

Boudicca's Rebellion Against the Roman Empire in 60 AD

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the rebellion of Boudicca, the queen of the Iceni tribe, during the Roman Empire's occupation of Britannia in 60 AD. The study shows that had Boudicca not changed her winning strategy in one key battle, she could have forced the Roman Empire to withdraw their presence from Britannia, at least until it was prudent to invade again. This paper analyzes the few extant historical accounts available on Boudicca, namely those of the Roman historians Tacitus and Cassius Dio, to explore the effectiveness of tactics on both sides of the rebellion. The sources reveal that Boudicca enjoyed initial success against the Roman army, which she greatly outnumbered, due to the Roman authority underestimating both her ability in combat and the consequences a defeat would bring. However, she soon became overconfident in her actions, allowing her to fall into a trap where her numbers and other advantages she previously enjoyed no longer mattered.

The study will also argue that in the aftermath of the rebellion, Emperor Nero tasked the current Roman governor of Britannia to begin reprisals against most of Britannia and then create a scapegoat out of him by recalling him from his position. This was carefully done to show Britons that the Romans could be harsh but they could be kind as well, which created a sense of loyalty to the Roman Empire that survived for centuries. There would never again be another British rebellion against the Roman

presence in Britannia, ensuring cooperation between the two civilizations. Through Rome's helping hand, ensured by Britons no longer seeking independence through violent insurrections, strides were made to connect the area with the greater world. The start of urbanization and the founding of strategically-planned trading cities, such as Londinium, had a profound effect on Britannia and it could not have become so powerful in the future without these developments. In addition, the unification of tribes ended common conflicts and the stability achieved through this allowed Britons to focus more on other pursuits and modern trades. Boudicca's rebellion would therefore have had a great effect on the course of modern history if she were to successfully drive the Romans out and cause a regression back to the original customs and traditions. The fact that the Roman Empire was able to stop her and pacify Britannia so they would no longer reject their authority therefore is important to the study of any modern history through the powerful influence that Britannia later had on global affairs.

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## Preface

In the first century BC, when Julius Caesar first made contact with Britannia, the region was home to near thirty major tribes in total. These tribes did not live in harmony however, and battles between warring communities were not uncommon. Their political system was largely undeveloped and not as sophisticated as the governments of the Mediterranean civilizations or even as the tribal system of their Gallic neighbors. By the mid-first century AD, however, when Emperor Claudius of the Roman Empire began the conquest of Britannia, it was all about to change. The Romans held control of the region for over 360 years until 410 AD, when they decided to withdraw their presence due to problems both at home and mounting pressure from outside forces, but during this time they influenced Britannia tremendously. While there is a large gap in time between the Roman withdrawal from Britannia and British Empire emergence as a global power, serious strides were made during the Roman occupation and tools to success were developed without which the creation of an empire would most likely not have occurred.

Exploring the roots of the British Empire is important to understanding not only how they were able to become such a globally-dominating power, but is also important for historians to further the study of British history. Boudicca is not a very well-known woman, and was actually forgotten for millennia, even though she was an integral part of why modern Britain exists in its current state. Not only did she alert the Roman Empire to how poorly they were treating Britannia as a wakeup call that they may lose control, but the story of one woman successfully challenging the Roman Empire is rare.

The Roman development of Britannia was a necessity for the creation of their later empire. It brought Britannia into communication with the greater world and brought unknown technology to the region which in turn created infrastructure and stability. This stability was important since Britannia, previously a war-torn region, could now achieve greater productivity and quality of life through peace. In addition, Rome started the process of urbanization, which was previously unknown to the tribal people and was necessary to help create Britannia as a trading power. The founding of planned cities as trading hubs to attract foreign merchants was quickly undertaken by the Romans. Both Verulamium and Londinium, which Boudicca targeted, were founded as trading cities and Londinium quickly proved to become Britannia's largest and most profitable city. The urbanization process also brought the practice of government to the attention of the Britons, and they developed their political system with the help of Rome. Local governments arose to help citizens and the need to fund them through local taxes encouraged Britons to actively learn skills that would further their own development. Although there was much more work to be done until the Britons were able to handle a globally-spanning empire, the giant leap forward that Rome brought upon them was necessary to keep them up to speed with the modern world.

When Claudius initiated the conquest in 43 AD, the Roman Empire was in its infancy and was in the process of imperial expansion. The empire was not even a century old yet and Claudius was only the fourth ever emperor. They were not yet close to the height of their power although they already did control many provinces outside of Italy from the Roman Republic. Nevertheless, Rome had been in the process of an

aggressive expansion and Britannia was next on the list. After the conquest, they treated the natives poorly and cared more about expanding their borders than about British concerns. As a result, strong anti-Roman feelings quickly brewed among the British tribes, particularly the Iceni and Trinovantes in south-western England. After the king of the Iceni died in 59 AD, he attempted to leave his wife, Boudicca, as the successor to his rule but Rome denied this request and humiliated her in the process. This put Boudicca in a special position to unify all those who felt unfairly treated by Rome. Although previously tribes did not band together, Boudicca was able to unite both the Iceni and the Trinovantes in 60 AD and quickly created an army consisting of 150,000 people, which quickly increased to 230,000. She razed three cities and by defeating one of the four Roman legions in Britannia, she proved that Britons stood a chance against Roman might. However, she ended up losing and her army was defeated at the Battle of Watling Street not soon after, but it is important to note that she stood a chance of pushing the Romans out of Britannia.

At this time period, there were other rebellions against Roman occupation and battles to stop Roman conquests. One of these rebellions was the first Jewish-Roman War that took place in Judaea in 66 AD. Similarly, to the situation in Britannia, there was a lot of tension between the Jews and the Romans since they had annexed the region sixty years prior, and the Jews wanted to rebel against the Empire and push the Romans out. This war was one of three Jewish rebellions against the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire wanted to control Judaea not necessarily because of the riches of the land, but because its trade location to the wealthier Egypt. This is in contrast to the Roman

interest in Britannia, which was in the rich resources that lay in the land and the strong pool of manpower available in the large population. The Roman Empire did not need the people of Judaea as much as they needed the people of Britannia and so their goals in each region were different.

The Romans were not very interested in keeping Britannia if it brought more trouble than it was worth, but this was not the case with Judaea, as evidenced by the continuation of the Jewish diaspora under Roman law. After the war, there were permanent punitive measures taken against the Jews, such as the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. In contrast to Judaea, Rome took advantage of the rebellion to show that, while they could punish and make life harder for the Britons, they were also capable of helping them and improving their lives, which is something that they did not offer to Judaea. In addition, the First Jewish-Roman War did not stand nearly as much of a chance of pushing the Roman Empire out of their land as Boudicca did.



## Introduction

Modern history has forever been influenced by the wide-reaching power of the United Kingdom; from its medieval history to its more modern history as a vast imperial power, it has made its mark on the world. However, in Britain's earlier development, it was nothing more than a collection of divided barbarian tribes. During this time, in the first century BC and AD, the Roman Empire was intrigued by Britannia's possible wealth and attempted an invasion of the isles. Although it took Rome many years, and they were not fully able to annex the entire region, they conquered most of England and held it for nearly four hundred years, setting the stage for Britain to develop into a world-changing superpower. But this was almost not to be, due to the actions of Boudicca, one British tribe's disgruntled queen. Boudicca led a large rebellion against the Roman Empire in 60 AD, only seventeen years after the Roman invasion, whilst Rome was still in the process of solidifying its rule. Her army was vast and enjoyed initial success, until the Romans finally took the threat seriously and were able to outmaneuver her. Although the rebellion was short-lived, it was the largest that Rome had ever faced from Britain in its entire occupation of the territory, and it could have conceivably ended the Roman hold over Britannia if Boudicca had been more careful in her strategy. In fact, Boudicca had been so ruthless and successful in the initial stages of her rebellion, that Emperor Nero had even thought of pulling out from Britannia as it was not worth the trouble.<sup>1</sup>

The existing literature on Early Romano-British history is dominated by a small group of authors, but this is no surprise when considering the primary sources available

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<sup>1</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, "Nero," in *De Vita Caesarum*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

for this time period. Although there are many ancient sources detailing the full history of the Roman conquest of Britain, there are only two surviving sources available that discuss Boudicca's rebellion and its immediate aftermath. These sources are written by Tacitus, who lived during the aftermath of the rebellion and whose father-in-law was a Roman soldier in Britain, and Cassius Dio, who would not be born for another 95 years after the rebellion and had to collect most of his information second-hand. In addition, there are elements of Cassius Dio's history that directly conflict with what Tacitus recorded but since Tacitus was more of a contemporary of Boudicca, he likely was more accurate.

Because of the small amount of primary source material, most of the existing literature has had to combine recent archaeological finds with written history to reconstruct a timeline of Roman Britain and the rebellion. Although this makes for a smaller circle of secondary literature, because this material has been covered extensively already, this thesis will contribute to the field by examining the mistakes that Boudicca made in her campaign, and exploring how the Romans were able to obtain British allegiance afterwards. It will attempt to demonstrate that had Boudicca acted more cautious in keeping the strength of her original strategy, as suited to her army, her tactics could have defeated the Romans and run them out of Britain at least temporarily. It will also show that in the aftermath of the rebellion, the Roman Empire ingeniously created a scapegoat to which the Britons accepted, leading to their absolute loyalty for the rest of the occupation.

After the rebellion had been crushed, the Roman Empire devised a plan to use this rare opportunity to strengthen their hold over Britain. They showed the Britons that while they could be feared and intimidate the Britons into compliance, they could also work with them to reach a mutual benefit. This policy is interesting because it eventually converted an anti-imperialist region with a long history of strife and conflict into loyal subjects. The Roman strategy was successful because, aside from a small rebellion several years later in Northern England, there was never again any recorded attempts of British rebellions in hopes of throwing out the Roman Empire in nearly 350 years, all the way to the Roman withdrawal of Britannia in 410 AD.

