The Centurion’s Faith in the Gospels and Soldiers in Early Christian Imagination

In this article my aim is to demonstrate that the faith of the centurion in Capernaum fits well with the general positive picture of centurions in the ancient world. Centurions did not share the ill repute of the rank-and-file men. I start with an overview of soldiers in the Roman world in the New Testament times. After that I focus on the stories of the centurion in Capernaum and, then, continue with remarks on John’s story of the royal official. Why is there no centurion in John’s gospel, although his version belongs to the same tradition as Matthew’s and Luke’s story? I claim that John differed from Matthew and Luke as he did not share the positive view of soldiers, not even of the centurions.

I. Soldiers In The World Of The Early Christians

1. Police work

Because the social context is so important we do not begin with the Christian sources and their scattered sayings of soldiers. Instead, we should first study the presence of the military in the Eastern Mediterranean area in the first two centuries. Where did people encounter soldiers? How were the army and the rest of society interconnected?

First of all, we have to notice that the army had a broader task than it has today. According to Benjamin Isaac, a full-scale military campaign was an exception: “[M]any soldiers would have spent only a small part of their quarter of a century’s service taking part
in campaigns; there must have been quite a few who rarely, if ever, saw active service, as several writers noted about the troops in Syria and the East.”

This does not mean that soldiers spent their time peacefully. The troops had a role in maintaining Roman control, overpowering local unrest, co-operating in judicial processes, exacting punishments and safeguarding tax collection or extracting taxes. In a word, the army fulfilled the tasks that in contemporary societies belong to the police or to other officials. Police work or any other paramilitary or nonmilitary tasks of the army, however, do not change the fact that soldiers were first and foremost: soldiers. They were regularly exercising for warfare, but their daily drill is not described in earliest Christian sources. There are references to a military campaign in the Jewish War (eg. Luke 19:43–44), but the New Testament primarily describes soldiers performing police work: they arrest, flog and execute Jesus, they guard the tomb, they stand in Antonia ready to imprison Paul and bring him to Rome.

Another thing that we should keep in mind is the organization of military tasks in the Empire. In the modern Western societies the army is usually strictly under the command of the government. This was not the case in the Roman Empire. The vassal rulers had their own armies. For example, Josephus informs us that the Herodian client rulers had their own military forces. It was an exceptional case if Roman troops were present in the areas of the vassal rulers. Moreover, the Roman army did not only consist of the regular troops but also of auxiliary units comprising locally recruited manpower. Yet, there were also auxiliary troops recruited from among the Italian citizens just as Acts 10:1 reports.

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3 Davies, *Service*, pp. 41–43.
5 Chancy, *Greco-Roman*, p. 49. One can question if this troop was really stationed in Caesarea at that time. “It may be that circumstances prevailing at a later period were assumed to have existed at an earlier one.”
2. Tensions Between the Army and the Local People

In the occupied areas police work was not so much aimed at protecting people than it was at attending the interests of the Empire. Soldiers were widespread in the outposts of small towns and the countryside. One of the main purposes of these outposts was the maintenance of the Roman order. The usual Roman practice was to station larger detachments in the countryside, except in the East. There were large garrisons in Antioch, Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. Benjamin Isaac assumes that the reason for the exceptional practice was the need for a closer control of the local centers.

All this suggests some kind of tension between the army and the local people. This tension is clearly felt in Paul’s words on earthly authorities in Romans 13. He is uncompromisingly loyal to the authorities, but his reasoning is noteworthy. Besides his theological reasoning, which the scholars have duly noted, he provides a more ‘secular’ reasoning: you must (ἀνάγκη) obey because of wrath (Rom. 13:5). Paul speaks of the fear before authority, which bears the sword and executes wrath (literally: “avenger to wrath”) (Rom. 13:3–4). The fear Paul describes is the emotional echo among the population who realizes that the troops are stationed to overpower any resistance and unrest.

