

Radosław A. Gawroński

The Italian Cohort from Caesarea described in the acts of Apostles

Seminare. Poszukiwania naukowe 33, 241-250

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach
dozwolonego użytku.

Z PROBLEMATYKI HISTORYCZNEJ

SEMINARE
t. 33 *2013* s. 241–250

RADOSŁAW A. GAWROŃSKI
UKSW, Warszawa

THE ITALIAN COHORT FROM CAESAREA DESCRIBED IN THE ACTS OF APOSTLES

The Acts of Apostles contain a statement, which mentions certain centurion *Cornelius*, who served in an Italian cohort, stationed at *Caesarea Maritima*, an administrative capital of the Roman province of Judea: Ἀνὴρ δὲ τις ἐν Καισαρείᾳ ὀνόματι Κορνήλιος, ἑκατοντάρχης ἐκ σπείρης τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς — (There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the cohort, known as the Italian one)¹.

The passage in Acts is fraught with many interpretation problems. The author of the Acts was more interested in the fluid course of his narration than in describing the internal command structure of the roman army. Yet, some details are clear at first glance. Cornelius (“Κορνήλιος) was described as a junior commander, a centurion (ἑκατοντάρχης) of a unit called *speira* (literally ἐκ σπείρης). The word σπεῖρα (*speira*) in the Roman times was commonly used as a Greek equivalent for Latin *cohors*². The term also occurs in the New Testament to describe the unit which guarded Jesus at his trial and crucifixion³.

The next words describe the cohort as known as Italian (τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς). That suggests an independent auxiliary unit of an Italian origin. The statement is somewhat confusing as in the early imperial times all recruits from Italy were Roman citizens and customarily served in legions or praetorian cohorts, not in the auxiliary units. Yet, in the age of the procurators no legion was permanently stationed in the province of Judea, therefore the author of the Acts had in mind not a legionary cohort, but an independent auxiliary unit. Sometimes an auxiliary unit was granted Roman citizenship en bloc, as a reward for its

¹ Acts 10,1. Author’s translation. According to the passage Cornelius was converted by the Apostle Peter.

² For example σπεῖρα τρίτης Ἰουδαίων mentioned by P.Mich. IX 568-9 is almost certainly identical with *coh(ors) III Iturae[o]ru[m]* in P.Mich.164; see also J. Spaul, *Cohors 2. The Evidence For and a Short History of the Auxiliary Infantry of The Roman Imperial Army*, British Archaeological Reports (BAR) International Series 841, Oxford 200, p. 446.

³ Mt 27,54; Mk 15,39; Lk 23,47. For the discussion of that terminology, see D. B. Saddington, *The Development of the Roman Auxiliary Forces from Caesar to Vespasian (49 B.C.–A.D. 79)*, Harare, Zimbabwe 1982, p. 51 and p. 211, note 114.

bravery and gallant behavior. Certainly that was not the case, as the cohort is literally described as “Italian”, i.e. recruited in Italy. However, we know that some small independent auxiliary units certainly were raised in Italy, especially during the reign of Augustus⁴. Therefore we can be sure that the Acts refer to a citizen cohort, originally raised in Italy, and then transferred to Judea⁵. If the passage is correct, the unit was present at *Caesarea* about AD 40.

The accuracy of the passage in question has been a subject of the hot debate. For example, Emil Shürer argued that the Roman army of the province of Judea, serving under the procurators, was composed only from one cavalry and five infantry units, raised in the capital of Samaria called *Sebaste*⁶. These units: one *ala* and five *cohortes Sebastenorum* were very useful against the rebellious indigenous populace because of their hatred against the Jews⁷. If that was the case there was no place for an Italian cohort in the province of Judea⁸. It has also been suggested that no Roman regular units were stationed in Herod Agrippa’s kingdom⁹ and that the relation about centurion Cornelius is at least “historically suspect”¹⁰.

1. THE *SEBASTENI*

First of all, we have to take a closer look on the testimonies dealing with the *Sebasteni* units. The careful examination of these sources would shed some

⁴ See J. Spaul, *Cohors...*, p. 19.

