

Latin Text, DĒ BELLŌ GALLICŌ 6.15.1–7, p. 163

- [6.15] *Alterum genus est equitum. Hī, cum est ūsus atque aliquod bellum incidit (quod ferē ante Caesaris adventum quotannis accidere solēbat, utī aut ipsī iniūriās inferrent aut illātās prōpulsārent), omnēs in bellō versantur, atque*
 5 *eōrum ut quisque est genere cōpiisque amplissimus, ita plūrimōs circum sē ambactōs clientēsque habet. Hanc ūnam grātiā potentiāque nōvērunt.*

Literal Translation Molinarius

The other class is of equestrians [cavalry men]. These [men], whenever there is need and some war occurs (which generally before Caesar’s arrival was accustomed to occur annually, with the result that either they themselves were inflicting outrages or were driving away [outrages] inflicted [on them]), [and] all [these men] are practiced in war, and of these [men], as each is most abundant in respect to birth and resources, thus [i.e., to that extent] he has around himself very many dependents and followers. They understand this single influence and power [i.e., the only kind of power and influence they understand is how many men one has control over].

Literal Translation McDevitte

The other order is that of the knights. These, when there is occasion and any war occurs (which before Caesar’s arrival was for the most part wont to happen every year, as either they on their part were inflicting injuries or repelling those which others inflicted on them), are all engaged in war. And those of them most distinguished by birth and resources, have the greatest number of vassals and dependents about them. They acknowledge this sort of influence and power only.

Discussion Questions

1. Druids studied verses. Men of equestrian status practiced war every year. How would the education of the cavalry have affected their worldview? Why is experience so important in shaping us? There is a long-standing and important debate between those who think that, as human beings, we are born the way we are (that is, we are the way we are “by nature”) versus those who believe that we are shaped by the world after we enter it

(that is, we become the way we are “by nurture”). Based on what you read in Caesar, which side do you think he would have taken? (The placement of this question here would seem to imply “nurture,” but one would do well to recall what stress Caesar lays on the status of one’s birth, character traits, etc. Caesar provides much evidence for both sides.)

2. In Caesar’s day, the Roman cavalry consisted primarily of hired foreigners, especially Gauls and Germans. Roman citizens served for the most part in the infantry, and Romans of “equestrian” status served among the officers. What do these differences imply about the status of Roman citizens in comparison with the debt-ridden “plebeians” of Gaul? Why might Roman armies have relied on mercenaries for their cavalry?
3. Political calculations were simple (at least according to Caesar) among the Gauls. How did the Gauls reckon how powerful individuals were? Does this help explain the trial of Orgetorix? The relative power of individual tribes?