

Centurions, Caesar, and Swords to the Face: The Curious Case of Crastinus

1. Caesar *De Bello Civile* 3.91.1-4

*Erat C. Crastinus evocatus in exercitu Caesaris, qui superiore anno apud eum primum pilum in legione decima duxerat, vir singulari virtute. Hic signo dato, "sequimini me," inquit, "manipulares mei qui fuistis, et vestro imperatori quam constituistis operam date. Unum hoc proelium superest; **quo confecto et ille suam dignitatem et nos nostram libertatem recuperabimus.**" Simul **respiciens Caesarem**, "faciam," inquit, "hodie, imperator, ut aut vivo mihi aut mortuo gratias agas." Haec cum dixisset, **primus ex dextro cornu procucurrit**, atque eum electi milites circiter CXX voluntarii [eiusdem centuriae] sunt prosecuti.*

There was a certain veteran in Caesar's army named Caius Crastinus, who had reached the rank of first spear centurion of the tenth legion last year, a man with unique courage. This man, after the sign was given said "Follow me, you who are my soldiers, and do what you have promised to your general. This one battle remains after which **both we will recover our freedom and his standing.**" At the same time, **looking at Caesar**, he said, "I will make it so that you thank me, general, whether I am alive or dead." After he had said these things, **he first rushed out** from the right flank and his 120 chosen volunteers [from the same century] followed him.

2. Caesar *De Bello Civile* 3.99.1-3

*In eo proelio non amplius CC milites desideravit, sed centuriones, **fortes viros**, circiter XXX amisit. Interfectus est etiam **fortissime pugnans** Crastinus, cuius mentionem supra fecimus, gladio in os adversum coniecto. Neque id fuit falsum, quod ille in pugnam proficiscens dixerat. Sic enim Caesar existimabat, eo proelio **excellentissimam virtutem** Crastini fuisse, **optimeque eum de se meritum iudicabat.***

In that battle, Caesar lost not more than 200 soldiers, but around thirty centurions, those **strong men**. Even Crastinus died, **fighting most bravely**, who we've mentioned before, by means of a sword through his mouth. Nor was it false what he said setting out into battle. For this reason, Caesar thought that in that battle, Crastinus had **the most exceptional courage** and Caesar **judged that Crastinus had served him the best.**

3. Caesar *De Bello Civile* 1.7.1-9

*Quibus rebus cognitis Caesar apud milites contionatur...hortatur... ut eius existimationem **dignitatemque** ab inimicis defendant.*

After these affairs were known, Caesar called a contio among his soldiers. He urged them to defend his reputation and his **standing** from his enemies

4. Caesar *De Bello Civile* 1.22.5

*Cuius orationem Caesar interpellat: se non malefici causa ex provincia egressum sed uti se a contumeliis inimicorum defenderet, ut tribunos plebis in ea re ex civitate expulsos **in suam dignitatem** restitueret, ut se et populum Romanum factione paucorum oppressum **in libertatem** vindicaret.*

Whose speech Caesar interrupted saying that he had not left his province for the sake of wrongdoing, but so that he might defend himself from the insults of his enemies, restore the expelled tribunes **to their standing**, and vindicate the Roman people **to freedom** after their oppression by a faction of a few men.

5. Battle-Starter

a. Lucan 7.473-4

*cuius torta manu commisit lancea bellum
primaque Thessaliam Romano sanguine tinxit*

You from whose hand the thrown javelin started the battle and first stained
Thessaly with Roman blood!

b. *Commenta Bernensia ad Luc.* 4.470

*De quo Titius Livius dicit ‘tunc fuisse evocatum, proximo anno deduxisse primum
pilum Gaium Crastinum **qui a parte Caesaris primus lanceam misit.***

Titus Livius says of this man “Gaius Crastinus, **who was the first to cast a spear on Caesar’s side**, had then been recalled to the ranks and had served as first centurion the year before.”¹

c. Florus *Epit.* 2.13

*Adnotatum quoque committentis aciem **Crastini pilum***

The javelin of Crastinus was noted as that of the man who started the battle

d. Plutarch *Pomp.* 71

πρῶτος ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος φάλαγγος ἐξέδραμε Γάιος Κρασσιανός

The first man to run out from Caesar’s line was Gaius Crassianus

¹ Translation from Leigh, 1997

6. Lucan *Bellum Civile* 7.470-5

*di tibi non mortem, quae cunctis poena paratur,
sed sensum post fata tuae dent, Crastine, morti,
cuius torta manu commisit lancea bellum
primumque Thessaliam Romano sanguine tinxit.
o praeceps rabies! cum Caesar tela teneret,
inuenta est prior ulla manus?*

May the gods not grant you, **Crastinus**, death, which punishment is prepared for all, but the pains beyond death, **you from whose hand the thrown javelin started the battle and first stained Thessaly with Roman blood!** Oh headlong **madness!** When Caesar held back the spears, was any earlier hand found?

