

# Julius Caesar and the Germans

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This article is proposing a discussion of what was written in *De Bello Gallico* on Caesar's military campaign against the Germans, in particular against Usipetes and Tencteri. It will also be analyzed what was said by Plutarch about the accusation, made to Caesar by Cato the Younger, of having violated the truce with these Germans. Finally, the texts of Caesar and Plutarch will be compared with what is written in the books by Luciano Canfora and Jérôme Carcopino.

Torino, 3 Agosto 2018. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1328251. Revised 3 December 2018

Recently, some Dutch archaeologists have proposed a reconstruction of the physical appearance of Julius Caesar [1]. The reconstruction, which I discussed in [2-4], was used to launch a book by Tom Buijtendorp, *Caesar in de Lage Landen*, on Caesar's military campaign against the Germans, in particular against Usipetes and Tencteri tribes, a campaign that took place in the territory crossed by the Rhine and today located in the Netherlands. [5]. Some clarifications on this military campaign are, in my opinion, necessary. They are contained in the article that I am now proposing. In it, the reader will find the analysis of what Caesar wrote in his *De Bello Gallico* and what Plutarch told about the accusation made to Caesar by Cato the Younger, of violating the truce with these Germans. Finally, the texts of Caesar and Plutarch will be compared with what is written in the books by Luciano Canfora and Jérôme Carcopino.

Here the story of what happened. The only direct source is the *De Bello Gallico* by Julius Caesar. The Netherlands. Year 55 BC. After having wandered for three years under the pressure of the Suebi, the Germanic tribes of Usipetes and Tencteri had reached the regions inhabited by the Menapes at the mouth of the Rhine, in the today Netherlands. The Menapes possessed, on both banks of the river, fields, farmhouses and villages. Frightened by the arrival of such a large mass of people, they abandoned the settlements on the other bank of the river, but placed some garrisons along the Rhine to prevent the Germans to enter the Gaul. Failing to cross the river, Tencteri and Usipetes used a deception. They simulated a retreat, but a night their cavalry suddenly came back, killing the Menapes who had returned to their villages. They took the boats of Menapes and crossed the river. They occupied the villages and nourished themselves during the winter by means of the provisions of Menapes.

When aware of these facts, Caesar decided to anticipate his departure for the Gaul and to reach his legions, which were wintering in the Gallia Belgica. He was also informed that some Gallic tribes had invited the Germanic tribes to abandon the newly conquered territories of the Lower Rhine, to enter the Gaul.

*Allured by this hope, the Germans were then making excursions to greater distances, and had advanced to the territories of the Eburones and the Condrusi, who are under the protection of the Treviri. After summoning the chiefs of Gaul, Caesar thought proper to pretend ignorance of the things which he had discovered; and having conciliated and confirmed their minds, and ordered some cavalry to be raised, resolved to make war against the Germans. [7].*

The Germans, who were in a location not far from today Nijmegen, when aware that the Roman army was approaching, decided to send ambassadors to Caesar, to ask his permission to settle in those territories, offering their friendship in return. They reminded him why they had been forced to migrate and their strength in battle, where they considered themselves second only to the Suebi. Caesar denied them permission to occupy territories in Gaul. He also maintained that it was not right for the Germans to take possession of the lands of other populations, they, who had not been able to defend their territories from the attacks of the Suebi.

Caesar advised them to cross the Rhine and occupy the territories of Ubii, who were loyal allies of Rome. A truce was then established to be used to reach an agreement. During the truce, however, the Germans came across a squadron of Gallic cavalry, attacked it, overthrowing a great many of the men and putting the rest to flight. Caesar accused the Germans of breaking the truce.

When, as told by Caesar, a large body of Germans, consisting of their princes and old men, went to him to justify themselves, he kept them in the Roman camp. After, with a rapid move, he fell on the Germanic camp attacking the enemies and forcing them to flee. This mass of people moved in the direction of the confluence of the Rhine with the Meuse (along that part knows as Waal).

