

War Anarchic: Boudica

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Roman incursions into Britain began with Julius Caesar between 55–54 B.C.E. with two separate attempts. The first invasion (55 B.C.E.) was launched on the grounds of supposed support from the Britons towards the Gallic tribes against the Romans during the Gallic Wars (58–50 B.C.E.). This first attempt ended in failure, losing their cavalry boarded on ships due to bad weather and constant guerrilla attacks by the Britons forced a stalemate. The second invasion (54 B.C.E.) proved more fruitful for the Romans and Caesar as they managed to fight their way to the river Thames as well as establishing a number of treaties and trade partners with local tribes living in the south-eastern parts of the territory.

It wouldn't be until about a hundred years later that Rome would even attempt to set foot in Britain again. When it did return in 43 AD under the Roman emperor Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus it would be with much greater success. Rome had wanted access to Britain for some time due to rumors of great material wealth, both in metals and food that were always in need by the large, imperial government of Rome. It would be under these conditions that Boudica of the Iceni tribe would rise to become queen of her people and lead a brutal insurrection against Roman occupation.

The Romans invaded Britain when Boudica was around eighteen years old, having either previously or within recent times married their husband Prasutagus, whom may have been related to the then king of the Iceni, Antedios. Meanwhile their neighbors to the south in the Catuvellauni tribe, in alliance with other tribes, waged a guerrilla campaign against the Roman army. After a successful battle against the Catuvellauni led rebellion Claudius established a legionary fortress located at Camulodunum, now modern day Colchester in Essex, as well as the submission of eleven British tribes, including the Iceni under Antedios.

In 47 AD Ostorius Scapula replaced the first, previously established Roman governor of Britain. Ostorius arrived to the territory under guerrilla attacks and as such, decided to disarm the British tribes, including the Iceni. This was seen both as a threat and an insult to the Britons Celtic traditions and as such rebelled. However, this rebellion would fail and at some point Antedios would die, leaving Prasutagus and Boudica as king and queen of the Iceni. The Romans seized more land around Camulodunum to establish a colonia of veteran Roman soldiers, resulting in the enslavement and execution of many local tribes in an attempt to expand Roman influence, both materially and culturally in an effort to "Romanize" the territory. In 52 AD the king of the

Catuvellauni, whom had been a leading figure in much of the resistance up to this point, was captured by Rome. That same year, Ostorius died, replaced as governor by Didius Gallus.

In 54 AD Emperor Claudius was poisoned, possibly by the mother of his successor, Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus who became emperor of Rome. Later in 58 AD Caius Suetonius Paullinus, replacing Didius Gallus, became governor of Britain and began a vicious military campaign in Wales. After successfully pushing to the north-western borders in 61 AD, Suetonius reached the sacred Celtic groves on the isle of Mona. There, they attacked the isle slaughtering the druids and what resistance was there, cutting down the sacred groves that were located on the isle. This would most likely have been an incredibly painful moment for the Celtic tribes of Britain, and it wouldn't have been unlikely for Boudica to have heard of this assault against such an important spiritual location.

In conjuncture to the brutality at Mona, Boudica's husband Prasutagus died. In death, Prasutagus left a will that was meant to split power between Rome and the Iceni, however this had no legal precedence either in Roman law or Celtic tradition and was therefore ignored. Under Roman law the death of a client king meant that either a new one was to replace them or Rome would take control of the territory directly. In this case, it would be the latter. Boudica, now acting as the sole ruler of the Iceni, was confronted by the procurator Decianus Catus, a financial official of Rome. They began to take inventory of Iceni property and lands, now considered property of Rome. When Boudica objected to this, Boudica was beaten and their daughters were raped. This violent act against Boudica and their daughters wouldn't silence them however. It would spark a fire that would be felt across Britain and would not be forgotten.

After uniting with a number of other tribes resistant to Rome's imperialism, Boudica attacked Camulodunum, slaughtering the inhabitants and burning it to the ground. The Roman legion Legio IX under the command of Quintus Petillius Cerialis Caesius Rufus attempted to halt the rebellion, but was ambushed by Boudica's forces, escaping with their cavalry leaving his remaining infantry to be slaughtered. At this point Suetonius would learn of the rebellion and made their way from Mona to Londinium, Boudica's next target. However, much like Camulodunum, Londinium had no walls or defenses and so Suetonius ordered the town evacuated. Those whom remained were brutally executed by Boudica's forces.

Similarly to Camulodunum and Londinium, Verulamium, which had been granted the title of municipium by Rome which allowed for a limited amount of autonomy and participation in Roman government, was raided by Boudica. Suetonius gathered an army of around 10,000 soldiers, made up of the combined forces of Legio's XIV and XX, as well as a number of auxiliaries gathered from around the local area. Dio wrote that Boudica's forces number at around 230,000 warriors from various Celtic tribes that had allied themselves to Boudica's cause. Where exactly Suetonius and Boudica's forces met in battle isn't exactly known, though some suggest it to be located around Watling Street (A5).