⁵ I.e. *cohors Italica civium romanorum*, for the reconstruction of details of the history of the unit, see M.P. Speidel, *The Roman Army In Judea Under the Procurators*, in: idem, *Roman Army Studies*, vol. 2 (*Mavors Roman Army Researches*; vol.8), Stuttgart 1992, p. 224ff = *Ancient Society* 13/14 1983/84, p. 233–240, see p. 233ff.

⁶ *Sebaste*, as its name indicates, was a Greek city, see A.H.M. Jones, *The Cities of Eastern Roman Provinces*, Oxford 1937, p. 211. Yet, there is a possibility, that these units were raised not from the Greek speaking citizens, but from the Aramaic speaking local population, see M. Sartre, *Wschód Rzymski. Prowincje i społeczeństwa prowincjonalne we wschodniej części basenu Morza Śródziemnego w okresie od Augusta do Sewerów (31 r. p.n.e.–235 r. n.e.)* — a polish translation of: *l’Orient Romain. Provinces et sociétés provinciales en Méditerranée orientale d’Auguste aux Sévères (31 avant J.-C. — 235 après J.-C.)*, Wrocław 1997, p. 83. *Sebaste* was also populated by the descendants of Gallic, Germanic and Thracian mercenaries, hired by Herod The Great, see ibidem, p. 394.

⁷ See E. Shürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* I, revised and edited by G. Vermes and F. Millar, Edinburgh 1973, p. 363ff. See also M.P. Speidel, *The Roman Army...*, p. 225=234.

⁸ In some occasions our sources mention only five auxiliary infantry units, cf. *Jos. Ant. Iud.* 19. 9.2. 366 and 20.6.1. If all of them were composed from the *Sebasteni*, there was no place for an Italian cohort.

⁹ R. M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, New York 1963, p. 145.

¹⁰ See, for example, arguments quoted in: J. Burke, *Studies In The Historicity of Acts*, at: <http://www.academia.edu/454431/Studies_In_The_Historicity_of_Acts>, note 47, (28-10-2012). For the opposite view, see D. B. Saddington, *The Development...*, p. 99.

light on the role of the army in the province of Judea and also would provide us with some useful information about the tasks fulfilled by the Italian cohort as well. And so, the *Sebasteni* were a part of the army of Herod the Great¹¹ and proved their loyalty towards the Romans in the events which occurred after the king's death¹². They were efficient, loyal and reliable. Moreover, their traditional antipathy against the Jews made them excellent policing troops, especially useful against riots. For example, according to Josephus' relation the ill-famed governor Pontius Pilatus once had taken money from the treasury of the Temple in Jerusalem and used it to pay for the work on an aqueduct. The "Antiquities of the Jews" contain a description of these events: "this roused the population to fury and when Pilate visited Jerusalem they surrounded him and shouted him down. But he had predicted the disturbance and had his soldiers mingle with the mob, wearing civilian clothing over their armor. They were given orders not to draw their swords but to use clubs against the Jews. Pilate then gave the orders and the Jews were clubbed. Many died from the blows while others were trampled to death as they fled in panic"¹³.

We should bear in mind that such ruthlessness, shown during the pacification of riots, was a normal practice of the time. And so, according to the Roman historian Suetonius, when the emperor Caligula was awoken by the noise made by the crowd, which gathered waiting for gladiatorial games, he send soldiers to club them¹⁴. Moreover, many tombstones from Rome and Caesarea in Mauretania depict Roman soldiers carrying wooden sticks or clubs¹⁵. Even the paramilitary police formations, called *diogmitoi*, customarily carried wooden clubs¹⁶. Yet, when we look closer on the Josephus' relation another interesting clue appears: the *Sebasteni* were able to mingle with the crowd. Therefore it is possible that the soldiers perfectly understood the Aramaic language, regardless their supposed

¹¹ See S. Rocca, *The Army of Herod the Great*, Oxford 2009, p. 10, 14, 16.

¹² Jos. BJ. 2. 3.4. 52–53: "The most efficient division, however, of those troops still adhered to the Romans, namely three thousands Sebastenians, under Rufus and Gratus, the latter commanding the royal infantry, the former the cavalry" — Translation H. St. J. Thackeray, *The Jewish War*, Books I–III, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1959, p. 343.