Boudicca's rebellion occurred in a large part because of the way that Rome was treating its subjects. What remains important from this rebellion, however, is that Boudicca had stood a chance to push Roman forces out of Britain, changing the flow of history as we currently know it. Because of the importance that Rome played in England's development as a global power, this rebellion is important to examine as its implications were vast. Had Nero decided to pull out of Britain, perhaps England might not have become the global imperialist power that ended up shaping modern history. In addition, through Rome's deliberate use of a scapegoat, Britain eventually became a loyal subject of Roman authority and kept their blend of Roman and British culture. The progress made in modernizing Britain was not destroyed afterwards and so they were able to continue their course as a developing power and not regress into their previous tribal conflicts.

Because the British have had a large influence on modern history, the root of this influence has had a wide range of scholarly work written. Roman Britain has been covered by historians on all available areas and Boudicca's Rebellion is no exception. Graham Webster, a British archaeologist widely considered to be one of the greatest Romano-British archaeologists, writes that a key reason that the Roman army was so effective was because, living in a war torn region, "tacticians were always concerned with methods of dealing with new threats."<sup>2</sup> Webster also cites the Roman army's strict disciplinary system which ensured that the officers, when they realized they had to switch to a new tactic, could easily command a group of soldiers to manoeuvre into intricate and difficult formations on the battlefield.<sup>3</sup> This, he claims, was in contrast to the Britons who, "once the battle was engaged... were committed to a predetermined course of actions."<sup>4</sup> T.W. Potter shares this view of an innovating Roman army, writing that "the Roman authorities were constantly evolving new methods of warfare."<sup>5</sup> Peter Salway also agrees with this assessment, writing that the British's lack of daily training and discipline that standing armies, such as Rome's, underwent "meant that the Britons could not carry out complicated maneuvers in battle. Roman troops could... be detached and sent to different parts of the field as required... a British commander... had little chance of carrying out alternatives if the needs of the moment seemed to demand

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Webster, *Boudica: The British Revolt Against Rome AD 60* (London: Routledge, 1993), 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> T.W. Potter, *Roman Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 33.

them.”<sup>6</sup> These tactics, all three agree, were a strong advantage against the British forces, who they claim had little chance to rival their might.

In contrast, R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres claim that British forces were more than ready to face the methodical and modern Roman maneuvers, and they use the Battle of Medway as their evidence. This battle was fought in 43 AD during the Roman invasion under Claudius and lasted two days, which was rare for ancient warfare. They write that this “reflects credit both on British leadership and on the steadiness of British troops that, though caught unawares and confronted with a simultaneous cavalry attack and flanking movement, the Britons were victors in the first day’s fighting.”<sup>7</sup> Although Rome eventually won the battle, they use this example to show that British forces were not easily overrun and could put up a good fight against Rome. This strength in the face of both superior cavalry and modern tactics is not mentioned as an achievement by other scholars. Collingwood is keen to point out that the Britons were not a simple and unmatched force. He writes that “the Britons whom the armies of Claudius conquered were by no means savages.”<sup>8</sup> He goes on to claim that the difference in culture between the British and the Romans is not nearly as vast as “there is between the natives of an African protectorate and their European rulers [during the modern imperialist period].”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the difference in culture and access to technologies was not as wide as is commonly believed. This does contrast with other scholars, such as Graham, who in his description of British forces, paint an old-fashioned

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 77.

<sup>7</sup> R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 83.

<sup>8</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Roman Britain* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994), 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

and very traditional military force who would not be able to adapt to the tactical Romans.<sup>10</sup>

Peter Hunter Blair takes a position in-between both Graham and Collingwood by claiming that Roman troops “had learned that their opponents had evolved methods of fighting on open ground which made them formidable enemies.”<sup>11</sup> He places a greater importance on the British chariot as a battle-turning tool than Graham did and writes that it gave them somewhat of an advantage in open battles, which supports Collingwood and Myres notions that the British, while no great force, were not as simple and underdeveloped as is usually claimed.<sup>12</sup> However, Blair does state that the Roman forces’ ability to quickly change tactics in battles against set positions, from which they had prior experience in due to Rome’s constant wars and aggressive border expansions, gave the Romans a strong advantage that the British could not overcome.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars have also written various assessments on Boudicca, and Guy de la Bédoyère has gone as far as to claim that she may or may not have existed. He argues that Boudicca was made up by Roman historians who did not like Nero and so when they wrote about his conquests as Emperor, “in the context of their stories nothing suited their purpose better than a character that could be depicted as a counterpoise.”<sup>14</sup> He writes that “Boudica was a woman who exhibited all the attributes they would have

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<sup>10</sup> Webster, *Boudica*, 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain and Early England: 55 B.C. – A.D. 871* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>14</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *The Real Lives of Roman Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 27.

preferred in a Roman emperor” and thus she made for a good character.<sup>15</sup> He substantiates these claims by writing that she and her king husband, Prasutagus, still cannot be verified by the archaeology of coinage, in which many other British individuals of the time have been.<sup>16</sup> The only record of her existence is from the two Roman historians who wrote about her. De la Bédoyère also writes that her very name makes her existence suspect as well. Her name is made up of different parts of towns and translates literally to ‘Victory.’ He goes on to argue that it was likely a classicized version of the name of a Gallic tribal leader that Caesar had defeated or of a name that appears on the coinage of a different British tribe, as her name resembles a feminized version of these well-known Celtic names.<sup>17</sup>

He also mentions that it is unlikely she is real because in her rebellion, “she presented the Romans with an enemy that could be targeted in a way that virtually guaranteed defeat for her” and that it is just not believable that a competent commander would go to battle like this.<sup>18</sup> De la Bédoyère concludes his argument by writing that “she is at best a literary character made up of some elements of truth and other mythologized features that converted her into a box-office turn,” such as has happened many times in history with the deeds of many men being attributed to one figure, like Robin Hood or Hercules.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *Defying Rome: The Rebels of Roman Britain* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2003), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 48; de la Bédoyère, *The Real Lives of Roman Britain*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> De la Bédoyère, *Defying Rome*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> De la Bédoyère, *The Real Lives of Roman Britain*, 28.

This was an interesting accusation as there are no other sources I have found that cast any sort of doubt onto the existence of Boudicca, or even suggestions that her life may be a collection of legends and mythologies attributed to one person. It seems to be a widely held belief on the part of every other scholar of Romano-British history that Boudicca was indeed a real queen who fomented a real rebellion. I will explain my reasons for agreeing with this assessment in a later chapter, but it is important to note that, even though de la Bédoyère is one of the more recent scholars to write on Romano-British history, there has been no evidence to prove that Boudicca's Rebellion did not occur and that the small amount of evidence that he gives to disprove her authenticity is circumstantial at best and not concrete enough.

The life and fate of Boudicca, as she is only mentioned in two Roman sources, is a point of contention among scholars. Marguerite Johnson writes that Boudicca became queen after the Romans installed her husband, Prasutagus, as king of the Iceni following a small Iceni revolt in 47 AD.<sup>20</sup> She also claims that during the rebellion, Boudicca chose her target cities of Camulodunum, Londinium, and Verulamium because "they promised plunder and little exertion."<sup>21</sup> She then characterizes Boudicca as she appears in both Roman accounts and compares the differences. This source is therefore not as helpful as others in determining a full history of Boudicca and her rebellion, since it is mostly an aggregation of what the primary sources had to offer.

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<sup>20</sup> Marguerite Johnson, *Ancients in Action: Boudicca* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), 29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35.



Webster and Donald Dudley write that the evidence that Rome appointed Prasutagus leader over the Iceni after a prior rebellion is lacking,<sup>22</sup> an assessment that Salway also agrees with.<sup>23</sup> Webster and Dudley also write that Boudicca and Prasutagus cannot have been married after 45 AD and that her entire ancestry is unknown.<sup>24</sup> They even suggest that “it is possible that she was not of Icenian origin at all” as inter-tribal marriages were apparently common at this time in Britain.<sup>25</sup> When discussing her rebellion, they claim that Suetonius, upon hearing of Boudicca’s rebellion, eventually made the calculated decision to give up Londinium and Verulamium, knowing that he would have no chance to defend them from her army with his limited troops, choosing instead to find a battlefield in which his smaller army would have an advantage.<sup>26</sup> They also claim that because Boudicca did not capture any Roman military positions Suetonius was able to get supplies and reinforcements, and that this was a key point in Suetonius’ ability to easily crush the rebellion.<sup>27</sup>

M. J. Trow contradicts other authors, claiming that Prasutagus was already king when the Claudian Invasion occurred.<sup>28</sup> While Trow agrees that her ancestry is unknown, he makes odd claims about her personality and several physical traits, even though there is no primary evidence to support any of this, making his assessment of

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<sup>22</sup> Donald R. Dudley and Graham Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1962), 47-48.

<sup>23</sup> Salway, *Roman Britain*, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Dudley and Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>28</sup> M.J. Trow, *Boudicca: The Warrior Queen* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2003), 53.

Boudicca's life suspicious.<sup>29</sup> As the book progresses, it reads as more of a fictional narrative than a true account of her life and, as such, cannot be counted on to provide a clear understanding of both Boudicca and her rebellion.

Collingwood and Myres agree with the assessment that Prasutagus was already king before the Claudian Invasion and that he surrendered to Roman rule.<sup>30</sup> Their assessment of the rebellion, however, is interesting in that it reads as a game of 'cat and mouse' between Boudicca and Suetonius, portraying him as worried about the chances of being defeated and losing Britannia than he is in his depiction by Webster and Dudley. Collingwood and Myres write that "as soon as he heard that the Iceni had risen, he marched to the rescue."<sup>31</sup> They describe how Boudicca's army marched ever closer and that Suetonius, far outnumbered, was able to outsmart Boudicca by choosing a battlefield where her numbers were not an advantage, and then easily crushed the rebellion with superior tactics.<sup>32</sup> In the end, they write that Boudicca killed herself by drinking poison to avoid capture.<sup>33</sup>

Salway writes of the rebellion like other Romano-British scholars have: that Suetonius picked the last battlefield to give himself an advantage, and that Boudicca likely killed herself by drinking poison after defeat.<sup>34</sup> However, he differs from Collingwood and Myres in suggesting that when Suetonius marched back down to challenge the rebellion, it was because "he was afraid to leave the west unguarded

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid 53-54.