One might initially think that Boudica's numbers would have played a decisive factor in the battle. However, the training, equipment and strategem of the Roman army would prove itself once again against the might of the Celtic rebels. The Romans chose to position themselves in a defile in which the woods would be at their back, with open country in the front, taking advantage of an essentially natural fortification. Boudica's forces met Suetonius's in the field, Boudica reportedly riding in a chariot, commonly used by the Celts in warfare. The Romans opened the battle with their throwing javelins, followed by a charge in wedge formation, supported by cavalry on their wings. The long swords of the Celtic warriors, which required relative space to swing properly,

were rendered ineffective on the cluttered battlefield that favored the Romans shield formations, stabbing with their short swords into Celtic lines. The chariots that the Celts favored proved completely useless against an enemy that had effectively fortified their position. The Celtic warriors weren't even able to effectively retreat as they had brought their wives in wagons, set up behind their lines to witness the battle, effectively barricading themselves against retreat. The result was an overwhelming Roman victory, slaughtering the Celts and pushing Boudica to suicide, most likely in order to avoid capture by the Romans. Tacitus reports around 80,000 casualties for the Celts and 400 for the Romans.

Boudica's revolt resulted in the death of about 70,000 Roman civilians and 7,000 Roman soldiers, if Tacitus's numbers are to be believed. Boudica's revolt, while a failure, shocked Roman society with its tenacity and violence. Rome would eventually take control of Britain, but the effects of Boudica's rebellion are still felt to this day and much can be learned from them and the Celtic warriors that fought by their side. Lessons can be drawn from the successes, failures and context of the insurrection itself.

Which is what Boudica's revolt must be understood as, an insurrection.

An insurrection is a general uprising against the power structure. It is usually a sustained rebellion over the course of days, weeks, months or even years. It is a type of class war that involves a whole population in an act of armed or semi-armed resistance. Sometimes mistakenly called a rebellion, its character is far more combative and revolutionary. Rebellions are almost totally spontaneous, short-term affairs. An insurrection is also not the revolution, SINCE REVOLUTION IS A SOCIAL PROCESS, RATHER THAN A SINGLE EVENT, but it can be an important part of the revolution, maybe its final phase. An insurrection is a planned violent protest campaign which takes the spontaneous revolt of the masses to a higher level. Revolutionaries intervene to push rebellions to insurrectionary stage, and the insurrection to a social revolution. Source.

Under this definition, Boudica's revolt meets all the criteria for an insurrection. When we consider the revolts that proceeded Boudica's from the beginning of the Claudian invasion in 43 AD all the way to their own ending in 61 AD, there exists eighteen years of prolonged insurrectionary activity within Britain. Though not necessarily able to be classified as a revolutionary process, the Celtic tribes of Britain certainly were united in a sustained, multi-year long process of warfare against Roman occupation. Boudica's revolt was an extension of this campaign, which is especially obvious when we consider the targets that the Celtic insurrectionists chose and the kind of violence and destruction unleashed upon Roman colonists and soldiers. Of note is Boudica's first target at Camulodunum, due to its establishment as a colonia and especially for the temple to the emperor Claudius that had been constructed there by emperor Nero in their honor. In assaulting Camulodunum, the soldiers and survivors that were able to escape the initial attack took shelter inside the temple itself. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Celts burned Camulodunum to the ground, including the temple. The Celts also, according to Roman reports, slaughtered and mutilated much of the towns inhabitants, though to what extent the Romans could judge with their own use of rape, torture, slavery and gladiatorial blood sports is questionable.

Suffice it to say, the Celtic insurrectionists sought to remove the Romans, and anyone who would ally with them, from Britain entirely. Of the three locations that were assaulted by

Boudica's forces, Camulodunum and Londinium were colonia. Verulamium itself was a Celtic community that had accepted a degree of Romanization and was therefore seen as a threat to Celtic autonomy due to their loyalty to Rome. A clear path of anti-imperialism is present in the insurrectionary campaign of Boudica, for personal as well as social, political, economic and spiritual reasons. This campaign would culminate in the battle against Suetonius.

The Celts made a number of errors in regards to this particular battle. Equipment wise, the Celts were highly under prepared for the type of engagement that they were about to undertake. While the style of weapons and battle dress of the Celts did not necessarily spell defeat for them, it had to be undertaken with their strengths in mind against whatever weaknesses could be exploited against their opponents, namely the Roman military. However the Celts choose to meet the Romans in open battle, something they were incredibly experienced with, in a position that highly favored the Romans. Not only that but the Celts, under their own arrogance, brought their wives in wagons with them, which would later prevent them from escaping Roman slaughter. The Celtic failure at this battle is quite disappointing given resistance up to this point, especially given the strategic knowledge Boudica had employed previously. There is an argument to be made that, had the Celts been successful in this battle it very well may have completely halted Roman incursion into Britain, at least for some time.

Boudica's insurrection demonstrates that the struggle against domination and oppression is not one that can be accomplished over night. It is an evolutionary social process. Boudica's insurrection was not the first in Britain but rather a part of an established historical struggle. Without that, Boudica would have had little to no reason to resist with the tenacity that they did, barring their own obvious personal reasons for doing so. This history would have given Boudica an understanding of what and why Roman imperialism needed to be resisted. The colonization, enslavement, murder, torture, rape and destruction of spiritual practices and ritual sites that had taken place before Boudica's insurrection deeply informed their actions and strategy. It is why for example they chose to burn Camulodunum and the temple built there as they represented, both materially and symbolically, Roman domination over their lands and peoples.

In order to struggle for our freedom against domination, we must understand the history of that struggle for us to understand the context of our current one. Not only that, but we must be united in our struggle, otherwise it may fall apart without direction or understanding of what we are fighting for. Finally, struggling against domination must be understood within the evolutionary social process, that the struggle for freedom itself will contain the potential for a free society within it. These are the lessons that Boudica's insurrection teach us, ones that I am of the idea must be understood if we are not only to understand the context of rebellions in our own time, but so that we may push them towards their insurrectionary and quite possibly, revolutionary potentialities.

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