) M(anibus) Mandubili Dousonni fil(ii) et Suarica(e) ux(ori)s*, for which see the commentary of Kakoschke 2002, no. 3.16. *Masculus*, by contrast, is a very common name which can be found almost anywhere in the Empire. From the same area as the other mentioned texts comes *CAG* 21.2, p. 249 (Divio, mod. Dijon): *D(is) [M(anibus)] Blanda et Mascul[us] Dribanci et Marce[lla(?)]*.

¹⁶ The text was mentioned briefly by Tomlin (Tomlin and Hassall 2007, 357–8, note 35). Petruillus is absent from Birley, A.R. 1979, 101–6, Dessau 1912; Ivleva 2011, 2012 and forthcoming. Cf. also Dobson and Mann 1973, 204: ‘Most notable is the absence in the record of British centurions’. Petruillus is also absent from Devijver’s *PME*. The inscription does, however, appear in the list of geographical references in the Trismegistos database for Britannia, see http://www.trismegistos.org/geo/georef_list.php?tm=3232 (consulted October 2015). It is also recorded in *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clausii/Slaby* under no EDCS-11301195.

¹⁷ *CIL* VIII, 2877 (Lambaesis): *D. M. T. Fl. Virilis | leg. II Aug. | leg. XX V. V. | leg. VI Vic. | leg. XX V. V. | leg. III Aug. | leg. III Parth. Sever. VIII hast. poster. vixit annis LXX stip. XXXXV Lollia Boudicca coniux et Flavi Victor et Victorinus fili. heredes ex HS | CC n. faciendum curaver.* Virilis held six posts as a centurion in five different legions. Of these, three were legions stationed in Britain, e.g. *legiones II Augusta, VI Victrix* and *XX Valeria Victrix*. The origin of Virilis is considered to be British on the basis of his service as a centurion in all of the legions that were stationed in Britain. Cf. also Dessau 1912, 23; Malone 2006, 117.

¹⁸ *CIL* VI, 3594 (Rome): *D. M. Fl. Brittoni | leg. XIII Gem. Catonia Baudia coniux et liberi eius b. m. fecer.* Apart from Flavius Britto’s rather telling name and the name of his wife, Catonia Baudia, Baudia being reminiscent of the name Boudicca, nothing points to a conclusive argument for him being of British ancestry.

¹⁹ Nectoreca is mentioned on two inscriptions dated to c. A.D. 192 found in Volubilis: *AE* 1920, 48 = *AE* 1998, 1596 = *AE* 2004, 1892 = *AE* 2006, 1822: *Pro salute et incolumitate Imp. Caesaris L. Aeli Aurel. Commodi Pii Invicti Felicis Herculis Romani imperioque eius Aur. Nectoreca | vex. Britt. Volubili agentium sua pecunia Invicto posuit et d. d.*; *AE* 1920, 47 = *AE* 1998, 1596 = *AE* 2004, 1893 = *AE* 2006, 1821: *I. D. M. Aur. Nectoreca | vex. Brit. Volubili agentium l. l. m.* He served as a centurion of a *vexillatio Brittonum*. His cognomen, Nectoreca, is a combination of two Celtic elements, nect*- and rec*-. The element nect*- appears only in two names known to the present day: both the people who had names with this element were of British descent: Nectovelius was a Brigantian by origin (*RIB* 2142) and Catunectus was a Trinovantian (*AE* 2003, 1218). Nectoreca may thus have been a British-born centurion put in charge of the British detachment in Mauretania Tingitana.

