

Leadership Qualities of a Warrior Queen

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the leadership qualities of Briton Iceni Warrior Queen Boudica. A secondary purpose is to share information with adult learners at University of Oxford and with student learners at Baylor University. The possibility exists to inform colleagues in educational arenas in Texas and the United States of the heroics of this woman who rallied and led many disparate tribes of Britons to fight the Roman Empire in the first century.

An outstanding statue of Boudica and her daughters charging the enemy in their chariot stands on the banks of the Thames River in London; it looks as if she is going to battle against Westminster and the Parliament buildings. In actuality the statue was erected by Prince Albert in honor of Queen Victoria in 1905. *Boudica* is said to be translated to *Victoria* through several changes—*Boudicca*, *Bouidicca*, *Boudicea*, etc. The preferred and original spelling is Boudica (with the accent on the first syllable).

To gather information and answer research questions regarding leadership qualities of Boudica, texts, websites, pictures, CDs of television broadcasts, music, and plays were analyzed to find common themes. A look at the history of the Iceni-Roman relationship was necessary for better understanding of the circumstances that stimulated this lady to take up arms against the ruling Roman legions.

Results of the study revealed the leadership qualities of Boudica were specific to her place and time in some ways, but not all. Her determination and fierce confidence are still found in leaders of integrity today. Her extreme anxiety and ability to lead an army of tribes that were not united in any way is particular to her situation. The element of surprise attack helped her tribesmen of 120,000 defeat the enemy. Boudica was successful in rallying her Briton tribesmen by convincing them that the injustices done to her and her family would be visited on other Britons in the future unless they worked together to defeat their common enemy. She pointed out how all had suffered since the Romans landed on their island. The ruling Romans did not conceive that the subjugated Britons could rise up and massacre them. “It is a mistake the conquering nations sometimes make –to consider a rebellion of the conquered to be impossible, because they find it unbelievable.”¹

¹Antonia Fraser. *The Warrior Queens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.

Women in Power: A View from History—Against All Odds

Shortly after my arrival in London my friend walked me to points of interest on the Embankment of the Thames River. We happened upon a larger-than-life statue of a woman with spear in hand, accompanied by two young ladies—all three in a chariot—with horses rearing to the obvious urging of the chariot reins and voice of the austere woman. She looked as if she was set to attack Parliament just across the street. My friend answered, “This is Boudica,” when I asked for the identity of the robust, immortalized woman in stone. Boudica intrigued me when I found that she helped drive the Romans from Britain in the First Century. Rome dominated the entirety of the known world at this time—Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. And yet this Celtic woman, for a short period of two years, is credited with ridding her island home of one of the greatest conquerors in the history of the world. Boudica was one of the first heroines of Britain’s history and a contemporary of the Roman Emperors Claudius and Nero. Her attacks on Roman rule took place in AD 60-61, at the time when Paul was writing his epistles and St. Mark was composing his gospel.²

Boudica was an Iceni queen, having married the King of the Iceni tribe; she was reared as a princess of the Trinovantes tribe. These two tribes, along with as many as 21 others, lived in the eastern area of present day England, in the East Anglia pastoral setting of rolling hills and great forests north of London. Lives of the people were spent in small villages in cone-shaped houses made of reeds, sticks, and thatched roofs. (AWA036-DVD-5)³ As the wife of Iceni King Prasutagus, Queen Boudica lived a privileged life. There was no union or network between the tribes and the many other loosely-formed groups of people in the land. No widespread social organization existed. The Druid religion was the chief form of worship, with fires, incantations, yelling and screeching heard in the sacred forests nearby.

When the Romans first came to the island of present day United Kingdom, they set up a system similar to forced taxation with the kings and warlords of the area. Members of these tribes agreed to work the land, share their wealth of livestock, and give appropriation for their land to the Romans. Tacitus relates:

“The Britons themselves submit to the levy, the tribute and the other charges of Empire with cheerful readiness, provided that there is no abuse. That they bitterly resent: for they are broken in to obedience, not to slavery.” (*Agricola*)⁴

The establishment of a colonia, as described above, was always a part of the imperial Roman decree from Emperor Claudius, when overtaking lands. The plan was to civilize loyal veterans (ex-soldiers) who joined with Rome to ultimately spread and multiply the newly captured area. The Roman settlers drove the Trinovantes/Iceni from their homes and lands and referred to them as slaves or prisoners. Roman land possessors turned a blind eye to the theft or property by other Romans, as they intended to do the same when they had the chance.

