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THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF BRITAIN

by

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Abstract

In 43 CE, Britain became part of the Roman Empire and was systematically conquered for nearly half a century. The province had valuable natural resources to plunder, but the decision to invade was based upon more than its material wealth. Prestige through warfare was paramount in Roman society, and that is just what Claudius sought to achieve when he launched his invasion of the island. The Romans pushed all the way into Caledonia before stopping and securing the frontier with the construction of Hadrian's Wall. Britain had become just another component in the colossal machine that was the Roman Empire.

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Introduction

Rome, the vast entity that seemed to incessantly grow and conquer more people, was not always the empire that it would later become. At the outset it was only a small republic, confined to the area around its capital city, but the civilization expanded to dominate the whole of the Italian peninsula. As it grew further, it came into conflict with other civilizations, and as these other civilizations were conquered, they became assimilated into the Roman system. Rome's influence in the Mediterranean continued to grow and so did its borders. By the time an emperor replaced the republican form of government, it controlled much of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East and still it continued to expand. Rome wanted to control everything within its grasp, even an island on the fringes of the empire known as Britannia.

Britannia, better known as Britain, was situated off the northwest coast of Gaul. Ancient geographers had some knowledge of it and the Greek explorer Pytheas went so far as to claim to have sailed there, but details of the island were scarce. The native tribes closely resembled the peoples of Gaul and it was under the pretense of extinguishing Celtic resistance that Julius Caesar first invaded the island. Nearly a century later, Claudius launched his invasion in an effort to emulate the great general. Though the emperor claimed his triumph within the year, the conquest was far from over.

Rome continued its subjugation of the island for over four decades until the recall of Agricola brought the northern conquest to an end. They faced significant resistance and even a near disaster when Boudicca, the widow of a deceased British king, led an uprising against the

invaders. The revolt was quelled and Rome continued its conquest. The province experienced a stasis during the latter part of the first century and in 122 CE the emperor Hadrian built his famous wall across the entire width of the island, signifying the end of Roman expansion. Hadrian chose to secure the frontier throughout the empire, but the wall constructed in Britain was the most visible example of this policy. Britain had successfully become a functional province of the Roman Empire by the end of the first century CE.

During Rome's early years, its expansion allowed it to acquire the wealth of knowledge from the civilizations it conquered. Greek thought heavily influenced the conquerors and permeated into Roman society. Much of the remaining information on the empire came from Roman historians influenced by the Greeks before them. The writings of Tacitus, widely considered one of the greatest Roman historians, cover much of the first century CE, including a biography of Agricola, Tacitus' father-in-law and governor of Britain. Cassius Dio's histories lack the detail of Tacitus', but they will still be heavily utilized in this thesis. Julius Caesar's account of his Gallic and British wars will be crucial to understanding the initial invasion. The writings of other contemporary historians and geographers provide additional details about the Roman world and the nature of the island.

Although much remains from the ancient scholars, even more has been lost, and although we view the surviving texts as primary sources, most were written decades after the events they depict. Just as modern historians pull from a wealth of sources to supplement their writings, so too did the ancient historians rely on earlier works. It is highly likely that complete accounts of the Roman conquest of Britain existed at one point, but they have since been lost to the world. This is unfortunate as these histories would have been highly beneficial to the writing of this

thesis. The accounts of Tacitus and Dio offer an overview of the invasion, but they lack the detail of a book dedicated solely to the conquest of the island. The surviving writings are relatively taciturn on the motivations behind the invasion, instead focusing primarily on military actions taken against the island. While these serve to provide a timeline of the events, they do little to help understand the reasoning behind the conquest, leaving modern historians to make assumptions about what the original texts may have said. Roman historians knew what those texts said and based their own accounts off of them. When examining the surviving sources, which are viewed today as primary, it is the duty of the modern historian to interpret them to try and understand what the original sources may have said.

Modern historians have written a great number of secondary sources about the conquest, although only a scarce amount will be used in this thesis. More important will be archaeological research, which proves crucial where textual evidence fails. Sites throughout the island reveal a wealth of knowledge of the Roman occupation, and excavations of mines show the nature and extent of Roman-era quarrying just as excavations of forts have divulged important information about the military. Such research has proved paramount to an understanding of the Roman period and will be utilized to supplement the surviving written evidence.

This thesis will assemble the evidence into a concise history of the conquest and focus on the motivations behind the invasion, as well as the difficulties faced in subjugating the island. Controlling the island fit into the Roman culture of conquest; Rome had been expanding its boundaries for centuries, and Britain was just another territory waiting to be conquered. This ideology was especially prominent among the leaders of Rome, and the newly crowned Claudius used this invasion to elevate his status as emperor. Rome faced many difficulties in its attempt to

subdue Britain and some contemporary authors debated whether the exertion was mitigated by the benefits. Britain offered much to Rome, however, both in terms of physical resources and the achievement of an ideological victory, crossing the ocean to complete the invasion.

This thesis will examine the conquest from a militaristic viewpoint, although other factors – such as Romanization – were also important and will be discussed. Rome did not want to simply conquer the island; they wanted to integrate it into the empire, and to do so they had to ‘civilize’ the Romans. The effects of this policy would make for an interesting discussion on the conquest, though that is not the primary focus of this thesis. The ideology of militarized conquest will be more important for this discussion, starting with the great Roman general, Julius Caesar. Caesar conquered many lands before he embarked on one of his greatest achievements, his voyage across the ocean to the unknown island of Britain.

The Road to Claudius' Triumph

The decision to conquer Britain would not have shocked the majority of Roman citizens; rather, it would have been viewed as yet another example of the Roman expansion to which they had become so accustomed. The island of Britain – although at this time its status as an island was merely speculative – had long been shrouded in mystery. Julius Caesar, having completed his subjugation of Gaul, sought to investigate this unknown world. In 55 BCE, Caesar ventured across the hitherto uncrossed English Channel to see what the island had to offer Rome. Whatever he hoped to find, whether it was treasure or something more enigmatic, he was likely disappointed. Britain appeared to offer little, save for an unforgiving geography and a barbarous native population, though a number of resources were later discovered. Nevertheless, Caesar's accomplishment was heralded as a great success in Rome. He was the first person in recorded history to set foot on this distant land.

Caesar's Invasion

Caesar's first foray into Britain occurred late in the summer of 55 BCE. According to his *Commentaries*, Caesar believed that the Gallic chiefs had fled across the English Channel to seek an alliance with the Celtic tribes in Britain.¹ He states his reason for invading was to finish the war started in Gaul. Understanding that this was not a realistic goal to complete in the short

¹ Caesar, *Commentaries* 4.17.

campaign season remaining, it is more likely that his real purpose was to survey the island and gather information about the native population. Traders who had visited Britain provided Caesar with some intelligence about the island, but this information was scant and did not provide Caesar with any real answers to his questions.

By his own account, Caesar needed eighty ships to carry his two legions over to Britain. The cliffs he intended to land at, however, were teeming with hostile Britons, Caesar was forced to land some eight miles from his intended landing spot. His enemy was not to be deceived, and met the Romans in battle. The invaders were initially caught off guard, but managed to offer stiff resistance nonetheless. They eventually gained the upper hand and repelled the Britons. This battle proved more difficult than it should have been due to a delay in the arrival of the cavalry, some eighteen ships that had been prevented from landing by a storm.² The lack of cavalry hindered the Romans' ability to pursue the fleeing enemy, and left them vulnerable to attacks by the British cavalry and charioteers.

The chariot was a unique feature of British warfare that proved disconcerting to Caesar's men. These chariots specialized in an indirect hit-and-run type of warfare, designed to divide the Roman army into smaller, more manageable units. This prevented a head-on battle with the Roman legion, a battle the natives were likely lose. While similar tactics had been used in Spain and Gaul, by the first century BCE chariot use had been restricted to the British Isles.³ The speed and mobility of the chariots proved difficult for the Romans to deal with, especially with their lack of cavalry. The charioteers could move quickly around the battlefield, dividing Roman

² Caesar, *Commentaries* 4.26.

³ Bradley, Carl Meredith, "The British War Chariot: A Case for Indirect Warfare." *Journal Of Military History* 73, no. 4 (October 2009), p. 1078.

troops and providing assistance wherever needed. While the Roman legionary was still far better trained than the British soldier, British chariot use helped close the disparity between the two.

Caesar experienced further bad luck when the high tide, of which he was unaware, destroyed much of his fleet. With winter approaching and supplies running low – this was intended only as a brief expedition and the Romans packed accordingly – Caesar’s men had to work quickly to repair the broken ships. The British observed these developments and, in an attempt to prevent all future forays to the island, attacked Caesar and his men.⁴ The Romans again faced difficulties from the charioteers, but stood their ground until the enemy withdrew.

Poor weather provided for a hiatus in the fighting, and when the rains stopped it was the Romans’ turn to be the aggressors. They fell upon the Britons and slaughtered the natives until the survivors fled. The Britons sued for peace and Caesar demanded hostages be sent to Gaul. The Romans sailed back to the Continent soon after, but not before one last British attack. This time the Britons, namely the Morini tribe, were repelled and slaughtered easily.⁵ An uprising in Gaul culminated with difficulties and failures in receiving reinforcements and forced the Romans to return to the mainland for the winter.⁶ Thus ended Rome’s first foray into Britain.

Though Caesar did not make any tangible gains from his expedition, the ramifications were great indeed. Caesar was pleased with his efforts and desired to return to the island. The Roman people hailed his accomplishment with a twenty-day celebration in his honor. They viewed this invasion of Britain as a step forward; as Cassius Dio writes, ‘For seeing that the formerly unknown had become certain and the previously unheard-of accessible, they regarded

⁴ Caesar, *Commentaries* 4.27.

⁵ Caesar, *Commentaries* 4.33.