<sup>30</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Salway, *Roman Britain*, 120-121.

rather than he acted out of terror of Boudicca.”<sup>35</sup> This assessment is interesting to note, as it contrasts with other secondary sources’ depiction of Suetonius being scared of Boudicca’s campaign.

When discussing how Rome treated Britain after the revolt, Collingwood and Myres claim that Suetonius had a thirst for vengeance. They write that Suetonius was completely consumed by the thought of revenge and acted as if he was punishing all of Britain for the revolt. They claim that “new police-posts were scattered over the country, and the land of the guilty and suspect tribes was ravaged with terrible thoroughness. As the year wore on, famine helped.”<sup>36</sup> This is interesting as Suetonius’s vindictive nature seems to come from nowhere, and there is no motivation given as to what caused such heavy punishment. They also claim that the new procurator, Gaius Julius Alpinus Classicianus, was worried about this and what it’s possible effects on the tribute that Britannia was required to send Rome. He therefore petitioned Nero to replace him, since the British tribes were quickly coming into an increasingly dire situation with every passing day. Nero eventually replaced him with a more humane governor, C. Petronius Turpilianus, willing to listen to the natives and who was sent “with instructions to... keep the peace. These instructions he faithfully obeyed.”<sup>37</sup>

Webster writes a similar story of a tyrannical Suetonius. He claims that not only were rebellious tribes punished, but even those who remained neutral had their lands

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 119-120.

<sup>36</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 103.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

damaged in a clear attempt to create a famine as retribution.<sup>38</sup> In addition, he writes that the Romans “seized or destroyed stores and standing crops” and he claims that although Tacitus blamed this on the British sending more manpower to the rebellion than they had tending crops, this is not likely the case as agriculture was an important part of the British lifestyle.<sup>39</sup> They would therefore make sure they had enough agricultural labor to make sure they could survive the coming seasons. Just like Collingwood and Myres, Webster also mentions that Julius Classicianus petitioned Nero to replace Suetonius and that he told the Britons not to worry about Suetonius as he had a solution.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned previously, a new governor was eventually sent to Britain with a mission of peace and understanding and he lifted all of the sanctions that were previously placed on the offending tribes.<sup>41</sup> All sources covering the aftermath of the rebellion mention the same timeline of events, which is important because the way that Rome showed leniency to Britain is likely a large reason that they remained so loyal to the empire for the next several centuries.

Martin Henig also tells of a similar account but includes the role of Tiberius Claudius Togidubnus, who succeeded the previous king Verica of the Atrebates tribe after he was expelled from Britain by the natives. Henig claims that Togidubnus, a native Briton, accompanied Suetonius in his battle against Boudicca’s army.<sup>42</sup> He suggests that Togidubnus “may also have had a small army of his own. It may have well have been

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<sup>38</sup> Webster, *Boudica*, 101.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica: Culture & Politics in Roman Britain* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2002), 47.

now that he showed his merit... by playing a crucial role in destroying Boudica.”<sup>43</sup>

Although he does not elaborate on what he believes Togidubnus’ role to be, he claims it is more probable than not that Togidubnus was present at Suetonius’s camp. In addition, he states that Togidubnus, even though he helped Suetonius against the Britons, teamed up with Classicianus “as a strong influence in limiting the extent of the governor’s reprisals” after the end of the rebellion.<sup>44</sup> This is interesting to note as most other accounts do not speak of Togidubnus as having any influence in Roman politics. However, Henig believes that he was important not only in crushing the rebellion, but also in stopping Suetonius’s tyranny and having the Roman Empire show mercy to the Britons.

Stephen Hill and Stanley Ireland also discuss the aftermath of the rebellion, but their claims run contrary to Henig and supports Webster, Collingwood, and Myres in their assessments of how Suetonius’ reprisals were halted. Hill and Ireland claim that “it was only the arrival of a new Procurator, Julius Classicianus, whose chief function was the development of the Britain’s economy, that brought hope for the future.”<sup>45</sup> They lay sole responsibility for usurping Suetonius onto Classicianus, though unlike others, they do not suggest that this was done out of mercy, but rather because the reprisals “threatened in fact to perpetuate a political and economic disaster in Britain” and it was his duty as procurator to prevent that.<sup>46</sup> They also differ from Webster’s interpretation of the Roman retaliations and claim that the famine was not created by the Romans,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Hill and Stanley Ireland, *Roman Britain* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996), 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

and was in fact the fault of the Britons who depended on winning the rebellion so much, that they completely forgot about their agricultural duties.<sup>47</sup> Hill and Ireland also do not claim that Turpilianus, the new governor, came with any message of peace and that he only stopped the reprisals because it was his duty, and he therefore did nothing more to mend relations.<sup>48</sup> They suggest that the reason that Britain became so loyal following the rebellion was not because of the way that the Romans treated them afterwards, but rather because the Britons learned “the futility of revolt,” and how they would never be strong enough to defeat the Roman army.<sup>49</sup>

Sheppard Frere was of a different opinion regarding the aftermath of the rebellion. He claims that Classicianus did not petition Nero to recall Suetonius because of his harsh reprisals or because his reprisals were threatening to adversely affect the British economy, rather Frere suggests that it was simply because Classicianus was bold and new. Because he did not like the longstanding economic policies that Suetonius put in place, he was not afraid to petition for his removal.<sup>50</sup> Frere writes that “this man took a statesman’s view of the situation and was not afraid either to oppose the governor or to report to Rome adversely upon the fiscal effects of his policies: what was now required, he submitted, was a new man with a new policy.”<sup>51</sup> While Frere does mention that there were punishments, he claims that it was not much different from Suetonius’

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 23-24.

<sup>50</sup> Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* (London: The Folio Society, 1999), 77.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

usual policies of repression and military strength and that Classicianus just did not see these policies benefitting Britain's economy.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

## From Caesar to Nero

To fully understand the both Boudicca's and the Roman Generals' motivations, the background of Roman Britain is important. Without knowing the details of how, and for what reasons, Rome attempted to conquer Britain, the full implications of Boudicca's revolution do not have as much of an impact. Rome first became aware of Britannia during Julius Caesar's campaigns in Gaul in 57 BC.<sup>1</sup> During this time, Britain was divided along tribal lines which Tacitus mentions worked to their extreme disadvantage as "they do not act in concert. Seldom is it that two or three states meet together to ward off a common danger. Thus, while they fight singly, all are conquered."<sup>2</sup> In addition, Tacitus mentions their less advanced military and their weaponry. He states that their strength was in their infantry, although some high-ranking men used chariots in battle as well.<sup>3</sup> These chariots were not used by armed men to fight, rather they were used as quick transport in and out of battle. They could transport infantry where needed and move them out if they needed a retreat, making them a unique and dangerous force.<sup>4</sup>

The art of warfare was important to Britons, and they often practiced hand-to-hand combat, leading to stark differences between them and the Romans.<sup>5</sup> When Britons fought, they preferred to fight in the nude, as the typical leather armor available to them restricted movement with each additional layer, which could create fatal

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<sup>1</sup> John Wachter, *Britain Before the Conquest: The Coming of Rome* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, "Chapter 12," in *De Vita et Moribus Iulii Agricola*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1877).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Wachter, *The Coming of Rome*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> Graham Webster, *Boudica: The British Revolt Against Rome AD 60* (London: Routledge, 1993), 28.



mistakes in close combat.<sup>6</sup> British fighting tactics also were not nearly as advanced as the Romans, who were well disciplined and would change stations as battles raged; the Britons were instead unmoving, preferring to charge head-on with bravery.

Caesar turned his attention to Britannia soon after learning of its existence. Some scholars suggest that he created an expedition because he believed that Britons were aiding the Gauls against the Romans in the Gallic War.<sup>7</sup> However, others seem to suggest that he did not actually believe this and only claimed it to gain popular support for an invasion.<sup>8</sup> Caesar never made his true motivations for conquering Britain clear, but the question arises of why Caesar wanted to risk another war when he was already involved in one. What is known is that this region had a large concentration of goods and fertile land that were important for a growing power, and would also provide a large amount of wealth to whomever controlled it.<sup>9</sup> In addition, trades, such as the production of a variety of metals, were big and already well-established for centuries in this region, and with the notable large population, the prospect of increased slavery would have been attractive to Caesar for both financial and military reasons.

Whatever Caesar's actual motives were, he decided that an invasion of Britannia would be advantageous and he attacked with his infantry in 55 BC although his cavalry never came due to several unfortunate weather-related incidents.<sup>10</sup> Even though he could not chase the Britons with his cavalry to win a truly decisive victory, he was

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> T.W. Potter and Catherine Johns, *Roman Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 29

<sup>8</sup> Wachter, *The Coming of Rome*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Potter and Johns, *Roman Britain*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Wachter, *The Coming of Rome*, 4.

nevertheless successful with his infantry and offered terms with the British tribes for peace, which most tribes scorned.<sup>11</sup> Caesar soon came back with a proper invasion force and, although they were met with staunch opposition and unique military tactics, such as extensive fighting from British chariots and guerrilla warfare, the Britons were eventually defeated.<sup>12</sup> These British forces were led by Cassivellaunus, a tribal king most likely of the Catuvellauni. Caesar's second expedition was soon over after more terms were met and tributes demanded and although Caesar likely wanted to return for yet another expedition, Gallic revolts in the late 50s BC kept most of his focus. Caesar knew that the best time to invade Britain would not be when his Gallic campaigns were still ongoing, and that he would have to wait until they were pacified before he could consider anything more.