Tacitus also relates the Roman governor was a tyrant to the people and the procurator unfairly took their possessions:

²Paul Johnson, *Heroes: From Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to Churchill and De Gaulle*.

³AWA036-DVD-5, *Boudicca: Warrior Queen*.

⁴Cornelius Tacitus. 1984 *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Translated by Michael Grant. Dorset Press. Cornelius

“[The Roman] gangs of centurions or slaves, as the case may be, mingle violence and insult. Nothing is any longer safe from their greed and lusts. In war it is the braver who takes the spoil; as things stand with us, it is mostly cowards and shirkers that rob our homes, kidnap our children and conscript our men.”⁵

Although not asked for by the Britons, Rome gave the Britons money in the form of loans, with high interest payments demanded on the loans. In an effort for his family to retain wealth and property, the Iceni king left half of his kingdom to Nero and the other half to his 2 daughters. He must have hoped that by doing this, he had provided a peaceful solution to care for his daughters after his death. This was a false hope. When the King of the Iceni died, payment of interest was demanded from Queen Boudica for her husband’s estate. She refused according to her husband’s previous plans. However, his lands were ravaged by Roman centurions; slaves ransacked his house and his belongings were seized as lawful plunder.

Tacitus records:

“...Kingdom and household alike were plundered like prizes of war, the one by Roman officers, the other by Roman slaves. As a beginning, his widow Boudicca was flogged and their daughters raped. The Icenian chiefs were deprived of their hereditary estates as if the Romans had been given the whole country. The king’s own relatives were treated like slaves.”⁶

The violation of Boudica’s daughters was not done in a mindless way. This was a deliberate act, accomplished according to Roman policy, and was also symbolic. Rape was “the vehicle of *his* victorious conquest over *her* being.” The intent was not so much to punish the defiance of the Iceni tribe but to show their subordinate status and the uselessness of resisting Roman orders.

Boudica rebelled! She enlisted the aid of other Briton tribes and began her campaign to rid their island of the ruthless Roman Legions. The rebellions had deep causes. Even though other tribes may have been less personally shocked at the treatment of Boudica, they recognized they could be involved in a widespread and dangerous protest against the excesses of Roman subjugation. At the hands of the Romans, the weak Britons had no rights, but under Boudica’s leadership, they ceased to be weak. They relished in their new strength. They were oppressed but rose up to strike down their oppressors to exact revenge. Roman historian Dio said, “Boudica used a form of divination in determining when and where to fight. She released a hare from the folds of her dress to see the direction it ran, so as to lead her tribes in the same direction. She invoked Andraste, a British goddess of victory.”⁷ The Celtic tribes fought almost naked, fearing that clothes constrained their ability to fight unencumbered. They also decorated their bodies with blue-colored tattoos, the better to frighten their enemies.

⁵ Cornelius Tacitus. *The Annals of Imperial Rome*.

⁶ AWA035-DVD-5. Boudicca: Warrior Queen.

⁷ Cassius Dio., *Roman History*. LXII. 1-2. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/Cassius_Dio/62*.html Retrieved 2/10/2012

So says Cassius Dio:

“...a terrible disaster occurred in Britain. Two cities were sacked, eighty thousand of the Romans and of their allies perished, and the island was lost to Rome. Moreover, all this ruin was brought upon the Romans by a woman, a fact which in itself caused them the greatest shame...But the person who was chiefly instrumental in rousing the natives and persuading them to fight the Romans, the person who was thought worthy to be their leader and who directed the conduct of the entire war, was Boudica, a Briton woman of the royal family and possessed of greater intelligence than often belongs to women...In stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh; a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips; around her neck was a large golden necklace; and she wore a tunic of divers colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch. This was her invariable attire.”⁸