⁶ Cary, *III*, p. 385.

the hope for the future inspired by these facts as already actually realized and exulted over their expected acquisitions as if they were already in their grasp.⁷ Even though Caesar's army did little more than repel the Britons and win some skirmishes, the Roman people had faith in their general to finish the job. He had nearly completed his subjugation of Gaul with little hindrance and was fully expected to continue this trend on the island of Britain.

One reason for this confidence was the similarity between the peoples of Gaul and Britain. The Greek geographer Strabo writes that although their habits were very similar, the Britons were more simple and barbaric. They are also 'taller than the Celti, and not so yellow-haired, although their bodies are of looser build.'⁸ Strabo also comments on the resemblance of their fighting styles. Tacitus likewise notes a comparison between the two peoples. He posits that the red-haired Caledonians originated from Germany, and the Silures are of Spanish heritage. Of the rest of the island, he states, 'Those nearest to the Gauls also resemble that people.'⁹ Their religious beliefs and languages were very similar; the key difference between the two was that the Britons were more spirited. However, Tacitus writes after much of Britain had already been conquered, so this difference was likely observed during Claudius' campaign against the island, not Caesar's brief foray.

Caesar returned to Britain the next year with ten times as many ships.¹⁰ His landing was unopposed this time as the Britons were frightened by the size of the Roman fleet. Caesar determined not to be caught unaware like he was the previous year and led his men out in pursuit of the enemy. After winning a battle against the Britons and pushing them out of the ancient fort

⁷ Cary, *III*, p. 387.

⁸ Strabo, 4.5.2.

⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 13.

¹⁰ Caesar, *Commentaries* 5.7.

of Bigbury, Caesar received word that his fleet had once again been destroyed, this time by a violent storm. He returned to rebuild his ships and secure the camp. Meanwhile, the tribes of Britain banded together under the leadership of Cassivellaunus, king of the Catuvellauni.¹¹

The Catuvellauni, a Belgic tribe situated north of the Thames River, were one of the strongest tribes in Britain. At the time of Caesar's second invasion they were involved in a war with the non-Belgic Trinovantes to acquire their territory. The tribes of Kent, where Caesar had landed, were forming a coalition against the invaders. Despite their resistance, Caesar refers to them as, 'the most civilized of all the Britons, and differ but little in their manners from the Gauls.'¹² After their initial defeat, they appealed to Cassivellaunus for help. He agreed and assumed command over the forces of Britain. He would prove to be a more formidable adversary than Caesar had faced in Gaul or Britain.

This freshly made alliance presented considerable difficulties for Caesar's legions, who, upon completion of the ship repairs, resumed their pursuit of the enemy. The strategy of the Britons consisted of feigning retreat to draw the Roman cavalry away from the bulk of the army. With this accomplished, they would rush at the Romans on foot in the hopes of catching them unawares. This method proved so effective that the cavalry became reluctant to pursue the enemy, rendering impotent in this regard. The natives, fiercely fighting to protect their homeland, were finally repulsed at the cost of many Roman casualties.

¹¹ Collingwood, R. G. & J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 46.

¹² Caesar, *Commentaries* 5.10.

Caesar notes a significant decrease in British ferocity during the following day's battle.¹³ After repelling the army, the Roman cavalry pursued the enemy with great success. According to Caesar, the Roman victory that day was so complete that the Britons never again assembled against them as a complete nation. Many Britons were successful in their retreat northward. Caesar's next step was to cross the Thames into Catuvellauni territory.

The Britons, having already crossed the river, defended it by placing stakes along the banks and in the water. The Romans were not to be deterred and successfully forded the river despite the obstacles, causing Cassivellaunus and his men to flee. The Romans continued their advance, hindered only by the occasional skirmish led by the natives against any Roman who strayed too far from the main army.

The deterioration of British resistance was marked by the submission of several tribes, the first being the Trinovantes who were a traditional enemy of the Catuvellauni. In return for Roman protection, the Trinovantes provided Caesar with hostages and safe passage through their lands. Lesser tribes, whom Caesar names as the Cenimagni, Segontiaci, Ancalites, Bibroci, and Cassi, soon followed suit, also providing hostages.¹⁴ Perhaps more important to the Roman operation was information regarding the location of the Catuvellauni capital, a fact hitherto unknown to the Romans. They took this information and set themselves against the native fortress. Many Britons were slaughtered or taken prisoner, although Cassivellaunus managed to survive the onslaught.

Following the fall of the Catuvellauni capital, the Kentish tribes attacked the camp where the Roman fleet was sheltered. The battle was no more than a last ditch effort at the behest of

¹³ Caesar, *Commentaries* 5.13.

¹⁴ Caesar, *Commentaries* 5.17.

Cassivellaunus. A Roman victory signaled the end of any realistic hopes of a British triumph over the invading armies. Cassivellaunus, recognizing his position, submitted to the victorious Romans. The terms of the peace included hostages and an annual tribute to Rome. With this concluded, Caesar returned to the mainland.

Some question may be raised as to why Caesar accepted the terms of peace as opposed to completing his conquest of the island. He writes of his plan to return to Gaul for the winter ‘because of the frequent commotions in that country.’¹⁵ Indeed, shortly after his return to the Continent a revolt broke out among the Gallic tribes. The uprising was put down and the remainder of Caesar’s *Commentaries* devoted to the completion of his conquest in Gaul. Caesar never set foot in Britain again. Roman relations with the island would exist for the next century, though to a limited degree.

From Caesar to Claudius

Once order was restored following Augustus’ ascension to the emperorship, the idea of crossing the English Channel was again entertained. Augustus planned to invade the island on a number of occasions, but these expeditions were deterred by unrest elsewhere in the empire. He set out for the island in 34 BCE, ‘in emulation of his father.’¹⁶ He had just reached Gaul when a revolt by the Dalmatians forced him to turn back and deal with the situation along the eastern Adriatic Sea. By this time, the people of Britain were not honoring their agreements with Rome and refused to come to terms with the emperor. As a result, further expeditions were planned for

¹⁵ Caesar, *Commentaries* 5.19.

¹⁶ Cary, *Dio’s Roman History V*, p. 419.

27 and 26 BCE, in which Augustus intended ‘to outdo the feats of his adoptive father.’¹⁷ These were likewise cancelled due to unrest, this time in Gaul and Spain, respectively.¹⁸

Augustus’ reluctance to launch the invasion shows his considerable prudence. Caesar’s expedition some twenty years prior was cut short not by insurmountable resistance on the part of the Britons, but by unrest on the mainland. He made the crucial mistake of leaving Gaul before the country was completely pacified. Augustus, though he no doubt desired to possess Britain, was determined not to make the same mistake. Any foray into Britain at this time would be seen as an attempt to conquer, not as an expedition to survey the island. While Augustus may have been overly cautious, he preferred to fortify Rome’s existing provinces rather than launching an expensive invasion of the island.

Though Britain was not yet made a province of Rome, it played its part in the empire’s vast trade network. Exports from the island included gold, silver, iron, cattle, wheat, and hides, while Britain imported luxury wares such as bracelets, necklaces, and glassware.¹⁹ Slaves, crucial to the enormous workforce the empire required, were also exported to Rome. This trade network thrived, despite the island still being outside Augustus’ control, and it was perhaps for this reason that the emperor did not exert more effort to conquer the island.

Augustus’ contemporaries tended to agree with the assertion that relations with Britain were satisfactory. Strabo, writing near the end of the first emperor’s reign, posits that the chieftains of Britain, by paying tribute and sending embassies, had made ‘the whole of the island virtually Roman property,’ and as a result there was ‘no need of garrisoning the island.’²⁰ The

¹⁷ Collingwood, p. 71-72.

¹⁸ Cassius Dio, 53.25.2.

¹⁹ Collingwood, p. 70.

²⁰ Strabo, 4.5.3.

benefits of conquering Britain would not outweigh the expenses. His preferred course of action would be to keep the status quo in regards to the island through the maintenance of trade relations and the exaction of tribute.

The next few decades saw the fulfillment of this course, though that did not mean that the idea of obtaining the island had completely left Roman thoughts. The region of Gaul had long been conquered but the border along the Rhine River was far from secure, resulting in many conflicts with the Germans. The emperor Gaius, better known as Caligula, feigned a conquest of Germany before traveling to Gaul and turning his sights to Britain. His intended conquest of Britain was likewise aborted.

Literary sources are not exactly clear as to why Caligula abandoned his mission, though many pointed to his inexperience as a leader and military commander. The historian Suetonius writes of the British prince Adminius' exile by his father Cynobellinus, king of the Britons. Upon his arrival in Gaul, Adminius submitted to the emperor, an act that Caligula interpreted as the capitulation of the entire island.²¹ Cassius Dio's account differs, claiming that the emperor set out from Gaul on a trireme, before quickly turning around and returning to shore. He ordered his soldiers to collect seashells, which he claimed as booty from his expedition. According to Dio, 'Having secured these spoils...he became greatly elated, as if he had enslaved the very ocean.'²² He returned to Rome demanding a triumph and claiming the title Britannicus, as if he had successfully brought the island under his control. Though popular in his early years, Caligula's reign had turned despotic by this time, and it was not long until he was assassinated by his own

²¹ Suetonius, *Caligula* 45.

²² Cassius Dio, 59.25.3.

Praetorian Guard. His uncle Claudius, who would later rightfully earn the title Britannicus, succeeded him.