One source of tension was the practice of requisition, which had its own technical terms in Greek, angareia (ἀγαρεία, ἀγαρεύω). In principle, angareia was allowed only for state officials. Soldiers could practice it only with an official permit, but this rule was often “forgot”. Soldiers confiscated clothes, foodstuff for men and animals, firewood – practically

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6 CAMPBELL, War and Society, p. 88.
7 DAVIES, Service, pp. 56–57.
anything. *Angareia* made it also possible to commission local people or their animals. The latter might be returned, or not. Thus, *angareia* could easily turn into pure robbery.\textsuperscript{10}

The reason for the robbery was not always pure greed. The soldier’s pay was not generous, little more than the wages of a labourer. In addition, we have evidence of corrupt officers who kept the pay of their men.\textsuperscript{11} Percennius, a rebellious soldier under Emperor Tiberius, incited his fellows by describing the miseries of military service. The content, as Tacitus tells it, was for example:

In fact, the whole trade of war was comfortless and profitless: ten asses a day was the assessment of body and soul: with that they had to buy clothes, weapons and tents, bribe the bullying centurion and purchase a respite from the duty. (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.17; trans. John Jackson, LCL)\textsuperscript{12}

Later Tacitus describes how the respite from duty laid an economic burden on the shoulders of the rank and file. No one cared how the soldiers got their money. Tacitus continues: “[I]n reality, it was through highway robbery, petty thieving, and by menial occupations that the soldiers purchased rest from military service” (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.46; trans. Clifford H. Moore, LCL).


This scenario fits well with some passages in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus speaks of an evildoer\(^\text{13}\) who compels another to walk a mile. The text uses here the technical verb ἀγγαρέω (Matt. 5:41). A similar negative trait can also be felt in the Lukan story of John the Baptist preaching. Luke tells the reaction of the listeners, among whom we encounter tax-collectors and soldiers:

Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’ Soldiers (στρατευόμενοι) also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.’ (μηδένα διασέσατε μηδὲ συκοφαντήσετε καὶ ἀρκεῖσθε τοῖς ὑψωνίοις ύμῶν) (Luke 3:12–14; trans. NRSV)

It may be that the tax collectors and soldiers are not mentioned together in random fashion, as soldiers could safeguard taxation.\(^\text{14}\) Ramsay MacMullen vividly describes a gross abuse from the side of soldiers and tax collectors:

At Mendechora, stationarii and kolletiones, threatening reports to their superiors or imprisonment, practiced a diaseismon, a “shakedown,” upon the whole village; nearby, nine men were imprisoned and only one released, for a thousand drachmas; a third neighboring village was loaded “with insupportable burdens, exhausted by unlimited

\(^{13}\) If the Greek τῷ πονηρῷ is actually masculine (as the NRSV understands it) or neuter (when it should be understood as evil in an abstract and general sense), does not matter here. In both cases Matthew is describing negative encounters.

expenses of these sojourners and for the hordes of kolletiones is deprived also of its baths due to its depleted condition, and deprived too of the necessities of life”.

Stationarii were soldiers scattered around in minor posts, stationes. MacMullen describes the soldiers’ ill repute: “It is natural that they should have made themselves unpopular, taking the oxen from the fields, and so forth.” The other group mentioned, kolletiones, were some kind of tax collectors. Interestingly, MacMullen describes soldiers and tax collectors in co-operation just as Luke seems to presume. This co-operation is even philologically visible in the words συκοφαντέω and διασείω, which John the Baptist uses to refer to soldier’s questionable activities. Zacchaeus the tax collector uses συκοφαντέω to admit that he has “defrauded” people (19:8). Moreover, the other verb, διασείω, is a semi-official term for extortion. Its cognate, διασεισμός, appears in MacMullen’s description denoting the joint activities of soldiers and tax collectors.

Luke parallels συκοφαντέω with διασείω which is somewhat pleonastic but not unique in the ancient literature. The verbs as such do not necessarily refer to extorting money or goods but the end of the sentence makes this meaning inevitable. The verb διασείω refers to violent means in extorting, while συκοφαντέω refers to false accusations.