Although there was never another expedition in his lifetime, Roman relations with Britain slowly developed. Strabo tells us that Caesar's invasion was so successful, and the terms he set became so profitable, that it would have been economically disadvantageous to annex Britannia at the time since "the expense of the army would offset the tribute-money."<sup>13</sup> Strabo also mentions that trade began between the two regions, and this trade, as expected, left a Roman influence on Britannia.<sup>14</sup> This cessation of Roman activity from Caesar's expedition to Claudius's invasion is not entirely based in a cost-benefit analysis, however. Expeditions were planned on several

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Strabo, "Book IV Chapter 5," in *Geographica*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

occasions, however they were never realized due to strife in Roman politics.<sup>15</sup> With the assassination of Caesar and the ensuing civil war, the Romans were too caught up in their own affairs to even consider annexing Britain. When the civil war ended and Augustus created the Roman Empire, plans for more expeditions were made on several occasions, but even then they did not pan out either due to increased activity in Gaul demanding more attention, or simply because it seemed clear to Augustus that the British would surrender easily and was therefore not entirely worth his time.<sup>16</sup>

However, Rome did not completely forget about Britannia and even though they still had no incentive for any further expeditions, there was a diplomatic history between the two regions that even shows Britons respecting the Roman Empire. When Augustus visited Gaul in 16 BC, the poet Horace wrote that two British kings went to visit Augustus, and that he accepted their audience and established the beginning of a relationship.<sup>17</sup> Through the evidence of coinage found by archaeologists, this Roman influence on Britain can also be seen. Kings of British tribes had their names on their coinage and modern archaeologists have found differences between some coins. While this practice also helps historians locate the migration trends of various tribes in Britannia, and even shows the immigration and assimilation of non-British people such as Gauls into British tribes, the designs of these coins can also show how Roman culture had spread in the region by the way their designs exhibit certain Roman aspects. For

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 48; Lucius Cassius Dio, "Book LIII," in *Historia Romana*, trans. Earnest Cary. Ed. Loeb Classical Library, (Harvard University Press: 1927), 25, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

example, after visiting Emperor Augustus in 16 BC, one British king, who in turn influenced others, started to present a very distinctly Roman characteristic on the design of his coinage.<sup>18</sup> It appears that they copied the designs of Gallic coins, who got their designs from popularly-used Roman coins.<sup>19</sup> These British coins appear with laurel wreathes and other markers indicative of a Roman origin, such as a likely attempt at creating the profile of Apollo and the presence of horses.<sup>20</sup> In addition, coinage from two different kings were found to have “rex,” the Latin word for “king” inscribed on them, which, if of a Latin and not Celtic origin as scholars currently believe, shows the adoption of elements of the Roman language by Britons into their general vocabulary.<sup>21</sup>

Other items have also been found by archaeologists that show the extent of Roman influence in Britannia. Archaeologists have found the tombs of kings who, during their time, held anti-Roman sympathies but it is plain to see how Roman culture has influenced their burial process.<sup>22</sup> British art even began to adapt to a more Roman style as it imitated Roman artwork. Although it took time for this change to occur, archaeology can show how silver, copper, and even gold British artwork began to have a more Roman style in contrast to what was previously created in the region.<sup>23</sup> Collingwood and Myres even claim that Roman fashion had made its way to Britain.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the degree of the distribution of imported Roman goods, which can be

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 61.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Salway, *Roman Britain*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 63.

noticed as being purchased more by British aristocrats than by other classes, shows the extent of Romanization. These instances are just several of the many items of evidence suggesting that by this point, even without multiple Roman expeditions into Britain, the British had overall started to feel the effects of Roman civilization. Even though they were still considered barbarians by the Romans, they had definitely started to become Romanized before Claudius's organized conquest years from this point.

Emperor Claudius eventually saw fit to pick up where Caesar left off and 43 AD started the widespread invasion of Britannia. This was during the era of Roman expansion and Claudius, having recently become Emperor and seeking to make his mark, saw no reason not to finally execute what had been discussed for decades. Aulus Plautius led 40,000 men, consisting of four legions combined with auxiliaries, to the shores of East Kent.<sup>25</sup> Within the span of a few months, the Romans had already taken Camulodunum, modern-day Colchester and the capital of the Catuvellauni tribe, who had recently become the most powerful British tribe in the region.<sup>26</sup> They were evicted from their land and Camulodunum became occupied by the XXth legion as they built a more permanent base there, and the other legions expanded outward from there in all directions.<sup>27</sup>

The defeat of the powerful Catuvellauni so quickly shocked other British tribes, since the Catuvellauni had led the British opposition against Rome near a century earlier. Because of this, some tribes pled their loyalty to the Roman Empire not soon

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<sup>25</sup> Potter and Johns, *Roman Britain*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

after in hopes that they would be spared while their neighboring enemies were overrun. They allied themselves with Rome and the Roman Empire made the chieftains of these tribes client-kings.<sup>28</sup> The Iceni, whose capital of Venta Icenorum was located near modern-day Norfolk, was one of these tribes.<sup>29</sup> This tribe, led by Prasutagus, played a major role in the Roman Empire's affairs in Britannia. Sometime before 45 AD, Prasutagus married Boudicca, through which he had two daughters.<sup>30</sup> He and his wife Boudicca are, interestingly enough, two of only ten people that Tacitus mentions by name in his *Agricola*, and are the only two to be named who are British.<sup>31</sup>

Boudicca is particularly interesting in that, despite being so important to the history of Roman Britain, and even modern Britain itself, there are little historical records on her. The entire record of her existence is through Roman historians, who only wrote about her rebellion and the immediate causes of it, thus leaving modern historians in the dark concerning anything else about her. However, several assumptions about basic information on her can be made from these sources. Because her daughters were raped by Romans, they must have been at least young teenagers, which means that Boudicca was at least thirty when she started her rebellion.<sup>32</sup> However, her ancestry, if she had any other children, or anything else that could be used to create a general profile on her is unknown. This is one of de la Bédoyère's reasons of doubting

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Donald R. Dudley and Graham Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *Defying Rome: The Rebels of Roman Britain* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2003), 48.

her existence, since other rebels during this time period were more thoroughly described. Nevertheless, the rebellion did indeed occur and we do know that the Iceni were allied with Rome.

The title of client-king was, by this point in Roman history, long established. Rome had allied itself with native rulers in near every new region that they conquered and those who had surrendered to Rome before they were conquered gained this relationship. Client-kings kept their general independence and their sovereignty, but Rome was the true leader of the city and their word was final.<sup>33</sup> One of Rome's laws, the one which proved to be the catalyst to Boudicca's revolt, was the condition that, upon the death of the client-king, Rome would choose a successor from their populace and the city would be near completely annexed.<sup>34</sup> In previous instances, client-kings of large territories who could offer something valuable to Rome did not have the standard client-king and could have exceptions made against some laws. However, the three British kings who became client-kings were not of great value to Rome and therefore were not of this status, thus the standard rules for client-kingdoms were imposed on them. While the Iceni were allied to Rome, and the Romans were busy conquering more of Britannia and subjugating the surrounding tribes, the Iceni enjoyed a general prosperity. The Romans lent money to them and helped them, however it started to become clear that Rome did not understand the culture of Britons and how wary they were of assimilating.

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<sup>33</sup> Dudley and Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

The Roman governor of Britannia, Publius Ostorius Scapula, caused a small rebellion in 47 AD when he disarmed the British tribes. The Iceni, a “proud and independent people,” who only allied with the Romans to save themselves and therefore thought of themselves as above this ‘punishment,’ did not take it well.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the Iceni are actually the tribe that Caesar described as the Cenimagni, which was likely meant to be Iceni Magni, meaning “the Great Iceni” in Latin.<sup>36</sup> As many of the tribes named by Caesar during his expedition could not be located, it seems plausible that he was referring to the Iceni and simply made an error. The Cenimagni were one of the five British tribes who submitted to Caesar during his expeditions and therefore had a better relationship with him.<sup>37</sup> If the Iceni were indeed the Cenimagni, they would have expected to be treated with greater respect when the Romans finally appeared again since they had recognized Roman authority earlier than most other tribes.

The Iceni valued their privacy, their weapons, and their status, and having Roman troops break into their homes to take their weapons away from them was considered a great insult. Although the Iceni revolt was quickly put down,<sup>38</sup> the important point to gain from this event is not that they revolted, but that the Iceni had made it known that they believe they are above the other tribes and wish to be treated as such. In addition, it shows that men like Scapula, i.e. the Roman governors, did not realize how to appease the British masses when they made errors in their governance.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Potter and Johns, *Roman Britain*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 35



Scapula made a further mistake when, in order to intimidate both the Iceni and their surrounding tribes so future rebellions would not occur, he drove Britons off nearby land and built a military base in their place.<sup>39</sup> This is one of the actions that that led a different tribe to sympathize with Boudicca's cause and take up arms with her.

In the next decade, more of Britannia had become subjugated by Roman authority and many tribes had found themselves under Roman rule. Emperor Claudius had died and was succeeded by Nero in 54 AD. By this point however, Nero did not see a good outlook for a Romanized Britain anytime soon. There was still a large amount of territory to conquer in the region and with all these small rebellions, there was more money tied up in his keeping their military presence active than there was money coming into the Empire.<sup>40</sup> The conquest of Britannia had not been living up to prior expectations and it was likely that he was not the only Roman who felt this way. The historian Suetonius even mentions that Nero had considered withdrawing completely, but, because an annexed Britannia was his adopted father's vision, he pursued the matter in to continue his legacy.<sup>41</sup> Nero did, however, encourage the governors of Britain to act more aggressive and push to conquer more territory instead of settling conflicts between tribes. Scapula, along with both of the governors that succeeded him, had died, allowing Nero to appoint Gaius Suetonius Paulinus to the office in 57 AD.<sup>42</sup> This appointment was very calculated as Suetonius was a great military strategist and

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<sup>39</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, "Nero," in *De Vita Caesarum*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

<sup>42</sup> Dudley and Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca*, 37

proved his resolve as a general in terrain unfamiliar to most Romans through his successful campaigns against the rebel Moors in Africa.<sup>43</sup> Because it is reasonable to assume that he'd likely be useful in doing the same in Britain, Nero chose him to fulfill what others failed. His predecessor, Quintus Veranius, had started to draw up plans to conquer territories in the north but had died after only a year in office and Nero left this task to Suetonius.<sup>44</sup>

In 59 AD, Prasutagus died but left behind a will stating how he would like Venta Icenorum governed, leaving his wife Boudicca as Queen of the Iceni.<sup>45</sup> The Romans, however, must not have forgiven the Iceni for their revolt twelve years earlier because they disregarded his will completely and saw fit to humiliate the Iceni. The 'nobles' were completely ransacked by centurions, all relatives of Prasutagus were enslaved, Boudicca was publically flogged, her two daughters were raped, the town's massive loans and debts were called in, and Rome installed a Roman governor in Venta Icenorum who demanded a large number of both tribute and recruits.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps this was punishment for the Iceni thinking they were above other British tribes and this was Rome's way of humbling them. Perhaps the Romans sought to show everyone the insolence of Boudicca for thinking she could be queen by punishing her familial line, or perhaps it could even have been entirely a coincidence or something that happened to other tribes as well, only becoming noteworthy in this case because of its consequences. However,

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<sup>43</sup> Bédoyère, *Defying Rome*, 47.