Claudius' ascension to the emperorship was marred with controversy. For one, it was predicated by the slaughter of most of Gaius' immediate family. Claudius survived the slaughter and was found the next day 'hidden away in a dark corner somewhere' by guards pillaging the imperial palace.²³ While the Senate and the consuls were discussing how the succession should proceed, the soldiers kidnapped Claudius and declared him emperor, despite his apparent reluctance to accept the position. This angered the Senate and put them at odds with him. Some in the Senate favored a return of the republic, while others simply wanted to promote their own candidate for emperor. Claudius began to enjoy the idea of being emperor; he even paid those in the Praetorian Guard five thousand denarii each to support him.²⁴ The populace likewise supported Claudius, and the reluctant Senate was forced to yield power to him.

Claudius was a sickly, feeble man. Suetonius notes that he suffered from a limp, and when he was angry, '[H]e would foam at the mouth and his nose would run. Besides this, he had a speech impediment and his head twitched all the time.'²⁵ Though Claudius suffered from a physical infirmity, his mental facilities were very much intact. He penned a number of historical works in his earlier years, notably a history of the Etruscan people, the Carthaginians, and a controversial account of the civil war involving his adoptive grandfather, Augustus.²⁶ His works were widely respected and were used as sources by later Roman scholars, though none of his

²³ Cassius Dio, *60.1.2*.

²⁴ Josephus, *7.246-247*.

²⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius 30*.

²⁶ Suetonius, *Claudius 42*.

writings survive today. As a scholar, he would have been familiar with the earlier historical works, including Caesar's account of the Gallic Wars and his invasion of Britain.

Despite Claudius having an acute mind in regards to history and law, his physical debilitation did affect his mental state. Dio describes him as cowardly, the result of the maladies that plagued his childhood.²⁷ Timid by nature, he was inclined to fear for his safety, especially given the circumstances of his ascension. The Senate was displeased at not having a say in the succession, and the conspirators in his nephew's assassination had proven that the position of emperor was not wholly secure. Suetonius notes the emperor was suspicious of such a conspiracy against his life.²⁸ Claudius knew that to placate these fears he must legitimize his rule.

In 41 CE, Sulpicius Galba and Publius Gabinius helped Claudius obtain the title *imperator* with their victories over in Germania, defeating the Chatti and the Cauchi, respectively.²⁹ Other than the recovery of the last military eagle lost at the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, these victories did little more than to strengthen the German frontier. He was also hailed for conquering Mauretania – modern-day Morocco – despite that war concluding prior to his reign. Suetonius claims that the emperor 'wish[ed] for the glory of a full triumph,' though this may not have been entirely true as the historian was prone to exaggeration.³⁰ Whether for personal glory or merely the securement of his position, Claudius wanted, and felt that he needed, a conquest. The opportunity to achieve such prestige would arise two years after

²⁷ Cassius Dio, *60.2.1-6*.

²⁸ Suetonius, *Claudius* 35-36.

²⁹ Cassius Dio, *60.8.7*.

³⁰ Suetonius, *Claudius* 17.

his rule began when a Briton by the name of Bericus implored the emperor to send an invading force to the island.

Little is known of Bericus – Cassius Dio is the only contemporary historian to mention him – save for that he was expelled from Britain as the result of an uprising that had deposed him, making him either a king or a prince.³¹ While Claudius' response was to send a force to the island, it is unlikely that the emperor of the Rome acted out of empathy towards the foreigner; more probable is that he used this incident as a pretense to invade the island. Having studied Caesar's *Commentaries* and knowing of Caligula's abortive invasion, the idea of conquering this yet out-of-reach land would have crossed his mind prior to Bericus' arrival in Rome. It was now time for Claudius to complete the task Julius Caesar had begun nearly a century earlier.

The Claudian Invasion

The campaign against Britain commenced in 43 CE under the leadership of Aulus Plautius. The senator faced none of the initial complications that plagued Caesar. The legions crossed the English Channel with little difficulty and were unopposed in their landing. Plautius sent his army over in three divisions so as not to be overwhelmed by the natives upon landing.³² This measure proved to be needless yet indicative of an ability to learn from the previous invasion. The Britons were unaware of the impending invasion and were thus unable to assemble a force to greet the Romans.

³¹ Cassius Dio, *60.19.1*.

³² Cassius Dio, *60.19.4*.

After missing their opportunity to win a quick victory over the invaders, the Britons chose not to meet the Romans in pitched battle, opting instead to engage the enemy in skirmishes. They hoped to frustrate the aspiring conquerors into abandoning their plan of annexing the island and instead returning home. Unfortunately for the Britons, Plautius did not have to worry about unrest on the mainland as Caesar did. Gaul had become a relatively peaceful province of the empire. Even in the event of a revolt, other legions occupied the territory and would be able to quell the uprising. Plautius could concentrate his entire attention on the conquest of Britain without having to guard his rear.

Sometime prior to 43 CE the British king Cynobellinus died, leaving control of his tribes to his sons, Caratacus and Togodumnus.³³ While Cynobellinus had been labeled king of the Britons, he only controlled a portion of the island, the Catuvellauni tribe forming the heart of his territory. The two brother kings that succeeded Cynobellinus led the British resistance against the Romans until they were each defeated by Plautius and forced to flee, resulting in a portion of the Bodunni tribe submitting to Roman authority. The remaining tribes retreated and secured their position on the other side of a river. Plautius left a garrison with the Bodunni before pursuing Britons; the ensuing battle lasted two days, finally culminating in a Roman victory.

Dio does not indicate in his account the name of the river at which the battle occurred, only that it is relatively near the River Thames. Historians have long assumed the River Medway to be the site of the battle, although recent scholarship has suggested other possible locations, such as the River Wey, a site sixty miles west of Medway.³⁴ Dio also does not mention Caratacus

³³ Cassius Dio, *60.20.1*.

³⁴ Bird, D. G., *The Claudian Invasion Campaign Reconsidered*. (Oxford: Oxford Journal Of Archaeology 19, no. 1, 2000), p. 97.

or Togodumnus as being present at the battle, though Togodumnus is said to have died shortly afterwards.³⁵ It is therefore unknown who led the resistance during this battle. The absence of the two kings was not confirmed, but considering they were of the select group of Britons Dio refers to by name, it is unlikely they were at the battle without being mentioned.

Upon reaching the battle site, Plautius sent a contingent of German troops to ford the river as a first wave of attack. The future emperor Vespasian and his brother commanded the next set of troops to cross the river. Despite suffering a large number of casualties, the Britons fought valiantly, forcing a second day of fighting. According to Dio, ‘The struggle was indecisive until Gnaeus Hosidius Geta, after narrowly missing being captured, finally managed to defeat the barbarians so soundly that he received the *ornamenta triumphalia*.’³⁶ The Britons retreated once more, this time across the River Thames to a spot near Londinium – modern-day London.

Following his victory, Plautius pushed forward to the Thames as well, where he was met with further resistance. He next informed Claudius of the situation, for he was instructed to summon the emperor if ‘he met with any particularly stubborn resistance.’³⁷ Claudius embarked for his newly won territory by sailing to Massilia – modern-day Marseilles – before crossing over Gaul and the English Channel. He took command of the army upon his arrival near the River Thames, immediately crossing the river and engaging the enemy. Claudius led the Roman’s to victory at Camulodunum – modern-day Colchester – capturing the city that was once the capital of Cynobellinus’ territories. He was subsequently given a triumph and the title

³⁵ Cassius Dio, *60.21.1*.

³⁶ Cassius Dio, *60.20.4*.

³⁷ Cassius Dio, *60.21.2*.

Britannicus, which he bequeathed upon his son. Claudius departed from Britain shortly after his victory.

Plautius' decision to halt and summon Claudius appeared to be an act of propaganda, especially when countered by Dio's claim that the general was fearful of the resistance at the Thames and chose to secure his holdings rather than press onward. It is unlikely that Plautius would have doubted his company's ability to defeat the Britons given the victory they had just achieved. Knowing that the region was nearly defeated, Claudius came to Britain to deliver the final blow himself and personally earn his triumph. If he was to truly emulate the campaigns of Caesar, he must lead the charge himself, not remain in Rome and allow his generals to achieve glory for him. As the emperor, he would have been awarded a triumph even if Plautius led the charge, but Claudius did not covet an empty title. He invaded Britain to legitimize his rule and be placed among the ranks of Augustus and Julius Caesar. By capturing Camulodunum himself, he achieved this goal.

Securement of the Island

Though Claudius had been given his triumph as *imperator* of Britain in 43 CE, the island was still far from conquered. The Romans had forced the capitulation of some tribes, but even more remained to oppose them. Caratacus survived his brother and was recruiting various tribes to the cause of repelling the invaders. While the king remained at large, native resistance was certain to remain.

Aulus Plautius received praise from the emperor for subjugating the southern part of the island. This did not, however, ensure he would remain governor of the province; Publius Ostorius Scapula replaced Plautius by 47 CE. Paranoia plagued the emperor and it would not have been the first time it caused the emperor to recall a successful general. He stripped Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo of his command of the German legions the same year, despite the man making advances into German territory. Corbulo was quoted as saying, 'How happy those who led our armies in olden times,' implying that the generals of old were allowed to achieve such success without being impeded by a jealous emperor.³⁸ Regardless of Claudius' rationale, it was Ostorius who would continue the assault against the Britons.

Cassius Dio's account is relatively taciturn on the happenings of Britain for the next decade. He does mention an incident where Vespasian found himself surrounded and facing certain destruction at the hands of the Britons before being saved by his son Titus. The issue with this claim is that if the incident took place in 47 CE as Dio claims, Titus would have been eight

³⁸ Cassius Dio, *61.30.5*.

years old at the time of his heroic rescue.³⁹ Dio's inaccuracy, coupled with a lack of details on the location and facts of the incident make it of little interest. Other than a brief excerpt about Caratacus' capture, Dio remains quiet on Britain until the Boudiccan revolt. Thankfully, Tacitus' narrative resumes in 47 CE, giving much greater detail to the British campaign than Cassius Dio's writings.