As we saw earlier, extortion and other unlawful activities of the soldiers were real threats in

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15 MacMullen, Soldier and Civilian, p. 87.
16 Ibid., pp. 55–56.
17 Ibid., p. 87 n. 38.
18 Ibid.
20 The NRSV speaks only of extorting money. This is possibly due to translating ὀψώνιον to wages. Yet, ὀψώνιον probably means the provisions in a more general sense. For the meaning of ὀψώνιον, see C.C. Caragounis’ (ὁψώνιον: a Reconsideration of Its Meaning, in NovT 16, 1974, 35–57.) for a careful examination. He proposes the following translation for the Lucan sentence “Do not by applying violence rob anyone, nor slander anyone with a view to possible gain, and be content with your own provisions/shoppings” (Caragounis, ὀψώνιον, p. 51).
the Roman East. So, both Luke and Matthew refer to common problematic encounters between soldiers and the local people.

3. Positive Relationships Between Soldiers and Civilians

The tension between soldiers and the local people is only one side of the truth, however. At the same time we have to acknowledge that the army recruited soldiers around the vast Empire and they were not necessarily brought away from their earlier home area. In these cases it was natural that the tensions with the local people were lighter.

Marriages with local women lessened the tension with the local peoples. Until Septimus Severus (reigning 193–211), soldiers in the Roman army were forbidden by law to contract a marriage, but in practice unofficial unions (concubinage) were common and tolerated. The families settled close to the garrisons. In the auxiliary troops and in the armies of vassal rulers the situation could be even more open towards marriage.

We should also remember that the supplies were not only provided through requisition, but also through the open market. Though we should not exaggerate the economical side-effects of the army, its presence surely stimulated local trade. If the soldiers had wealth, they could take part in business, contract debts or lend money. A document from the Judean desert dated 124 CE shows how a centurion in the camp of En Gedi had lent money to a Jewish owner of a local palm grove.

The case of En Gedi shows the economic resources of centurions. This does not mean that centurions came from wealthy families. While the rank and file came from low social

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21 CAMPBELL, War and Society, pp. 25–32.
23 MACMULLEN, Soldier and Civilian, pp. 90–95; CAMPBELL, War and Society, pp. 92–96.
24 CAMPBELL, War and Society, p. 100.
backgrounds, the centurionate was socially heterogeneous. Centurions were, in the main, the most experienced soldiers in the army, and they were often destined to be promoted to more senior posts and then on to civil administration. The army could be a way of acquiring social promotion. In the early 1st century CE centurions earned about fifteen times the salary of a legionary.25

Richard Alston has vividly described the confidence local people could feel towards centurions. They were, for example, often asked for help in matters that were officially not their tasks.26 Centurions could act on behalf of locals in legal cases and present petitions to the emperor on behalf of the local people. Besides the official cult, they could worship diverse deities, including the local ones.27 In this context, Luke’s picture of a centurion who had funded a synagogue in Capernaum is credible (Luke 7:4) – which, of course, does not prove its historicity.

In sum, soldiers in the world of the early Christians were mostly known as doing something which would be regarded today as police work. Because the army attended more to the interests of the Empire than to the local people, the latter could feel the army as a threat. At the same time, there are also traces of more positive interaction. Specifically, the image of centurions seems to be much better than that of the rank-and-file men. It is worth noting that the same picture is mirrored in the gospels: rank-and-file men are mostly negative figures while centurions bear always positive connotations.

II. SOLDIERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS

1. Centurion – a historical person?

Matthew and Luke tell the story of the believing centurion in Capernaum (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). Who is this centurion? We have to differentiate between the centurion as a possible historical person in Capernaum in Jesus’ time and the centurion as a literary figure in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke.

When speaking of a historical person we have to be aware that the Roman army was not present in Galilee in Jesus’ time. This is due to the fact that Rome did not station its army in the client kingdoms. This also applies to the tetrarchy of Antipas. We have evidence of neither Roman troops nor coloniae of veterans in its area during the time of Jesus.\(^\text{28}\)

Mark A. Chancey has analysed the story of the centurion in Capernaum from historical perspective. He notes that the Greek word behind the English “centurion” is not a Latin loan word κεντυρίων (cf. Mark 15:39, 44–45) but ἐκατοντάρχης or ἐκατώνταρχος. Though all these words can be used as equivalents, there are also differences in the usage. The words ἐκατοντάρχης and ἐκατώνταρχος can also be used for non-Roman commanders in Josephus and the Septuagint (e.g. Ex. 18:21; Num. 31:14).\(^\text{29}\) Chancey concludes: “In short, the gospels themselves do not present the centurion at Capernaum as the commander of Roman forces, and it is far more likely that he was a Herodian officer.”\(^\text{30}\)