<sup>44</sup> Dudley and Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 99.

<sup>46</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, "Book XIV," in *Annales*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1877).

in the end the result was the same: if the Iceni were insulted at having their weapons taken from them, this incredible disrespect to the royal line in the wake of their king's death was not only embarrassing for them in front of the other British tribes, but an unforgivable act in need of a swift and just response.

The Iceni found an ally in the Trinovantes, another tribe who felt slighted and insulted by the Roman Empire. They were also one of the first tribes conquered by the Romans after Claudius's invasion and they never forgave the Romans for taking part of their land to build both a military base, the base constructed by Ostorius after the Iceni revolt in 47 AD, and a new Roman colony established in Camulodunum.<sup>47</sup> They were also upset about the tributes and taxes that they had to pay to Rome as part of their alliance. In addition, they were unhappy about the settling policy that Roman soldiers followed concerning land rights. While there did not seem to be a law concerning how Roman veterans could take previously conquered lands, there does exist a history of Roman veterans doing so, and this did not change when they came to Britannia.<sup>48</sup> The Trinovantes, existing near the center of Roman rule due to their close proximity to Camulodunum and the landing site for Roman parties, therefore often had veterans driving them off their own land.<sup>49</sup>

Over the next several years, this practice, combined with the inaction of mediating these seizures, convinced many of the Trinovantes of the benefits in revolting with Boudicca. However, the single greatest act that pushed the Trinovantes to flock to

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<sup>47</sup> Dudley and Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Boudicca was their required maintenance of the temple of the deified Emperor Claudius that was built near them.<sup>50</sup> While they were upset by previous mandates of the Roman authority, they ended up becoming tasked with caring for what R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres called “the symbol of Rome’s dominance among them,” and this became too much for their honor.<sup>51</sup> Just as the Iceni regarded themselves as Caesar’s *Cenimagni*, and therefore more deserving of a higher privilege than the other British tribes, the Trinovantes were also previously held in higher regard by Caesar and felt undeserving of their current fate. When Caesar made his first expedition, the Trinovantes exhibited a pro-Roman sentiment and as a reward, one of Caesar’s terms with the other British tribes was that a rival tribe, the nearby *Catuvellauni*, would no longer harass them.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, just like the Iceni, the Romans gave them no special favors and so, when hearing of Boudicca’s planned rebellion, they decided that this was their chance of returning to their former glory and joined her.

Although Boudicca’s rebellion is the most famous British revolt against the Romans, there was an earlier insurrection that, even though it had failed, showed the British that it may have been possible for them to drive out the Romans. Caratacus, one of the sons of the *Catuvellaunian* king, fought against Rome from the invasion in 43 AD to his capture in 51 AD.<sup>53</sup> Even though his capital city was conquered by the Romans, he did not surrender and he went up to Wales to instigate the tribes there. This region of Britannia, occupied by the *Silures*, had been largely untouched by previous Roman

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<sup>50</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 100.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Potter and Johns, *Roman Britain*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Bédoyère, *Defying Rome*, 29.

influence and as such, they had no reason to give in to Roman authority. Indeed, Ostorius found that he could offer nothing to them to gain their loyalty.<sup>54</sup>

Caratacus gathered more Welsh tribes to follow him and although he never won a single battle in his entire eight-year campaign, and was eventually captured and shipped off to Rome, he was successful in that he was able to last so long.<sup>55</sup> Caratacus showed Britons that they too might stand a chance against Rome by showing that if he, a failed military commander, could last so long against the Romans, maybe a capable commander could defeat them. However, what Boudicca and her allies failed to realize was that Caratacus lasted so long by gaining the support of tribes that had never encountered the true power of the Roman military and what they were capable of on the battlefield. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the Catuvellauni followed Caratacus when he fled to Wales to create a new army, maybe because having seen firsthand how strong the Romans were, they knew it was futile.<sup>56</sup> The Welsh, knowing nothing of Roman tactics and units, believed they might have a chance.

The Iceni and the Trinovantes started to plan their revolt but they found their biggest problem to be the strong Roman military presence in their midst. They knew the power of the Roman legions and even if they believed in their cause, they knew that the rebellion would not last long if most of the Roman army could be quickly dispatched to them. Their time came in 60 AD when Suetonius took the brunt of the Roman army and moved northward into Wales to combat the druids who lived there. The druids were

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 88.

<sup>56</sup> Bédoyère, *Defying Rome*, 41.

known to Romans since Caesar's expedition over a century beforehand, and they were responsible for a lot of the anti-Roman sentiment in the north. They used both their position as religious figureheads and magic to convince locals, in a show of divine power, to rise up against the Romans. The druids were successful in fomenting small rebellions and this had been a great nuisance for the Roman governors for decades by this point.<sup>57</sup> Suetonius had not been governor for very long and he wished to show Nero and the Roman people that he would not waste his time in his position. While there were not many governors before him, some were so ineffective that they were easily forgotten.

Suetonius therefore decided to finish this problem once and for all and, because he required such a large force to ensure victory, he took many of the Roman troops occupied in south Britannia with him. After Boudicca and her allies noticed that the south of Britain was left largely ungarrisoned by Roman troops, they saw this moment as their best and possibly only chance of having a successful start and rose up in arms.<sup>58</sup>

The rebellion had started well for the British: Suetonius was hundreds of miles away, Roman cities were left undefended and vulnerable, and a force Cassius Dio numbers 120,000 strong lined up behind her. This was the result of years of unfair subjugation by Romans which the British felt were insults to their people and their customs. These British tribes had over a century of conflict with Rome and this became their chance to finally gain their homes back.

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<sup>57</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *Roman Britain: A New History* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2006), 36.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



## The Rebellion and its Consequences

While the size of Boudicca's army was probably not what Cassius Dio recorded, she most likely did command a large force after consolidating the Iceni and the Trinovantes. Boudicca used her large army to raze three Roman cities to the ground and won victories against the contingents that Suetonius had sent to stop her. But in the end, Boudicca failed in part because of the reasons that Suetonius prevailed. Were it not both for Boudicca arrogantly pressing her advance instead of being cautious and continuing her winning strategy, and for Suetonius's smart judgement in knowing both when and where to make his stand, Boudicca could very easily have overcome the odds and defeated a large part of the Roman army in Britain. Considering that Nero already had to be convinced, by this point, to continue his presence in Britain, a defeat like this may have been sufficient enough to change his mind. If she had defeated Suetonius, the remaining Roman Legions in Britannia would be left without a commander and too scattered to successfully combat the threat she posed. It likely would have resulted in the necessary withdrawal of the Roman military, at least until they could send reinforcements. Nevertheless, Boudicca's Rebellion was a tremendous undertaking by the Britons and the fact that they were able to coordinate so well and enjoyed great success in the initial stages of their war is unprecedented and a sign of their strength.

As mentioned earlier, once Suetonius moved his forces north in a campaign against the druids, Boudicca and the Iceni saw this as the proper time to strike. Dio describes in detail the moment that Boudicca exhorts the Britons to war. In his passage, he gives her both masculine and feminine traits. He writes that, even though she had



“hair [that] fell to her hips,”<sup>1</sup> she also “possessed a greater intelligence than [that which] often belongs to women”<sup>2</sup> and that “she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh.”<sup>3</sup> This description, while claiming that she may have been in some ways traditionally feminine, attributes traits typically ascribed to very masculine commanders rather than noble women. Noble women, at least in the Roman tradition, are not thought of as tall and imposing people, with deep gravelly voices. Dio also recorded a speech that she supposedly gave to her countrymen in order to galvanize her cause.

Her speech is split into three different chapters with each chapter focusing on a different aspect. The first chapter deals with the poor way that the Romans treat them: Boudicca claims that the Britons “have been deceived by the alluring promises of the Romans.”<sup>4</sup> She speaks of the annual taxes they have to pay and “how much better it would be to have been sold to masters once for all than, possessing empty titles of freedom, to have to ransom ourselves every year.”<sup>5</sup> In this comparison to slavery, Boudicca explains “even dying is not free of cost with them... [because of the] fees we deposit even for our dead. Among the rest of mankind death frees even those who are in slavery to others; only in the case of the Romans do the very dead remain alive for their profit.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lucius Cassius Dio, “Book LXII,” in *Historia Romana*, trans. Earnest Cary. Ed. Loeb Classical Library, (Harvard University Press: 1927), 2.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 2.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 3.1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 3.2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 3.4.