Expanding Roman Control

The British, thinking that the shift in command signaled a weakness on the part of the Romans, began to invade occupied territory. Ostorius, knowing he must make a strong impression lest he lose the momentum started by Plautius, hit back at the enemy with several cohorts. He not only pushed the enemy back but also took control of the lands up to the Rivers Trisantona and Sabrina – modern-day Trent and Severn, respectively.⁴⁰ The Iceni, a tribe who previously held an alliance with Rome, balked at these actions and rallied various tribes to fortify against Ostorius. Their resistance was for naught as the governor's troops destroyed the fortifications and the men hiding behind them. The defeat of the Iceni caused consternation among the other tribes and '[B]rought calm to those hesitating between war and peace.'⁴¹ Many tribes chose to ally with the aggressors rather than face destruction at the hands of an enemy that was yet to be truly defeated.

Ostorius continued to expand his control, defeating all tribes that still stood opposed. He had nearly reached Wales when an outbreak of violence amongst the Brigantes forced his

³⁹ Cassius Dio, *61.30.1-2*.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Annals 12.31.2*.

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annals 12.32.1*.

withdrawal. He had enough sense not to leave his rear exposed while he pushed onward. The rebellious Brigantes were quickly put down, though the Silures remained hostile to them. In response, Rome established their first colony on the island at the site of Claudius' great victory, Camulodunum.⁴² The town served as a Roman base and was constantly manned by experienced soldiers. Reinforcements could be pulled from the ranks of these men to help defeat particularly resilient British fortresses. Camulodunum became the center of Roman power on the island, allowing them flexibility to launch forays while maintaining a stronghold behind them. A temple was built at the site to commemorate Claudius' victory over the barbarous native population.⁴³

In addition to providing military strength, the foundation of a colony allowed for the introduction of Roman law and commencement of the island's process of Romanization. Throughout the empire, conquered and allied tribes alike became subject to Roman laws; Britain was no different in this regard. Although Romanization was clearly occurring, mention of the process was scarce in antiquarian sources. Discussion of Britain in the writings of Tacitus and Cassius Dio is typically limited to military action.⁴⁴ Tacitus' *Agricola* is the exception, as the historian references domestic policies made under the governor. Apart from that account the Romanization of the island is mentioned only to a limited extent.

With Camulodunum firmly established, Rome focused attention on the hostile Silures, who remained in rebellion under the leadership of Caratacus. The British king had been biding his time for nearly eight years since his defeat at the hands of Plautius, inciting insurgence against Rome and rallying the British people to his command. When he finally decided to engage

⁴² Tacitus, *Annals* 12.32.2.

⁴³ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.31.4.

⁴⁴ Hingley, Richard. "Not so Romanized? Tradition, reinvention or discovery in the study of Roman Britain." *World Archaeology* 40, no. 3 (September 2008), p. 434.

the Romans in a pitched battle, he did so on his own terms. The field of battle was a narrow mountain pass lined with boulders to make it impassable. An army of Silures and Ordovices, roused against the invaders by their commander, held the higher ground, separated by a river from Rome's advancing army.

Despite the formidable appearance of his foe, Ostorius led his men across the river and into the pass. The combat between the two armies was vicious and the Britons were forced to retreat higher into the mountain. Despite their fervor to defend their homes, the natives too inexperienced and ill-equipped to deal with the seasoned Roman army. Their resistance was met with a slaughter; as Tacitus writes, 'If they tried to resist the auxiliaries they were slain by legionary swords and pikes, and if they turned to the legions, by auxiliary blades and spears.'⁴⁵ Caratacus' brothers surrendered to Ostorius, while Caratacus himself managed to escape once again. This time, however, his disappearance would not be nearly as illustrious.

Caratacus fled to the nearby Brigantes, whom he believed would grant him safe-haven. He was mistaken, as their queen, Cartimandua, was loyal to the Romans and seized the opportunity to take the disgraced king captive. Perhaps Caratacus hoped to convince Cartimandua to support his cause, or he was simply unaware of her allegiance. Regardless, the queen took advantage of the situation to gain favor with Rome. By handing Caratacus over to the Romans, she enhanced her own position and demonstrated her loyalty to the empire.

Caratacus' capture was heralded in Rome; after all, he had been their most notable adversary in Britain for nearly a decade. Tacitus credited the former king with a speech of such eloquence that Claudius pardoned him and his family. As he wandered the capital of the empire,

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.35.3.

a free man in a city far from home, he marveled at the grandeur of Rome, saying, ‘And can you, then, who have got such possessions and so many of them, covet our poor tents?’⁴⁶ The Senate granted Ostorius an honorary triumph for his role in apprehending the elusive king.

While in Rome the capture of Caratacus was seen as the removal of Britain’s greatest threat, resistance on the island did not abate as the Romans thought it would. Rather, the Britons yearned for revenge, the Silures in particular. They found their revenge in the form of besieging and routing a camp of Romans.⁴⁷ Even the reinforcements sent to aid the men were slaughtered. The enemy managed to escape relatively unscathed, despite Ostorius bringing the main part of his army against them. The Britons regrouped, but instead of engaging the superior Roman army outright they took a lesson from the early years of the invasion used the land to their advantage. Hiding in the forests and moors, they attacked the Romans through raids. Just as the Britons of Caesar’s time, they would surround and capture any faction of troops that wandered too far from the main army.

The persistence of the native opposition was compounded with the death Ostorius in 52 CE, only a year after his capture of Caratacus. Though Plautius was still credited with the initial invasion, Ostorius did much to ensure the continued success of the campaign. In addition to the expansion of territory, his establishment of the colony at Camulodunum was the first step towards establishing Britain as a permanent Roman province. He ruled over some of it himself and entrusted other parts to local kings, as Rome was wont to do in newly established provinces. The client-king he set up, Cogidumnus, remained loyal to Britain and took the burden of leadership off of the governor, allowing him to focus on his conquests – Cogidumnus is not

⁴⁶ Cassius Dio, *61.33.3*.

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals 12.38.3*.

mentioned in Tacitus' *Annals*, at least not in the remaining books, but the historian does bring attention to him in the biography of his father-in-law, Agricola.⁴⁸ Ostorius' greatest achievement, aside from his conquests, was the expansion of Romanization in Britain under his rule.

Aulus Didius, Ostorius' successor, found Britain in a turbulent state upon his arrival to the island. The Silures were still in open rebellion and had inflicted a defeat upon Manlius Valens and his legion during the interim period when Didius sailed to Britain.⁴⁹ The new governor managed to repel the Silures, though the tribe remained one of the biggest threats in Britain.

Shortly after Didius' arrival, unrest broke out once more among the Brigantes, this time in the form of a civil war. Queen Cartimandua spurned her husband, Venutius, in favor of his squire. The queen allocated Venutius' lands to her new lover, Velloctatus and dismissed her former husband.⁵⁰ Hostilities ignited as Venutius rallied men against the queen and were further inflamed when Cartimandua killed several of Venutius' kinfolks, including his brother. Venutius attacked the kingdom with intent to overthrow the queen, forcing Rome to come to the rescue of her client. Didius' men, led by Caesius Nasica, defeated the separatists, allowing Cartimandua to retain her leadership.⁵¹ Venutius emulated Caratacus by surviving, retreating, and biding his time as he recruited more men to his cause.

Other than putting down Venutius' revolt, Aulus Didius achieved little more during his governorship than expanding the territory he ruled. His successor, Veranius, did even less, dying

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola* 14.

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.40.1

⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Histories* 3.45.

⁵¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.40.2-4.

within a year of his succession.⁵² Veranius won some victories over the Silures and claimed on his deathbed, according to Tacitus, ‘I would have rendered the province subject to you had I lived another two years.’⁵³ His successor had a similar level of ambition and was fortunate to remain in power for longer than a year. Suetonius Paulinus conquered for two years before setting his sights westward upon the island of Anglesey.

Anglesey, referred to as Mona by both Cassius Dio and Tacitus, was ‘[a] stronghold for inhabitants and a haven for deserters,’ and home of the Druids, a religious order whom the Romans supposed to be inciters of British resistance.⁵⁴ Paulinus, having reached the Irish Sea in his conquests, set out for the island to destroy this final vestige of opposition. He was greeted by an onslaught of men and women, charging the Romans in defense of their holy isle. His army, initially perturbed by the fury of the Druids, was roused to fight by their leader and soon made short work of the defenders. The Romans proceeded to cut down and burn the altars and sacred groves of the island, hoping to destroy the spirit of the Britons in the process.

Paulinus’ invasion of the island seemed to be going well, but he had made a crucial mistake. Years earlier, Ostorius Scapula halted his invasion of Wales lest he leave his rear exposed. Paulinus, whether over-eager or bolstered by his earlier victories, lacked this prudence, choosing instead to invade Anglesey. Discontent among the Britons had led to a mutiny against the empire in 61 CE, resulting in eighty thousand Roman casualties according to Dio.⁵⁵ The governor hastened back east, but not before the Britons destroyed the cities of Camulodunum and Verulamium – modern-day St. Albans.

⁵² Tacitus, *Agricola* 14.

⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.29.1.

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.29.3.

⁵⁵ Cassius Dio, *62.1.1*.

The British Revolt

The accounts of Tacitus and Cassius Dio differ on the exact cause of the uprising, but both historians attribute leadership to Boudicca, wife of the Iceni king Prasutagus. Upon his death, Prasutagus willed half of his assets to his daughters with the other half going to the emperor Nero as a token of good faith. Instead of preserving his kingdom, however, the Roman leaders in Britain plundered the leaderless kingdom. Boudicca was beaten, her daughters raped by soldiers. Tacitus, from whom we have this account, writes, ‘The Iceni elite...were stripped of ancestral possessions and the king’s relatives enslaved.’⁵⁶ Boudicca and the Iceni who remained roused the other British tribes, not content to sit idly by while the Romans pillaged their lands and impugned their honor. They held the veterans of the Claudian invasion, many of whom had settled at Camulodunum, in particular contempt for their disregard of the native population.