¹³ Jos. Ant. Iud. 18. 3. 60–63. Translation after passage quoted in: T. Newark, *Age of Conquerors*, Hong Kong 2006, p. 8. The described event took place probably after autumn in AD 26 as Josephus a passage earlier (Ant. Iud. 18. 3. 55–63 parallel narration in BJ 2. 169–177) describes the Pilate's attempt of introducing the Roman military standards to Jerusalem. According to C.H. Kraeling, *The Episode of Roman Standards at Jerusalem*, HTR 35(1942), p. 262ff — the incident with the standards took place in autumn of AD 26 before the downfall of Sejanus, see also: Józef Flawiusz, *Dawne Dzieje Izraela, część 2*, Warszawa 1997, p. 785, note 66.

¹⁴ Cf. Suet. Cal. 26.

¹⁵ About the Roman soldiers serving as the policing force and the use of clubs during the pacification of riots, see M.P. Speidel, *The fustis as a Soldier's weapon*, *Antiquités Africaines* 29(1993), p. 137–149.

¹⁶ See G. Sumner, *Roman Military Clothing (1) 100 BC–AD 200*, Oxford 2002, p. 47.

Greek or Semitic origins. Perhaps that was their real value, which made them excellent policing troops.

And that was the way in which they were remembered. In several cases our sources explicitly mention the *Sebasteni* being used to pacify the indigenous population. These sources describe also the *Sebasteni* as a threat to the locals. For example, a passage in Josephus' "Antiquities of the Jews" focuses on deeds of procurator Cumanus, who governed the province in AD 48–52¹⁷. The Roman governor had to pacify the rebellious Galileans, who were angered by the acts of pure banditism, committed by the Samaritans. Being denied justice the Galileans took arms to take revenge: "When Cumanus heard of this action of theirs, he took the unit of cavalry from Sebaste, with four regiments of footmen, and armed the Samaritans, and marched out against the Jews, and caught them, and slew many of them, and took a great number of them alive"¹⁸. Of course, the unit described in Josephus' statement is the formidable *ala I Sebastenorum*, a Samaritan cavalry regiment, which served the Romans as "hammer of the Jews"¹⁹. It is also noteworthy that the unit played an active part in a bitter ethnic conflict, which caused so many problems in these times.

These ethnic tensions were a big trouble at *Caesarea Maritima*, then the administrative capital of the Roman province of Judea. According to Josephus, after the death of the King Herod Agrippa the 1st the Samaritan soldiers had taken the images of king's daughters to brothels and abused them in a sinister way²⁰. That incident almost caused the *Sebasteni* withdrawal to the other province, as the Emperor Claudius: "determined, in the first place, to send orders to Fadus, that he should chastise the inhabitants of Caesarea and Sebaste for those abuses they had offered to him that was deceased, and their madness towards his daughters that were still alive; and that he should remove that body of soldiers that were at Caesarea and Sebaste, with the five regiments, into Pontus, that they might do their military duty there; and that he should choose an equal number of soldiers out of the Roman legions that were in Syria, to supply their place. Yet were not those that had such orders actually removed; for by sending ambassadors to Claudius,

¹⁷ Cf. Józef Flawiusz, *Dawne Dzieje*..., p. 866, note 61.

¹⁸ Jos. Ant. Iud. 20.6.1. 122–3: "Κουμανός δὲ τῆς πράξεως εἰς αὐτὸν ἀφικομένης ἀναλαβὼν τὴν τῶν Σεβαστηνῶν ἴλην καὶ πεζῶν τέσσαρα τάγματα τοὺς τε Σαμαρεῖς καθοπλίσας ἐξῆλθεν ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, καὶ συμβαλὼν πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτῶν ἀπέκτεινεν πλείους δὲ ζῶντας ἔλαβεν". Slightly changed translation after W. Winston, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, New York and Melbourne 1878, p. 524. BJ 2. 12. 5. 236 contains similar relation: „Κουμανός δ' ἀναλαβὼν ἀπὸ τῆς Καισαρείας μίαν ἴλην ἰπέων καλουμένην Σεβαστηνῶν ἐξεβοήθει τοῖς πορθοῦμενοις καὶ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἐλεάζαρον πολλοὺς μὲν συνέλαβεν, πλείστους δ' ἀπέκτεινεν — Cumanus taking with him from Caesarea a troop of cavalry known as Sebastenians now set off to the assistance of the victims of this ravages; he made prisoners of many of Eleazar's companions and killed yet a larger number — text and translation after H.St.J. Thackeray, *The Jewish*..., p. 416f.