The second chapter detailing Boudicca's speech moves onto a different form of rhetoric where she placed both tribes under common circumstances to unite them together. She said that "although we inhabit so large an island... and although we possess a veritable world of our own and are so separated by the ocean from all... [that] even [outsider's] wisest men, have not hitherto known for a certainty even by what name we are called, we have... been despised and trampled underfoot."<sup>7</sup> Through saying this, she threw out the differences between the British tribes in order to unite them against a common enemy. By using 'we' so many times, and by saying that 'we inhabit this land' and 'people did not know what to call *us*,' Boudicca is showing them that they are the same and thus should fight as one. Considering that before the Romans came, the different tribes of Britain fought with one another frequently, it was necessary to make them understand that, although in relation to one another they are different, in relation to everyone else they are one country. Boudicca goes on to say "though we have not done so before, let us, my countrymen and friends and kinsmen – for I consider you all my kinsmen, seeing that you inhabit a single island and are called by one common name... do our duty while we still remember what freedom is."<sup>8</sup>

The third chapter of Boudicca's speech is used to empower the Britons against the Romans. In this part, she claimed that the Romans "are superior to us neither in numbers nor in bravery."<sup>9</sup> She spoke about how the Roman military uses armor and how Romans are prone to setting up walls to defend their fortifications. Connecting

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 4.2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 4.3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 5.2.

these two observations, she states that because Britons do neither of these things, since they prefer to fight in the nude and traditionally did not heavily fortify their cities, they “enjoy a surplus of bravery” compared to the weaker Romans.<sup>10</sup> In addition, she says that their guerilla tactics are superior because the Romans “can neither pursue anybody, by reason of their heavy armour, nor yet flee; and if they ever do slip away from us, they take refuge in certain appointed spots, where they shut themselves up as in a trap.”<sup>11</sup> Since they have the home field advantage, they both knew where it was best to fight and had the ability to slip in and out the battlefields quickly. Furthermore, she claimed that the Romans are not as strong as Britons are, due to the difference in lifestyles. She said that “they cannot bear up under hunger, thirst, cold, or eat as we can. They require shade and covering, they require kneaded bread and wine and oil, and if any of these things fails them, they perish; for us... any grass or root serves as bread, the juice of any plant as oil, any water as wine, any tree as a house.”<sup>12</sup> She concludes her speech by telling her followers to show the Romans “that they are hares and foxes trying to rule over dogs and wolves,” having sufficiently motivated an army to battle.<sup>13</sup>

Dio then writes of how Boudicca divined where the first battle against the Romans would take place. She had kept a hare in her dress and after letting it escape, she marked the direction and course that it ran as a divine showing to where she should lead her army to.<sup>14</sup> This led her straight to Camulodunum, the former capital of the Trinovantes which the Romans took from them to convert into an outpost. At this point

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 5.3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 5.4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 5.5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 5.6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 6.1-.5.

in the rebellion, Tacitus's account starts to become more detailed. He had earlier only quickly described the circumstances that led to the rebellion, and begins his account mostly at the destruction of Camulodunum. Tacitus writes that "it appeared... [to be] no difficult matter to destroy the colony, undefended as it was by fortifications, a precaution neglected by our generals... the ocean had worn the aspect of blood, and, when the tide ebbed, there had been left the likeness of human forms."<sup>15</sup>

Boudicca had quickly taken the city and started killing every Roman veteran living there. She had completely overwhelmed them due to both her large numbers and tactics of surprise, causing survivors to hide themselves in a temple. Because Suetonius had moved the bulk of the Roman army away from the region, the survivors appealed to the procurator, Catus Decianus, to send help.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for them, however, "all he did was to send two hundred men, and no more, without regular arms, and there was in the place but a small military force."<sup>17</sup> Tacitus writes that the Roman soldiers and survivors were embarrassingly unprepared, "trusting to the protection of the temple, hindered too by secret accomplices in the revolt," they did not construct any defenses in the temple and did not try to evacuate any women, children, or elderly people.<sup>18</sup> After a two-day siege, the temple was burned and the result was total annihilation.

Unbeknownst to Boudicca however, Petilius Cerialis, the commander of the ninth legion, the Legio IX Hispana, was on his way to Camulodunum to try to help the survivors. This legion would have been battle-tested since they had already been

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<sup>15</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, "Book XIV," in *Annales*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1877).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

involved in the suppression of British troops. It therefore probably seemed more than sufficient to send one legion down to crush the rebellion, considering the ease of taking this region and that every other rebellion to this point was easily put down by only a small number of troops. Roman Legions were usually around 10,000 soldiers, an equal number of legionnaires and auxiliaries, but this paled in comparison to the size of her army.<sup>19</sup> Boudicca met the IX Legion in battle and won a decisive victory, routing Cerialis's troops by crushing his entire infantry with only some cavalry escaping the onslaught.<sup>20</sup> The IX Legion was completely destroyed and because of this total defeat, Catus Decianus, the procurator who supplied the Roman forces, fled his post and settled in Gaul.<sup>21</sup> Cerialis was rash in his willingness to fight. He underestimated, not only how capable a commander Boudicca was, but how strong the Britons could be when united thusly, and he paid the price.

Boudicca pressed her advantage and moved on to Londinium, a newly made Roman city and "though undistinguished by the name of a colony, was much frequented by a number of merchants and trading vessels."<sup>22</sup> Londinium was founded as a planned urban center and was located in a strategic position for international trade by sea. This was therefore an image of Roman influence and Boudicca hoped that by attacking it, she would both undermine Roman control of the region and cripple Rome's financial ability.

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<sup>19</sup> Potter and Johns, *Roman Britain*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

While traveling to Londinium, Dio claims that an increasing amount of Britons joined her cause and her army grew tremendously.<sup>23</sup>

Suetonius had now heard of what had been going on in his absence, how Camulodunum was destroyed and the IX Legion massacred. He understood that this threat was a credible one. Leaving his army, he quickly traveled to Londinium before Boudicca could get there.<sup>24</sup> While Suetonius wanted to make a stand at the city, Tacitus writes that he did not want to make the same mistake as Cerialis by underestimating Boudicca's capability. He ordered an evacuation of the town and left it for the rebels to conquer, since "he resolved to save the province at the cost of a single town."<sup>25</sup> While this may seem like an unwise move, he understood the grave nature of the threat and he knew what the consequences would if he were to be defeated. If he staged a battle in Londinium and suffered the same defeat as Cerialis, the resulting blow to the Roman army could very well threaten Roman control of the entire region. In addition to the damage of his reputation, there would be no army large enough nearby to take the region back in a timely manner. Unfortunately, even though Suetonius fled with everyone that could leave, not everyone left. Tacitus claims that "those who were chained to the spot by the weakness of their sex, or the infirmity of age, or the attractions of the place, were cut off by the enemy."<sup>26</sup> Just as at Camulodunum, Boudicca burned Londinium to the ground.

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<sup>23</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 8.2.

<sup>24</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

After Londinium, Boudicca turned her attention to Verulamium. This city was also founded by the Romans as a planned urban community and had grown to be symbolic of Roman might. The primary sources do not mention much about the city, only that Boudicca conquered it soon after taking Londinium and before marching up Watling Street where she met Suetonius.

Based on past British fighting style and Dio's account of Boudicca trying to reclaim their lifestyle these victories that Boudicca had won were likely accomplished through guerilla warfare. The Britons could, as Dio mentions, slip in and out of forests to attack and since Dio claims that they were not well-armed, guerilla tactics make the most sense. In the battle outside of Camulodunum, for example, only the cavalry were able to flee. In this case, British chariots were likely used, enabling Boudicca to quickly and effectively encircle the opposing army. Her use of guerilla tactics therefore played a large part in securing victory and was indicative of advantages she could have had if only she did not change strategies. Roman forces at this time did not have much experience battling these quick tactics. Boudicca was a capable commander and, since she was able to rally her troops effectively and march on, she had a good chance of beating back the Romans. Historians can estimate her age because she had at least teenage children by 60 AD, so she would have been alive when the Claudian invasion of Britain occurred. She therefore would have known how the Roman military triumphed over British forces in regular combat, and aware of the fact that they could not fight them as well when easily ambushed. She would have known that her strength lay in hiding in wait and striking at

a marching force. But Suetonius plotted to take away her advantages of large numbers and guerilla tactics, and Boudicca fell into the trap.

While historians do not know exactly where the final battle between Boudicca and Suetonius was fought, historians believe that it was most likely on Watling Street near Lactodorum, modern Towcester, or Manduessedum, which is modern Mancetter.<sup>27</sup> Suetonius called the XIV Legion and veterans of the XX Legion, and had altogether a little over ten thousand soldiers,<sup>28</sup> which would not be nearly enough to fight the horde that Dio estimated had now reached 230,000 people.<sup>29</sup> Suetonius would have been utterly engulfed by this large force so he knew he had to use their large numbers against them. He chose a site “approached by a narrow defile, closed in at the rear by a forest, having first ascertained that there was not a soldier of the enemy except in his front, where an open plain extended without any danger from ambushes.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, he knew he would be ambushed so he chose a narrow battlefield where he could extend his own lines as widely Boudicca would be able to. The site was narrow enough that he could extend his lines all the way through, being able to reinforce it as well, and Boudicca would not be able to use her superior manpower and chariots to encircle and rout them as she did with Cerialis.

Suetonius essentially tried to trap Boudicca; she had to travel on Watling Street from Verulamium to advance and he knew he could catch her and force her to fight there. By this point in the rebellion, Boudicca had faced the Romans multiple times and

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<sup>27</sup> Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* (London: The Folio Society, 1999), 76.

<sup>28</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

<sup>29</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 8.2.

<sup>30</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.



never even lost a significant part of her army. But this was only because of her guerilla ambushes, which allowed her forces to engulf and destroy the enemy from all sides, combined with the Roman mindset of 'dumb barbarians' not knowing how to properly wage war. Suetonius made sure that these previous advantages would no longer be a problem.

That tables had been turned and now Boudicca was the rash commander. She took this as her opportunity to, as she exclaims in her pre-battle speech, avenge "lost freedom, my scourged body, [and] the outraged chastity of my daughters."<sup>31</sup> From the Roman sources, Boudicca obviously seems overconfident. Tacitus claims that they were "exulting [at the battlefield] ... so fierce in spirit that they actually brought with them, to witness the victory, their wives riding in wagons, which they had placed on the extreme border of the plain."<sup>32</sup> Dio claims that they just walked at a normal pace into the fray once the battle started, confident that this combination of legions would be no match for them.<sup>33</sup> She must have thought that with a force allegedly twenty-three times that of the enemy, and knowing how the Romans had underestimated her so, she could defeat any army thrown at her. So she rode into battle calmly and this became her biggest mistake.

Suetonius set his army into a wedge-formation and, because of his stronger cavalry, quickly broke through the British resistance. Tacitus claims that the Britons had started to retreat, but due to the massive amount of reinforced lines and the family-

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 12.2.

filled wagons they placed behind them, it was too difficult to flee and they were easily slaughtered.<sup>34</sup> Tacitus writes that a little less than eighty-thousand Britons were killed, while only four hundred Romans were killed with an equal amount wounded.<sup>35</sup> Even if the actual numbers are a fraction of that, it is still a resounding Roman victory. Tacitus and Dio offer conflicting accounts of what happened afterwards, if Boudicca killed herself to escape capture or died of illness immediately after, but the end result is the same: the rebellion was quashed.<sup>36</sup>

The short-lived rebellion had come so far under Boudicca's command. They took three cities and wiped out almost an entire Roman legion, which is farther than any British force had done up to this point. Had Boudicca not faced Suetonius at Watling Street, as Suetonius was running out of supplies and could not keep up his war against Boudicca for much longer,<sup>37</sup> Boudicca could have moved on with her campaign. She could have easily conquered the other legions in the forests of Britain, where Roman infantry and cavalry struggled against her usual tactics, and forced Nero to withdraw the Roman presence from Britain. Unfortunately, Boudicca had was not cautious enough and thought her forces to be invulnerable when faced with the full might and power of the Roman military, something which undeveloped militaries like Britons did not stand much of a chance against.