The epigraphic record is rather modest when it comes to the identification of persons of British descent who lived and died overseas: a total of 40 have been identified epigraphically, out of which only 27 explicitly mention their origin; others were identified on the basis of onomastic and prosopographic analysis.²⁰ These numbers are extremely low in comparison to other ethnic groups who migrated such as Dacians (150 cases) or Germans (174 cases).²¹ This may suggest that there were not many Britons moving and settling abroad in the Roman Empire, though it has been argued that native Britons had low epigraphic consciousness and were therefore under represented.²² Such low numbers — or low epigraphic consciousness — are, of course, not representative of the real level of mobility: there is other indirect evidence testifying to movements of Britons abroad. The epigraphic record contains information on 13 British auxiliary units, most of which were composed of the natives of the province at the time of the units' formation.²³ For a 'Briton' in such a British auxiliary unit, it would have been unnecessary specifically to name his origin, whereas if he had served in another ethnic unit he would most likely have wanted to emphasise his ethnic background.²⁴

The geographic spread of inscriptions directly identifying individuals of British descent is not confined to a particular province. They are distributed across the whole of the western part of the Roman Empire, basically from North Africa to Lower and Upper Germany, from Gaul to the Roman frontiers on the Danube (FIG. 2). Furthermore, units raised in Britain were dispatched to various provinces, including Dacia and Mauretania Caesariensis, as well as being temporarily deployed in the Near East.²⁵ The occurrence of a British *Petrullus* in Arabia is thus not extraordinary, albeit it raises some questions.

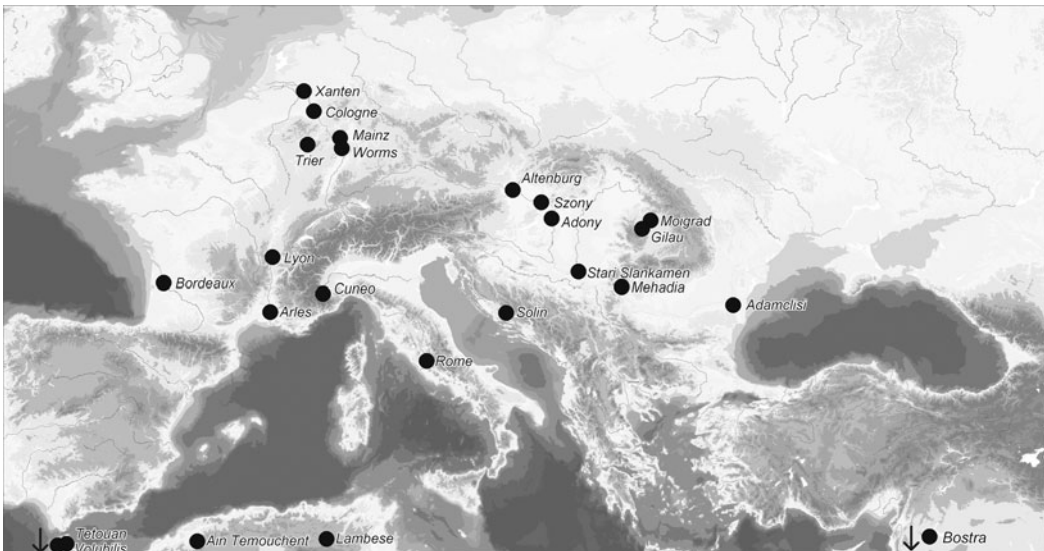


FIG. 2. Places on the Continent where Britons settled down or died according to the epigraphic record. (© Tatiana Ivleva)

²⁰ Ivleva forthcoming.

²¹ Oltean 2009, 96; Kakoschke 2004, 198.

²² Mann 1985.

²³ Cheesman 1914, 170–1; Dobson and Mann 1973, 199–200 = Mann 1996, 46–8; Spaul 1994, 70–2 and 2000, 189–204.

²⁴ Birley, A.R. 1979, 104; Oltean 2009, 91.