How many were the Usipets and Tencteri? Let us try to estimate the order of magnitude. Let's see what De Bello Gallico is telling [7], on the Germanic knights who, during the truce assaulted the Gallo-Romans.

[12] At hostes, ubi primum nostros equites conspexerunt, quorum erat V milium numerus, cum ipsi non amplius DCCC equites haberent, quod ii qui frumentandi causa erant trans Mosam profecti nondum redierant, nihil timentibus nostris, quod legati eorum paulo ante a Caesare discesserant atque is dies induitiis erat ab his petitus, impetu facto celeriter nostros perturbaverunt; rursus his resistentibus consuetudine sua ad pedes desiluerunt subfossis equis compluribus nostris deiectis reliquos in fugam coniecerunt atque ita perterritos egerunt ut non prius fuga desisterent quam in conspectum agminis nostri venissent. In eo proelio ex equitibus nostris interficiuntur IIII et LXX, in his vir fortissimus Piso Aquitanus, amplissimo genere natus, cuius avus in civitate sua regnum obtinuerat amicus a senatu nostro appellatus.

That is [8]. *But the enemy, as soon as they saw our horse, the number of which was 5000, whereas they themselves had not more than 800 horse, because those which had gone over the Meuse for the purpose of foraging had not returned, while our men had no apprehensions, because their ambassadors had gone away from Caesar a little before, and that day had been requested by them as a period of truce, made an onset on our men, and soon threw them into disorder. When our men, in their turn, made a stand, they, according to their practice, leaped from their horses to their feet, and stabbing our horses in the belly and overthrowing a great many of our men, put the rest to flight, and drove them forward so much alarmed that they did not desist from their retreat till they had come in sight of our army. In that encounter seventy-four of our horse were slain; among them, Piso, an Aquitanian, a most valiant man, and descended from a very illustrious family; whose grandfather had held the sovereignty of his state, and had been styled friend by our senate.*

Therefore, they were 800 German knights who overthrow and put to flight 5000 knights recruited by the Romans. The order of magnitude of this part of the Germanic cavalry is  $10^3$ . Caesar tells

that most part of the Germanic cavalry was for prey and harvest beyond the Meuse. Let us estimate that between the number of knights involved in the reported episode and the total number of German knights there is the difference of an order of magnitude. We find that the number of Usipetes and Tencteri warriors could exceed the 5000 units.

About this cavalry, there is an important fact to note. The horses of the Germans were trained to remain at rest when their knight leaped from them during the battle. In this manner, the Germanic warrior had the chance to face the enemy knight, stabbing the opponent's horse in the belly, and kill the enemy falling on the ground, as described in the above mentioned passage of *De Bello Gallico*. After, the Germanic knight found his horse waiting for him. A formidable cavalry then, made by at least twice as many elements, counting the horses in the fight too.

Therefore, Caesar then had to face two tribes having an excellent cavalry of about 5000 units. An infantry probably existed too, besides the cavalry. Among the Romans, for each knight there were ten infantrymen. As discussed in [9], the Germanic peoples had in the army an infantry too, but it is necessary to say that, probably, the ratio between infantrymen and knights was different from that of the Romans. Assuming the same proportion, the number of warriors would have amounted to fifty thousand, and these Germans would have been less than the warriors of the Suebi, who could encamp a hundred thousand warriors, as said by Caesar himself (*De Bello Gallico* IV.15.3). Actually, the Suebi took a hundred thousand warriors per year from their villages for war, the same number of men stayed behind to cultivate fields in homeland.

As told before, many of the warriors of Usipetes and Tencteri were on the other bank of the Meuse to search for prey and harvest wheat and forage. It is probable that they had also freedmen and servants, or even the local people, to help them to gather and arrange the harvest on wagons, and then to it across the Meuse. Moreover, the number of warriors could have been increased, if some armed groups from other tribes had been added meanwhile.

