

HERODIAN KINGS AND THEIR SOLDIERS IN THE ACTS OF THE
APOSTLES: A RESPONSE TO CRAIG KEENER

Christopher B. Zeichmann

Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

In a recent *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* article, Craig Keener addresses the neglected topic of the first-century CE military in early Christian literature.¹ Keener's article focuses on the depiction of the centurion Cornelius, and he endeavors to rehabilitate the character's historicity in Acts 10.1–11.18. This biblical passage has not fared well under the scrutiny of historical-critical analyses, which often cite the unlikelihood of a Roman soldier being stationed in Caesarea during Agrippa I's reign in 41-44 CE. Keener responds to this objection by highlighting a few possible explanations. First, although Keener deems it doubtful, the episode may not be placed in chronological sequence. That is, even though the incident is located amidst Agrippa I's reign, it may have occurred either before or after his rule, when Judaea was officially a Roman province. Secondly, Josephus attests an ample number of Roman soldiers in Caesarea during Agrippa I's reign. Keener suggests that the soldiers may have formed connections with the locals in Caesarea. Finally, it is possible that Cornelius was a veteran that had retired to Caesarea. Keener does note, however, that the reference to a soldier performing duties at Cornelius's beckoning may tell against this final possibility (Acts 10.7), unless this soldier is also a veteran.

While Keener's suggestions are entirely consistent with the data, they cannot be verified given their conjectural nature. But two crucial historical problems concerning the first-century CE military in the

1. Craig S. Keener, 'Acts 10: Were Troops Stationed in Caesarea during Agrippa's Rule?' *JGRChJ* 7 (2010), pp. 164-76; cf. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012-14), II, pp. 1732-50. I would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful feedback in improving this article for publication.

Cornelius episode remain unresolved. First, Keener may misconstrue some of the objections to the historicity of the Cornelius episode. For instance, he is right to note that Josephus unambiguously locates a formidable military force in Judaea during Agrippa's reign. Keener's contention that non-Jews served in Caesarea during Agrippa I's reign is not a controversial conclusion. Rather, commentators have objected that Agrippa's kingdom of Judaea maintained its own army apart from Rome. Roman soldiers had no reason to be in a client kingdom that had its own military apparatus, apart from exceptional states where there was internal unrest. Cornelius's regiment, the Italian cohort (σπείρης τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς; Acts 10.1), rendered as *cohors Italica* in Latin, was an auxiliary infantry unit.²

To summarize, three types of military forces were found in the Roman East during the Principate (c. 27 BCE–284 CE): Roman legions, which were only present in major imperial provinces, such as Syria; Roman auxiliaries, which were garrisoned in major as well as minor imperial provinces (i.e. with an equestrian governor), such as Judaea while it held provincial status; and armies of client kings, which were autonomous forces maintained by petty monarchs allied with Rome, such as those in the Herodian kingdoms.³ The problem is that an

2. Auxiliary units throughout the empire often used shortened names in unofficial settings, and so this unit is commonly identified with the regiment formally named *cohors II Italica civium romanorum*. This unit was attested in Syria in 62 CE but was transferred to Noricum before 69 CE and was returned again to Syria before 88 CE (*ILS* 9168; *CIL* 16.35; *AE* 2006.1838-1839). There is no evidence for this cohort's presence in Judaea at all, let alone during the reign of Agrippa I in particular, with the exception of Acts. See the various assessments of Denis B. Saddington, 'Roman Military and Administrative Personnel in the New Testament', *ANRW* 2.26.3, pp. 2409-35 (2415-16); Jonathan P. Roth, 'Jews and the Roman Army: Perceptions and Realities', in Lukas de Blois and Elio Lo Cascio (eds.), *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious, and Cultural Aspects* (Impact of Empire, 6; Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 409-20 (412); Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.—A.D. 135)* (trans. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Matthew Black; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, rev. edn, 1973–1987), I, p. 365; Michael P. Speidel, 'The Roman Army in Judaea under the Procurators: The Italian and the Augustan Cohort in the Acts of the Apostles', *Ancient Society* 13-14 (1982–1983), pp. 233-40 (233-37).