²⁵ Detachments of *ala I Britannica* and *cohors III Augusta Nerviana Pacensis Brittonum* are known to have taken part in the Parthian War of Trajan (A.D. 114–17). For *ala* see *AE* 1908, 23 (Nicopolis Armeniae), *CIL* III, 6748

The admittedly poor evidence for recruitment patterns of *legio III* in Bostra does not prepare us for the appearance of a Briton, though it also does not preclude such a possibility.²⁶ There are only eight military inscriptions from Bostra in which the place or region of origin of an individual is explicitly stated.²⁷ Apart from Britain, these are Parthicopolis (possibly the city of that name in the Strymon Valley), an otherwise unknown vicus Doecis in Pannonia, Thrace, Carthage, Celeia in Noricum and, within Italy, Mantua and Forum Sempronii.²⁸ The origins that are mentioned can be reconciled with the onomastic profile of *legio III* which occurs in a list of names preserved on a Latin papyrus dating from the years shortly before its transfer to Arabia.²⁹ There is neither in the papyrus nor in the other inscriptions anything that points to wider recruitment of military personnel from north-western Europe, though as just stated the evidence is relatively meagre and does not rule out the presence of people from this area. Nevertheless, in the present state of the evidence, our Petrullus remains something of an outsider.

This raises the question how Petrullus ended up as a centurion in Bostra. In view of the fact that we are dealing with a single individual, no certainty is possible, and only tentative suggestions can be offered. The Celtic cognomen and the high social status suggested by his centurionate imply a background among a family of a local elite. As one would expect a change to fully Latin cognomina in subsequent generations, it also seems likely that Petrullus had acquired the Roman citizenship himself rather than his predecessors, though again such an inference must remain hypothetical. We may note that only one British member of the equestrian order is known, a man buried at Colchester with the fragmentary name of Macri... who died at the age of 20.³⁰

Petrullus was relatively young when he died, a legionary centurion aged 30 years, and that is of significance in seeking to reconstruct his possible career. There were two methods of entry to the legionary centurionate, from the ranks and by direct commission. A soldier would normally have served at least 13 years in the ranks before being promoted to centurion,³¹ though earlier promotions are recorded. In the second half of the second century, Petronius Fortunatus held

(Amaseia); for cohort see Eck and Pangerl 2008, 367. A detachment of the *cohors I Hispanorum* based at Maryport may have been dispatched to serve in the army seeking to put down the Jewish Rebellion of A.D. 132/5 (Breeze 1997, 73–4, 77), for which see below.

²⁶ One further item which may offer corroboration of sorts is a lead seal found in Gloucester mentioning LEG III CYR. It was published by Roger Tomlin (Tomlin and Hassall 2007, 357, no. 17). The seal is unique in that it mentions another legion (Leg. VI Victrix) on the other side; it may have been brought by someone who was transferred from Leg. III to Leg. VI sometime after Leg. VI was moved to Britain by Hadrian.

²⁷ See Tacoma and Tybout forthcoming.

²⁸ *IGLS* 13.9052–3 (with addenda) for Parthicopolis; 9193 for Doecis in Pannonia; 9194 for Thrace; 9203 for Carthage; 9506 for Celeia in Noricum (mod. Celje in Slovenia); 9183 for Mantua in Lombardia; 9187 for Forum Sempronii in Umbria. Although *legio III* is not explicitly mentioned in all these texts, it seems reasonably certain that they concern it. In view of a new reading discussed by Sartre in his addenda, we have left out *IGLS* 13.9177 (possibly concerning a soldier). Initially *d(is) m(anibus) s(acrum)*. *Chresto sanctissimo M(?) n̄aṭo Corinthias dulcissima uxor benemerenti fecit* was read, but *marito Corinthias* ('husband of Corinthia') makes better sense. Also left out is *IGLS* 13.9016 mentioning Thusdritani (from modern El-Djem in Tunisia); these may also be soldiers, but traders seem just as likely. There is more evidence for recruitment of *legio III Cyrenaica* in texts from outside Bostra, including papyri from the period before and shortly after its transfer from Egypt. For example, *IGLS* 21.2.34 from Philadelphia (modern Amman) mentions a soldier from nearby Hierapolis. *CIL* XI, 6055 from Urbino has a *primus pilus* hailing from Foro Brent(ano) or Brent(anorum), location unknown, but likely in the vicinity of Urbino. If *P.Mich.* 8.466 (A.D. 107) and 465 (A.D. 108) concern a soldier from *legio III Cyrenaica*, as seems likely, Karanis in Egypt should be added to the list. Much of this evidence can be found in scattered pages in Forni 1953 and Mann 1983, but a new study is a desideratum.