After some considerations, that we find in *De Bello Gallico*, IV,13, Caesar had to decide his move, keeping in mind what could be the result, for the Romans, to face all the Germans. First, he kept in his camp the chiefs and the elders who had come to apologize for the assault on the cavalry and to demand to continue the truce. And then he did the following [7].

[14] *Acie triplici instituta et celeriter VIII milium itinere confecto, prius ad hostium castrapervenit quam quid ageretur Germani sentire possent. Qui omnibus rebus subito perterriti et celeritate adventus nostri et discessu suorum, neque consilii habendi neque arma capiendi spatio dato perturbantur, copiasne adversus hostem ducere an castra defendere an fuga salutem petere praestaret. Quorum timor cum fremitu et concursu significaretur, milites nostri pristini diei perfidia incitati in castra inruperunt. Quo loco qui celeriter arma capere potuerunt paulisper nostris restiterunt atque inter carros impedimentaue proelium commiserunt; at reliqua multitudo puerorum mulierumque (nam cum omnibus suis domo excesserant Rhenum transierant) passim fugere coepit, ad quos consecrandos Caesar equitatum misit.*

[15] *Germani post tergum clamore audito, cum suos interfici viderent, armis abiectis signis militaribus relictis se ex castris eiecerunt, et cum ad confluentem Mosae et Rheni pervenissent, reliqua fuga desperata, magno numero interfecto, reliqui se in flumen praecipitaverunt atque ibi timore, lassitudine, vi fluminis oppressi perierunt. Nostri ad unum omnes incolumes, perpauca vulneratis, ex tanti belli timore, cum hostium numerus capitum CCCXXX milium fuisset, se in castra receperunt. Caesar iis quos in castris retinuerat discedendi potestatem fecit. Illi supplicia cruciatusque Gallorum veriti, quorum agros vexaverant, remanere se apud eum velle dixerunt. His Caesar libertatem concessit.*

[14] *Having divided his army in three lines, and in a short time performed a march of eight miles, he arrived at the camp of the enemy before the Germans could perceive what was going on; who being suddenly alarmed by all the circumstances, both by the speediness of*

our arrival and the absence of their own chiefs, as time was afforded neither for concerting measures nor for seizing their arms, are perplexed as to whether it would be better to lead out their forces against the enemy, or to defend their camp, or seek their safety by flight. Their consternation being made apparent by their noise and tumult, our soldiers, excited by the treachery of the preceding day, rushed into the camp: such of them as could readily get their arms, for a short time withstood our men, and gave battle among their carts and baggage wagons; but the rest of the people, boys and women (for they had left their country and crossed the Rhine with all their families) began to fly in all directions; to follow them Caesar sent the cavalry.

[15] *The Germans, hearing the shouting behind them and seeing their comrades falling, threw away their arms, abandoned their standards, and fled out of the camp, and when they had arrived at the confluence of Meuse and Rhine rivers, the survivors despairing of further escape, many of them had been killed, threw themselves into the river and there perished, overcome by fear, fatigue, and the violence of the stream. Our soldiers, after the alarm of so great a war, for the number of the enemy amounted to 430,000, returned to their camp, all safe to a man, very few being even wounded. Caesar granted those whom he had kept in the camp liberty of departing. They however, dreading revenge and torture from the Gauls, whose lands they had harassed, said that they desired to remain with him. Caesar granted them permission to choose.*

Here I have used partially the translation as in [8] of Caes. Gal. 4.13 and 4.15. However I had to change the first sentence of chapter [15]. Here is the reason. Concerning *seeing their comrades falling*, cum suos interfici viderent, I have to stress that suos is the plural accusative of the substantive sui, which is easily translated in the Italian *i suoi / i loro* (amici, partigiani, compagni, familiari, ecc.) [9]. similarly in French (*les siens / les leurs*), or in German (*die Seinen / die Ihren*), so to be found in the translations of Caesar's De Bello Gallico in those languages. Because this is not possible in English, the translator is obliged to specify, i.e. to give his own interpretation of to whom sui in each case refers, which may be correct - or false.