Dio does not give the same detail about the widow of the late king, saying only, ‘[She] directed the conduct of the entire war...[and was] a Briton woman of the royal family and possessed of a greater intelligence than often belongs to women.’⁵⁷ Neither her slight at the hands of the Romans or the misappropriation of her husband’s will were mentioned. Instead, Dio offers a different rationale for the British uprising. Seneca, advisor to Nero, had lent the Britons forty million sesterces with the hope that the loan would garner interest and be profitable to the empire. The recipients of the money did not understand the workings of Roman economics and

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.31.1.

⁵⁷ Cassius Dio, 62.2.2.

likely thought it a gift rather than a loan. The measures Seneca exacted to recollect his money were harsh and resulted in British resentment of Rome.

Though anger at the retraction of Seneca's loans was great, the incident would not have come to much if not for the provocation of Boudicca. Dio describes her as very tall and terrifying to behold, as well as being skilled in the art of rhetoric. Her fiery words evoked the cruelty suffered at the hands of the Romans and inflamed the natives to rebel. The Britons answered her call by slaughtering two cities and taking numerous captives. Dio notes the gruesome treatment of the prisoners: impaled, mutilated, and hanged as part of a religious ceremony.⁵⁸

Thus was the situation when Paulinus returned from his foray on Anglesey, the province in revolt and faced with disaster. The size and ferocity of the British army made him wary. The governor commanded a mere legion and a half against a force that not only fervently despised their oppressors, but outnumbered them twenty to one.⁵⁹ He called on Puenius Postumus to reinforce his army with the Second legion, yet the commander refused, fearing destruction at the hands of the Britons. Paulinus would be left to take on the massive British force with only ten thousand men from the Fourteenth and Twentieth legions.⁶⁰ Hesitant though he may have been, the Roman general knew he must meet the Britons in battle lest they continue to decimate the countryside and his own men run out of supplies.

Thankfully for the Romans, Paulinus was able to pick the site of the ensuing battle himself. He made sure to choose a location that suited his vastly outnumbered army. His legions stood at the edge of a narrow field, their backs protected from a rear assault by a forest. The

⁵⁸ Cassius Dio, *62.7.2*.

⁵⁹ Cassius Dio, *62.8.2-3*.

⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annals 14.34.1*.

British would only be able to attack from the front, though a full onslaught was prevented by the narrowness of the battlefield. With the British troops condensed, their superior numbers would provide less of an advantage. Despite this, the Britons were so confident they brought their wives and children to be spectators, gathered around the field of battle in their wagons, for they believed that this was the battle that would end Rome's hegemony over the island.

Paulinus and his men stood with their backs to the forest, waiting as the enemy rushed across the narrow field. The charging Britons were showered with throwing spears before the Romans moved forward to meet them. Numerical superiority mattered not in these tight quarters and the better trained and better equipped Romans slaughtered their opponents. British retreat was impaired by the wagons that encircled the field, and the Roman soldiers showed no mercy to those who could not escape. The day ended with complete victory for Rome; Tacitus records a loss of only four hundred Romans compared to eighty thousand casualties for the British.⁶¹ Although more than half of the Britons survived, their resistance ended with the life of their commander. Boudicca died shortly after the battle; Dio posits she fell sick and died while Tacitus claimed it was suicide.⁶² Regardless of whether her death was natural or the result of poison, the British threat to the province died with her.

The glory won by the legions was great, and the empire rejoiced at the quelling of the rebellion. One man who was not pleased was Poenius Postumus, who, having ignored his general's summons, missed out on his share of the glory. He chose to end his life rather than live with his shame.⁶³ Great though the victory had been, the province had suffered serious losses at

⁶¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.37.2.

⁶² Cassius Dio, 62.12.6.

⁶³ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.37.3.

the hands of Boudicca. Britain was reinforced with legionaries and auxiliaries from Germany, several thousand men in all. Suetonius Paulinus was replaced as governor of the island, notwithstanding his heroics at the final battle. His replacement, former consul Petronius Turpilianus, pacified whatever resistance endured in the aftermath of the revolt. He spent the remainder of his governorship avoiding conflict. Nevertheless, he was awarded a triumph in 65 CE, though Tacitus did not explicitly state that it was the result of his work in Britain.⁶⁴ Turpilianus' next two successors were even more ineffectual than he.

Civil War-era Britain

The forced suicide of Nero in 68 CE threw the entire empire into disarray, with four emperors coming into power in the span of a single year. Germany in particular experienced upheaval and ended up pledging themselves to one of the would-be emperors, Vitellius. Tacitus said of the British army, '[N]o other legions through all the confusion caused by the civil wars made less trouble.'⁶⁵ While this may have been true in relation to the entire empire, Tacitus contradicts himself in a later passage when discussing the failings of Turpilianus' successor, Trebellius Maximus, and his mutinous legions.

Trebellius, aside from being despised by his soldiers, was constantly at odds with the commander of the Twentieth Legion, Roscius Coelius. The claims posited by Coelius against his governor included the governor stealing money from the legions, showing cruelty towards the

⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.1.

⁶⁵ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.9.

men, and lacking the skill to properly discipline the soldiers.⁶⁶ The legionaries and auxiliaries, having grown restless from inactivity, sided with Coelius, forcing Trebellius to flee the province and join with Vitellius in Germany. The island did not experience any serious revolt as a result of the absence of its governor.

Vettius Bolanus replaced the disgraced governor while war still raged throughout the empire; Tacitus describes him as just as inactive and ineffectual as Trebellius, though his shortcomings were mitigated by his temperament.⁶⁷ The confusion that marked the civil war period inspired Venutius to revolt once more against Rome and Cartimandua. This attempt was more successful than his previous and resulted in Venutius gaining control of the kingdom.⁶⁸ Roman auxiliaries rescued the deposed queen, though she was now without title or power. Rome, being embroiled in a civil war of her own, was unable to mount a significant response to Venutius usurping the throne. The duration of his reign is unknown as both he and Cartimandua disappear from the literary sources following this episode.

Vitellius reigned as emperor for less than a year before he was deposed, like Galba and Otho before him, and the civil wars that had plagued Britain since Nero finally came to an end. Vespasian, who ruled from 69 CE to 79 CE, was renowned for his military ability, garnering much of it from his role in the invasion of Britain. In this he proved to be the antithesis of Claudius. Vespasian came into his reign as a seasoned veteran of war, whereas Claudius, with no prior military experience, invaded Britain to help legitimize his rule. Vespasian's rule was already legitimized when he came into office, partly from his overthrowing of Vitellius and

⁶⁶ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.60.

⁶⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola* 16.

⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Histories* 3.45.

partly from his help in subjugating Britain. Warfare was crucial to power in Rome, and once again Britain played a vital role.

With the ascension of Vespasian, a marked improvement upon Nero, came superior governors for the island of Britain. The stasis under Trebellius and Bolanus ended with the appointment of Petilius Cerialis in 71 CE.⁶⁹ The Britons, having grown complacent from the inactivity of the previous years, suddenly found themselves harried by a competent and aggressive governor. Cerialis focused his attention on the Brigantes of central Britain. Though they had previously been allies of Britain, the days of Carimandua were past and Rome no longer had use for client kings now that they had established a firm base of strength on the island. Cerialis' war against the Brigantes was successful in many territories, though he was replaced before the tribe was wholly overcome. A fort was established at Luguvalium – modern-day Carlisle – in the northwestern part of Brigantes territory.⁷⁰ Located on the western coast, Luguvalium became Rome's northernmost fort at the time.

Julius Frontinus chose not to continue his predecessor's campaign, instead focusing on the Silures of southern Wales. Tacitus wrote that, '[Frontinus] subjugated the strong and warlike people...overcoming not merely the courage of the enemy but the difficulties of the terrain.'⁷¹ The Silures had long caused problems for Rome so their conquest at the hands of Frontinus was a significant victory. With this Rome occupied the entirety of southern England, southern Wales, and much of the central parts of England.

Total Conquest

⁶⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 17.

⁷⁰ Birley, p. xlvi.

⁷¹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 17.

Frontinus' successor became the best known of the British governors due in part to his skill as a general but also because of his biography, written by Tacitus. Gnaeus Julius Agricola became governor of Britain in 77 CE, a year after Tacitus married his daughter and nearly twenty years before the historian composed the biography of his father-in-law. It must be recognized that Tacitus' text is not without bias. Agricola was certainly one of Britain's most successful and competent governors, but that did not make him the infallible individual that Tacitus depicted him being.

Agricola's first order of business was to complete the occupation of Wales, a region that had long given Rome difficulties. With the Silures conquered by Frontinus, only the Ordovices remained to offer them significant resistance, and they had grown bold after slaughtering a Roman cavalry regiment shortly before the change in governors.⁷² Agricola arrived on the island during the summer, as the traditional campaign season was drawing to a close. Choosing to break with convention, however, he took part of his army into northern Wales to deal with the defiant tribe. He rode his men into the hills where the Ordovices had retreated and there he routed the enemy, at last bringing the whole of Wales under Roman occupation.

Agricola's next task was to complete the capture of Anglesey. Paulinus had been forced to retreat from the island before he had finished his campaign. The new governor sought to complete the task despite not having any ships at his disposal. He sent auxiliaries across the strait with only their weapons and horses; the inhabitants, caught completely unawares, quickly sued

⁷² Tacitus, *Agricola* 17-18.

for peace.⁷³ That Agricola managed to subdue both Wales and the island of Anglesey before his first winter in Britain would be suggestive of the remainder of his governorship.