Boudicca's position, with such a seemingly different attitude than her previous fights, is one the reasons that de la Bédoyère doubts the existence of Boudicca. As

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<sup>34</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.; Dio, *Historia Romana*, 12.6.

<sup>37</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

stated before, one of the reasons that he believes she is a made up character by the Romans is because “by gathering her forces together in a single straggling army, she presented the Romans with an enemy that could be targeted in such a way that virtually guaranteed defeat for her.” Which is something he believes that no capable commander would do.<sup>38</sup> This evidence, however, overlooks the fact the role that religion and righteous belief played in this rebellion.

The Briton’s religious figures, namely the druids, were inciting Britons to battle, claiming that it was through their gods’ divine will that they fight back against the Romans.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Dio writes multiple accounts of Boudicca invoking the name of Andraste and Andate, who he claims are the goddesses of war and victory, respectively.<sup>40</sup> Before setting out to Camulodunum, Boudicca called upon Andraste to lead them into battle, since it is in her name of war that they seek freedom.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Dio claims that at the cities that she conquered, Boudicca made multiple sacrifices to Andate, who the Britons believed was helping them.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Boudicca was a religious woman who trusted Andraste on where to first be led into battle when she divined her will. She trusted her religion to guide her in her efforts and with this divine guidance on her side, combined with the multiple unprecedented victories over the Roman army, she must have believed that she was blessed and decided to press her

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<sup>38</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *Defying Rome: The Rebels of Roman Britain* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2003), 46.

<sup>39</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *Roman Britain: A New History* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2006), 36.

<sup>40</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 6-7.

<sup>41</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 7.3.

luck in this attempt. Unfortunately for her, the confidence that her religious beliefs gave her were not enough to challenge the Roman Empire.

Evidence suggesting that a victory at the Battle of Watling Street could have forced the Romans to withdraw from Britannia comes from the story of Arminius, the German leader of the Cherusci tribe who Tacitus claimed “assuredly... was the deliverer of Germany.”<sup>43</sup> Arminius was the leader of a coalition against Roman incursions into Germania and it was through his victories that the Romans were forced to retreat behind the Rhine river and no longer attempt an occupation.<sup>44</sup> The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD was the start of Arminius’s victories. In this battle, Arminius and his troops set a trap for the Roman army, which consisted of three legions and over 20,000 men, and ambushed them.<sup>45</sup> The result was the total annihilation of all three legions.<sup>46</sup> Although there were more battles involved in this war before Rome finally withdrew in 17 AD, the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest proved to Rome that their efforts to take Germania may have been futile.

There are parallels in the cases of Boudicca and Arminius that lead one to believe Roman policy for the two would be similar as well. Both leaders were responsible for creating and keeping an alliance among native tribes against the Roman Empire and both were responsible for a great victory over the Romans, though situations do differ in key areas too.<sup>47</sup> 9 AD was during the era of Augustus’s expansion and with Germania

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<sup>43</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, “Book II,” in *Annales*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1877).

<sup>44</sup> Martin Goodman, *The Roman World: 44 BC – AD 180* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 245.

<sup>45</sup> Tacitus, Book II, *Annales*.

<sup>46</sup> Goodman, *The Roman World*, 243.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

being on the territorial frontier of the Roman Empire, it was both necessary and easy to send reinforcements to ensure success. Britannia, however, required ships to transport troops and there had been a tendency of weather-related accidents delaying or destroying fleets. It was therefore much easier to send more manpower to Germania than Britannia if the need arose. Considering that the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest and the proven capability of Arminius was a large factor in Rome's withdrawal from Germania, if Boudicca had succeeded at the Battle of Watling Street and defeated over two of the four total legions brought to Britannia, it is conceivable that Rome would have withdrawn from there as well. It would not have been efficient for Nero to send reinforcements to Britannia before Rome could fully make a plan that would minimize future losses and guarantee victory, such as in the case of Germania.

After Boudicca's rebellion had been quashed, Suetonius quickly resumed command of Britannia and led a series of harsh reprisals.<sup>48</sup> No reasons are given for why he did so, and it therefore seems like more of a personal vendetta than anything else. Some historians argue that he justified his reprisals based on Boudicca's ruthlessness to her prisoners, namely that she did not take any.<sup>49</sup> Tacitus claims that after capturing any territory, Boudicca's army was only interested in any physical wealth that they could easily plunder, and not much else, which included Roman citizens.<sup>50</sup> He writes that "it was not on making prisoners and selling them, or on any of the barter of war, that the

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<sup>48</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

enemy was bent, but on slaughter, on the gibbet, the fire and the cross, like men soon about to pay the penalty, and meanwhile snatching at instant vengeance.”<sup>51</sup>

While Boudicca is viewed by many modern Britons as a one of the first patriots of her country and have respect for her, she was merciless in her dealings and showed this side at every city that she conquered. While Tacitus does not write much about what happened to the Roman citizens of the towns that Boudicca took, Dio devotes a significant section to the atrocities she and her army committed, which he called an “indescribable slaughter... subjected to every known form of outrage.”<sup>52</sup> He says that there were a lot of carnage involved, but he only writes about a few: including cutting off noble Roman women’s breasts and sewing them to their mouths and afterwards impaling them lengthwise on skewers,<sup>53</sup> disembowelment while alive, and “perish[ing] by being melted in boiling water.”<sup>54</sup> Though it is not known how many people she subjected these treatments to, Tacitus claims that she killed a total of 70,000 Roman citizens and allies between the three cities that she took, and a fair amount were likely through these methods.<sup>55</sup> These harsh actions may be the reason that Suetonius treated the Britons so harshly after defeating the rebellion, especially since had to leave people in Londinium and likely sent them to this fate. But Dio’s account of the rebellion seems less reliable than Tacitus’s and with several contradictions between the two, it is likely that Tacitus’s is the more accurate source.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 7.1.

<sup>53</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 7.2.

<sup>54</sup> Dio, *Historia Romana*, 11.4.

<sup>55</sup> Tacitus, Book XIV, *Annales*.

Because Tacitus had a father-in-law fight in Suetonius's army, for whom he wrote the *Agricolae*, he has a unique insight into the rebellion which other historians would not have. His father-in-law actually fought in the Battle of Watling Street alongside Suetonius and he therefore would be able to know exactly what happened during this campaign better than other Romans. Dio had no such luxury and his account comes over a century later, when he would be unable to interview people who were present at the time for accurate statements. While it is likely that there are many facts in his account, the mere fact that he disagrees with Tacitus on some minor things, such as how Boudicca died, means that it is probable that there are more inconsistencies in his story. These atrocities are also almost entirely unmentioned by Tacitus, since all he states is a suggestion that they hanged, burned, and crucified Romans for a more instantaneous vengeance.<sup>56</sup> If such carnage actually did take place, Tacitus would have known and would have included it in his works. The fact that he does not specifically mention these in his deep account of the rebellion means that they were likely exaggerated by Dio, which was not uncommon for historians of this time. Most likely Dio embellished rumors of what Britons did to their prisoners, if not entirely fabricated them, in order to give a just cause for the Roman reprisals after the rebellion. This is corroborated by recent inconclusive archaeological evidence. While there is proof that Boudicca burned the cities that she captured, since during excavations on them a layer

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

of burnt debris was found that would coincide with this time frame,<sup>57</sup> there is no evidence of any mass graves that impaling tens of thousands of people would leave.

Tacitus does not write exactly what policies Suetonius initiated after the rebellion, though he does mention that he was anything but merciful. Unfortunately, Dio also does not mention Boudicca's story any longer after her defeat so it is difficult to understand exactly happened, but with recent archaeological work, historians have been able to extrapolate a possible answer. Nevertheless, it is likely that these harsh policies were not entirely the work of Suetonius, and were initiated under the suggestion of Nero as a method of converting the region into a loyal colony. A similar method appears in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

In one chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes about what a prince should do with new territory acquired by the arms of others. He describes how Francesco Sforza had acquired the Romagna region in Italy. However, the people of this region were vastly different than him in culture and he found it hard to unify them and give them laws.<sup>58</sup> So Sforza appointed a governor to the territory who had the responsibility to do this, and was very cruel in his practice.<sup>59</sup> As a result of his cruelty, the people of Romagna utterly hated him, and Sforza knew this. In order to "clear himself in the minds of the people, and gain them entirely to himself, he desired to show that, if any cruelty had been practiced, it had not originated with him, but in the natural sternness of the

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<sup>57</sup> Frere, *Britannia*, 75.

<sup>58</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, "Chapter VII – Concerning New Principalities Which Are Acquired Either by the Arms of Others or by Good Fortune," in *The Prince*, trans. W. K. Marriott.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



minister.”<sup>60</sup> Sforza had his governor executed and left him dead in the middle of a piazza. When the people then saw this, they flocked to him and Machiavelli claims that Sforza had successfully won over the people of Romagna for the rest of his time there.

This method is reminiscent of Nero’s position in Britannia. Nero had acquired Britannia from Claudius, who started the Roman invasion, and had a governor in the territory, Suetonius, who was constantly conquering more land for him. In addition, the Britons were lawless like the Romagna people and Nero was attempting to give them Roman culture. Just like Sforza, he knew that he could make them loyal to him by creating a scapegoat, and it worked to a degree. Although the Britons never became fiercely loyal to Nero, they eventually showed allegiance to the Roman Empire and never again did a British citizen try to push their presence out of Britannia.