From [10], we see that sui, suorum, means *their friends, soldiers, fellow-beings, equals, adherents, followers, partisans, posterity, slaves, family*, etc., "of persons in any near connection with the antecedent". Because of the context, suos is better referring to (plural) qui celeriter arma capere potuerunt, paulisper nostris restiterunt atque inter carros impedimenta proelium commiserunt, that is to the men which were fighting, those who had tried in vain to oppose resistance, rather to (singular) reliqua multitudo puerorum mulierumque, the multitude of women and children, that had previously fled, passim fugere coepit. As a consequence, the men could no longer see them, because women and children had abandoned the camp (it was not by chance that the cavalry was sent to follow them: ad quos consecrandos Caesar equitatum misit).

For the previously given reasons, it is necessary to consider suos referred to the comrades-in-arms of the Germans, here rendered as *comrades*.

In fact, just above, on the one side Caesar tells nam cum omnibus suis domo excesserant, meaning here with suis their families, but before he speaks of the discessu suorum, meaning the absence of their military leaders (and not of the relatives). In the third case, cum suos interfici viderent, with suos are meant the comrades. Three meanings of the same word in the same paragraph, due to the polysemy of the Latin sui. Let us stress that, to think that sui has the same meaning in different occurrences is misleading, because it is always necessary to consider the context and the grammar.

There is a reason why I am stressing this point. In English a proper translation is "theirs". In a few cases, we find translations having "theirs" rendered by friends or companions. But many read sui their family. Here an example: it is the Commentaries on the Gallic War. Translated into

English by T. Rice Holmes. Publication date 1908: "but the host of women and children (for they had left their country and crossed the Rhine with all their belongings) began to flee in all directions; and Caesar sent his cavalry to hunt them down. The Germans heard the shrieks behind, and, seeing that their kith and kin were being slaughtered, threw away their weapons, abandoned their standards, and rushed out of the camp." Totally distorted.

Let us consider again Caesar's words.

We can see that Caesar tells that, feeling a great clamor behind them and seeing their (comrades) falling, the Germans fled. What is the clamor that the Germans hear? That of the battle. Behind them? The reasonable explanation is that, since the camp had a large dimension, the Romans entered the camp, breaking through where they saw a weak defense. Once they entered the camp, they attacked the Germans, those who were facing the Roman army. Therefore, who are the ones that the Germans see falling? We repeat, their comrades. And once again we tell that they could not see what was happening to women and children, because they had escaped in all directions after the irruption of the Romans, so that Caesar sent the cavalry to look for them. It is worth pointing out that those Germans who adapt to the description made by Caesar, with weapons and banners, are the warriors who are facing Caesar's army (as from an observation by Francesco Carotta, via e-mail).

Caesar had kept his cavalry behind the legions, since it was still shaken by the clash of the previous day. Moreover, the cavalry had no reason to enter the German camp, where the horsemen could not move in team and, singularly, could become a prey for the Germans. Thus, the only Romans that the Germans could see behind them were the legionaries. Caesar occupies the cavalry in the search for women and children, who were able to escape from the camp through some openings in the Roman army, openings which appeared when it entered the camp.

To understand properly what happened, and in particular the "post tergum clamore", let us see what happens in Alesia. I know that the situation is different, but it helps to sketch the role of the clamore. De bello gallico VII,84. "Vercingetorix sees his men from the fortress of Alesia and leaves the city. He brings forth long hooks, movable pent-houses, mural hooks, and other weapons, which he had prepared for the sortie. They engage on all sides at once and every expedient is adopted. They flocked to whatever part of the works seemed weakest. The Roman troops are forced to divide themselves because of the extension of the lines, and it is not easy to reject the attacks which are launched simultaneously in different sectors. The clamor that rises behind our men, while fighting, contributes to sow fear and panic, because they understood that their life was linked to the salvation of others: the dangers that do not lie before the eyes, in general, disturb with greater intensity the minds of men."

