

CEDO ALTERAM, OR THE PROBLEM WITH SOME AUGUSTAN CENTURIONS IN TIMES OF PEACE*

by

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ABSTRACT: The aim of my article is to explain the source of the problems with the Augustan centurions, which Tacitus described in the first book of the *Annales*. Through the analysis of the promotion system inherited from the Republican period, I have made an attempt to determine which characteristics might have helped a soldier to become a centurion. Tacitus mentioned a centurion named Lucilius, who was given the nickname '*Cedo alteram*' because of his habit of breaking a rod on the back of a legionary and then simply ordering another one. Lucilius and other unpopular centurions became the object of the soldiers' wrath after the outbreak of the mutiny in 14 CE. The question arises as to whether the violent reaction of the soldiers was only the result of the behaviour of some centurions, or whether the system of granting promotions during the reign of Augustus was deeply flawed, enabling people with mental problems to have a military career. To find the answer, I have also used some elements of military psychology which, however, should not be overestimated due to the historical and cultural distance between the events of 14 CE and modern conflicts. In my opinion, the mutinies of the legions stationed in Pannonia and the Lower Germany are good illustrations of some of the serious problems affecting the Augustan army.

In the well-known passage from the *Annales*, Cornelius Tacitus describes Lucilius, a centurion killed by the Roman soldiers who mutinied in Pannonia in 14 CE:

...et centurio Lucilius interficitur, cui militaribus facetiis vocabulum '*Cedo alteram*' indiderant, quia fracta vite in tergo militis alteram clara voce ac rursus aliam poscebat¹.

Many scholars have already discussed in detail the events that sparked off this rebellion and contributed to the period of violent upheaval in the Roman army after the death of emperor Augustus². In contrast, I would like to consider another

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¹ Tac. *Ann.* I 23, 3.

² On the mutinies of 14 CE, see in particular GABBA 1975: 76–91; WILLIAMS 1997; MALLOCH 2004; PAGÁN 2005; WOODMAN 2006; SALVO 2010. On Tacitus' presentation of the rebelling