Suetonius’s first policy after the rebellion started when he “harried the lands of the tribes which had rebelled or even appeared to be indifferent.”<sup>61</sup> By doing this, Suetonius created a famine because the Britons relied heavily on agriculture and this was devastating to the local population. Suetonius also created new Roman police-posts that he “scattered over the country.”<sup>62</sup> This food crisis and surveillance crackdown ravaged the British people until Julius Classicianus, the procurator, petitioned to have him removed as governor. Finally, in 61 AD, Nero acquiesced and recalled Suetonius, sending Petronius Turpilianus to be governor in his place.<sup>63</sup> Tacitus writes that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Graham Webster, *Boudica: The British Revolt Against Rome AD 60* (London: Routledge, 1993), 101.

<sup>62</sup> R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 103.

<sup>63</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, “Chapter 12,” in *De Vita et Moribus Iulii Agricolaе*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1877).

Turpilianus “was sent out to initiate a milder rule” which he immediately did.<sup>64</sup> As governor of Britannia, he stopped Suetonius’s harsh reprisals and oppression against the British people and took a more conciliatory approach. He did not attempt to conquer any more lands in Britannia and instead focused on improving relations. Turpilianus was in the middle of his consulship at Rome when he resigned that post in favor of moving to Britannia, so this was obviously a careful decision.<sup>65</sup> In 63 AD, after improving peace with the Britons for two years, Turpilianus gave up his post and handed it over to Trebellius Maximus who, just like Turpilianus, continued his mission of reconciliation and did not attempt any more wars in Britannia.<sup>66</sup>

This approach was a concentrated effort by Nero to assure that the Britons would become loyal to the Roman Empire. Nero knew that Britannia could easily have become completely lost, and in fact he was ready to give up the country as it was becoming too much of a headache for the empire.<sup>67</sup> Because of previous poor Roman policies, the Britons did not just despise the Romans, but abhorred them. In Boudicca’s speech before setting out to Camulodunum, she speaks to her army about “a hatred of present conditions, that hatred you already have.”<sup>68</sup> Clearly the Romans had made a misstep in their foreign policy and did not take into account just how much the Britons would come to scorn them in the seventeen years of their occupation. This hatred

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Publius Cornelius Tacitus, “Book XIV,” in *Annales*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1877).

<sup>66</sup> Tacitus, “Chapter 12,” *Agricolae*.

<sup>67</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, “Nero,” in *De Vita Caesarum*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

<sup>68</sup> Lucius Cassius Dio, “Book LXII,” in *Historia Romana*, trans. Earnest Cary. Ed. Loeb Classical Library, (Harvard University Press: 1927), 2.4.

caused problems for the Romans as an ideology is hard to wipe out of a population. Even though Boudicca's rebellion was defeated, without improving relations there were still conditions for a second rebellion, possibly one with even more tribes participating. Moreover, the new commander of this future rebellion might be smarter and be aware of Boudicca's mistakes, and it is probable that he could finish what she started.

This tactic by Nero was calculated and ingenious. He knew that just changing policy would not have a great effect on the Britons' mindset towards the Roman Empire. If Suetonius was to just stop his aggressive expansion, the Britons would have thought that the Romans were scared of another revolt and that they were weak. However, by having Suetonius exact personal revenge and then recalling him in light of a 'scandal,' on the pretext of the new procurator concluding that his governing of the state would cause a complete economic collapse, Nero could make it seem as if these misfortunes were never his attention and mark himself a respected figure.

With a more merciful governor, Britain became Romanized in a slower and less aggressive manner, not by force and cruelty as was under the previous governors. The way that Rome previously tried to Romanize Britannia was done hastily and proved to be ineffective in its use. For example, Britons were forced to take on large debts by the Romans for items they did not need and then had it called back at random. Furthermore, Rome attempted to quickly destroy their culture and history, such as when they evicted everyone out of Camulodunum to make it an outpost. Nero realized that such hatred after only seventeen years of occupation did not make the goal of keeping Britannia a long-term possibility. He recognized the faults in their previous

policies and understood that the fastest way to sway the Britons' minds in favor of Rome lay with scapegoating Suetonius. In the end this was a gamble by Nero, as sending a more conciliatory governor could have showed the Britons that the Romans were weak and could be scared into leaving Britannia, but it paid off well and ensured the loyalty of the region for hundreds of years after his reign ended.

## Conclusion

Compared to the development of both their Gallic neighbors and the long-established Mediterranean powers, the Britons were far behind. Their tribal system was much more simple than Gaul's, having come into prominence only through the influence of Gallic immigrants, and by this point other powers existed in the world which had long surpassed tribal conflicts and started to have influence in global affairs. The Roman Empire was such a power, and by the beginning of their conquest of Britannia in 43 AD, Rome had far-reaching capabilities and great technological prowess. In contrast, individual British tribes were still fighting for dominance in the region and there seemingly existed no common identity with which to unify under. They were less advanced than Rome in nearly all aspects including agriculturally, politically, and militarily. The Britons put up a fight when Emperor Claudius and his forces invaded, but they were easily defeated by the more-disciplined, better-equipped, and smarter Roman military, and several British tribes surrendered. These circumstances make it all the more interesting that one woman could have united several large tribes in south-east Britannia, creating an army hundreds of thousands strong, in a bid to push the Romans out of Britannia. Of even greater interest is the fact that, in the face of overwhelming British military failures to combat the Romans at this point, she had a good chance of turning the tables and creating a major problem for the Roman Empire's interests in Britannia.

When the Romans conquered Britannia, they quickly began the long process of Romanization, intending to impose their own customs and culture on Britons and

assimilate them as quickly as they could. They enforced their rule on British tribes, deciding who would be king of which tribe, what they would do with occupied land, and had the ability to dictate how each king would deal with day to day minutiae. They also encouraged Britons to take loans and buy frivolous items that were indicative of Roman culture. In addition, they started construction of specifically Roman buildings, such as the temple to the deified Claudius near Camulodunum that they tasked the Trinovantes with caring for. Unfortunately for the Romans, they did not take into account how the Britons would react to such a drastic change in their lifestyle in such a short period of time, and general unrest began to grow.

Small rebellions broke out in the country, such as the Iceni Rebellion of 47 AD, and was indicative of a larger problem but the Romans were too focused on expansion to care about the everyday problems of already-subjugated peoples. Their greatest mistake came in 59 AD when King Prasutagus died and attempted to install Boudicca as queen; it seems that either the Romans were so focused on other tasks that they did not explain to him that he did not have the power to choose his successor, or he figured that the Romans would be okay with it and that it was worth a try. Nevertheless, Rome further fractured their interests in Britannia by placing a Roman ruler of the Iceni and humiliating Boudicca possibly as punishment for thinking she had the right to rule. The Romans were so occupied with the thought of controlling Britannia as quickly as possible that they did not take fully into account how the Britons would react and underestimated their ability to stand together in the face of perceived tyranny.

By 59 AD, it had only been sixteen years since the Romans invaded Britannia and started Romanization which is not a very long time at all since the Iceni and other tribes had many citizens who were alive for the event and remember what their lives were like before the Romans arrived. They remembered their previous customs and a time when each tribal king was not secondary to the Roman governor. But the Romans either did not notice the growing tension or did not care, and Suetonius turned his attention to the north in hopes of further expansion, leaving a hotbed of anti-Roman fervor unguarded in the south. Boudicca's genius was in taking advantage of this anger and uniting it against a common enemy.

Boudicca was in a rare position at this point because, by 60 AD, she was the most publicized case of the Briton with the least to lose. She had been unfairly brutalized by the Romans only for attempting to adhere to Iceni customs of the king choosing his successor upon death. And for this mistake, her daughters' honor was spoiled, she became bankrupt, family members were enslaved, and she was humiliated for all to see by a very public flogging. We hear of no other cases in Britannia during this time period such as hers where one woman has the unique position of both being well-known and popular among her people and having endured so much simply for not assimilating quickly enough. Her ability to unite the Trinovantes and the Iceni, raising an army 150,000 strong against their common enemy, was a great undertaking and stands as a testament to her abilities. Even more so that she did this all while unbeknownst to the Roman authority.

Boudicca had just proved herself as a capable and charismatic leader, and she soon after proved herself to be a smart and competent commander. Boudicca mainly chose influential cities to attack; she chose cities that were indicative of Roman power and authority. Camulodunum because it was taken from the Trinovantes and Verulamium and Londinium as they were entirely new cities built by Rome to open Britannia's resources to the global market. While Londinium collapsed without putting up much of a fight, since everyone who could fled with Suetonius, Camulodunum had a small Roman presence and called in an entire legion as reinforcements. They both proved to be no match for Boudicca and this legion was almost entirely destroyed. The Romans had been continuously underestimating both the Britons' and Boudicca's strength and capability and they were paying the price for it. Boudicca's defeat of the IX Legion near Camulodunum could not be seen as a fluke since she was less prepared for that battle than she was for the Battle of Watling Street. The fight with the IX Legion proved the military might of the Britons and their guerilla tactics. But unfortunately for the Britons, arrogance led to their demise and after so many successes, they did not take proper precautions and were defeated shortly after by Suetonius.

Had she won the Battle of Watling Street, it is conceivable that she could have pushed the Romans out of Britannia, at least for some time. There would have been less than two full legions left in the area with no current Roman governor and this, coupled with Nero's reluctance to have a presence there, could have been enough for a victory. This story is important both because rebellions against the Roman Empire had a tendency of failing, and the continued Romanization of Britannia was integral to the



Britons much later emergence as a world power. Boudicca had successfully challenged the power of the Roman Empire, going down in history as one of the few native peoples to stand as a chance at ending Roman occupation. In addition, with all the anti-Roman sentiments in Britannia, their use of this rebellion to instill loyalty in the region was a necessity to keep it. A rebellion was inevitable, and if Rome did not change the Britons' mindsets soon, there would be no conceivable end to the cycle. Through these actions, they preserved Britannia for centuries and developed the region throughout their occupation in a way that would prove to be important for the chance of Britannia of having any effect on a global scale. Even though there is a large disconnect between the Roman occupation of Britannia and the emergence of the British Empire, and it required the work of several more centuries of different peoples coming and going, Rome had begun the slow process of developing their future capabilities. They had given Britannia a chance by pushing forward their growth as a civilization tremendously and gave them some tools necessary to have any global influence.

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