Thus, the centurion was not Roman, if he was a historical person at all. Both Matthew and Luke only assume that the centurion is gentile. Antipas’s father, Herod the Great, recruited troops from the gentile areas of his kingdom and the bodyguards consisted of Gauls, Thracians and Germans. It is probable that Antipas also had foreign forces.\(^\text{31}\)

What, then, might have been the tasks of a centurion in such a fishing village like Capernaum? The presence of a centurion does not necessarily indicate any large scale


\(^{29}\)CHANCEY, Greco-Roman, p. 52.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 55.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., pp. 51–52.
military troops. The number of soldiers in the command of a centurion could be more or – which is probable in this case – less than one hundred. As we have seen, centurions had tasks in the local administration. The centurion in Capernaum, therefore, was possibly coordinating or safeguarding the toll collection at the nearby border between Antipas’s and Philip’s territories.32

2. The Centurion of Matthew and Luke

So much for the possible historical person. But what about the literary person presented in the gospels? Matthew and Luke were conscious of the fact that Galilee was under Antipas’s vassal rule during Jesus’ lifetime. Yet, it is not clear if it made any difference in their political imagination whether the centurion belonged to the Herodian or the Roman army. In Matthew and Luke, the centurion seems to be just one gentile person whom Jesus encounters.

In the case of Matthew, the centurion appears after the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon soldiers are referred to only once, when speaking of angareía. While that encounter, probably with a military person, is negative, the centurion of Capernaum is clearly a positive figure (Matt. 8:5–13). Jesus appreciates his faith which is above all faith in Israel. The centurion is clearly prefiguring gentiles who “will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” (Matt. 8:11–12).

From Matthew’s point of view the centurion’s profession does not seem to be any problem. However, scholars with pacifistic leanings advise not to make too straightforward conclusion: it is an argument from silence to claim that the military profession is accepted

32 Ibid., pp. 54–55.
It is true that there is no explicit approval of the centurion’s profession, but in this case the argument from silence has a certain weight. If this figure’s profession was dubious, how could he be portrayed as an exemplary of the faith?

The positive trait becomes clearly visible in Luke’s parallel story of the centurion in Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10). This is possibly no surprise after observing the general tendency in ancient texts to picture centurions in a positive light. As we have seen above centurions were often well off, economically, and the common people could feel some kind of trust towards them. While in the Matthean parallel the centurion of Capernaum is already exemplary, Luke’s centurion is even more exemplary.

In Luke’s version the centurion never meets Jesus but communicates with him via Jewish elders and friends. In Luke’s narrative Jewish elders praise the centurion as a wealthy benefactor in the local community. He is clearly not a Jew (7:9), but he “loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us,” (trans. NRSV) as Luke allows the elders to say. The words may imply that the centurion is a God-fearer – whatever this means in practice.

As we noted, soldiers could honor local deities next to the state and the military deities. Loving Israel and building a synagogue can also refer to good relations with the local people.

From the historical point of view one can question the picture painted by Luke. Did the centurions really have resources to build a synagogue? Is it credible that a centurion in pre-war Galilee – where the soldiers were not Romans before 44 CE, but Herod Antipas’s men and possibly harboring anti-Jewish attitudes (cf. Josephus, Ant. 19.356–359) – had such a good relationship with the local Jews?

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34 There are examples of gentiles founding a synagogue. See, NOLLAND, Luke 1–9:20, p. 317.
36 WEGNER, Der Hauptmann, pp. 257–259.
These questions, however, are secondary as we try to understand Luke’s message instead of speculating on the historicity of his account. Luke wrote outside of Galilee after the Jewish war. For him, the centurion is primarily an example of a faithful response to Jesus for the audience in the Eastern Mediterranean area. Luke may somewhat exaggerate the economic resources of a man like this, but otherwise his prestigious status in the local community is fully credible in the light of what we know about Roman centurions.