3. Broadly speaking, the primary difference between auxiliary soldiers and legionaries is that auxiliary soldiers were non-Roman citizens who were awarded

auxiliary cohort had no reason to be in Agrippa's kingdom of Judaea. Josephus describes Agrippa's reign of Judaea as singularly peaceful among the Herodian client kings; Philo, Acts, the rabbis and other sources give no indication that Roman soldiers ever entered Agrippa's Judaea.⁴ The territory of Judaea vacillated between provincial and kingdom status, but the soldiers in the kingdom were at the sole command of Agrippa I.

Secondly, Judaea recruited all its soldiers from within the province, most of them from the sister cities of Sebaste and Caesarea.⁵ This was the case from Herod the Great until the outbreak of the First Jewish War. While this policy was in place, Archelaus's ethnarchy of Judaea was annexed as a minor imperial province in 6 CE, but reverted to the status of a kingdom in 41 CE until Agrippa I's death in 44 CE, where it was re-annexed again as a Roman imperial province. Despite these administrative vicissitudes, Judaea continued to recruit almost exclusively from its Gentile cities of Sebaste and Caesarea. We see a similar continuity with the Roman imperial annexation of other provinces; the Gallic Julii of Gaul, for instance, were transferred from the existing army and reshaped into Roman units.⁶ Josephus (*Ant.* 17.286; 18.120-122; 18.279; 19.365; *War passim*) is careful in noting the movement of troops into and out of Palestine during the first century CE, but he mentions no additional military units in Judaea after the census revolt of 6 CE until the beginning of the First Jewish War. In sum, the demographics of the military in Judaea had total continuity

citizenship after 25 years of service. Legionaries, by contrast, were Roman citizens prior to recruitment.

4. Josephus (*Ant.* 18.279) reports that the Syrian legate Petronius brought two legions and their corresponding auxiliaries to Tiberias in 39 CE during the infamous Gaius-statue incident. This incident does not cast aspersions on the above claim, because Philo's meticulous reporting in *Legatio* knows nothing of this particular embassy (and so is historically dubious); the troops were never described as traveling south to Judaea, and Agrippa was not yet king of Judaea—only Galilee and Batanaea at the time.

5. See Schürer, *History*, I, pp. 363-65; Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (SNTSMS, 134; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 43-70.

6. John Drinkwater, 'The Rise and Fall of the Gallic Iulii: Aspects of the Development of the Aristocracy of the Three Gauls under the Early Roman Empire', *Latomus* 37 (1978), pp. 817-50 (824-31). Cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.47 on Pontus's annexation.

from 6–66 CE. The same Sebastene and Caesarean soldiers served before, during and after Agrippa’s reign, albeit employed by a different state. It is therefore difficult to explain the presence of a non-Sebastene—and specifically, Italian—cohort in Caesarea.

Keener’s characteristic prudence leads him to speak cautiously about Cornelius, framing his conclusions as possible explanations for the narrative’s peculiarities consistent with historicity. But other experts have noted that the author of Luke–Acts is prone to misrepresent the military situation and management in Palestine. Seth Schwartz, for instance, describes the author of Luke–Acts as ‘notoriously confused about the administration of Judaea’.⁷ The assessment of Roman military historian Jonathan Roth is more direct: ‘The historicity of Acts is a complex issue, but from a military historical perspective, the author of the work seems uninformed about the security situation in Jesus’ Palestine’.⁸ Following the lead of Schwartz and Roth, I will argue that the narrative goals of Acts diminish the historian’s ability to glean data concerning the military situation of Palestine. Rather than belaboring the Cornelius episode to argue this point, I will focus on another centurion episode in Acts, that is, Julius from the Augustan cohort.

The Army of Agrippa II and the Augustan Cohort

Near the conclusion of Acts, a centurion appears in connection with the Judaeian governor Festus and the Batanaean king Agrippa II. The kind centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius escorts Paul from Caesarea to Rome and protects him along the journey (27.1-3, 43). As with Cornelius’s Italian cohort, Julius was undoubtedly from an auxiliary infantry regiment. *σπίρης Σεβαστῆς* was a common abbreviation, and several scholars have attempted to identify this unit.

A few commentators follow Emil Schürer’s suggestion that the Augustan cohort in Acts was one of five infantry units recruited from Sebaste and Caesarea, otherwise known to go by the formal name of

7. Seth Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaeian Politics* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, 18; Leiden: Brill, 1990), p. 97 n. 137.

