

The Motivations of Valens' Army in Tacitus' *Histories*¹

1) Fabius Valens in the Parallel Tradition

Φάβιον δὲ Οὐάλεντα τὸν ἕτερον στρατηγὸν οὔτε **ἀρπαγαὶ πολεμίων** οὔτε **κλοπαὶ** καὶ **δωροδοκίαι παρὰ συμμάχων** ἐνεπίπλασαν χρηματιζόμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐδόκει διὰ τοῦτο βραδέως ὀδεύων ὑστερεῖσθαι τῆς προτέρας μάχης. (Plu. *Oth.* 6.4)

Fabius Valens, the other general, was so rapacious that neither what he **plundered from the enemy** nor what he **stole** or **received as gifts from the allies** could satisfy him. Indeed, it was thought that this rapacity of his had delayed his march, so that he was too late for the battle at Placentia. [trans. Loeb]

Ὅτι ὁ Οὐάλης οὕτω περὶ τὰ χρήματα ἐσπούδαζεν καὶ οὕτως **ἐξ ἅπαντος τρόπου** ἤθροιζεν ὥστε καὶ τὸν δέκαρχον⁴ τὸν κατακρύψαντά τε αὐτὸν καὶ διασώσαντα⁵ ἀποσφάξαι διὰ χιλίας δραχμάς, ἅς ἐκ τῶν σκευῶν αὐτοῦ ὑψηρῆσθαι ἔδοξεν. (Dio Cass. 64.10.1)

Valens was so eager for money and collected it so assiduously **by every means** that he even put to death the decurion who had concealed him and had saved his life—all because of a thousand denarii which he thought had been purloined from his baggage. [trans. Loeb]

2) Why the Vitellians Fight

nunc **initia causasque** motus Vitelliani expediam. caeso cum omnibus copiis Iulio Vindice **ferox praeda gloriaque** exercitus, ut cui sine labore ac periculo ditissimi belli victoria evenisset, **expeditionem et aciem, praemia quam stipendia malebat.** (Tac. *Hist.* 1.53.1)

I will now set forth the **initial phases and causes** of the Vitellian challenge. Now that Julius Vindex and all his men had been killed, the army, **wild with plunder and glory**, since victory in a highly profitable war had been achieved effortlessly and without danger, **preferred the reward of campaigns and battles over regular payment.**

3) Give Anything for Plunder

nec principes modo coloniarum aut castrorum...sed manipuli quoque et gregarius miles viatica sua et balteos phalerasque, insignia armorum argento decora, loco pecuniae tradebant, **instinctu et impetu et avaritia.** (Tac. *Hist.* 1.57.2)

Not only the leaders of the colonies and the camp...but even the maniples and the common soldiers donated their travel stipend, their belts and ornaments, the splendid, silver-wrought insignia on their armor, instead of money—**because of external pressures, internal urges, and greed.**

¹ Translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

4) Valens' Orders

Fabius Valens **adlicere vel, si abnuerent, vastare Gallias** et Cottanis Alpibus Italiam inrumpere, Caecina proprio transitu Poeninis iugis degredi iussus. (Tac. *Hist.* 1.61.1)

Fabius Valens received orders **to entice the Gauls or, if they refused, to crush them**, and to burst into Italy by way of the Cottian Alps; Caecina was ordered to descend through the Pennine pass by a shorter route.

5) Madness and Murder at Stop #1

Divoduri (Mediomatricorum id oppidum est) quamquam omni comitate exceptos subitus pavor terruit, raptis repente armis ad caedem innoxiae civitatis, **non ob praedam aut spoliandi cupidine, sed furore et rabie et causis incertis eoque difficilioribus remediis**, donec precibus ducis mitigati ab excidio civitatis temperavere; caesa tamen ad quattuor milia hominum. (Tac. *Hist.* 1.63.1)

At Divodurum (the town of the Mediomatrici), though welcomed with complete friendliness, the men, seized with a sudden terror, **suddenly took up arms to slaughter innocent citizens, not for plunder or out of a desire for looting, but because of madness and frenzy and reasons uncertain and thus difficult to remedy**, until, soothed by the entreaties of their general they left off destroying the town—not before 4,000 people were killed, however.

6) Valens Handles a Mutiny

sed brevis laetitia fuit cohortium **intemperie... iurgia** primum, mox **rixa** inter Batavos et legionarios, dum his aut illis studia militum adgregantur, prope in proelium exarsere, **ni Valens animadversione paucorum oblitus iam Batavos imperii admonisset**. (Tac. *Hist.* 1.64.1-2)

But the happiness was short-lived because of the **outrageous behavior** of the cohorts. ... at first **insults**, soon **brawls** between the Batavians and legionaries, while the common soldiers' support went to either this or that side, almost exploded into a battle—**had not Valens, through the punishment of a few men, reminded the Batavians of what they had already forgotten: that they were under his command**.