¹⁹ About the unit, see D.B. Saddington, *The Development*..., s. 50, 133, 163.

²⁰ Jos. Ant. Iud. 19. 9.1. 354–360. These events took place in AD 44.

they mollified him, and got leave to abide in Judea still; and these were the very men that became the source of very great calamities to the Jews in after-times, and sowed the seeds of that war which began under Florus; whence it was that when Vespasian had subdued the country, he removed them out of his province, as we shall relate hereafter²¹.

As the withdrawal was cancelled the ethnic tensions were still growing at Caesarea. And so, in the other passage Josephus describes the position and acts of the garrison of the city. That fragment is crucial for our understanding of the complicated situation in Caesarea, therefore it should be quoted in full: “And now it was that a great sedition arose between the Jews that inhabited Caesarea, and the Syrians who dwelt there also, concerning their equal right to the privileges belonging to citizens; for the Jews claimed the preeminence, because Herod their king was the builder of Caesarea, and because he was by birth a Jew. Now the Syrians did not deny what was alleged about Herod; but they said that Caesarea was formerly called Strato’s Tower, and that then there was not one Jewish inhabitant. When the presidents of that country heard of these disorders, they caught the authors of them on both sides, and tormented them with stripes, and by that means put a stop to the disturbance for a time. But the Jewish citizens depending on their wealth, and on that account despising the Syrians, reproached them again, and hoped to provoke them by such reproaches. However, the Syrians, though they were inferior in wealth, yet valuing themselves highly on this account, that the greatest part of the Roman soldiers that were there were either of Caesarea or Sebaste, they also for some time used reproachful language to the Jews also; and thus it was, till at length they came to throwing stones at one another, and several were wounded, and fell on both sides, though still the Jews were the conquerors. But when Felix saw that this quarrel was become a kind of war, he came upon them on the sudden, and desired the Jews to desist; and when they refused so to do, he armed his soldiers, and sent them out upon them, and slew many of them, and took more of them alive, and permitted his soldiers to plunder some of the houses of the citizens, which were full of riches. Now those Jews that were more moderate, and of principal dignity among them, were afraid of themselves, and desired of Felix that he would sound a retreat to his soldiers, and spare them for the future, and afford them room for repentance for what they had done; and Felix was prevailed upon to do so²².

Surprisingly, the Sebasteni units had left not much epigraphical evidence, especially from the first century AD. For example, the *cohors I Sebastenorum* is recorded as serving in the Syrian province only in the Flavian times²³. Despite

²¹ Jos. Ant. Iud. 19. 9.2. 365–6 — translation after trans. W. Winston, *The Works...*, p. 517.

²² Jos. Ant. Iud. 20.7 175–177 trans. W. Winston, *The Works...*, p. 528.

²³ A *cohors I Sebastena* is mentioned as serving in Syria by a *diploma* dated to AD 7-IX-88, see CIL XVI 35; see also J. Spaul, *Cohors...*, p. 453.

Josephus' relation we have no other trace of its very existence. According to Josephus, the *Sebasteni* troops were removed from Judea when Vespasian became emperor²⁴.

When we look on the literary testimonies it becomes clear that the *Sebasteni* units were remembered by the Jews as ruthless pacification units. As a result, the majority of people living in Judea feared the Samaritans or looked on them with contempt at best. Hence, the parable of the good Samaritan, quoted in Luke's gospel²⁵, could have been quite a shock to Jesus' listeners! Not surprisingly, when Flavius Josephus wanted to build tension in his narration, he simply introduced on the stage the *Sebasteni* units. That is particularly true when the scenes of ruthless behavior are concerned. Moreover, as the *Sebasteni* have captured the imagination of the readers, there really was no need of mentioning the other units. But the silence in Josephus' works is not a proof of their inexistence. The story told by the other categories of evidence offers us a quite different picture. And so, the existence of the Italian cohort is epigraphically attested in Syria and Noricum for the reign of the emperor Domitian.