In the area of what is now Colchester, Rome had previously mandated an elaborate temple of stone be erected, dedicating it to the former Roman Emperor Claudius. It was built and maintained at local expense to the Britons. It existed undefended for 17 years as the town grew and became the Roman capitol of the island. Calculations made from surviving walls and piers suggest the temple measured 150 feet by 80 feet and was surrounded by a colonnade of columns, 35 feet high and over 3 feet in diameter, fronted by a flight of stairs. A reconstruction shows a building of gleaming white, with red, blue and golden ornamentation. Roman eagles and a statue of Emperor Claudius allows one to understand it was built to be a stronghold. The temple may have been intended to confer a sense of Roman loyalty to the native Britons; however it had the opposite effect.

A civic monument was foreign to the British natives, as they lived and worshiped, mostly in rolling hills and forests. Roman soldiers took refuge in the temple dedicated to Claudius after Boudica's hoard attacked, but the temple fell after 2 days. Her armies butchered, impaled, and looted the people in the capitol city. Boudica turned her attention to London (at the time known as Londinium). London was an obscure port, built entirely of wooden structures, without a hint of the world center it would later become. London was the chief residence of merchants and was a trade mart of commerce.⁹ As Boudica and her undisciplined army marched south to London, they burned and killed at any hint of Roman dominance. Her army of undisciplined Britons of the first century was not interested in finding treasure or keeping valuables; they were intent on destruction and annihilation of all in their paths. Tribe members disemboweled their enemies and read their entrails for signs of the next outcome of the next battle. Cages of wood were fashioned by some of the tribes, members of the enemy herded into the cages, and the cages set on fire.

Tacitus describes the Britons' motivation:

“...The natives enjoyed plundering and thought of nothing else. Roman and provincial deaths...are estimated at seventy thousand for the British did not take or

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Cassius Dio., *Roman History*. LXII. 1-2. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/Cassius_Dio/62*.html Retrieved 2/10/2012

sell prisoners, or practice war-time exchanges. They could not wait to cut throats, hang, burn, and crucify—as though avenging, in advance, the retribution that was on its way.”¹⁰

Dio gives a graphic account of the terrible destruction done by the Celtic tribes to those in their paths:

“...the noblest women were implanted on spikes and had their breasts cut off and sewn to their mouths, to the accompaniment of sacrifices, banquets, and wanton behavior in sacred places, particularly the groves of Andraste.”¹¹

London was burned to the ground, with areas of thick, red, and burned debris covering coins and pottery from the fires and blood. Today the red layer beneath the City of London serves as a reminder of the Boudican annihilation of London. It also serves as a perpetual reminder that the most thriving commercial city can be a set up for destruction by a people despised as slaves. In an instant, the destruction of everything—clay, timber, thatch, durable materials, and life itself can happen. Peter Marsden stated “Far below the modern streets of the City of London the events of AD 60 are indelibly scorched on the soil as a red layer of burnt debris...”¹²

Boudica and her various British tribes moved on from London to the present day site of undefended St. Albans. St. Albans was populated by Britons friendly to the cause of Rome—not Roman veterans and families or people from the Mediterranean area. St. Albans was classified as a *municipium*, ranked below a *colonia*, but above an ordinary native tribal town (a *civitas*). Thus St. Albans fell to Boudica without any defensive mechanics on the part of the citizenry. As Tacitus is quoted, “It was a glorious victory, comparable with bygone triumphs. According to one report, almost 80,000 Britons fell.”¹³

Tacitus suggests Boudica’s remarks in addressing her armies. She presented herself as an ordinary woman, wishing to avenge her lost freedom, her unjust flogging, and the abused chastity of her 2 daughters. She admonished the crowd that their cause was just and the gods were on their side. She was resolved to win or to die. She told her people what to expect in their determination to rid their land of the Romans.¹⁴ She is said to have talked about the differences between freedom and slavery, which they knew from experience. She spoke of the ancestral mode of life they were accustomed to living and boasted of their hardiness. She reminded them of their suffering since the Romans had landed on their island land. “Have we not been robbed entirely of most of our possessions, and those the greatest, while for those that remain we pay taxes?”¹⁵ Another reminder was that although the Britons should have repelled the Romans

¹⁰ Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals by Tacitus: The Tribes are Revolting!* <http://www.gallica.co.uk/celts/Boudica.htm>
Retrieved 2/8/2012

¹¹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*.

