

THE LEGIONNAIRE

VOICE OVER

The year is 69 A.D. The encampment, Cohors Vasconum Civium Romanorum, in Novesion (nowadays Neuss, Lower Rhine).

The legionnaire enters.

LEGIONNAIRE

Éccum! Cáius Iúlius Beltesónis, legionárius míles secúndae cohórtis prímae centúriae...! (Legionnaire Caio Betesonis, fifth century of the second cohort...!)

CENTURION

Sat est. Éstne hoc túum, míles? (Enough. Is this yours?)

Shows him some writing.

LEGIONNAIRE

Méum est, dómne. (Yes, Centurion.)

CENTURION

(Reading with difficulty) **“Ni, Beltesonis, Umezaharren senbe.” Scín tu lítteras per nótas scribere póenas cápíte expéndere?** (“Ni, Betesonis, Umezaharraren senbe.” Don’t you know that writing coded messages is punishable with death?)

LEGIONNAIRE

Scío. Sed háe non sunt lítterae per nótas scriptae. (Yes, Centurion. But that isn’t a coded message.)

CENTURION

Scío, míles, et crédo tíbi; et tu scís me dilígere, sed míhi ratiónem reddéndum est superióribus. (I believe you, soldier; you know I think highly of you, but I have to explain this to my superiors.)

LEGIONNAIRE

Significant “Ego, Beltesónis, Umézaris filius...” (It means “I, Beltsonis, Umezar’s son...”)

CENTURION

Et quid? (And?)

LEGIONNAIRE

Príma vocábula sunt tántum. Germanórum bélla scriptúrus sum. Lingae Vasconum Primitiae! (Those are just the opening words. I want to write about the Germanic Wars. First in basque language.)

The centurion is astounded.

LEGIONNAIRE

Cáium Iulium Cáesarem veheménter cólo. Béllum éius Gállicum archetypum mihi est. (I am a great admirer of Julius Caesar. His *Gallic Wars* is my model.)

CENTURION

At, miser fili mi, Cáius Iúlius Cáesar latíne scripsit! (But, dear child, Julius Caesar wrote in Latin.)

LEGIONNAIRE

Scio equidem. (Of course.)

CENTURION

Febriculósum te esse mihi vídeor, fructus forte ex púgnae contentióne... (I understand, this must be a passing fever brought on by the stress of battle...)

LEGIONNAIRE

Non, Centúrio; iam duo mensis sunt cum in re laboro. (No, Centurion, I have been working on it for two months.)

CENTURION

Adhúc quáttuor vocábula tántum scripsísti. (You only wrote four words.)

LEGIONNAIRE

Longa et ardua res est. Meae linguae vocabula barbara etiam sunt. Capienda mihi sunt singula et mansuefacienda. Quasi papiliónes venéris. (It takes time. Words in my language are untamed still. I have to capture them one by one and domesticate them. It's like catching butterflies.)

CENTURION

(Smiling) **Papiliónes venári! Spero testimónium túm probatúrum tribunálem. Et si vis consilium admíttere, língua cum futúro scríbe. Scríbe latine!** (Catching butterflies! I hope the tribunal will believe your testimony. And follow my advice, soldier: write in a language with a future. Write in Latin.)

LEGIONNAIRE

Et cur tu, domne, credis língvam tuam perduratúram magis quam meam? (And why do you believe that your language has more of a future than mine, Centurion?)

The centurion stares at him in disbelief and finally bursts out laughing. Then he leaves, praising the legionnaire's "joke" and leaving him with his manuscript.

VOICE OVER

Beltsonis was cleared of the charge of espionage, and most probably died in the next battle. But in any case his *History of the Germanic Wars* never saw the light, thus allowing the honour of being the first Basque writer to befall on Bernat D'Etxepare... unless one day an archaeologist digs up his manuscript from under the earth in some corner of the Lower Rhine.