

# Iron age: romano- british tribe analysis

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## **Iron Age/ Romano-British Tribe analysis Britain p**

rior to the original Roman invasions in the early parts of the 1st century B. C was an area of Europe that had relatively little contact with mainland Europe as well as being regarded as an undomesticated and barbarous land as the inhabitants appeared as feral as a pack of ravenous wild dogs. The main sources that historians have used throughout the previous centuries are the personal writing of Caesar from his times on campaign. This description of savagery can be seen from the extracts from Julius Caesars writings in the Gallic wars as Caesar described the British capital at that time (c. 55/54 A. D) under the rule of Cassivellaunus as “ protected by forests and marshes, and filled with a large number of men and cattle.... it was of great natural strength, and extremely well-fortified”.

However, it is clear that the ancient tribes such as the Catuvellauni were no match for the very well drilled legionaries that had been brought over by Julius Caesar and this essay will show how the Catuvellauni interacted with Rome and contemporary tribes post the invasion of Caesar. However the reader must be weary considering that the main sources employed come on behalf of a Roman narrative thus making it hard to gain a real bi-partisan view on what the Catuvellauni were truly like. The Catevellauni were and ancient Belgic tribe that had occupied areas along the coast and had expanded as far up as the river Thames. In Caesars writings he says “ Belgic immigrants occupy the coast. They came as raiders and warriors and later settled down to cultivate the land”.

This tells us that similar to the Romans, the Catuvellauni were not native to Britain and had previously conquered large area in order to expand their Kingdom. However unlike other contemporary British tribes, they had remained in contact with their continental predecessors, this goes against the previous scholarship curve of thinking that prior to the Roman invasion Britain had been dominated solely by Celts whom had an identical dialect and culture universally which appears not to be the case. Caesar remarks about their wild and untrained fighting style upon his invasion along the coast especially in their employment of cavalry and chariots. He says “ First of all they drive from all directions and hurl missiles, and so by the mere terror that they inspire and by the noise of the wheels they generally throw ranks into confusion”.

However, one may interpret the large volumes of noise prior to engaging in battle as a means of inflicting doubt or psychological torment upon the foreign invaders and as we can see the Roman troops were very taken aback by this style of warfare and was perhaps a factor in the reason why Caesar never decided to pursue any further advances into the heart of Britain at that time. It is also possible that Caesar knew that the tribes were not truly wild and he feared that he may have suffered heavy losses if he had advanced further into Britain as the tribes may have united together, branding the people of Britain as barbarians and savages may have served a purpose in deflecting the Roman peoples opinion on expansion of the Roman provinces as they would have felt no need to conquer marshy land that had no agricultural or economic benefit at that time. It is clear that this invasion and withdrawal by the Romans had a significant effect on the power struggle

that had been occurring within Britain at that time as the Catevellauni were the pre-eminent aggressors at that time but after their defeat to the Romans under the leadership of Cassivellaunus they were forbidden (by order of their terms of surrender) to encroach upon territory owned by the Trinovantes.

For a period of about one generation there was a power struggle and the Catevellauni in particular struggled to gain a real foothold as the primary tribe in Britain until their new king Tasciovanus decided to neglect the terms of their submission while also moving the capital to Verulamium as the previous capital at Wheathampstead was perhaps tarnished from the humiliating defeat to the Romans<sup>4</sup>. These various actions were allowed to occur as there was no direct contact with the Roman empire at this time rather the Catevellauni were dealing with pro-Roman powers such as the Atrebates who usually just appeased the Catevellauni as they were not seeking open conflict and did not want to risk heavy loss of life. Therefore, throughout Augustus reign the strength of the Catevellauni grew and grew as the Roman Empire became pre occupied with events that were occurring along the Rhine and other provinces, this trend continued on through Tiberius reign also.

On the years prior to the invasion of 43 A. D, trade began to grow exponentially as merchants from Spain and other Gallic regions visited frequently in order to gain profitable connections. However, it was through this cross continent communication that allowed for the Roman lifestyle to promulgate throughout Britain. This lead to an easier transition of power from that of the tribes to the ways of the Roman republic. Merchants whom

dealt with the British peoples told them of the benefits of life under Roman rule such as roads and systems for entertainment such as baths or theatres. This led to the term Romanization (adoption of Latin linguistics and culture) being coined by later historians.

Thus to conclude, society within Britain in the first century B. C and A. D was described as wild and brutish as the people remained in a primal horde and it was from the writings of Julius Caesar that reinforced these views to the Roman people, however from a modern historians point of view it is clear that the Catuvellauni were indeed a complex race that held similar views of expansion to the Romans but also reverence towards their predecessors from the continent. It is due to a lack of written sources on their behalf (Catuvellauni) that an unbiased view can be formed as the only primary sources such as Julius Caesar's writings more often than not described them as being wild, savage and of less importance than the people of Rome.