This is also what happened to the Germans, who had gathered themselves behind the defenses of the camp among wagons and supply, and who were trying to face the Caesar's army that was approaching. Caesar forces them to divide while his army was attacking at once in those places where the defense seemed weaker. Here, the Germans are shocked, like the Romans in Alesia, by the clamor of the battle behind them and they understand that their salvation is linked to the salvation of their comrades who are fighting. When they saw that their comrades-in-arms were falling, they threw away their weapons and standards, and fled out of the camp.

Caesar tells us that many men were killed. Let me stress that were warriors. He does not tell the number of victims, but only the estimated number of enemies. In fact, when he writes cum hostium numerus capitum CCCXXX milium fuisset, Caesar speaks of the number, 430 thousand, of esteemed enemies. This seems too large as the number of the population of these two tribes, and, in fact, some scholars have thought of a mistake made by an amanuensis in

copying the text. If we assume the number of the population of an order of magnitude greater than the order of magnitude of the warriors, we reach a maximum of 50 thousand units. Probably the figure we read today in *De Bello Gallico* has been altered over time, perhaps exaggerating that actually written by Caesar.

To some historians, and also because of what Plutarch wrote, probably altered by amanuenses, this number turned into the number of 400 thousand enemies *cut to pieces*. So let's see what Plutarch says [12].

*On returning to his forces in Gaul, Caesar found a considerable war in the country, since two great German nations had just crossed the Rhine to possess the land, one called the Usipes, the other the Tenteritae. Concerning the battle which was fought with them Caesar says in his "Commentaries" that the Barbarians, while treating with him under a truce, attacked on their march and there routed his five thousand cavalry with their eight hundred, since his men were taken off their guard; that they then sent other envoys to him who tried to deceive him again, but he held them fast and led his army against the Barbarians, considering that good faith towards such faithless breakers of truces was folly. But Tanusius says that when the senate voted sacrifices of rejoicing over the victory, Cato pronounced the opinion that they ought to deliver up Caesar to the Barbarians, thus purging away the violation of the truce in behalf of the city, and turning the curse therefor on the guilty man.*

*Of those who had crossed the Rhine into Gaul four hundred thousand were cut to pieces, and the few who succeeded in making their way back were received by the Sugambri, a German nation. This action Caesar made a ground of complaint against the Sugambri, and besides, he coveted the fame of being the first man to cross the Rhine with an army.*

Here the Greek text: τῶν δὲ διαβάντων αἱ μὲν κατακοπεῖσαι τεσσαράκοντα μυριάδες ἦσαν, ὀλίγους δὲ τοὺς ἀποπεράσαντας αὐθις ὑπεδέξαντο Σούγαμβροι, Γερμανικὸν ἔθνος. [13] And here, we can see how the oversight occurred on the number of the Germans. In origin, there was written, properly, four hundred thousand as the number of those who crossed the Rhine; the addition of μὲν κατακοπεῖσαι, that is *then cut to pieces*, turned this figure into the number of killed people.

Plutarch cites Tanusius (in Latin Tanusius Geminus), who was a Roman historian. He lived in the first century BC and was of anti-Caesar political extraction, as we can see from Plutarch's passage. He wrote an unspecified number of annals. As reported by Plutarch, Tanusius states that when the Senate was about to vote for thanksgiving to the Gods (supplicatio) for the victory of Caesar, Cato the Younger opposed to it. Cato was a bitter enemy of Caesar. On this occasion, he accused Caesar of having not complied with this truce. For the ancient Romans, the sacredness of the given word was fundamental. After being aware that Caesar had kept the ambassadors in his camp and that he had not respected the truce, in Cato the rhetoric string of an offense against the Gods was forced to sound. An offense that could only damage Rome. Cato even proposed Caesar to be handed over to the barbarians for having failed in his word! According to Cato, Caesar should have to continue to keep the truce, despite the enemies had violated it. It was clearly a pretentious accusation, which did not pass in the Senate.

