

Instances of Fear in *De Bello Gallico*

The emotion of fear is a forceful presence in *De Bello Gallico* and is felt by Roman soldiers, Gauls, Germans, leaders, subordinates, and Caesar himself. Caesar, in keeping with his literary style and linguistic persuasions (Conte 1994; Edwards 1994) used four words to convey the emotion of fear with the greatest frequency throughout *De Bello Gallico*. These words are *timor*, *timere*, *perterrere*, and *vereri*. This paper examines how, in what context, and for what purpose Caesar used these words. In particular, Caesar used the notion of fear in *De Bello Gallico* not only to differentiate his fears from those of his men and his enemies, but also to provide evidence of his ability to lead both his men back victorious from battle and, by extension, the Roman people intact from the political turmoil of the 50s in Rome.

An analysis of every instance of the words *timor*, *timere*, *perterrere*, and *vereri* provided the basis for differentiating the types of fear these words describe in *De Bello Gallico*. In order to examine the usage of these words by Caesar alone, the analysis was done on books 1 through 7 only. *Timor* appeared in 34 passages, *timere* in 15, *vereri* in 26 passages, and *perterrere* in 32 passages.

Caesar reserves *vereri* for ‘fears’ or, perhaps more appropriate to the context, ‘concerns’ about tactics and leadership (BG 1.42.5; 2.11.2; 4.5.1; 5.44.5; 6.29.1; 7.67.6; etc)¹. Issues of tactical fear range from battle circumstances to procuring the grain supply, while leadership fears span the concept of being *virtus* to making the right decision for the welfare of the troops. For example, in BG 6.29.1, Caesar fears a shortage of corn for his troops (*Caesar...inopiam frumenti veritus...*). Leaders of the Romans (Caesar, Labienus, and Vorenus) are the only Romans that fear with the verb *veretur*. Furthermore, when *vereri* is used in connection to the Gauls, again Caesar limits the individuals fearing to Gallic leaders, or those dealing with tactical maneuvering. Thus, to Caesar *vereri* is an acceptable and appropriate fear for commanders in a tactical sense.

Similarly, *perterrere*, *timor*, and *timere* are generally limited to situations in which Caesar’s troops, Gallic troops, and individuals are afraid of losing either their lives or their property, or when the battle is going poorly (BG 1.22.4; 1.23.3; 1.39.1-2; 4.34.1; 5.8.5; 6.41.3-4; 7.4.10; etc). The context of the passages in which *perterrere*, *timor*, and *timere* appear are usually scenes of panic and hysteria, of troops disorganized and undisciplined. For example, the soldier Considius is terrified by fear in BG 1.22.4 (*...Considium timore perterritum...*) and ends up providing false information to Caesar.

It is the distinction between the types of fearing that separate Caesar from his men and provide evidence for his leadership capability. When reading Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*, whether the books were published serially or at once, the Roman reader would have noticed this careful choice of verbiage and drawn similar conclusions about Caesar’s ability. More importantly, fear was present in daily life in Rome during the 50s and Caesar presented himself as a commander and a leader capable of guiding his soldiers and the Roman people out of fear. In writing himself as a rational and concerned general, as opposed to a fearful general, Caesar added yet another reason why the Roman people could and should look to him for guidance after he returned from Gaul.

¹ All books, chapters, and section references are based on the OCT.

Bibliography

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