In the narrative, the centurion’s office and his economic resources has secured him a powerful status in Capernaum. This is also indicated by the fact that he can send a Jewish delegation. The centurion clearly has the authority not only in his military unit but also among the local Jews whose patron the centurion seems to be. In this context, the word “friends” (φίλοι) probably does not indicate actual equality between the friends and the centurion, but indicates instead a loyal relationship between the patron and the clients.

What makes the centurion exemplary is his humble attitude towards Jesus. His socially high status emphasizes the humility. The Jewish delegation describes him as being worthy (ἀξιός) of Jesus’ help. The centurion himself, however, claims to be unworthy: “I am not worthy (οὐ γὰρ ἴκανός εἰμι) to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume (οὐδὲ ἐμαυτὸν ἥξιοσα) to come to you.” (Luke 7:6–7; NRSV.) The centurion is humble in an exemplary way, just like the tax collector in the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector in the temple (Luke 18:9–14). There is, however, one remarkable difference. The centurion’s profession is in no way presented as leading to sin. While tax collecting seems to be a stumbling block

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3. John: Basilikos is not a soldier

In the Johannine parallel to the story of the centurion’s faith, there is no centurion, but instead there is a person who is called βασιλικός in Greek. The Greek word (which is usually translated as a royal official) can mean a wide range of professions in royal service, including military ones.40 Can the Johannine βασιλικός be a soldier? We can assess the possibility after reading what John says about soldiers in his gospel.

In John, the soldiers unambiguously appear in the passion story. Their march onto the stage is massive: an entire cohort (σπείρα), led by a tribunus cohortis (ὁ χιλιάρχος), together with servants (ὑπηρέτως) of Pharisees and high priests, come to arrest Jesus (John 18:3, 12). Thus, Jews and Romans co-operate in the arrest.41

The Jewish-Roman co-operation may seem surprising. In the story of Jesus’ arrest John refers to the plan of the Jews to seek Jesus’ death: since the Jews were afraid of Romans, they planned Jesus’ death to avoid the national destruction (John 11:47–50; 18:14). Thus, the co-operation does not reflect any particularly good or confidential relationship between Jewish leaders and Romans. Pilate is to be won onto the side of Jews only later (John 18:28–19:18), but still a whole cohort assists in Jesus’ arrest! How can a whole cohort be united with the Jews in this situation?

40 WEGNER, Der Hauptmann, pp. 57–60; cf. the article by Ismo Dunderberg in this volume. I also express my gratitude to Dunderberg, who read this article beforehand and generously commented it.


The answer is Judas: he – and no one else – “took” (λαβών) the cohort and the servants as though he were the real leader. This might seem an over-interpretation of a single verb if we forget that Judas plays the part of Satan (John 13:27). Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and he can – through Judas – recruit these massive forces against Jesus. And yet, at the end of the day, God pulls all the strings: everything happens as he has planned.

Soldiers appear in John’s gospel again in the scene when the Jews try to induce Pilate to pass a death sentence on Jesus. Pilate is reluctant and flogged Jesus – this surely means that he ordered soldiers to do the flogging (John 19:1). This flogging is an odd turn, as Pilate saw no case against Jesus (John 18:38; 19:4). Does he hope that the Jews are satisfied with flogging only? Be that as it may, soldiers properly humiliate Jesus: they do not only flog but also mock him.

As Pilate finally assents to execute Jesus, John’s story continues with the crucifixion. After that soldiers appear twice to assure the reader that it is God who pulls the strings. John makes it clear to the reader that the soldiers only fulfilled scriptural prophecies (John 19:23–24; 32–37). Everything happens according to a divine plan, and soldiers play their role as it was written.

This, however, is no positive statement concerning soldiers. Everyone, even the Jews striving for Jesus’ death are a part of this plan (John 11:51–52), but this does not mean that these characters would be good ones in the gospel. The reader cannot miss the fact that the

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43 This kind of criticism of my interpretation is quite common. For most interpreters the verb indicates that Judas showed the way (see, e.g., D.A. CARSON, The Gospel According to John, Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1991, p. 577; BEASLEY-MURRAY, John, p. 322). The meaning of the verb, however, requires more (cf. BROWN, The Gospel, p. 807).
45 Thus, e.g. BROWN (The Gospel, p. 886) and BEASLEY-MURRAY (John, p. 334).
46 BEASLEY-MURRAY (John, p. 336) see the mockery as “motivated by a spontaneous desire for some crude and cruel horseplay”.
Jews are dark characters with dark motives. This is clear throughout the gospel. A high point is Jesus saying to the Jews: “You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires” (John 8:44).