²⁹ Kramer 1993, dated by him to A.D. 98–127. If the transfer of the legion took place in A.D. 106, the date of this text can be narrowed down to A.D. 98–106. Although the spelling of the names shows many peculiar and unattested forms, the names are mostly generic ones.

³⁰ *RIB* 202.

³¹ Breeze 1974, 273–8 = Breeze and Dobson 1993, 39–44.

the posts of *librarius*, *tesserarius*, *optio* and *signifer* within four years before being promoted to centurion by the vote of his fellow soldiers.³² Legionary *optiones* and *signiferi* with six and eight years' service are known and were presumably promoted to centurion shortly afterwards.³³ Taking 13 years' service as the 'normal' point at which soldiers could expect to be promoted to centurion and acknowledging that most men joined the legion between the ages of 18 and 21, a soldier will usually have been at least 32 when promoted to centurion.³⁴

A man who sought a direct commission had normally previously served his municipality as a senior magistrate before joining the army at about 30.³⁵ Dobson acknowledged that there was not much evidence for the age, but offered evidence in support of his assertion, including a centurion commissioned at 29 and another at 30.³⁶ We may also note another centurion, presumably directly commissioned, at the age of 18, though the latter's exceptionally young age almost certainly rules out a previous municipal career.³⁷ Alföldy noted that the equestrian officers in the province of Germania Inferior after A.D. 70 had generally no previous municipal posts and were therefore presumably younger men.³⁸

Which is the most likely way in which Petrullus became a centurion? It is possible that he rose through the ranks of a legion, but a centurionate by the age of 30 by this path would have been unusual. The examples of directly commissioned centurions about the age of Petrullus offer better parallels. If this is accepted, it is likely that he was a member of a local elite.

How might Petrullus have arrived in Bostra? There is a particular event which may have led to the movement of a centurion from Britain to Arabia. In A.D. 133, or possibly 134, Sex. Julius Severus, governor of Britain, was sent to lead the Roman forces against the Jewish rebellions. There is no firm evidence that he was accompanied by troops from Britain (A.R. Birley does not name any), but about this time M. Censorius Cornelianus, prefect of the First Cohort of Spaniards based at Maryport, moved to a centurionate in *legio X Fretensis*, and the appointment of Severus to his command would make a suitable occasion for the transfer of Cornelianus and, therefore, also Petrullus.³⁹ Such an appointment was in the gift of the governor, though the emperor's subsequent approval was also required.⁴⁰

A transfer across the Empire for a directly commissioned centurion might be thought to be unusual, but there are other examples. The clearest parallel to Petrullus is C. Octavius Honoratus, a citizen of Thuburnica in North Africa, who entered the centurionate by direct commission and was sent to serve in *II Augusta* in Britain.⁴¹ There are also examples of centurions who travelled across the Empire to take up new appointments. They include P. Aelius Romanus who moved from centurion in *I Italica* in Moesia, his birthplace, to *XX Valeria Victrix* in Britain, and then to *VII Claudia* and finally *III Augusta* in North Africa in the second century.⁴² Eric Birley drew attention to M. Liburnius Fronto, centurion of *II*

³² *CIL* VIII, 217 = 11301 = *ILS* 2658. See now Birley, A.R. 2016 forthcoming.

³³ *CIL* XIII, 6955; 6681; III, 10525; 5976.

³⁴ Forni 1953, 135–41.

³⁵ Dobson 1972, 194 = Breeze and Dobson 1993, 187, citing Birley, E. 1953 and Alföldy 1968. This is not the place for elaborate discussion of such moves from the civilian into the military sphere. But it is to be noted that there were usually minimum ages for municipal offices and that such offices were normally held with some space between them. In consequence, also from a civilian perspective a transfer around the age of 30 would be an exceptional occurrence and therefore indicate high status.