The governor's next location of attack was the homeland of the Brigantes in northern England. He conquered this area through a combination of swift raids against the enemy and acts of clemency. In this way he obtained surrenders from the tribes weary of fighting and destroyed those that still opposed him. He established new forts to keep the conquered regions pacified; Tacitus claims, '[That] no fort established by Agricola was ever taken by the enemy by storm or abandoned either by capitulation or by flight,' and that the governor showed particular wisdom in his selection of sites.⁷⁴ Agricola made sure to fortify the regions he had already conquered so as not to be exposed from the rear as he pushed further northward to complete his conquest.

By 80 CE, the Roman army had penetrated all the way into Scotland, where they encountered a number of hitherto uncontested tribes. He pushed his troops all the way up to the Taus Estuary – modern-day Tay Estuary near Dundee – and the following summer was spent fortifying the gains he made. He sailed ships up the eastern border of Britain to engage the tribes of Caledonia – modern-day Scotland. Though fearful of the Roman fleets, they resisted the invaders rather than submitting to their authority. The natives harassed the Roman forts, leading Agricola to divide his army into three sections. His hope was that this would prevent them from being surrounded by the enemy, who, being familiar with the land, held the advantage in the hilly landscape.⁷⁵

⁷³ Tacitus, *Agricola* 18.

⁷⁴ Tacitus, *Agricola* 22.

⁷⁵ Tacitus, *Agricola* 25-26.

Upon hearing of the partition of the Roman forces, the natives launched a night attack on the smallest division. They snuck into the Roman camp and attacked the sleeping Ninth Legion. Agricola brought reinforcements to repel the assailants, surrounding the camp with his cavalry on one side and the rest of his army on the other. The Ninth Legion, after regaining their wits, joined the attack from the inside. The enemy fled through the forest, their familiarity with the country aiding in their escape. While the Romans reveled in their victory, the Britons were not discouraged and set plans for their continued resistance. Tribes set aside their differences and united to defend their homeland against the Roman aggressors.

The following year the Romans continued their conquest northward until they reached Mons Graupius – modern-day Grampian Mountains – where the Britons had assembled the whole of their forces to oppose the invaders. Tribes set aside their differences and forged alliances with one another to unite against the Roman aggressors. The British army had the height advantage, having posted up in the mountains, as well as the numerical advantage, but Agricola successfully overcame these difficulties by extending his lines and ordering a long-range attack. In doing so, he ensured his army would not be flanked and the enemy unable to charge at the commencement of the fray.

He next sent auxiliaries up the mountain to engage the Britons; the rest of the army followed after their success. The Britons not involved in the primary conflict began harassing the rear of the Roman army, though Agricola's cavalry was successful in repelling them. The rest of the Roman army was equally as successful and by the end of the day the Britons were fleeing the sight of the battle. Tacitus records ten thousand British casualties with only three hundred and

sixty for Rome.⁷⁶ This was the last battle the Romans fought that season before returning south for the winter.

In addition to being the final campaign of the season, it was also Agricola's last in Britain. Domitian, younger son of Vespasian, had become emperor in 81 CE, in the middle of Agricola's reign as governor of Britain. Domitian was wary of Agricola's continued success on the island and feared that the general's popularity would surpass his own. He recalled Agricola in 83 CE, though not unceremoniously. Agricola deservedly received an honorary triumph for his efforts in Britain. As for the island, it would remain peaceful with the new governor simply having to fortify what had already been won, but Rome would never complete its conquest of Caledonia. Though not victorious, the Britons in the north managed to hold off the Romans for long enough to make the Romans tired of battle in Britain and ensure the safety of their homeland.

Agricola's territorial gains were no doubt great, but he was a competent governor for reasons other than his conquests. He enacted a series of policy changes to improve the maintenance of the province. Previous governors abused their power to make profit on the collection of taxes. Colonists had also been forced to travel to remote locations to pay high prices for grain and corn. He lowered prices and moved the granaries to locations nearer to the settlements, namely forts, and changed the tax policy so it would no longer be a source of profit for those collecting it.⁷⁷

The governor also improved the discipline of the army and those governing the province to cut down on abuses. His manners of disciplining were not harsh, however, as he tried to make

⁷⁶ Tacitus, *Agricola* 37.

⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola* 19.

peace a more appealing prospect than warfare. He showed mercy to conquered people so they would choose to adapt to Roman occupation rather than continuing to resist. He began a program of educating the children of British leaders to integrate them into the empire.⁷⁸ His efforts at Romanization were successful; the natives started wearing Roman garb and even speaking in Latin. They equated all things Roman with being sophisticated and civilized and therefore yearned for them.

A number of building projects were embarked upon at Agricola's behest. The settlements grew less primitive and gained features of Roman life. They built temples to honor the gods and market places to be the center of commerce for the colonies. Baths proved to be particularly popular among the Romans and the native population. In this way Agricola converted Britain from an island on the fringe of the empire to a province thriving and very much a part of the empire.

It was also under Agricola that Rome received confirmation that Britain was an island; this idea had long been projected by geographers such as Strabo and Diodorus but the claim had never been substantiated. A cohort of Usipi – a German tribe – mutinied upon arrival in Britain, killed some Roman soldiers, and escaped the province via boat.⁷⁹ Unbeknownst to them, they sailed all the way around Britain before landing on the other side. When Agricola received this news he sent some of his men to attempt the endeavor for themselves; their successful return confirmed Britain's long assumed status as an island.

The province remained relatively peaceful for many years following the removal of Agricola. Domitian was averse to making further expansions in Caledonia, instead abandoning

⁷⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola* 21.

⁷⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 28.

Agricola's northernmost conquests and moving the border eighty-five miles south of where it had been at the extent of the governor's power.⁸⁰ This provided a buffer between the Romans and the Britons of the north who had successfully resisted subjugation. The continual warring in the province ceased as Britain became more ingratiated into the Roman Empire. The inhabitants of Britain welcomed peace, but there were some, such as Agricola, who yearned to have the whole island under Roman rule.

Securing the Frontier

Tacitus' history of Britain ends with Agricola's departure, as his primary purpose was to write a biography of the general not a history of the province. What follows is a dearth of antiquarian sources on the activities of the island. This lack of literature was characteristic of Britain's place in the empire. Dio and Tacitus continue to write about activities in Rome's other territories, resigning Britain to the periphery. After Rome completed the conquest, Britain became quiet. The historians found little of note to write about so they chose to push it to the margins of their accounts. While it is understandable of Tacitus, who ends his histories after the civil wars, Dio's account continues into the third century CE.

Most surprising is Dio's failure to mention the building or completion of Hadrian's Wall, one of Rome's most notable architectural achievements. A biography of Hadrian found in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* contains a brief passage on the structure, saying, '[Hadrian] set out for Britain, and there he corrected many abuses and was the first to construct a wall, eighty

⁸⁰ Hanson, W. S., *Agricola and the Conquest of the North*. (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), p. 162.

miles in length, which was to separate the barbarians from the Romans.’⁸¹ Historians have traditionally regarded this collection of biographies, spanning from the beginning of Hadrian’s reign to the late third century, with suspicion. Its dubious authenticity has prevented it from joining the ranks of Tacitus or Dio’s accounts, yet it should still be given some consideration, if treated with caution. The aforementioned claim can be determined credible thanks to supporting archaeological evidence.

Shortly after Hadrian ascended to the emperorship, he embarked on a tour of the empire with the purpose of thoroughly examining his lands and adjusting the policies regarding them accordingly. Trajan, Hadrian’s predecessor and adoptive father, was in the process of conquering lands in Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Parthia when he died in 117 CE.⁸² Instead of continuing the costly war, Hadrian abandoned Trajan’s conquests and adopted a policy of frontier securement. Hadrian wanted to secure the borders throughout the empire, not just in the east. He constructed a wooden palisade along the German border to keep out the barbarians and signify that Roman expansion was at an end.⁸³ This artificial border was paltry in comparison to the stone structure that would mark the northern border of Britain, but it was symbolic of Hadrian’s plan for the empire. Centuries of Roman expansion had finally come to an end.

The concept of assembling a frontier in the north of Britain existed before Hadrian embarked upon building his wall. A system of forts and towers had been in place for several decades along the Tyne-Solway isthmus. The stone road the neck of the island, called the Stanegate, connected Luguvalium in the west with Corstopitum – modern-day Corbridge – in the

⁸¹ *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Hadrian 11.2.*

⁸² Cassius Dio, *68.33.1.*

⁸³ Everitt, Anthony, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome.* (New York: Random House, 2009), p. 211.

east, linking the forts in between. Dating the road has been difficult, due to the disparity of foundation dates along the system. The installation at Luguvalium was built in 71 CE, and the forts at Corstopitum and Vindolanda were completed not long after, making it likely that the Stanegate frontier had its beginnings at these locations.⁸⁴ The smaller forts were integrated into the system as they materialized, helping to defend Britain's northern frontier after the conquest of Caledonia was abandoned.

Hadrian visited Britain as part of his tour in 122 CE, and construction on the wall began shortly thereafter, albeit in a piecemeal fashion. The wall followed the general path of the stone road, stretching eighty Roman miles across the narrowest section of the country. The wall ran north of the Stanegate from Bowness on the west coast to Wallsend on the east.⁸⁵ The wall was not designed to be completely impassable, only to make crossing the frontier more difficult. It was at least ten feet tall in all places and military forts guarded every mile of the wall, making undetected crossings difficult. The initial project was completed in six years, although the Romans continued to rebuild and fortify it so as to prevent it from falling into disuse.

