CHAPTER 13

Nasty, Brutish, and Short? The Demography of the Roman Imperial Navy

Steven L. Tuck

This article presents the data and results from a program of research on the lives and deaths of the sailors and marines in the Roman imperial navy. The goal of this work is to illuminate the demographic patterns, essentially the simple facts of life, for the sub-equestrian classes that comprise the enlistments in the navy and to determine what the effects of naval enlistment were for their lives. The major topics addressed are recruitment patterns, age of enlistment, survival and life expectancy, and age at death. Although this research focuses on the Roman imperial navy, data on the army are included to allow analysis across branches of service with comparative and contrastive examples. Aggregation and analysis of the documentary sources on the fleet, primarily epitaphs from the tombs of common sailors and marines that make up the key evidence, allows a determination of a number of key aspects of the lives of the enlisted personnel in the navy. First, it is important to recognize what these sources can and cannot reveal.

Source Material: Epitaphs

Some examples of the 440 epitaphs of sailors and marines that survive will be illustrative of the limitations the evidence provided by the tombstones of serving or veteran members of the navy.1 The four examples below include three naval inscriptions and, for comparison, one of a member of the Praetorian cavalry.

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1 A number of compilations of these epitaphs have been published over the years. By far the most complete is Spaul 2002, whose book-length study I have used throughout my research to check my own spreadsheet. Despite its length, it is not complete; notably two of the three naval examples cited here were not included in the work.
C(aii) Iul(i) Pudentis / manip(ularis) Lib(urna) Libertate, / qui Dines Sautis, / nat(ione) Bessus. Vixit /\(5\) ann(is) xxxx; mil(itavit) an(nis) / \(XXIII\). Fecit C(aius) Antesti/us Rufus heres / bene merenti.

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Of Gaius Iulius Pudens, *manipularis* of the Liburnian ship Liberty, who was Dines Sautis, by nationality Bessus. He lived forty years, served twenty-three years. Gaius Antestius Rufus, heir, made this for (him) well deserving.

\(\text{D(is) M(anibus). / M(arcus) Fl(avius) Capito / armor(um) cust(os) / Lib(urna) Virtute, n(atione) Pam/phylus. Vix(it) an(nis) \(L\); / mil(itavit) an(nis) \(XXIII\). Deccia / Fortunata co(n)iugi b(ene) m(erenti).}\)

\(\text{CIL 10.3400}\)

To the Spirits of the Dead. Marcus Flavius Capito, keeper of arms on the Liburnian ship Courage, by nationality Pamphylian, lived fifty years, served twenty-four years. Deccia Fortunata for her well deserving spouse.

\(\text{D(is) M(anibus) / C(ai) Longini Maxi/mi Lib(urna) Clementia, /nation(e) Pamphyliis. /\(5\) Vix(it) annis xxxxv; / milita(vit) an(nis) xxv. / L(ucius) Valerius Valens / librari(u)s dupliciar(ius) / heres ben(e) mer(enti) fec(it).}\)

\(\text{EphEp 8, 113 no. 430}\)

To the Spirits of the Dead of Gaius Longinus Maximus from the Liburnian ship Clementia, Pamphylian by nationality. He lived forty-five years, served twenty-five years. Lucius Valerius Valens double-pay clerk, heir, made this for him well deserving.

\(\text{D(is) M(anibus). Aur(elio) Bito eq(uiti) co(ho)r(tis) vi pr(aetoriae), /natione T(h)rax, civ[i]s [Ph]ilopo/pulitanus, an(norum) p(lus) m(inus) xxxv, qui / mil(itavit) an(nnos) xvii sic: in legione I Italica, an(nos) II; in co(ho) r(ete) II pr(a)et(oria), / munifex an(nos) \(XIII\) factus; / eq(ues) mil(itavit) menses n(umero) \(X\), fratri / dignissimo Val(erius) Aulu/sanus pr(a)et(orianus) incomparabili.}\)

\(\text{CIL 6.2601}\)