8. Roth, ‘Jews and the Roman Army’, p. 413. Cf. Christopher B. Zeichmann, ‘οἱ στρατηγοὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ and the Location of Luke–Acts’ Composition’, *Early Christianity* 3 (2012), pp. 172-87.

cohors Sebastenorum.⁹ Schürer suggested that Julius's particular unit was termed 'the Augustan cohort' in Acts 27.1 because it received an honorific that distinguished it from the other four Sebastene cohorts, having the formal name, *cohors Augusta Sebastenorum*. These units were sometimes referred to by an abbreviation, as commentators suggest Acts may do. There are difficulties with this interpretation of the data, and its popularity has diminished accordingly. Foremost among the objections is that the five *cohortes Sebastenorum* remained in Judaea until after the First Jewish War and so never participated in any combat that would warrant imperial honors. It is therefore improbable that any Sebastene cohorts were abbreviated *cohors Augusta*. The continued citation of Schürer's suggestion probably reflects the stature of his opus more than the cogency of this particular argument.

Military historian Michael Speidel alternatively identified Julius's regiment with a *cohors Augusta* attested under Agrippa II in Batanaea.¹⁰ Speidel noted a few epigraphs discovered within or near the borders of Agrippa's Batanaea that attest a centurion named Lucius Obulnius from an Augustan cohort.

σι[...]ιος [...] | Λούκιος Ὀβούλνιος | ἑκατοντάρχης σπ(ε)ίρης | Αὐγούστης
παρηκολού- | θησα τῶ ἔργῳ | (ἔτους) ηκ' τοῦ ς'. || Ἔτους ηκ' βασιλέως με-
| γάλου Μάρκου Ἰουλίου Ἀγρίπ- | πα κυρίου Φιλοκαίσαρος Εὐ- | σεβοῦς
καὶ Φιλορομαίου τ[οῦ] | [ἐκ βασιλέως μεγάλου] | [...] ¹¹

9. Schürer, *History*, I, pp. 364-65. There was also a cavalry unit named *ala Sebastenorum*.

10. Speidel, 'Roman Army', pp. 237-40. In doing so, Speidel draws upon the seminal work of T.R.S. Broughton, 'Additional Note XXXIII: The Roman Army', in Kirsopp Lake and Henry Cadbury (eds.), *The Acts of the Apostles: Additional Notes and Commentary* (The Beginnings of Christianity, 5; London: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 427-45 (443-44). Two further interpretations of σπείρης Σεβαστῆς in Acts 27.1 have entirely fallen out of favor, both supposing that Luke poorly translated a Latin word or phrase. First, the phrase is a garbled reference to the *frumentarii* (see Theodor Mommsen and Adolf Harnack, 'Zu Apostelgeschichte 28,16 (στρατοπεδάρχης = *princeps peregrinorum*)', *Sitzungsberichte der berliner Akademie* [1895], pp. 495-503 [502-503]). Secondly, it is an imprecise rendering of *cohors Sebastenorum* (see Denis B. Saddington, *The Development of the Roman Auxiliary Forces from Caesar to Vespasian (49 B.C.–A.D. 79)* [Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press, 1982], p. 51), a position he later revised in favor of Speidel's conclusion.

11. *SEG* 7.970; Qanawat, Syria (Canatha, Decapolis).

[Δι] κυρί[ω] | Λούκιος Ὀβούλ- | νιο[ς] | ἑκατοντ[άρχης] | σπ(ε)ίρης
 Αὐ[γούστης].¹²

A third inscription was discovered after Speidel's article saw print.

Λούκιος Ὀβούλνιος ἑκατοντάρχης σπείρης Αὐγούστης ἀνήθηκ(εν).¹³

Lucius is unusual because he served in both an auxiliary cohort *and* a client king's army, that of Agrippa II. Why an auxiliary unit was present in Agrippa's kingdom is not self-evident, but Speidel elaborated a nuanced understanding of how the two intersected: even though Lucius's *cohors Augusta* is the same as the Augustan cohort of Acts 27.1, the regiment itself was probably not stationed in Caesarea where the episode occurs. Speidel observed that Acts 25–28 never indicates that the Augustan cohort was garrisoned in or near Caesarea, but only that a single centurion is present in the city. He suggested that *cohors Augusta* must have been garrisoned in Agrippa's Batanaea instead of in the province of Judaea.