Before continuing the analysis of Plutarch's words, let us remember what a supplicatio was. In ancient Rome, a supplicatio was a solemn ceremony of thanksgiving, or a petition, to the Gods decreed by the Senate. All the temples were opened and the statues of the Gods were placed on special supports so that people could offer them sacrifices of thanksgiving, offerings and prayers. A supplicatio could be decreed for two different reasons. One reason was on the occasion of an important victory during a war, and it was usually decreed when the Senate was receiving from a general the official report on the victorious outcome of the fight. The duration of the supplicatio

was proportional to the importance of the victory. A supplicatio, in the sense of a solemn supplication and humiliation of the whole city, was sometimes decreed on the occasion of a public danger or calamity and after prodigies, omina, which were showing the wrath of Gods.

Let us see what Plutarch is telling in the Life of Cato [14] and [15]: τοῦ δὲ Καίσαρος ἐμβάλοντος εἰς ἔθνη μάχῃ καὶ παραβόλῳ κρατήσαντος, Γερμανοῖς δὲ καὶ σπονδῶν γενομένων δοκοῦντος ἐπιθέσθαι καὶ καταβαλεῖν τριάκοντα μυριάδας, οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι τὸν δῆμον ἠξίουσαν εὐαγγέλια θύειν, ὁ δὲ Κάτων ἐκέλευεν ἐκδιδόναι τὸν Καίσαρα τοῖς παρανομηθεῖσι καὶ μὴ τρέπειν εἰς αὐτοὺς μηδὲ ἀναδέχεσθαι τὸ ἄγος εἰς τὴν πόλιν. *After Caesar had fallen upon warlike nations and at great hazards conquered them, and when it was believed that he had attacked the Germans even during a truce and slain three hundred thousand of them, there was a general demand at Rome that the people should offer sacrifices of good tidings, but Cato urged them to surrender Caesar to those whom he had wronged, and not to turn upon themselves, or allow to fall upon their city, the pollution of his crime.*

We note that Plutarch tells that many in Rome were happy about the Caesar's victory (*good tidings, εὐαγγέλια*), but that Cato imputed to him that he had won only because he had broken the truce, becoming, in this manner, superior to the enemy.

After the Plutarch's words, some people alleged the military campaign as a genocide [16]. Some added that the number of the Germanic victims disturbed the Romans. Let us stress that, the news of the victory was received by the Romans as good news, and they wanted to thank the Gods for it. Only Cato, the fierce enemy of Caesar, opposed. Let us repeat once again: Cato opposed to the celebration of victory by means of the pretense that Caesar had won the Germans by breaking the truce. At the end of Plutarch's passage, we can find that the attempt to have Caesar handed over to the Germans failed. After that pure rhetorical request, Cato asked the Senate what he really wanted, namely that Caesar were removed as leader of the Roman army.

The source that Plutarch uses in the biography of Cato the Minor is the same Tanusius, already mentioned in Caesar's biography. In writing the biography of Cato, Plutarch used pro-Cato sources, and therefore anti-Caesar sources. He does not tell us whether the celebrations requested by the people for the good news of the defeat of the Germans were made or not. Some information comes from Suetonius [17].

Nec deinde ulla belli occasione, ne iniusti quidem ac periculosi abstinuit, tam foederatis quam infestis ac feris gentibus ultro laccessitis, adeo ut senatus quondam legatos ad explorandum statum Galliarum mittendos decreverit ac nonnulli dedendum eum hostibus censuerint. Sed prospere cedentibus rebus et saepius et plurium quam quisquam umquam dierum supplicationes impetravit.