7. Florus *Epit.* 2.13

Adnotatum quoque committentis aciem Crastini pilum, qui mox adacto in os gladio—sic inter cadavera repertus—libidinem ac rabiem qua pugnaverat ipsa novitate volneris praeferebat.

The javelin of Crastinus was noted as that of the man who started the battle, he who was found among the dead with a sword thrust into his mouth, showed the rage and **madness with which he had fought because of the very strangeness of the wound.**

8. Plutarch *Caes.* 44.9-12

πρῶτον ὄρᾳ τῶν ταξιάρχων ἄνδρα πιστὸν αὐτῷ καὶ πολέμων ἔμπειρον, ἐπιθαρσύνοντα τοὺς ὑφ' αὐτῷ καὶ προκαλούμενον εἰς ἄμιλλαν ἀλκῆς, τοῦτον ὀνομαστὶ προσαγορεύσας, 'τί ἐλπίζομεν,' εἶπεν, 'ὦ Γάϊε Κρασσίνιε, καὶ πῶς τι θάρσους ἔχομεν;' ὁ δὲ Κρασσίνιος ἐκτείνας τὴν δεξιὰν καὶ μέγα βοήσας, 'νικήσομεν,' ἔφη, 'λαμπρῶς, ὦ Καῖσαρ ἐμὲ δὲ ἢ ζῶντα τήμερον ἢ τεθνηκότα ἐπαινέσεις.' ταῦτα εἰπὼν πρῶτος ἐμβάλλει τοῖς πολεμίοις δρόμῳ, ... διακόψας δὲ τοὺς πρώτους καὶ πρόσω χωρῶν φόνῳ πολλῷ καὶ βιαζόμενος ἀνακόπτεται ξίφει πληγείς διὰ τοῦ στόματος, ὥστε καὶ τὴν αἰχμὴν ὑπὲρ τὸ ἰνίον ἀνασχεῖν.

[Caesar] saw first one of his centurions, a man experienced in war and faithful to him, encouraging his men and challenging them to vie with him in prowess. **Caesar addressed him by name and said:** "Gaius Crassinius, what are our hopes, and how does our confidence stand?" Then Crassinius, stretching forth his right hand, said with a loud voice: "We shall win a glorious victory, O Caesar, and you will praise me today, whether I am alive or dead." **So saying, he plunged foremost into the enemy at full speed...** But after cutting his way through the first rank, and while he was forging onwards with great slaughter, he was beaten back by the thrust of a sword through his mouth, and the point of the sword actually came out at the back of his neck.

9. Appian *BC* 2.82

τὰ δὲ τρίτα Κρασσίνιος λοχαγός, ὃν Καῖσαρ μὲν ἐξιὼν ἐπὶ τὴν μάχην ἤρετο, ὃ τι προσδοκῶη, ὃ δὲ λαμπρῶς ἀνεβόησε: ‘νικήσομεν, ὦ Καῖσαρ, καὶ μὲν τήμερον ἢ ζῶντα ἢ νεκρὸν ἀποδέξει:’ ἢ στρατιὰ δ’ ἔμαρτύρει καθάπερ ἔνθουν ἐς ἐκάστην τάξιν μεταθέοντα **πολλὰ καὶ λαμπρὰ δρᾶσαι**. ἐπεὶ δὲ ζητούμενος ἐν τοῖς νεκροῖς εὐρέθη, τὰ ἀριστεῖα ὁ Καῖσαρ αὐτῷ περιέθηκε καὶ συνέθαψε καὶ τάφον ἐξαίρετον ἀνέστησεν ἐγγὺς τοῦ πολυανδρίου.

The third place is taken by the centurion Crassinius, whom Caesar asked at the beginning of the battle what result he anticipated, and who responded proudly, "We shall conquer, O Caesar, and you will thank me either living or dead." The army **testified** that he darted through the ranks **like one possessed** and **did many brilliant deeds**. When sought for he was found among the dead, and Caesar bestowed military honors on his body and buried it, and built a special tomb for him near the common burial place of the others.

10. Wound Recap

a. Caesar

gladio in os adversum coniecto

b. Florus

qui mox adacto in os gladio—sic inter cadavera repertus libidinem ac rabiem qua pugnaverat ipsa novitate volneris praeferabat.

c. Plutarch

βιαζόμενος ἀνακόπτεται ξίφει πληγείς διὰ τοῦ στόματος, ὥστε καὶ τὴν αἰχμὴν ὑπὲρ τὸ ἰνίον ἀνασχεῖν.

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