How did Lucius, Julius and the Augustan cohort enter the supervision of Agrippa II, one of Rome's client kings? Roman forces were neither needed nor authorized to be stationed in the kingdom of Batanaea in 59 CE when Paul's trial occurred. Batanaea maintained a sizable military of its own, functioning independently of Rome's legions and auxiliaries. Speidel anticipates this objection; he observes that Rome occasionally placed detachments of its forces under the authority of allied kings. The reason is that Roman soldiers could supplement native forces when combat was warranted. Significantly, Acts uses the third-person plural when describing the transfer of Paul into the care of Julius (παρεδίδουν; 27.1). This plural reference is to be explained by Julius's being under orders from both Festus and Agrippa II. Speidel concludes that Julius was an officer in this same *cohors Augusta*, who partook in a single assignment in Judaea (i.e. escorting Paul to Rome), even though his unit's garrison was outside that province. The historicity of the pericope is thereby preserved in whole.

Speidel's argument is routinely cited in commentaries on Acts to the point where it is uncontested, aside from occasional preference to Schürer's arguments. I would like to suggest three reasons to doubt

12. *SEG* 7.1100; Seeia, Syria (Batanaea).

13. *AE* 2003.1816; Qanawat, Syria (Canatha, Decapolis).

Speidel's interpretation of the data: the first from a historical-critical, the second from an epigraphic and the third from a literary perspective.

First, the narrative of Acts 25–28 warrants historical suspicion, as it requires the commentator to treat Acts as historical on issues that are increasingly contentious. For instance, the episode only makes sense on the assumption that Paul is a Roman citizen of considerable prestige, even though this status is difficult to reconcile with the contents of the apostle's letters.¹⁴ Likewise, Paul's unusual—even aristocratic—experience of incarceration via house arrest is fundamental to the narrative of Acts, an experience that could hardly differ from the description of imprisonment in his letter to the Philippians.¹⁵ These and other biographical aspects are essential to the narrative (e.g. Paul as orator, Paul's proficiency in Roman law) to the extent that the entirety of Acts 25–28 falls apart if any single aspect is seriously doubted. But even if the sequence of events is unhistorical, it is still possible that the narrative attests to a reliable memory of a single regiment's (or centurion's) presence in Palestine. That is, even if the particulars of the passage are fanciful, Acts could bear accurate testimony to an Augustan cohort in Caesarea. However, there are reasons to doubt this as well.

The second argument is based on epigraphic evidence. Our data suggest that Batanaean Jewish natives served in Agrippa II's army and in the same *cohors Augusta* as Lucius. Two epigraphs, both from Batanaea, attest to a certain Diomedes:

Ἐπὶ βασιλέω[ς μεγάλου Μάρκου Ιού-] | λίου Ἀγρίππα [ἔτους...Διομήδης]
| Χάρητος, ἔπα[ρχος...] | σπείρης Αὐ[γούστης καὶ στρατηγ-] | ὅς νομάδων
[...]| [...]ης καὶ Χαλ[κίδος...] | [...]¹⁶

Δ(ι)ομήδης Χάρητος | ἔπαρχος βασιλέως | μεγάλου Ἀγρίππα ἀπ- | ὁ
θεμελίων ἀνήγειρεν.¹⁷

14. E.g., the humiliation Paul endured through his beatings is difficult to reconcile with the ban on such premature punishments against Roman citizens. See Jennifer A. Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings: 2 Corinthians 11:23–25', *JBL* 123 (2004), pp. 99-135; Wolfgang Stegemann, 'War der Apostel Paulus ein römischer Bürger?' *ZNW* 78 (1987), pp. 200-29.

15. Craig S. Wansink, *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments* (JSNTSup, 130; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). Cf. Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting, 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

16. *OGIS* 421; Deir e-Scheir, Syria (Batanaea).

The works of Flavius Josephus may have also mentioned Diomedes's father Chares. Josephus's Chares was slain in the events leading up to the siege of Gamala as part of the Judaean War in 67 CE.¹⁸ Chares was part of the cavalry of Zamaris, which was composed of Babylonian Jews whom Herod the Great had colonized in Bathyra of Batanaea. These mounted troops came to comprise fully half of Agrippa II's army, having also aided Philip and Agrippa I during their reigns over Batanaea.¹⁹ According to Josephus, Chares was part of an influential pro-Roman family known personally to Josephus, had a military background, lived within the kingdom of Batanaea, was loyal to Agrippa II even under distress and had a rare name among Jews in the first century CE;²⁰ these points cumulatively suggest that we should follow Shimon Applebaum's identification of Diomedes's father with the man reported by Josephus.

