

Liv. V, 47,1-48,9

Text Übersetzung:

(Benjamin Oliver Foster)

47. While this was going on at Veii, the Citadel of Rome and the Capitol were in very great danger. [2] For the Gauls had noticed the tracks of a man, where the messenger from Veii had got through, or perhaps had observed for themselves that the cliff near the shrine of Carmentis afforded an easy ascent. So on a starlit night they first sent forward an unarmed man to try the way; [3] then handing up their weapons when there was a steep place, and supporting themselves by their fellows or affording support in their turn, they pulled one another up, as the ground required, and reached the summit, in such silence that not only the sentries but even the dogs — creatures easily troubled by noises in the night — were not aroused. [4] But they could not elude the vigilance of the geese, which, being sacred to Juno, had, notwithstanding the dearth of provisions, not been killed. This was the salvation of them all; for the geese with their gabbling and clapping of their wings woke Marcus Manlius, — consul of three years before and a distinguished soldier, — who, catching up his weapons and at the same time calling the rest to arms, strode past his bewildered comrades to a Gaul who had already got a foothold on the crest and dislodged him with a blow from the boss of his shield. [5] As he slipped and fell, he overturned those who were next to him, and the others in alarm let go their weapons and grasping the rocks to which they had been clinging, were slain by Manlius. [6] And by now the rest had come together and were assailing the invaders with javelins and stones, and presently the whole company lost their footing and were flung down headlong to destruction. [7] Then after the din was hushed, the rest of the night — so far as their excitement would permit, when even a past peril made them nervous — was given up to sleep. At dawn the trumpet summoned the soldiers to assemble before the tribunes. Good conduct and bad had both to be required. [8] First Manlius was praised for his courage and presented with gifts, not only by the tribunes of the soldiers, but by agreement amongst the troops, who brought each half a pound of spelt and a gill of wine to his house, which stood in the Citadel. It is a little thing to tell, but the scarcity made it a great token of affection, since everyone robbed himself of his own sustenance and bestowed what he had subtracted from his physical necessities to do honour to one man. [9] Then the watchmen of the cliff which the enemy had scaled without being discovered were called up. [10] Quintus Sulpicius, the tribune, announced his intention to punish them all in the military fashion; but deterred by the cries of the soldiers, who united in throwing the blame upon a single sentinel, he spared the others. This man was guilty beyond a doubt, and was flung from the rock with the approval of all. [11] From that time the guards on both sides were more alert: the Gauls, because it had been put about that messengers were passing between Veii and Rome, the Romans, from their recollection of the peril of the night.

48. But worse than all the evils of the blockade and the war was the famine with which both armies were afflicted. [2] The Gauls suffered also from a pestilence, being encamped between hills on low ground, parched and heated by the conflagration, where the air was filled with ashes, as well as dust, whenever a breeze sprang up. [3] These annoyances were intolerable to a race accustomed to damp and cold, and when, distressed by the suffocating heat, they began to sicken of diseases that spread as though the victims had been cattle, they were soon too slothful to bury their dead singly, and piling the bodies up in promiscuous heaps, they burned them, causing the place to be known from that circumstance as the Gallic Pyres. [4] A truce was afterwards made

with the Romans, and the commanders allowed their soldiers to talk together. Since in these conversations the Gauls used frequently to taunt their enemies with their famished state, and call on them to yield to that necessity and surrender, the Romans are said, in order to do away with this opinion, to have cast bread down from the Capitol in many places, into the outposts of the enemy. [5] Yet at last they could neither dissemble their hunger nor endure it any longer. The dictator was now holding a levy of his own at Ardea, and having ordered the master of the horse, Lucius Valerius, to bring up his army from Veii, was mustering and drilling a force with which he might cope with the Gauls on equal terms. [6] But the army on the Capitol was worn out with picket duty and mounting guard; and though they had got the better of all human ills, yet was there one, and that was famine, which nature would not suffer to be overcome. [7] Day after day they looked out to see if any relief from the dictator was at hand; but at last even hope, as well as food, beginning to fail them, and their bodies growing almost too weak to sustain their armour when they went out on picket duty, they declared that they must either surrender or ransom themselves, on whatever conditions they could make; for the Gauls were hinting very plainly that no great price would be required to induce them to raise the siege. [8] Thereupon the senate met, and instructed the tribunes of the soldiers to arrange the terms. Then, at a conference between Quintus Sulpicius the tribune and the Gallic chieftain Brennus, the affair was settled, and a thousand pounds of gold was agreed on as the price of a people that was destined presently to rule the nations. [9] The transaction was a foul disgrace in itself, but an insult was added thereto: the weights brought by the Gauls were dishonest, and on the tribune's objecting, the insolent Gaul added his sword to the weight, and a saying intolerable to Roman ears was heard, —Woe to the conquered!