³⁶ *CIL* VIII, 217; 6.3584. Cf. *CIL* XI, 1836 and VIII, 15872, both *iudex selectus*.

³⁷ *CIL* III, 1480 = *ILS* 2654.

³⁸ Alföldy 1968, 110–35, in particular 121–2.

³⁹ Birley, A.R. 2005, 132; Breeze 1997, 73–5. For further discussion of officers moving from west to east, and of the date of Severus' transfer, see Birley, A.R. 2016 forthcoming.

⁴⁰ Birley, E. 1988c.

⁴¹ *CIL* VIII, 14698 = *ILS* 2655; for other possible examples see Birley, E. 1988b and 1988c.

⁴² *CIL* VIII, 2786 = *ILS* 2659.

Augusta, who dedicated an inscription on Hadrian's Wall under Antoninus Pius; his nomen is often found among Galatian legionaries serving in Egypt, though A.R. Birley has noted that 'Liburnii are found mainly in northern Italy', while Roger Tomlin has pointed out to us (pers. comm.) that the name is quite frequently found in Italy and North Africa and may be Etruscan in origin.⁴³ And there is Petronius Fortunatus, already noted, who served as centurion in no less than 13 legions during the course of a career lasting 46 years; his travels included Syria, Lower Germany, Upper Pannonia, Britain, Numidia, Arabia and Cappadocia. There need be no surprise in Petrullus travelling from one end of the Empire to the other to take up a centurionate in a legion.

Furthermore, Petrullus is not the only Briton serving as a centurion. A *primus pilus* of *legio XXII Primigenia*, M. Minicius Marcellinus, indicated his origin as Lincoln on a votive inscription erected in Mainz.⁴⁴ The prefect of the *ala I Brittonum* with the same names recorded on a diploma of A.D. 123 is likely to have been his son.⁴⁵ *Legio XXII Primigenia* is known from two second-century building inscriptions erected in Britain, both probably recording detachments at a time that the legion was based in Mainz, and a tombstone of a centurion possibly dating to the early third century.⁴⁶ Marcellinus may have entered one of these detachments, while they were in Britain, but it is just as likely that he was posted directly to the legion in Mainz.

Another interesting case is that of M. Iunius Capito, also from Lincoln, who served as a soldier in *X Gemina*, deployed at Vienna on the Danube.⁴⁷ Sent with the legion's detachment to Mauretania Caesariensis in the late second century, he died in North Africa after ten years' service. Nothing is known about his entry to the unit, whether, for example, he was transferred from a legion stationed in Britain or elsewhere, which had been his first place of service, or he was directly enlisted to serve in an overseas unit. If the latter was the case, it offers an interesting parallel to Petrullus, disregarding the different career paths.

That Britons were accepted to serve in the overseas legions can be supported by two further votive inscriptions, erected in Xanten, Germany, by two soldiers of *XXX Ulpia Victrix*, among other evidence.⁴⁸ These and other legionaries of British descent sent to serve abroad were most likely offspring of the legionaries coming from the Continent and settling in the *coloniae*, as suggested by A.R. Birley.⁴⁹ This explains why these British-born of likely Continental fathers and local British mothers were allowed to join the legionary forces and why they may have had various privileges, such as a quick rise up the career ladder. It is easy to imagine that Petrullus was one of them, if we accept the arguments for his elite status and privileged position in local society.

Finally, the retention of a Celtic cognomen by a high-placed officer and the use of *domo Britannia* raise wider questions of self-representation and ethnic identity. Despite the factual appearance of the statements of origin on the inscriptions, in recent years the malleability of ethnicity has been emphasised.⁵⁰ Such malleability occurs in many periods, even in highly

⁴³ Birley, E. 1988c; Birley, A.R. 1979, 75.