The completion of Hadrian's Wall signaled the end of the Roman conquest. Rome had finally decided it could go no further and built a wall both to commemorate their victory and to mark the edge of the civilized world. Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, was emperor during a remarkably peaceful time and decided to campaign beyond the wall. He built the Antonine Wall nearly a hundred miles north of the existing wall, although his was the shorter structure and not nearly as impressive as his predecessor's. Rome pulled back to the original frontier after Pius'

⁸⁴ Jones, G. D. B. & Woolliscroft, D. J., *Hadrian's Wall from the air*. (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2001), p. 34.

⁸⁵ Jones, p. 76.

death, although Septimius Severus would campaign in the same region several decades later.

Whatever his intention was, whether to retake the Antonine Wall or conquer all of Caledonia, he was repulsed by the Britons. Hadrian's Wall would remain Rome's northernmost frontier.

The Wealth of Britain

Prestige, more specifically prestige in warfare, was one of the driving forces in the Roman world. Newly crowned emperors consistently embarked on military campaigns to prove their strength until Hadrian discontinued this trend and instead set ought to fortify the existing borders. Claudius' invasion of Britain was no doubt a military move designed to bolster his standing, but there was more behind the decision than just his reputation. Britain was not a barren country to be conquered and left alone. The island was rich in mineral resources and hosted a strong native population that was not wholly unwilling to be integrated into the empire.

Wealth from the Land

Iron

As with most of the ancient world, Britain was primarily agrarian at the time of the Roman invasion, although evidence of a small-scale iron industry at sites such as Garden Hill in East Sussex did exist.⁸⁶ The arrival of the Romans resulted in a significant increase in manufacturing of iron, especially in the Weald, a heavily forested region in southeastern Britain. At least nine sites in the region were functional by the end of the first century CE, and many more followed. While the Weald was the most important site of iron manufacturing at the beginning of the Roman occupation and contained the largest sites, the Forest of Dean and the

⁸⁶ Elliot, Simon, "Britain's First Industrial Revolution." *History Today* 64, no. 5 (2014): *MAS Ultra – School*, p. 52.

East Midlands joined it as major centers for iron production. The latter two outlasted their predecessor as production in the Weald had significantly decreased by the fourth century.⁸⁷

In his treatise on natural history, Pliny the Elder comments on a number of uses for iron. Some uses he posited as innocent, such as for agriculture and art, but more oft it was exploited for purposes of warfare.⁸⁸ Iron was an essential metal for the empire and was able to be crafted into a wide array of tools. Tools such as ploughs, hoes, sickles, and pitchforks were crucial for agricultural purposes just as iron weapons – javelins, arrows, swords, armor – were needed for the military. Perhaps an even more important use for iron was in the tools of blacksmiths. Anvils were almost always made of iron, the hardest metal the Romans had access to, and even the hammers, tongs, and chisels were often made of iron.⁸⁹ Using these tools, smiths could manufacture objects made not only from iron but from copper and lead as well.

The aforementioned tools are only a sampling of the many uses Rome found for iron. Pliny claims that, ‘Deposits of iron are found almost everywhere,’ but that did not lessen the importance of the British iron mines.⁹⁰ Demand for iron was incredibly high; a single Roman legion required thirty-eight tons of iron to be properly equipped.⁹¹ Other provinces may have had more substantial deposits of iron, but Britain’s ability to contribute to Rome’s need for the metal was beneficial both for the empire and for the province’s standing. Conquest of the island was costly and continued warring required a greater retinue of troops in Britain than in other

⁸⁷ Mattingly, David, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC-AD 409*. (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 509-510.

⁸⁸ Pliny, *34.138*.

⁸⁹ Allason-Jones, Lindsay, *Artefacts in Roman Britain: Their Purpose and Use*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 72-75.

⁹⁰ Pliny, *34.142*.

⁹¹ Hill, Philip, trans., Lukas Thommen, *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 121.

provinces.⁹² Its ability to provide Rome with mineral resources and help contribute to the supply of iron required to equip the armies on its home soil assuaged its burden on the empire.

The mining of iron ore may have been one of the primary purposes of sites such as Beauport Park and Laxton, but more occurred at these sites than the extraction of metal. Once removed from the earth it had to undergo smelting, a process in which the metal was separated from its ore by heating and melting, allowing it to be forged into a variety of materials. Smelting often occurred at furnaces directly adjacent to the mines. The by-product of the process, called slag, was often left behind, showing the extent of iron production. Three sites at the Weald – Beauport Park, Oaklands Park, and Footlands – left slag piles of over fifteen thousand cubic meters, an indication that substantial mining and smelting occurred at these locations.⁹³ Slag heaps and smelting furnaces were found elsewhere in the Weald, as well as throughout the Forest of Dean and the East Midlands. Five furnaces and a substantial amount of slag found at Laxton in the East Midlands denote a large-scale operation at the site.⁹⁴

Gold

Just as iron was the most important and necessary mineral in the Roman Empire, gold was the most sought after. While other minerals had an array of practical purposes, gold served only as an indicator of wealth. According to Pliny, ‘The worst crime against man’s life was

⁹² Mattingly, p. 22-23.

⁹³ Mattingly, p. 509.

⁹⁴ Mattingly, p. 510.

committed by the person who first put gold on his fingers.⁹⁵ Though his statement was clearly hyperbole, his degradation of the vainness of the Roman people for desiring the metal to such an extent is clear. He also maintained a critical view of Rome's system of currency, stating he preferred the method of bartering to the use of metal coins. Gold in particular he thought to be unnecessary and bemoaned the effect it had on the Roman people.

Despite Pliny's protestations, gold remained popular in Rome. One reason for this, which Pliny conceded, is that it exists in its natural form under the surface and is incredibly malleable, being softer than other metals.⁹⁶ Prior to Caesar's invasion of Britain, it was believed that the unknown island contained vast amounts of riches, a rumor that was highly exaggerated. Gold on the island was scarce, although not non-existent. A site at Dolaucothi in southern Wales showed evidence of gold mining based on water-powered mills built to process the precious metal.⁹⁷ Hydraulics were used to break down the rock and expose the gold underneath, which was then extracted from the mine. Since gold was such a precious commodity, a fort was built at Pumsaint, a kilometer northwest of the site on the rivers Cothi and Twrch, to control and protect the mine.⁹⁸ The Romans saw the mine as very important, despite it being the only gold mine on the island and therefore producing a significantly smaller output of raw material than the other British mines.

Lead

⁹⁵ Pliny, 33.8.

⁹⁶ Pliny, 33.61.

⁹⁷ Burnham, Barry C., "Roman Mining at Dolaucothi: The Implications of the 1991-3 Excavations near the Carreg Pumsaint," *Brittania Vol. 28* (1997), p. 328.

⁹⁸ Brewer, Richard, "Dolaucothi Gold Mine and Pumsaint Roman Fort," *Archaeological Journal, Vol. 167, Issue sup1* (2010), p. 28.

Britain had a more abundant supply of lead than any other province according to Pliny, and the mining process on the island was different than in other locations.⁹⁹ The deep mines of Gaul and Spain made the mining of lead difficult and laborious, whereas in Britain, it could be found on and just below the surface, making it very easy to excavate. The Mendip Hills had a particularly large deposit of lead, and a fort at Charterhouse was established shortly after the Claudian invasion. A lead ingot found at Charterhouse was dated 49 CE, meaning that lead production at the site must have started at or before that date.¹⁰⁰

Production at the site continued to grow and peaked within the next hundred years, according to a speleothem study done at the site.¹⁰¹ The study examined the mineral deposits found in a nearby cave to determine the extent of mining activity at Charterhouse. Analysis determined that the Mendip Hills ore fields had produced approximately one hundred thousand tons of lead, showing the volume of the site despite the total not being exclusive to Roman occupation.¹⁰² The Roman period did, however, feature a substantial amount of mining as production peaked again circa 400 CE.

Charterhouse was not the only lead mining site, although it was the earliest and best studied. The Romans exploited lead deposits scattered throughout Wales and the Pennines, a mountain range in central Britain that was the traditional home of the Brigantes. British lead mines were incredibly important to the empire, as the primary purpose of the metal was for use

⁹⁹ Pliny, *34.164*.

¹⁰⁰ Todd, Malcom, "Ancient Mining on Mendip, Somerset: a preliminary report on recent work." *Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society Vol. 13, No. 2* (1996), p. 50.

¹⁰¹ McFarlane, D. A., J. Lundberg, and H. Neff. "A SPELEOTHEM RECORD OF EARLY BRITISH AND ROMAN MINING AT CHARTERHOUSE, MENDIP, ENGLAND." *Archaeometry* 56, no. 3 (2014), p. 438. *Arts & Humanities Citation Index, EBSCOhost*.

¹⁰² McFarlane, p. 432.

in the construction of pipes.¹⁰³ As Rome continued to build aqueducts, demand for lead to be used in the water pipes remained high. The abundance of lead mines in Britain helped to alleviate this demand. British lead was also made into coffins and utilized in the manufacturing of pewter, an alloy of lead and tin.¹⁰⁴

Silver

Lead was valuable to the Romans for reasons besides its use in manufacturing. Through the process of cupellation, they extracted silver from the ore. Cupellation involved melting the lead and then using bone ash to absorb the melted lead, leaving pellets of pure silver behind; the lead is then re-smelted to return it to its normal state minus the silver.¹⁰⁵ Pliny refers to the silver as, '[T]he next madness of mankind,' though his disgust of the metal does not equal that of gold.¹⁰⁶ Silver's principal purpose was its use in currency. The denarius, the basic unit of Rome's coinage system, was made of silver.¹⁰⁷ Its use in currency made it a more glamorous and desirable metal than lead, despite both being crucial to the economy.

Many of the early mines, especially those extracting gold and silver, were placed under the supervision of the army. Military forts at Charterhouse and Pumsaint were built to protect what it believed to be its most important resources. The military officials in charge employed forced labor to mine the resources, often from the local native population. As the conquest of the island progressed, the military conceded control of these mines to Roman procurators or independent companies, called *socii*. Blocks of metal, called ingots, were stamped according to

¹⁰³ Pliny, 34.164.