2. THE EVIDENCE FOR THE ITALIAN COHORT'S EXISTENCE

Thanks to the evidence, carefully collected by Michael P. Speidel²⁶, we can say that the Italian cohort, formed from the Roman citizens, certainly served in the Syria-Palestine region, under the Flavian emperors. A gravestone found at *Carnuntum* in present day Austria²⁷ mentions certain *Proculus*, son of *Rabilius*. The Inscription reads as follows:

Proculus / Rabili f(i)lius Col(l)ina tribu / Philadel(phia) mil(itavit) / optio coh(ortis) II / Italic(ae) c(ivium) R(omanorum) (centuria) Fa[us]/tini ex vexil(latione) sa/git(tariorum) exer(citus) Syriaci / stip(endiorum) VII vixit an(nos) / XXVI / Apuleius frate(r) / f(aciendum) c(uravit).

According to Speidel, *Proculus* was, as suggested by his *tribus*, a Roman citizen. Yet, he was born in *Philadelphia* (now Amman in present day Jordan) and probably received his Roman citizenship just after the enlistment. That was the standard practice of the Roman army, which customarily tended to enroll local recruits into the auxiliary units "no matter where the unit had been raised originally"²⁸. Certainly *Proculus* was born in Arabia in a family, which, judging

²⁴ See Jos. Ant. Iud. 19. 9.2. 365-6 quoted above and D.B. Saddington, *The Development....*, p. 163.

²⁵ Lk 20,29-37.

²⁶ Actually H. Dessau had suggested under ILS 9168 that probably the Italian cohort from the Acts 10 was the one mentioned in the inscription, his suspicions were given further support by M.P. Speidel, *The Roman Army....*, p. 226-227 = 235-236.

²⁷ See CIL III 13483a = ILS 9168 = CSIR I Österreich I 4, no. 553.

²⁸ See Speidel, *The Roman Army....*, p. 225-226 = 234-235.

from the name of his father, had not yet received the Roman citizenship²⁹. We even do not know when and where *Proculus* joined the second Italian cohort. Yet, there are some suggestions. Karl Strobel argues that *Proculus* died during the Danubian campaign of emperor Domitian, in the hard fighting against the Germanic tribes³⁰.

Such explanation is quite acceptable. We should bear in mind that another Arabian recruit, similarly named and also born in *Philadelphia*, probably died in the same campaign. A gravestone, found at Mainz in 1954, mentions certain Proclus, a guardsman of the emperor Domitian:

*Flavius Proclus / eq(ues) sing(ularis) Aug(usti) domo / [Phi?]/lodelphia sic!
an(norum) XX / [Stip(endiorum) ---/ h(ic) s(itus) e(st) h(eres) f(aciendum)]
c(uravit)*³¹

The practice of local enrollment of recruits may indicate that the cohort in question could have been active in the Syro-Palestine region some years earlier. It seems that somewhere during Domitian's reign some auxiliary units stationed in Syria received an influx of Arabian recruits. It is not a coincidence that the inscription from *Carnuntum* literally mentions a unit of archers (*vexillatio sagittariorum*). Also on the Mainz gravestone *Flavius Proclus* is depicted as a horse archer³². It is quite probable that the Romans had recruited a group of Arabian archers from *Philadelphia*³³ and for curious reasons they had given them citizenship and even similar names as well. Nevertheless the process should be somehow connected with preparations and troop movement that preceded Domitian's campaign against the Germans. Some of these Arabian recruits found their way into the ranks of the Italian cohort. If that was the case the unit in question should have been active in Syria just before that time³⁴.

3. THE ETHNIC CLUE

Despite the existence of such evidence doubts were risen about the Italian cohort's presence at Caesarea around AD 40. It has been claimed that the unit mentioned by ILS 9168 was not an Italian cohort of the Acts and that such unit

²⁹ See *ibidem*.

³⁰ See K. Strobel, *Die Donaukriege Domitians*, Bonn 1989, p. 20–21; see also M. P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar. The Roman Emperors' Horse Guards*, London 1994, p. 36.