Diomedes was a Batanaean native and a commander in its only identifiable regiment; this creates a large problem for Speidel's thesis. Speidel's proposal works on the assumption that soldiers in both Agrippa's army and *cohors Augusta* were only temporarily under Agrippa's authority and would return to Roman command shortly thereafter. Speidel's argument that *cohors Augusta* was briefly incorporated into the forces of Agrippa II is tenable, if only foreign soldiers are attested in both Agrippa II's forces and *cohors Augusta*, but it cannot account for a Batanaean native in both armies. Indeed, it cannot explain why Diomedes only once claims to serve the client king, as it was far less prestigious than *cohors Augusta*.

17. *OGIS* 422; el-Hit, Syria (Eithae, Batanaea).

18. Josephus, *Life* 35, 37. See the discussion in Shimon Applebaum, *Judaea in Hellenistic and Roman Times: Historical and Archaeological Essays* (SJLA, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1989), p. 57.

19. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.23-31; cf. *Targ. Ps.-J.* Num. 34.15. More on the cavalry of Zamaris can be found in Applebaum, *Judaea*, pp. 47-65; Getzel M. Cohen, 'The Hellenistic Military Colony: A Herodian Example', *TAPA* 103 (1972), pp. 83-95; Jacob Neusner, *A History of Jews in Babylonia: I. The Parthian Period* (BJS, 62; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 2nd edn, 1984), pp. 41-43; Israel Shatzman, *The Armies of the Hasmonaeans and Herod: From Hellenistic to Roman Frameworks* (TSAJ, 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), pp. 175-80.

20. Josephus (*War* 4.18; 4.68) mentions another Chares who also lived in Gamala, albeit as an anti-Roman agitator; only one other Chares is attested epigraphically in Palestine (*CIIP* 1.290).

I would like to suggest that the *cohors Augusta* of Lucius and Diomedes is likely known more fully as *cohors I Augusta Canathenorum et Trachonitarum equitata*. Naturally, the inscriptions of Diomedes and Lucius were found in or near Canatha (modern Qanawat), and the regiment is further attested nearby.²¹ Notably, this regiment had a cavalry component, probably including others from the Bathyran colony. While Canatha was a city of the Decapolis, and was thus legally independent of Batanaea, there was a *de facto* integration into the social structures of Batanaea. The cohort appears to have remained near Canatha inside the borders of Batanaea until it transferred to adjacent Arabia shortly after its annexation in 106 CE. Military diplomas—certificates of Roman citizenship awarded to auxiliary veterans after serving 25 years—were all lost for this unit, although its presence in Arabia in the early second century means it probably transferred to Judaea to suppress the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The lack of post-Bar Kokhba evidence might result from losses due to the war to the extent that the regiment was either permanently destroyed (as may have happened to *legio XXII Deiotariana*) or combined with another cohort devastated during the Revolt.

Agrippa II's forces acted as auxiliaries during the First Jewish War and during Nero's aborted Parthian campaign in 55 CE.²² They presumably supplemented existing auxiliary units and took on their auxiliary names during these conflicts. When Batanaea was annexed after Agrippa's death in 97 CE, the soldiers' auxiliary status became permanent. If the adoption of Agrippa's forces into the Roman army was occasional in nature, it may explain the inconsistencies of the epigraphic record: Lucius is sometimes identified only as a centurion of *cohors Augusta* and once under Agrippa; Diomedes is once identified only as an eparch under Agrippa, and, in the other instance, under *cohors Augusta*; and other Batanaean officers are identified exclusively

21. *CIL* 3.14379; Imtan, Syria (Motha, Arabia); cf. *CIL* 3.3668. A different regiment named *cohors I Flavia canathenorum milliaria sagittaria* is first attested in Raetia as early as 116 CE (*AE* 1995.1185-1186). Cf. *AE* 2000.1210, which is difficult to date.

22. On the aborted Parthian campaign, see Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.7. On the Judean War, see Josephus, *War* 2.500 and 3.68, both explicitly mentioning the involvement of Agrippa II's cavalry.

with Agrippa II.²³ The reason may thus be chronological; soldiers referred to themselves as part of *cohors Augusta* alone after the annexation of Batanaea, but as part of Agrippa's forces alone if they had not yet aided Rome in a combat situation.