¹² Peter Marsden, *Roman London*. Thames and Hudson. 1986

¹³ Cornelius Tacitus. *Annals of Imperial Rome*.

¹⁴ AWA036-DVD-5. *Boudicca: Warrior Queen*.

¹⁵ Cornelius Tacitus. *Annals of Imperial Rome*.

when they first invaded, it was not too late to now atone for the error. For the sake of their children, they should act so they would not have to suffer in bondage.

However, it is what Boudica did, rather than what she said, that was most important. As to her tactics and the potency of surprise, Mao Tse-tung advocated in an essay on guerrilla warfare seizing the initiative whenever possible so that a small group of poorly equipped guerrillas could cause havoc and defeat a well-equipped army.¹⁶

The more victories Boudica experienced, the more allies among fellow tribesmen were gained. The winning side was seductive to the Britons looking at future profits. In AD 60 many Britons remembered a time before the Romans arrived, and were confident they could return to the time before Roman occupation.

Boudica prayed to the goddess Andraste, the war-goddess of the Iceni. She assumed the role of priestess, prophetess, and war leader in adherence of Celtic tradition and myth. Boudica's ability to become the character of priestess and goddess was an important factor in her leadership. Rome was especially unprepared for leadership from a woman. On Boudica's side was the negligence of the Romans. The Romans were overconfident. The Romans could not imagine that the Britons could defeat them—rise up, sack a city and massacre its inhabitants. It is common on the part of the conquering power to consider a rebellion to be impossible, because it is unbelievable. The Romans suffered for this overconfident attitude.

The Britons, nothing more than unorganized farmers, had no training in fighting a battle. The Celtic sword was their traditional weapon. They wore no body armor of any kind, except a pair of loose trousers. Many times they wore only a loin cloth, thinking that clothes inhibited their movements. Their chariots were made of wicker from which they dismounted to fight.

At this time, Romans used chariots for racing, not for warfare. Roman legionaries were trained over many years in continental warfare. They were equipped for fighting in a manner that developed each decade with the sole aim of making every legion an exemplary fighting machine. Against their enemies, they wore helmets, neck protection, light body armor to the waist, wide leather belts with metal-tipped leather thongs, and studded open boots similar to hobnailed sandals.

The Britons army of near 80,000 enjoyed success for a period of time. However, the lack of open-field warfare put the Celtic tribes at a disadvantage to the Romans who were highly trained and possessed superior equipment. Suetonius Paullinus, the Roman governor of Britannia, gathered his troops and used his Roman battle experience to finally wage a disciplined war against Boudicca's warriors. Involved in the Roman attack were: archers with bows and arrows against the Britons without breastplates; infantry with javelins; cavalry; and shields to withstand British axes, swords, and knives. The Roman wedge was used to advantage by shielding soldiers from an incoming assault. Paullinus chose his location for battle with care, putting his army above the plain where the ragtag British forces would be compelled to attack. Behind the plain where the Britons began their attack was a thick forest—impenetrable for retreat. The Britons, overconfident due to their many victories over 2 years of waging

¹⁶ Paul R. Sealey. *The Boudican Revolt Against Rome*. Buckinghamshire, UK: P Shire Publications, Ltd., 1997.

destruction, brought livestock, carts, wives and children to watch their victorious battle. This proved to be their undoing! When the Britons realized the futility of their battle and needed to retreat, they could not. They were blocked by their own carts, dead animals, and families. About 400 Roman soldiers perished during the battle.¹⁷

