

Boudica: Queen, Mother, Rebel, Warrior [C1]

La regina degli Icenî condusse un esercito formato da diverse tribù nel corso di una rivolta sanguinaria contro gli invasori romani nella Gran Bretagna del I secolo d.C. Le storie di Tacito e Dione Cassio ne confermano l'esistenza, sebbene alcuni studiosi la collochino nella sfera della leggenda. In ogni caso, occupa un posto preminente nel pantheon delle eroine britanniche.

According to historic accounts, Boudica was a 1st century queen of the Icenî tribe and the leader of a [mighty uprising](#) against the Roman Empire. Britain had been under Roman control for less than two decades when thousands of Britons united behind her in revolt. Several victories were achieved against Roman forces, whose [grip](#) on Britannia was temporarily [loosened](#).

ROMAN REPORTS

The circumstances surrounding Boudica's rebellion were reported by Roman historian Tacitus in around 115, over half a century after it occurred. Another Roman writer, Cassius Dio, [concurred](#) with the story, and [depicted](#) her as an imposing figure with "[fierce](#) eyes". Dio dramatically recreated the moment when Boudica rallied her 120,000 people-army: "Standing on a platform, holding a [spear](#), an [unbound](#) mass of long [tawny](#) hair falling down her back, she called on her people to fight against Rome".

POLITICAL AGENDA

Neither Tacitus nor Dio witnessed the events, however. What's more, as a Roman historian, Tacitus had an [agenda](#): at the time, barbarian attacks against the Roman Empire were a growing problem and Britain was seen as an [edgy](#), dangerous place in need of civilising. The Romans would have found the idea of a female ruler disastrous, something that would inevitably lead to destruction and chaos. (Egyptian queen Cleopatra's influence over her Roman lover Mark Antony was a clear example.) Tacitus's account of the

Boudica rebellion may have been intended to [warn](#) Romans to be [wary](#) as well as a [reminder](#) of their moral [duty](#).

PROBABLE TRUTH

However, as a British [subject](#) of Rome, Boudica was considered a Roman citizen. Her beating and the rape of her two daughters would have horrified Roman readers. Whatever Tacitus's [agenda](#), his sources are more contemporary and more factually authentic than any other writer's. He may have had access to war reports and even to [eye witness accounts](#). To find out more, Speak Up contacted Ben Paites, collections and learning [curator](#) at Colchester Museums. We began by asking him [to what extent](#) fiction and fact combined in creating the persona of Boudica. **Ben Paites (English accent): **Like with a lot of historical figures, there has been a lot of mythologisation around her. I would think that she was a real person. That there was a real warrior queen who lived at that time. But in terms of popular perception, especially since the Victorian period, [where] her name and her image really began [to take off](#) again. A lot of people have kind of created these ideas around who she was, what she did, why she did what she did. And even in the accounts of Tacitus and Cassius Dio, there's both information missing and information conflicting in some instances. So it's not quite sure, especially about what happened to her afterwards. We know she led a rebellion, we know she destroyed several towns in Britain. But what happened next?

SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH

It is estimated that 240,000 Britons lost their lives in Boudica's final battle in 61 AD. Its exact location, however, has never been established. While Iron Age coins exist that [display](#) a name which might represent Boudica's husband, Prasutagus, only [trace](#) archeological evidence [hints](#) at her existence. No [burial site](#) indicating that a battle occurred has been found, as Paites explains. **Ben Paites:** It is probably on one of the roads leading from London and St. Albans area up northwest, because that's where the army was stationed, around the Isle of Anglesea. And so it's likely that the two

intercepted on a route in that direction, and that's where that final battle took place. Now the place has been speculated [on] by many people. And it's very difficult to find any evidence of this, because you might find [arrowheads](#), sword fragments, whatever... but conflict was very common back in that period, so it could be any number of battles that took place at any of these sites.

BURNT TO THE [GROUND](#)

In London, Colchester and St. Albans, archaeologists have uncovered [thick layers](#) of [ash](#) dating to 60 AD. This does concur with Tacitus's account of towns burnt to the [ground](#) by Boudica's army, says Paites. **Ben Paites:** That's the one instance where we actually do know [about] Boudica's battles. At Colchester, London and St. Albans we have these burning [layers](#). You find them absolutely everywhere, especially in Colchester. You can [dig](#) down and you will always find a burnt layer. It gives you a very good indication of chronology within the excavations, because you know that that's the point, the Boudica layer; anything above that is post-Boudica, and anything below that is Iron Age. And it has been dated, that's the thing, because you find coins and [pottery](#) either side that indicate that was AD 60-61. That was when that burnt layer happened, which [ties in](#) very nicely to the accounts of when Boudica attacked those towns. So we do know that those [layers](#) are related to her. And we actually have in Colchester, we have on [display](#), quite a few objects and things from that layer. So we have burnt [pottery](#), burnt glass, metal, which really gives you an indication — even the glass — of just how [fierce](#) these fires would have been when she burned these towns; her and her people. She was followed by hundreds if not thousands of people. It was a [team effort](#). She and her army did do a huge amount of devastation through all the towns they went to. And these [layers](#) of destruction that you find in those towns is just phenomenal.

BURIED TREASURE

One [poignant](#) discovery in Colchester suggests that people felt sufficiently [threatened](#) to bury their treasure. **Ben Paites:** One particular example that's

been really useful is the Fenwick Treasure. So this is a collection of jewellery mostly, but amongst the jewellery was a curated group of coins. They are coins that date from almost every Emperor. That might have been accidental, but it gives us a good representation of the sorts of coins that were in circulation at the time. But they were all perfectly preserved, partly because the people who would have owned them, the people who lived in that house, buried those coins, so they were found just under that kind of layer. Thankfully, they protected that material. But what that also means, of course, is that those people didn't survive because they didn't go back to reclaim those coins. Boudica: the Warrior Queen

Glossary

- **edgy** = spigoloso, problematico
- **duty** = dovere
- **burial site** = luogo di sepoltura
- **pottery** = vasellame
- **grip** = controllo, stretta
- **tawny** = fulvi
- **thick** = spessi
- **ties in** = combaciare
- **poignant** = null
- **warn** = avvisare
- **to take off** = prender quota
- **trace** = traccia
- **team effort** = lavoro di squadra
- **uprising** = rivolta, sollevazione
- **spear** = lancia
- **wary** = prudenti, cauti
- **reminder** = monito
- **subject** = assoggettata, sottoposta
- **to what extent** = fino a che punto
- **threatened** = minacciare
- **mighty** = potente
- **concurred** = concordare con
- **depicted** = descrivere
- **fierce** = fieri
- **unbound** = sciolta
- **eye witness accounts** = testimoni oculari
- **layers** = strati
- **agenda** = scopo, priorità
- **curator** = null
- **hints** = alludere
- **ash** = cenere
- **dig** = scavare
- **loosened** = allentare

- **arrowheads** = punte di frecce
- **display** = mostrare
- **ground** = suolo