The third argument against the historicity of the Acts narrative is the oversaturation of heavy symbolism in the passage. The culmination of Luke–Acts's two-volume Christian epic is made possible by a *military officer* of the *Augustan* cohort named *Julius* in *Caesarea* escorting Paul to introduce the gospel to *Rome*. The eventual spread of the Christian gospel throughout the empire is one of the major themes of Acts, and these highly meaningful proper names bring this theme to the fore. Of course, the use of symbolism does not preclude historicity. However, one may nonetheless regard the passage as suspect due to the aforementioned objections about their historicity, the concentration of symbolic proper names, the importance of such symbolism for Acts's narrative and the function of such symbolism within Luke's political-ideological aims.

This may explain why, if the passage and its characters were unhistorical, they were given the names provided. Christine Shea argues that names in Acts are significant for characterization and symbolic import, as was conventional in ancient literature.²⁴ Consequently, the Acts Seminar has suggested that the healing of Aeneas in Acts 9.32-35 employs similarly allegorical devices vis-à-vis the Christian gospel and the Roman Empire; Aeneas had been bedridden for eight years (on the eve of Rome's eighth-hundredth anniversary, it might be added!) until Peter healed him. Given that a far more famous Aeneas was the legendary founder of Rome, the implication is obvious: the Christian gospel will heal an ailing empire.²⁵

23. *OGIS* 425 on Herod son of Aunos; Henri Seyrig, 'Antiquités syriennes', *Syria* 42 (1965), pp. 25-34 (31-34) on Archieus; and *CIIP* 2.2123 on Titus Mucius Clemens.

24. Christine R. Shea, 'Names in Acts: A Cameo Essay', in Dennis E. Smith and Joseph B. Tyson (eds.), *Acts and Christian Beginnings: The Acts Seminar Report* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2013), pp. 22-24.

25. Smith and Tyson (eds.), *Acts and Christian Beginnings*, p. 120; cf. Patrick Henry Reardon, 'Homing to Rome: The *Aeneid* and the Acts of the Apostles', *One in Christ* 38.1 (2003), pp. 45-55. On Luke–Acts as *apologia pro imperio*, see J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 97-101; Leif E. Vaage, 'Why Christianity Succeeded (in) the Roman Empire', in his *Religious Rivalries in the*

Several auxiliary cohorts in the Levant had the honorific ‘Augusta’ as part of their name during the first century CE (e.g. *Xoitana*, *Canathenorum et Trachonitarum equitata*, *Lusitanorum*, *Pannoniorum*, *I Thracum equitata*, *III Thracum*, etc.), but their officers had no reason to be in Judaea in 59 CE. Aside from Acts, no evidence suggests external troops were garrisoned in the province or kingdom of Judaea in 6–66 CE; likewise, the Sebastene-Caesarean soldiers did not leave Judaea until Vespasian transferred them out at conclusion of the First Jewish War. Given these factors, it seems most probable that the author of Luke had no particular Augustan cohort in mind when he composed the passage. The author instead opted to use a common regimental honorific that had symbolic significance for his narrative.

Conclusion

Dennis MacDonald offers an appealing explanation for the significance of names in Acts 10: ‘The name Cornelius was common among Romans, and the centurion’s association with the Italian cohort presents him as a quintessential gentile, not a provincial *conscriptus* who rose through the ranks.’²⁶ While MacDonald may have overstated the matter, this may actually mean that personal and cohort names served two complementary purposes. First, the passage suggests Gentile credentials, and Cornelius’s credentials are beyond doubt. If the author had opted for one of Agrippa I’s Caesarean-Sebastene soldiers, the character’s ethnicity would have been uncertain; Jews were among Agrippa’s ranks, even though Gentiles predominated.²⁷ Even though military

Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity (ESCJ, 18; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), pp. 253-78 (257-59); Paul W. Walaskay, *‘And So We Came to Rome’: The Political Perspective of St Luke* (SNTSMS, 49; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). While the precise date of Rome’s foundation was disputed during the Republic, a consensus emerged during the Empire in 21 April 753 BCE. Recall also that Julius Caesar and *gens Iulia* more broadly claimed descent from Aeneas’s son Iulus, better known as the firstborn in the Roman line.

26. Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 45.

27. Two Caesarean Jews in the Roman army are attested in military diplomas, including one with the *nomen* Cornelius (*CIL* 16.15; cf. 16.107)! Note also that the phrasing in Josephus, *Ant.* 20.176 implies that at least some Jews served in *cohortes*

recruits sometimes took the full *tria nomina* upon joining the *auxilia*, this practice was not universal.²⁸ Even so, the name Cornelius was an easy way to imply that this officer was not Jewish and was from outside the province of Judaea. Secondly, this passage fits with Luke–Acts’s spread of Christianity among Romanized elites (e.g. Luke 7.1-10; Acts 13.6-12; 17.12; 26.28) in expectation of Paul’s introduction of the Christian gospel to Rome. Taken in tandem with Julius and the centurion at Capernaum, it appears that Acts tends to load its military officers with heavy symbolism.

There are serious historical problems with Acts’s depiction of the first-century CE army, and so the book should be used with caution when referring to the social and military histories of the Holy Land.²⁹ If the proposed interpretation of the epigraphic record is sustainable, then Acts is the sole evidence for Julius’s Augustan cohort in Caesarea in 59 CE, since the epigraphic *cohors Augusta* is unrelated to it. If this is the case, then it is probable that Acts’s recollection of the unit being in Palestine is unhistorical. Considering this in tandem with the problems of the captains of the temple and the Italian cohort,³⁰ it may be prudent to assent to the objections to Acts’s historicity voiced by Schwartz and Roth above that the author of Acts is not particularly

Sebastenorum. On Jews in the Roman army, see Shimon Applebaum, ‘Jews and Service in the Roman Army’, in Mordechai Gichon (ed.), *Roman Frontier Studies 1967* (Tel-Aviv: Students’ Organization of Tel-Aviv, 1971), pp. 181-84; Raúl González Salinero, ‘El servicio militar de los judíos en el ejército romano’, *Aquila Legionis* 4 (2003), pp. 45-91; Samuel Rocca, ‘Josephus, Suetonius, and Tacitus on the Military Service of the Jews of Rome: Discrimination or Norm?’ *Italia* 20 (2010), pp. 7-30; Roth, ‘Jews and the Roman Army’, pp. 409-20; Andrew J. Schoenfeld, ‘Sons of Israel in Caesar’s Service: Jewish Soldiers in the Roman Military’, *Shofar* 24.3 (2006), pp. 115-26.

28. *P.Oxy.* 1022 is the *locus classicus* of the matter; cf. *BGU* 423; *RMR* 1; *IGRR* 1.1337. Benjamin Isaac, ‘Decapolis in Syria: A Neglected Inscription’, *ZPE* 44 (1981), pp. 67-74 (72-73), notes a few instances where denizens of the Decapolis dropped their Semitic names in favor of Roman ones.

29. See, for instance, the assumption of Acts’s historicity in Jerzy Ciecieląg, ‘Countermarked Coins of Roman Prefects of Judaea’, *Notae Numismaticae* 5 (2004), pp. 35-47 (translated by Tadeusz Stanek). Ciecieląg relies solely upon Acts in discussing the countermarks of possibly military purpose; it is unclear what significance these coins may hold if no soldiers of an Italian cohort were present in Judaea, a possibility suggested here.

30. On the captains of the temple, see Zeichmann, ‘οἱ στρατηγοὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ’, pp. 172-87.

well-informed about the workings of the Judaean state during the first century CE. To be sure, while this does not bolster one's confidence in Acts as an historical record, the arguments presented here do not preclude Acts's historicity in other respects.

Keener offers a few scenarios for the Cornelius episode that could explain his presence in Agrippa's Judaea, although they do not preclude sufficient doubt. Keener is undoubtedly correct in supposing that Gentiles predominated among centurions in Caesarea at the time. But this does little to resolve the issue of the particular regiment *cohors Italica* to which Acts assigns Cornelius, since Judaea's soldiers were all assigned to *cohortes Sebastenorum*. Keener's suggestion that Cornelius was a retired veteran from Caesarea is reasonable in the historical abstract, but its textual basis in Acts is scant. It is therefore prudent to regard the character's historicity as unlikely. Regardless of these criticisms, one still hopes that Keener's article will prompt additional discussion on the neglected topic of the military in the New Testament.