³¹ W. von Pfeifer, *Neue römische Steine aus Mainz*, *Mainzer Zeitschrift* 54(1959), p. 41ff; M. Schleiermacher, *Römische Reitergrabsteine. Die kaiserzeitlichen Reliefs des triumphierenden Reiters*, Bonn 1984, p. 103–104; M. Junkelmann, *Die Reiter Roms*, Teil III: *Zubehör; Reitweise, Bewaffnung*, Mainz 1992, p. 164–165.

³² See M. Schleiermacher, *Römische....*, p. 103.

³³ See M.P. Speidel, *Riding....*, p. 36.

³⁴ *A cohors II Flavia civium Romanorum* is mentioned as serving in Syria by a *diploma* dated to AD 7-IX-88, see CIL XVI 35; see also J. Spaul, *Cohors....*, p. 29.

“did not exist or was a later Syrian unit displaced to a different place and earlier time”³⁵. It seems that the main problem was caused by the existence of evidence for the local recruitment. As the analyzed evidence points only to the Arabian archers as the members of the unit in question, then where was the place for Italians?

We should remember that local recruitment was a standard practice of the time³⁶ and even the legions were recruited in that way. Yet, it is quite possible that in the case of the Italian cohort the practice could have been different³⁷. At that point we have to recall a passage which describes the complicated situation in Caesarea before the outbreak of revolt in AD 66: “on the following day, which was a Sabbath, when the Jews assembled at the Synagogue, they found that one of the Caesarean mischief makers had placed beside the entrance a pot, turned bottom upwards upon which he was sacrificing birds. This spectacle of what they considered an outrage upon their laws and a desecration of the spot enraged the Jews beyond endurance. The steady-going and peaceable members of the congregation were in favour of immediate recourse to the authorities; but the factious folk and the passionate youth were burning for a fight. The Caesarean party, on their side, stood prepared for action, for they had, by a concerted plan, sent the man on to the mock sacrifice; and so they soon came to blows. Jucundus, the cavalry commander commissioned to intervene, came up, removed the pot and endeavoured to quell the riot, but was unable to cope with the violence of the Caesareans”³⁸.

It is quite possible that in such specific conditions, where ethnic tensions between Greek and Jewish communities were a serious problem, the Roman governors needed a unit, which was perfectly impartial. The Italian cohort offered a perfect solution for that problem, as the Italian recruits were not involved in the conflict. If that was the case, the Italian cohort acted as an ancient equivalent of modern peace keeping forces. In that case the Italian cohort could have

³⁵ See *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 B.C.–A.D. 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects: Proceedings of the Sixth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, 200 B.C.–A.D. 476), Capri, Italy, March 29–April 2, 2005*, eds. L. de Blois, E. Lo Cascio, Leiden 2007, p. 412 (*non vidi* quoted after J. Burke, *Studies In...*, see esp. note 48).

³⁶ In places like Egypt local recruits were eligible for the service in legions and were given citizenship on enlistment, see ILS 2483; see also R. Cowan, *Roman Legionary 58 BC–AD 69*, Oxford 2003, p. 11.

³⁷ As was in the case of oriental archers, which were customarily recruited in the Levant and served on the all frontiers of the empire despite their eastern ethnic origins, see J. C. N. Coulston, *Roman Archery Equipment*, in: *The Production and Distribution of Roman Military Equipment. Proceedings of the Second Roman Military Equipment Seminar*, ed. M.C. Bishop, BAR International Series 275, Oxford 1985, p. 295–298.

³⁸ BJ 2. 14. 5. 289–292 — translation after H.St.J. Thackeray, *The Jewish.....*, p. 436–437.

switched to the local recruitment pattern later, perhaps during the Jewish uprising in AD 66.

That assumption would also offer an useful explanation of the silence present in the other sources. We have to bear in mind that centurion Cornelius from the Acts was described as a honest and pious man³⁹. We even can speculate that the whole Italian cohort, being the only one impartial unit at the place, had also enjoyed a good reputation inside the Jewish community. If that was the case, it was natural, for writers like Josephus, to omit their involvement in ruthless pacifications. Josephus, being a votary adherent of the Romans, in first his enemies and then his protectors, simply preferred to besmirch the hated Sebastenians.