7) Still Trying for War

frustra adversus Aeduos **quaesita** belli causa: **iussi** pecuniam atque arma deferre gratuitos insuper commeatus praebuere. quod Aedui formidine Lugdunenses gaudio fecere. (Tac. *Hist.* 1.64.3)

Pretext for war against the Aedui **was sought** in vain: though they **were ordered** to surrender money and arms, they provided supplies in addition for nothing in return. What the Aedui did out of fear, the Lugdunenses did gladly.

8) Valens Resorts to Bribery

his et pluribus in eundem modum, pepulerant ut ne legati quidem ac duces partium restingui posse iracundiam exercitus arbitrarentur, cum haud ignari discriminis sui Viennenses, (1) velamenta et infulas praeferentes, ubi agmen inceserat, (2) arma genua vestigia prensando flexere militum animos; (3) **addidit Valens trece nos singulis militibus sestertios. tum vetustas dignitasque coloniae valuit** et verba Fabi salutem incolumitatemque Viennensium commendantis aequis auribus accepta; publice tamen armis multati, privatis et promiscis copiis iuvere militem. **sed fama constans fuit ipsum Valentem magna pecunia emptum.** [...]

plus praedae ac sanguinis Caecina hausit. ... (Tac. *Hist.* 1.66.1-67.1)

After these arguments and more of the same sort, [the people of Lyons] had antagonized [the soldiers] such that not even their legates and generals thought it would be possible for the anger of the army to be extinguished, when the Viennese, hardly ignorant of the risk, approached where the column had advanced, (1) offering olive branches and fillets, and (2) by grasping their arms, knees, and feet in supplication, softened the soldiers' hearts. (3) **Valens chipped in by giving 300 HS to each man. Then, the antiquity and dignity of the colony began to hold sway** and the words of Fabius Valens recommending the safety and security fell on receptive ears; nevertheless, the entire community had its weapons revoked, and on an individual level they gave various gifts to the soldiers. **But there was a constant rumor that Valens himself had been bought off by a large sum.** [...]

Caecina drank in more plunder and blood. ...

9) Desire for Plunder Persists

...fremere legiones. orbari se fortissimorum virorum auxilio...**non abrumpendos ut corpori validissimos artus.**

haec ferociter iactando, postquam immissis lictoribus Valens coercere seditionem coeptabat, ipsum invadunt, saxa iaciunt, fugientem sequuntur. **spolia Galliarum et Viennensium aurum, pretia laborum suorum, occultare clamitantes, direptis sarcinis tabernacula ducis ipsamque humum pilis et lanceis rimabantur.** nam Valens servili veste apud decurionem equitum tegebatur. ... ille utili moderatione non supplicium cuiusquam poposcit, ac ne dissimulans suspectior foret, paucos incusavit, **gnarus civilibus bellis plus militibus quam ducibus licere.** (Tac. *Hist.* 2.28.2-29.3)

...the legions exclaimed that they had been deprived of the aid of the strongest men. ... **that the most powerful limbs ought not to be rent from the body, as it were.**

Having made these menacing statements, after Valens sent in his lictors to try to break up the mutiny, they attacked him, threw rocks at him and chased him as he fled. **Claiming that he had hidden Gallic loot and Viennese gold, the rewards for their own labor, they ripped his luggage apart, ransacked the general's tent, and poked at the very ground with spears and lances.** For Valens, dressed in slave-clothes, was hiding in a cavalry decurion's tent. ... Practical and moderate, he didn't demand anyone's execution, but lest he be suspected disingenuous, he chastised a few men, **aware as he was that in civil wars soldiers have more leeway than generals.**

10) The Flavians and Plunder

Romanae utrimque artes: pondera saxorum Vitelliani provolunt, disiectam fluitantemque testudinem **lanceis contisque scrutantur**, donec soluta compage scutorum exanguis aut laceros prosternerent multa cum strage. incesserat cunctatio, ni duces fesso militi et velut inritas exhortationes abneunti **Cremonam monstrassent**. (Tac. *Hist.*. 3.27.3)

Both sides were using Roman tactics: the Vitellians rolled down heavy rocks, prodded at a scattered and wavering *testudo* **with lances and pikes**, until, the tight-knit grouping of shields disintegrated, they laid low their enemies, bleeding out or wounded, with great slaughter. Hesitation would have set in, had not the generals, finding the men worn out and deaf to exhortation which seemed pointless, **pointed suggestively to Cremona**.²

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² Translation partially taken from Wellesley (2009) 140.