*Later [Caesar] did not neglect any opportunity to make war; even in an excessive and dangerous manner; and to arouse frictions both with allies and hostile and barbarous nations, so that once the Senate decreed to send delegates to verify the conditions of the Gaul provinces, and some came to propose to deliver him to the enemies. But since all his achievements were successful, he obtained public thanks more often and for longer days than any other general.*

Let' us stress that Suetonius has, in this passage, completely distorted what Plutarch told, omitting the reference to Cato.

In any case, let us consider that many Germans saved themselves from the Romans. We have the bulk of the army of these two tribes for sure, which was beyond the Meuse, probably with many other people, and women and children, that with horses and wagons were preparing the yearly provisions of wheat and forage. After Caesar's attack, these Germans found themselves without the chiefs and elders who had remained with Caesar (and therefore without military leaders), and

with many comrades died in the fight and in the desperate attempt to cross the river. They also knew that the survivors, including women and children, would be made servants by the Romans.

On the Rhine, the Germans had the boats of the Menapes and then withdrew beyond the river from any further attack of the Romans. Usipetes and Tencteri joined the Sicambri. Their military strength raised again in 17 or 16 BC, when they destroyed a Roman legion in the Clades Lolliana [18].

I would like to stress an interesting fact said by Caesar himself. Not only the Germans, who were beyond the Meuse, were free, but also the Usipetes and Tencteri, who were in the Caesar's camp, were left free to leave, but because of the fear of the Gauls whose lands they had ravaged, they asked and obtained to remain with Caesar, that is, they were recruited in the Caesar's army. Therefore, not only those who later committed the Lillian Clades survived, but also those who were recruited into the Caesar's cavalry.

Caesar had not the intent to commit genocide of Usipetes and Tencteri, as alleged sometimes. Caesar wanted to push them away from Gaul, as quickly as possible and with fewer losses for the Romans.

After the discussion of what Caesar, Plutarch and Suetonius told, I want to tell what I found in a book written by Luciano Canfora [19]. I Germani continuavano a premere per un accordo; Cesare cercava solo un pretesto per massacrarli. Ma fu con l'inganno che ebbe ragione di loro. Il pretesto fu offerto da una sortita di cavalieri degli Usipeti contro la cavalleria gallica alleata di Cesare. Nello scontro morirono alcuni dei collaborazionisti galli più cari a Cesare. Nonostante l'incidente i capi germanici si recarono al previsto incontro con Cesare. Il quale li ricevette a colloquio, ma li fece trucidare a tradimento; quindi assaltò gli avversari sbandati e senza guida, ed estese indiscriminatamente il genocidio a tutti, donne e bambini inclusi. Come crimine disumano questa ecatombe fu percepita anche a Roma, dove Catone, per ragioni beninteso di lotta politica interna, si spinse a chiedere la consegna del proconsole al nemico. La presumibile assenza di autentiche motivazioni umanitarie nella proposta di Catone non deve indurre a sottovalutare l'iniziativa del tenace oppositore. Era significativa comunque che l'enormità del crimine compiuto era percepita. Nondimeno il Senato, in preda ad una "ubriacatura imperialistica" (secondo l'espressione di Carcopino), concesse in onore della carneficina cesariana una colossale supplicatio.

That is [20]. *The Germans continued to press for an accord; Caesar, however, sought only a pretext to massacre them. Through deception he got the better of them. The pretext was a sortie of Usipetes cavalry against the cavalry of Caesar's Gallic allies. In the encounter some of the Gallic collaborators dearest to Caesar were killed. Notwithstanding the incident, the German leaders went to the scheduled meeting with Caesar. He received them, but had them treacherously slaughtered. Then he attacked opponents who were disunited, without leadership, and indiscriminately committed an act of genocide against them all, including their women and children. This massacre was viewed as an inhuman crime even in Rome, where Cato, undoubtedly for reasons to do with the internal political struggle, went so far as to demand that the proconsul be handed over to the enemy. The presumed lack of genuine humanitarian motivation in his proposition is no reason to dismiss the demand of this tenacious opponent of Caesar. It shows the enormity of the crime was noticed, at least. None the less, the Senate, a prey to 'imperialist intoxication' (in Carcopino's words), decreed a colossal supplication in honour of the Caesarian carnage.*