Boudicca either killed herself so she would not be captured, or died from an illness or wound. Tacitus and Cassius Dio differ on the cause of her death. The belief still exists that she is buried between platforms 9 and 10 in King's Cross station in London. The Queen's daughters and their fates and names, remain unknown to history. No written records of her appear in British historical record. All information concerning her leadership in Briton comes from Roman historians and archeological finds. There are only 3 written sources for the Boudican rebellion that might be considered primary sources; 1 of these is in an edited form made 900 years later. Two of the sources come from Tacitus in *Agricola*, the life of his father-in-law published in AD 98 and in *Annals*, written 15 to 20 years later. The third source is from Dio Cassius in AD 163. The Romans departed from the British Island 400 years after the Boudican battles. Rediscovery of the works of Roman historians Tacitus and Dio during the Renaissance allowed Polydore Virgil to introduce her into British history in 1534 as "Voadicea."

Rome brought fresh troops from Germany to complete the legions devastated by the British onslaught. Auxiliary units—both infantry and cavalry—were also imported. The Britons were humbled to pay for their glorious victories and spend the remainder of their existence in disarray. A policy of Roman repression was enacted towards them, including slavery. Roman forts were put at specific sites to control the movements of the population. Farms were burned.

Had Queen Boudica continued her rout of the Romans, and been able to choose her place to fight the Romans to her best advantage, with her numbers of warriors and courage, she might have been the winner of the final battle. The victory may have gone the other way. She was a Celt—bold and inspiring, but finally did not calculate battle plans to her advantage.

The London statue of Boudica was planned by Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, during the Victorian Age. It is said that the translation of "Boudica" to more modern times is "Victoria." Queen Victoria was thought to be Boudica's namesake—leading her people through turbulent times. The larger-than-life bronze statue was erected in the Westminster Bridge/Houses of Parliament area of London in 1905 in the auspicious vantage point of the Thames River and the seat of government. The statue of Boudica stands in her chariot recalling another time besides that of Victorian times, when a heroine died defending the liberty of her country against a foreign invader.

Numerous poetry, songs, plays, television specials, portraits (see Appendix A), comic book series, novels and chapters in books have been produced about Boudica over the centuries. Ships are named after her. Henry Purcell's last major work, composed in 1695, was music for the play "Bonduca, or the British Heroine." Some of the song titles are "To Arms," "Britons, Strike Home" and "O lead me to some Peaceful Gloom." Recordings about her are performed by Irish

¹⁷ Peter Salway, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Roman Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

singer Enya, Dutch soprano Petra Berger, Scottish songwriter Steve McDonald, and the English metal band Bal-Sagoth, Faith and the Muse.

Leadership qualities we find exemplified in this remarkable woman from 2,000 years ago include:

- compelling communication/speeches (she said to her people: “If we die, we die a glorious death.”);
- protector of her ancestral land;
- provider for children of the tribes;
- faith in her belief in her god(s)—spirits;
- encourager;
- recognition of her place as a truth teller;
- astute;
- authoritative as Queen of the Iceni;
- courageous;
- a leader by example;
- problem solver;
- realistic;
- rallied the Briton tribes to defeat a common enemy;
- great teacher;
- unifier of warring tribes;
- heartfelt, passionate communicator;
- fierce competitor;
- never-give-up attitude; and
- protector of that which was entrusted to her.

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Appendix A



The bronze statue of Boadicea and her daughters, in a scythe-wheeled chariot, sculptured by Thomas Thornycroft between 1856 and 1885, and finally erected by the London county Council in 1902. The lines of William Cowper are inscribed upon the plinth: 'Regions Caesar never knew/ thy Posterity shall sway.' www.artistspainsol.com Retrieved 3/25/2012.



Boadicea Haranguing the Britons. William Sharp, after John Opie line engraving, portrait 1793 (358 mm x 253 mm) National Portrait Gallery, London



Illustration by A. S. Forrest to *Our Island Story, A Child's History of England* by Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall; first published in 1905 – and written in Melbourne, Australia, for the author's children – this work provided formative images of history for many British children in the first half of the twentieth century, including the author. <https://www.google.com/search?q=www.artists+paintings+of+Boudica>. Retrieved 3/25/2012.