Does the negative judgment pronounced on the Jews also fit the soldiers? Yes and no. On the one hand, in John’s dualism the soldiers fall to the wrong side, opposing Jesus. The story of Jesus’ arrest clearly presumes this in claiming that a whole cohort was present. On the other hand, soldiers are some sort of extra figures. One can also see that the evangelist’s attitude towards Pilate is more lenient than towards the Jews. John lets Jesus say to Pilate: “the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin” (John 19:11). If one can draw any conclusion in respect of the soldiers from this utterance, it would imply that John’s attitude towards them is more lenient than that towards the Jews.

Despite these mitigating circumstances we must conclude that in John’s dualistic story the soldiers are against Jesus. Moreover, fighting does not belong to Jesus’ followers: “If my kingdom were from this world (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), my servants would be fighting (ἥγωνίζομαι) to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). Is it possible to soften this statement by claiming that fighting is out of place in this situation? This is not a probable reading. After reading the gospel of John to this point, one cannot miss that the “world” (κόσμος) is becoming increasingly negative concept in the Gospel of John.

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49 On the Jews in John, see HAKOLA, Identity.


51 “To fight” is the only possible meaning of the verb in this context. The basic meaning of ἥγωνιζομαι is “to contend”, especially in games. Yet, the meaning “to fight” is well known even early documents (e.g. Herodotus). See LIDDELL – SCOTT – JONES, A Greek-English, ἥγωνιζομαι.

In the opening hymn the world is made by God through the *logos* (John 1:10). A little later it is said that the world is the object of God’s love and that Jesus came to bear the sins of the world and save it (John 1:29; 3:17). Despite this basically positive stance towards the world one cannot miss the fact that there is something seriously wrong in the world. This negative trait becomes clearer as the story proceeds towards Jesus’ death. It is significant that Jesus proclaims his victory over the world (John 16:33) as though the world was his enemy (though he earlier was to save it!). A similarly hostile attitude is expressed when Jesus says that he does not pray for the world (John 17:9). Now it is no longer the world which will be rescued, but the believers who are rescued from the world (cf. also John 1:11-12).

In this context it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that fighting and the soldiers’ job are both something entirely negative, as they belong to this world. Moreover, Jesus speaks of his non-fighting followers as his servants (ὑπηρέται) (John 18:36). The use of the word “servant” possibly plays Jesus’ followers over against those servants who came to violently arrest Jesus (John 18:3, 12). If this interpretation is on the right track, we could recognize something close to pacifism in John’s gospel.

This Johannine background may also shed light on the story of the royal official (John 4:46–54). The story is possibly dependent on synoptic parallels. If this is the case, one can ask why the more original centurion is changed to the role of an official in John. One can answer that in John the official does not refer to his power to command minions. As this military metaphor is dropped in John, it is no longer meaningful to call him a centurion. This, however, is not enough to explain the change. Though the military metaphor is removed, his profession could still fit with the story. Thus, does the removal of the military metaphor hang together with the removal of the man’s profession? After reading the

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Johannine passion story I am inclined to answer positively. Soldiers do not play any positive role in the gospel.

On the other hand, it is far from clear that John received the story in the form we know of it in Matthew or in Luke. If he inherited the story in the form in which there was no centurion, it fit quite well with John’s conviction which became clear in the passion story.

We can also note that John’s passion story does not present a believing centurion at the cross (cf. Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). This comparison between the gospels gives again the impression that John did not count any soldiers among believers. While Synoptics shared the common ancient division between the respectable centurions and the dodgy rank-and-file men, John seemed to lump both groups together into the anti-God category of “this world”.
ABBREVIATIONS

AB  Anchor Bible
ABRL  Anchor Bible Reference Library
HTKNT  Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
NCB  New Century Bible Commentary
NICNT  New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovTSup  Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
PFES  Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
SBL SP  Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SNTS MS  Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TDNT  Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
WBC  Word Biblical Commentary

SOURCES AND LITERATURE

Sources


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