Caesar tells that the ambassadors, that is the Usipetes and Tencteri he held in his camp were free to move but that they decided to be enlisted in the Roman army. In Canfora's book, this episode became the assassination of the ambassadors (*He received them, but had them treacherously slaughtered*) [19,20]. I have reported passages from Plutarch and Suetonius and they do not



mention – I stress one more - they do not mention that the ambassadors of the Germans had been killed by the Romans. This is a fake news invented by Canfora, and spread over by the English translation.

For what concerns the Canfora's "ecatombe" or "massacre", as told by Plutarch, it was perceived in Rome as the good news of a victory in a military campaign against Germans, and therefore, it did not stirred any rumors in Rome concerning an inhuman crime. To Cato, in his rhetoric speech, the crime was that of breaking the truce.

Let me end the discussion of the passage in Canfora's book with this note. In the Italian text, the Gallic allies are defined as *collaborazionisti*, *collaborators*. In [21], we can read that the *collaborazionista* is a person who cooperates with an army which is occupying a country, such as, during the Second World War, who collaborated with Germans in Italy and in France (for instance, governments of Salò and Vichy). As a consequence, in Canfora's book, the Romans look like the soldiers of the Third Reich and Caesar a Hitler committing an act of genocide.

Let me write down also what told by Jérôme Carcopino [22] (in Italian) [23].

*A la fin de 55, il les réunit [ses «communiqués»] en volumes qui sont devenus les livres III et IV des Commentaires, et l'effet de cette publication fut immédiat. En vain Caton, au nom de l'humanité outragée, avait-il élevé sa protestation contre le carnage des Usipètes et des Tenctères, et proposé de livrer César aux Germains pour détourner de la République l'immanquable courroux des dieux. César avait commencé de verser dans les âmes de ses compatriotes l'ivresse d'un impérialisme irrésistible ; et le Sénat, hypnotisé à son tour par tant de profits et de gloire, céda à l'enthousiasme universel en décrétant, en l'honneur du héros, une supplication aux dieux supérieure de cinq jours à celle qu'il lui avait décerné deux ans auparavant.*

*At the end of 55 BC, Caesar collected [his writings] in books, which later became the III and IV books of the Commentaries, and published them. The effect of this work was immediate. In vain, in the name of outraged humanity, in vain Cato protested against the massacre of Usipetes and Tencteri and proposed to hand over Caesar to the Germans in order to remove from the Republic the just punishment of the gods. Caesar had begun to instill in the soul of compatriots the intoxication of an irresistible imperialism, and even the Senate, hypnotized by so many advantages and glory, surrounded itself to the general enthusiasm, decreeing in honor of the hero a supplication five-day longer than that attributed to him two years before.*

Let us comment what was told by Carcopino. It must be said clearly that it was not the publication of Caesar's book, but the news arrived in Rome of Caesar's victory and the request of a supplication in the Senate that stirred the reaction out of Cato. Only Plutarch reports of Cato's reaction exist, and Plutarch tells clearly that Cato imputed Caesar of the breaking of the truce, and not of the killing of enemies. As mentioned earlier, and as told by Plutarch himself, to Rome and its Senate the news was a good news. The memory of the terror cimbricus was still alive in Rome. In fact, not so many years had passed since the Cimbri, after having heavily defeated the Roman armies, had entered the Padan plain. The consul Gaius Mario had stopped them in the battle of the Campi Raudii, fought in 101 BC.

After all we had told, here my conclusion. Regardless of the judgment on Caesar's wars - let me stress, regardless - the ancient texts at our disposal have not to be misrepresented. That is, it is necessary to report the texts, in original and with translation, and to comment on them. Above all, it is necessary to avoid any fake news.

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