

Latin Text, DĒ BELLŌ GALLICŌ 6.19.6–11, p. 172

Virī in uxōrēs, sicutī in liberōs, vitae necisque habent potestātem; et cum pater familiae illūstriōre locō nātus dēcessit, eius propinquī conveniunt et, dē morte sī rēs in suspiciōnem vēnit, dē uxōribus in servilem modum
 10 quaestiōnem habent et, sī compertum est, ignī atque omnibus tormentis excruciatās interficiunt.

Literal Translation Molinarius

Husbands toward wives, just as toward children, have the power of life and death; and when the father of a family, having been born at an honorable [social] status, has died, his relatives assemble and, concerning the death, if the matter [circumstances] has come into doubt [become suspicious], they hold an inquiry concerning the wives according to slave method [i.e., under torture] and, if it has been ascertained [for a fact], they kill [the wives] having been tortured with fire and all instruments of torture.

Literal Translation McDevitte

Husbands have power of life and death over their wives as well as over their children: and when the father of a family, born in a more than commonly distinguished rank, has died, his relations assemble, and, if the circumstances of his death are suspicious, hold an investigation upon the wives in the manner adopted toward slaves; and, if proof be obtained, put them to severe torture, and kill them.

Discussion Questions

1. This passage tells us that women, despite equal financial contributions to family resources, were not full partners in Gallic marriages. Why?
2. What incentives does Caesar imply that wives had for murdering their husbands that might have led to inquiries after the death of a husband? Did the families of a deceased husband have a financial incentive for conducting an inquiry? Why or why not (at least according to what Caesar has told us)?
3. What were some of the purposes of marriage in the ancient world? (Hint: they did not include romance or finding a soulmate.)