¹⁰⁴ Mattingly, p. 508.

¹⁰⁵ Collingwood, p. 229.

¹⁰⁶ Pliny, 33.95.

¹⁰⁷ Allason-Jones, p. 22.

who was running the mining operation. Early ingots featured the name of a legion, such as *legio II Augusta* at Charterhouse, whereas later ingots would list the name of whatever *socii* or procurator ran that particular site.¹⁰⁸

Copper

The copper mines in Britain also produced ingots, although these were smaller and not always stamped. All of the copper mines in Britain were located in Wales and on the island of Anglesey.¹⁰⁹ Once mined, copper was often combined with other metals to make brass or bronze, though it was sometimes left in its natural state. These metals were used to make coins of a lesser denomination than the silver denarii, as these alloys were not as valuable as silver.¹¹⁰ Still, the metal was important because of the vast amount of coins needed by the empire.

Copper alloys were not as strong as iron, which is why the Bronze Age gave way to the Iron Age, but they were still heavily utilized throughout. Bronze in particular was used in a variety of domestic objects, such as lamps, tableware, kitchen utensils, hair pins, and jewelry, as well as in the majority of surgical instruments – knives, tubes, saws, probes, needles, and containers.¹¹¹ Copper and bronze were also the primary metals used in making both sculptures and smaller figurines.¹¹²

Tin

¹⁰⁸ Mattingly, p. 507.

¹⁰⁹ Mattingly, p. 506.

¹¹⁰ Allason-Jones, p. 22.

¹¹¹ Healy, John F., *Mining and Metallurgy in the Greek and Roman World*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 249.

¹¹² Pliny, 34.96.

Britain was one of the richest territories in terms of tin ore in the empire, namely at the site of Cornwall in the southwest.¹¹³ Knowledge of these tin deposits had long been known, even prior to Caesar's invasion of the island. The Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily refers to a significant tin trade stemming from a region of Britain called Belerium, now known as Cornwall.¹¹⁴ The Britons, who Diodorus describes as very hospitable, brought their tin through Gaul to the river Rhone, where it was then transported to the Mediterranean Sea and eventually Greece. At some point this trade was halted and did not resume again until the third century CE due to the rise in the Spanish tin industry.¹¹⁵

Production in Spain started declining midway through the third century, though Roman demand for the metal did not reflect this trend. The Cornish tin mines met this demand, filling the void left by the Spanish industry. Evidence of late Roman-era coins found at the Cornwall tin mines supports this claim, as does the prevalence of pewter objects during this period.¹¹⁶ Although lead had long been a staple of British mining, its use in the manufacturing of pewter was not taken advantage of until the island had its own significant supply of tin. The reopening of the tin mines resulted in a growth of pewter products being manufactured in Britain.

Coal

Coal was another mineral found in abundance on the island, with over two hundred sites having been excavated. Evidence at a large number of sites indicates domestic use of coal, both

¹¹³ Humphrey, John William, John Peter Oleson, and Andrew N. Sherwood, *Greek and Roman technology a sourcebook : annotated translations of Greek and Latin texts and documents*. (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 202.

¹¹⁴ Diodorus, 5.22.1.

¹¹⁵ Diodorus, 5.38.4.

¹¹⁶ Davies, Oliver, *Roman Mines in Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 147.

in hearths and in under floor heating systems called hypocausts.¹¹⁷ Findings of coal residue appeared at a number of ore production sites, leading scholars to believe that coal was used in the processing of ores, although its role still remains unknown. Sixty sites have been found that showed a connection between coal and iron, more than any other metal in Britain, although its role was unclear, likely being used after the smelting had occurred.¹¹⁸ A study at the site of Tiddington posits that coal was used in the smelting of iron; this would make Tiddington the oldest site in Britain to use such a process.¹¹⁹ While the use of coal in metalworking has remained a source of contention, its role in domestic fueling has been much clearer. The most significant evidence of coal usage was not found in the South Midlands and North Yorkshire, where the largest deposits existed, but rather at sites with large military populations, such as at Hadrian's Wall.¹²⁰

Agriculture

Britain was heavily forested; this served Rome well as they had a large demand for timber. One of the primary purposes was as a fuel source, both domestically and commercially. While coal's role in metal production was unclear, clear evidence of wood being used to heat smelting furnaces has been found.¹²¹ Rome used trees extensively for building purposes as well. The construction of buildings was often dependent on wood, as were the ships for the Roman navy.¹²² While Britain could not compete with some other provinces, such as Germany, in terms

¹¹⁷ Dearne, Martin J., "The Use of Coal in Roman Britain" *The Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. 75 (1995), p. 82.

¹¹⁸ Dearne, p. 83.

¹¹⁹ Craddock, Paul, "Charles Dawson's cast-iron statuette: the authentication of iron antiquities and possible coalsmelting of iron in Roman Britain." *Historical Metallurgy*, Vol. 39, Issue 1 (2005), p. 43.

¹²⁰ Dearne, p. 86.

¹²¹ Hill, p. 121.

¹²² Hill, p. 86.

of timber production, the substantial forests found on the island did help satiate the empire's need for wood.

In addition to the island's numerous forests, Britain also had large swaths of fertile farmland. Strabo, writing before the Claudian conquest, describes the Britons as having no experience in the field of agriculture, though he contradicts himself by listing grain as one of their exports to Rome.¹²³ Regardless of the native agricultural abilities prior to the conquest, the Romans brought with them extensive knowledge of farming techniques. The native population began growing enough crops to sustain themselves, with grain being by far the most produced. By the stages of the Roman occupation the province had a large enough surplus that they were able to export grain to legions on the Rhine frontier.¹²⁴

Wealth from the People

Britain's wealth stemmed not only from its minerals but from its people as well. Slavery was present on the island as it was in all the provinces of the empire. The slave population of Britain was taken largely from prisoners of war and other natives, although not all British slaves remained on the island. Strabo lists slaves among the exports of the island prior to the Roman conquest, and the subsequent warfare on the island resulted in an increase of prisoners of war.¹²⁵ Those who remained performed an assortment of tasks, farming, mining, or working as a personal slave on a villa. Neck-shackles were found at Anglesey near remnants of the copper

¹²³ Strabo, 4.5.2.

¹²⁴ Mattingly, p. 505.

¹²⁵ Strabo, 4.5.2.

production that occurred on the island.¹²⁶ These slaves forced into labor would have had a much more difficult than domestic slaves.

Cassius Dio describes some of the exported Britons being forced to fight in gladiatorial combats shortly after the conquest had been completed.¹²⁷ This passage shows the extent of the Roman slave trade, with slaves from Britain being transported all the way to the capital. Slaves were a crucial element of the Roman Empire and the more people Rome had under its control, the more people it could enslave. Just as British slaves were sent all over the empire, slaves from all over found their way to Britain.¹²⁸ The slave trade was expansive and conquest of Britain left the province to be just another part in it.

After the Romans had begun to occupy the island they recruited, forcibly rather than voluntarily, Britons to be a part of their army and serve in the auxiliaries. This was far from a novel concept. Many of the troops that invaded Britain were auxiliaries from Gaul and Germany. While some of the conscripted Britons were sent to the Continent to serve in auxiliaries, others remained on the island to reinforce the troops already there.¹²⁹ As with slaves, Rome was always in demand of more soldiers. One of its great achievements was its ability to pull recruits from the populations it had conquered, and in this regard, just as with slavery, Britain was no different than any other province.

¹²⁶ Thompson, F. Hugh, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2003), p. 225.

¹²⁷ Cassius Dio, *61.30.3*.

¹²⁸ Thompson, p. 121.

¹²⁹ Mattingly, p. 169.

Conclusion

The decision to conquer Britain was not one that was taken lightly. Although Rome long had a history of expansion and conquest, crossing the ocean was a different matter. Caesar initially invaded because he thought it would help him win the war in Gaul, although this was likely not his only reason. Doubtless he had heard stories of Britain, rumors of its riches. He was only a ship ride away from setting foot on this unfamiliar land, and he took advantage of the opportunity. Though ultimately forced to return to Gaul, he returned with the glory of being the first Roman to land on Britain's distant shores.

Claudius invaded for glory as well, but of a different variety. He wanted to legitimize his rule through the conquest of a new land, and Britain was appealing enough to be his destination. Just as with Caesar though, Claudius' motives were not singular. Rome already had trade relations with Britain, signifying that the emperor must have known something of the mineral riches of the island. The materials found on Britain justified its conquest, contrary to idea posited by Strabo that the island was not worth the cost it would take to conquer it.

It is unclear to what extent Claudius knew of the island's natural resources, but if it was a gamble then it certainly paid off. Lead, tin, iron, and coal were found in abundance and the island also had significant deposits of copper and gold. The land was arable and the many forests provided timber used for fuel and building alike. A large native population like Britain had meant a larger workforce, whether enslaved or not. Rome was able to plunder Britain of all its resources, and that was what the empire intended to do.

Rome experienced resistance in Britain, as it must have expected. After all, it was the only province that was able to successfully resist the might of Julius Caesar. Yet if the Britons hoped they could repel the Romans once more, they were sorely disappointed. Rome swept through the island and some scholars posit that if not for Domitian's recall of Agricola, the entire province would have been brought to his knees. Total conquest was not to be, however, so the Romans settled on building a wall on its northernmost frontier, the greatest structure the island had ever seen. And so, having completed their conquest, the Romans were content to rule. Rome eventually lost Britain, just as it ended up losing all of its provinces. The mighty Roman Empire that had spanned three continents was no more and Britain became just another country left in the wake of this great empire.

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