We should also remember that the information given by the Acts of Apostles proved to be surprisingly correct when the other Roman units of the province are described. And so, the last parts of the Acts deal with arrestment and trial of St. Paul. The unit, which was responsible for transferring of St. Paul from Caesarea to Rome was called *cohors Augusta*: “They handled Paul and some other prisoners over to a centurion named Julius of the Augustan cohort (literally: ἑκατοντάρχη ὀνόματι Ἰουλίῳ σπειρῆς Σεβαστῆς⁴⁰). An inscription found in Hauran mountains near the present Syrian and Jordanian border is the clear evidence for the unit’s building activities⁴¹. Therefore it is certain that the author of the Acts was quite familiar with the military situation in Judea.

The general conclusion is that the information about the presence of Italian cohort at Caesarea cannot be dismissed with ease. The Italian cohort was active in the area in the Flavian times and could have been transferred to the province of Judea somewhat earlier. The reason for the transfer was simple: the Roman authorities needed a unit, whose recruits were not involved in ethnic quarrels, which were a real problem in the place. Therefore the statement in Acts offers us a rare glimpse on the unusual activities of the Roman army. By the eyes of our imagination we can see the Italian cohort involved in peace keeping duties. If that was the case, the activities performed by the Roman army looked more “modern” than we even had suspected.

³⁹ See Acts 10.

⁴⁰ Acts 27.1. Translation after M.P. Speidel, *The Roman Army...*, p. 228 = 237.

⁴¹ See AE 1925, 121 and M. Dunand, *Le Musée de Sueda. Inscriptions et monuments figurés*, Paris 1934, no. 168. The inscriptions reads as follows: Σι..... ιος..../Λούκιος Ὀβούλνιος / ἑκατοντάρχης σπειρῆς / Αὐγούστης παρεκολούθησα τῷ ἔργῳ (ἔτους) ηκ' τοῦ ζι' / (ἔτους) ηκ' Βασιλέως μεγάλου Μάρκου Ἰουλίου Ἀγρίππα κυρίου Φιλοκαίσαρος Εὐ/σεβοῦς καὶ Φιλορωμαίου τ[οῦ] — Lucius Obulnius, centurion of the *cohors Augusta* took care of this work. Year 28. Year 28 of the great king Marcus Julius Agrippa, the Lord, friend of the emperor, pious, friend of the Romans (quoted after M.P. Speidel, *The Roman Army...*, p. 229 = 238). The inscription can be dated to AD 84 or AD 89. Yet, the unit could have been active in the province earlier, see *ibidem*, p. 228–9 = 237–8.

THE ITALIAN COHORT FROM CAESAREA DESCRIBED
IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Summary

The author examines the credibility of the Acts of the Apostles' testimony about the centurion Cornelius and the Italian Cohort from *Caesarea Maritima*. The analysis of written sources and epigraphic data indicates that the presence of an Italian cohort at Caesarea was not a coincidence. This troop performed a function quite unusual for the Roman army, being a sort of "peace-keeping force" preventing the escalation of the conflict between the Greeks and the Jews.

Keywords: Italian Cohort, Acts of the Apostles, Greeks and Jews, Caesarea, Cornelius the Centurion

ITALSKA KOHORTA Z CEZAREI OPISANA
W DZIEJACH APOSTOLSKICH

Abstrakt

Opierając się na przekazie Dziejów Apostolskich o centurionie Korneliuszu i italskiej kohorcie, stacjonującej w Cezarei Nadmorskiej, autor bada wiarygodność tego świadectwa. Z analizy źródeł pisanych i danych epigraficznych wynika, że obecność italskiej kohorty w Cezarei nie była dziełem przypadku. Oddział ten pełnił tam dość nietypową, jak na armię rzymską, funkcję — był rodzajem „sił rozjemczych” i miał uniemożliwić eskalację konfliktu pomiędzy Grekami i Żydami.

Nota o Autorze: dr Radosław Gawroński — adiunkt w Instytucie Archeologii UKSW. Zajmuje się historią armii rzymskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: italska kohorta, Dzieje Apostolskie, Grecy i Żydzi, Cezarea, centurion Korneliusz