⁴⁴ *CIL* XIII, 6679: *Fortunam Superam Honori Aquilae leg. XXII Pr. P.F. M. Minicius M. fil. Quir. Lindo Mar[cel]li [nus p.] p. leg. ei[us][dem]*

⁴⁵ *AE* 1973, 459 = *RMD* I 21: *A D IIII Id Aug T Salvio Rufino Minicio Opimiano Cn Sentio Aburiano cos alae Briton c R cui praefuit M Minicius Marcellinus ex gregale Glavo Navati f Sirm et Iubena Bellagenti fil uxori eius Eravis*. Dobson 1970; Russu 1974.

⁴⁶ *RIB* 1026; 2116a; 2216; 3486.

⁴⁷ *CIL* VIII, 21669 = *AE* 1897, 35 = *AE* 1941, 113: *D. M. M. Iunius Capito Lindo mil leg. X G. st. X Iul. Primus sig. h. f. c.*

⁴⁸ *CIL* XIII, 8631, 8632. For other British-born legionaries serving abroad see Birley, A.R. 1979, 104–5; Dobson and Mann 1973, 202–4.

⁴⁹ Birley, A.R. 1979, 104.

⁵⁰ Collins 2008; Derks and Roymans 2009; Eckardt 2010a; Eckardt and Müldner forthcoming; Hope forthcoming; Ivleva 2014; forthcoming; Mattingly 2011; Wallace-Hadrill 2007.

formalised contexts. The identification of the origin of a ‘foreigner’ was also an issue in the English census in the nineteenth century. While the origin of English people in the English census is detailed down to the hamlet, village or town, a person born in another part of the United Kingdom such as Scotland or Ireland is normally only assigned to the country. The 1881 UK census relating to London, for example, records Eliza Breeze as born in ‘Middlesex, Bayswater’, but her mother, also Eliza, merely in ‘Ireland’ rather than ‘Ireland, Belfast’, the town of her birth.

Such malleability applies also to the seemingly straightforward military epitaphs like that of Petrullus. Part of the explanation for the use of a formula like *domo Britannia* is no doubt to be sought in the practicalities of the military administration, for the naming patterns of the epitaphs are very similar to the ones used in official military documents like *diplomata*. If a soldier was enrolled in a unit while he was already abroad, the native province might have been recorded on the *diploma* as his home. If, on the other hand, he had enrolled in a unit stationed or raised in his own province, his tribe or town might have been specified.⁵¹ Considerable variations in local administrative practices have to be reckoned with, of course, but this ‘unofficial’ rule in the record of origin on the *diplomata* seems to have been valid in many areas, possibly as well in recording origin on the epitaphs.⁵² Although it remains an open question to what extent ethnic identities in this case were ascribed by the army administrators or assumed by the individual soldiers, it is clear that they were subject to construction. For instance, the Romans continuously cultivated tribal associations in the Batavians from Germania Inferior, placing an emphasis on their militaristic nature.⁵³ The constant manipulation of the group’s military vocations bound up with the group’s own ethnic identity resulted in the formation of a special community, called ‘ethnic soldiers’ by van Driel-Murray.⁵⁴ The Dacians are another similar case in point. After the Dacian Wars, ‘the Roman army reinvented rather than destroyed Dacian ethnic identity and provided the environment for the formation of a new Dacian military identity’ by recruiting locals to serve in various auxiliary units called *Dacorum*.⁵⁵

Soldiers from Britannia ‘were’ thus not ‘Britons’ by nature; being a Briton was not an ontological and immutable fact, especially when there were ‘no such social groups as “Britons”, the peoples were an assortment of tribes’.⁵⁶ In fact, epigraphic evidence suggests that in their home region the primary loyalty was with their home community rather than with a wider region.⁵⁷ When they moved elsewhere, such points of reference lost their relevance (both to recruitment officers and to fellow soldiers). In that sense, soldiers from Britannia *became* Britons when they crossed the Channel.

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⁵¹ Speidel 1986, 467.

⁵² *ibid.*, 475–6.

⁵³ van Driel-Murray 2003, 201; Roymans 2004, 223.

⁵⁴ van Driel-Murray 2003, 201.

⁵⁵ Oltean 2009, 99.

⁵⁶ Mattingly 2004, 10.

⁵⁷ Ivleva 2014, 226–7.

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