

# Boudiccas revolt against the romans history essay



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Boudicca's revolt against the Romans was initially shaped by misfortunes brought upon her life and her family. Among ancient Celts, women were equal to men and held a number of well established rights. Consequently, when Boudicca's husband, Prasutagus, King of the Iceni tribe met his death in 60 AD, Boudicca took her assumed role as Leader and queen. Her husband's will outlined Boudicca's inheritance of the tribe and its land yet the Romans considered this practise illegal and demanded she hand over her wealth and territories. The injustice of such a demand resulted in Boudicca's strong refusal which ultimately led to her arrest, flogging and then the public brutalisation and rape of her two young daughters. Tacitus, senator and historian of the Roman Empire depicted the event in his work, *The Annals*. He states, " His kingdom was plundered by centuries... his wife Boudicca was scourged and his daughters outrage. All the chief men of the Iceni as if Rome had received the whole country as a gift, were stripped of their ancestral possessions, and the kings relatives were made slaves."(<http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.html>). This prominent historian outlines significantly the atrocious actions of the Roman Empire and mistreatment of the Royal Family and its tribe. Manifestly, after the assault to her children, her family and her kingdom, it was time to seek vengeance.

Boudicca triumphed as courageous female leader and despite the fragmentary nature of sources; there is strong historical evidence which depicts her heroic qualities. In the case of Boudicca, the public lashing she received and the rape of her daughters was a calculated political move on the part of the offending Romans, whose intent was to show the Celts their helplessness against the conquerors. For years Celtic tribes had suffered

under roman domination and taxation. They had been driven off their own land and subject to lives as slaves and prisoners. After suffering yet enduring such great offences, Boudicca recruited neighbouring Celtic tribes which without a doubt strongly supported the revolt. Tacitus articulated that even neighbouring tribes which had not yet been cowed by slavery agreed in secret conspiracy to reclaim Celtic freedom. (Annals, 14, 31). Cassius Dio, a Roman historian, could not overlook the magnanimity of Boudicca as he romantically depicts her in his literature when he displayed, “ She was huge of frame, terrifying of aspect, and with a harsh voice. A great mass of bright red hair fell to her knees: she wore a twisted Torc, and a tunic of any colours, over which was a thick mantle, festered by a broach. Now she grasped a spear to strike fear into all that watched her”.(www. unc. edu). Without question, Boudicca’s larger than life reputation, courageous persona and frightening stance was clearly recognised and depicted strongly in Roman history. Her ability to inspire support from neighbouring tribes in her vengeance in seeking to revolt made her a leader in her own right. Her final speech to her army, retold by Tacitus, displays the motivations of the Celts. Boudicca stated, “ Roman lust has gone so far that not our very person, nor even age or virginity, are left unpolluted... If you weigh well the strength of the armies, and the causes of the war, you will see that this battle you must conquer or die. This is a women’s resolve; as for men, they may live and be slaves, and captive.”(www. unc. edu). Boudicca expresses that she would rather die than let herself and her tribe fall under the control of the Roman Empire. It is articulated that Boudicca saw the battle as life or death and that women will fight to the very end in the name of vengeance. Despite the fragmentary nature of the sources surrounding Boudicca, it is still evident

that her efforts to build and motivate her army display her impact and inspiring leadership qualities.

After the rape of her daughters, her own lashing and the outright theft of Iceni lands, Boudicca inspired an army of some 100, 000 to break out from the oppression of the Roman Empire. Those who rose up against the Romans were few and far between. Perhaps the most significant factor is that the Roman Legions were far away from the Iceni Lands when the uprising occurred. Roman Governor Suetonius and his army were on the island of Mona and his march would take considerable time to intercept Iceni plans. Consequently, Camulodunum, Romans centre of rule, was attacked by Boudicca's troops and burnt to the ground. With little resistance in Boudicca's path, her army marched on to Londinum which suffered largely the same result as Camolodunum. Boudicca's army slaughtered the Roman people mercilessly. Inspired by vengeance the army marched on. Governor Suetonius described by Tacitus as an officer of distinguished merit, received news of the revolt and gathered 10, 000 legionaries and marched them to stop Boudicca in her path of destruction. The exact location of the final battle is unknown but Boudicca's tribe were confident in their triumph against such a small Roman army. What the Iceni army did not have was militaristic training like the Roman soldiers did. Suetonius positioned his army on a hill leaving Boudicca's army to fight uphill, tired and hungry. Cassius Dio described the Iceni as a swelling army in a battle that lasted all day with Boudicca sending wave after wave of Celts. (www. womenshistory. about. com) Tacitus gives an account of the final battle and tells of the women running around frantically, hair wild, naked and screaming, " The Celtic chief

was adorned to barbaric splendour with highly ornamental shields of armour". (www. conquest. caeraustralia. com. au) Boudicca was again presented in a heroic light yet her tribe was depicted as unhuman and unsophisticated. This is evident bias as the Romans stood for order and military discipline. Consequently, Boudicca's army were brutally defeated. Boudicca escaped with her daughters and it is believed that they ended their lives with poison to escape punishment and having to submit to the hands of Roman Rule. The Celtic tribes were hopelessly outmatched in militaristic methods yet they represented tradition and religion. Boudicca led a rebellion which literally and metaphorically set Roman Britain ablaze, but in doing so guaranteed the destruction of her people.

Regardless of the fragmentary nature of the sources, Boudicca's influence is clear yet her fame in British and Roman history somewhat outweighs her achievements. Cassius Dio expresses the impact of Boudicca's revolt as he highlights, " A terrible disaster occurred in Britain, Two cities we sacked, eighty thousand of the Romans and their allies perished...Moreover, all this ruin was brought upon the Romans by a women, a fact which in itself caused them the greatest shame". (M. J. Trow, 2005). Boudicca had clearly made a significant impact, but perhaps the most history making aspect of the revolt was the simple fact that its leader, Boudicca, was a female. Cassius continued to make reference to Boudicca's gender as he articulated that she possessed greater intelligence than what often belongs to a woman. (S. Busby, 2006). The shock to the Roman's that a woman caused such a large uprising was evident and contributed greatly to her eminence.

In contemporary times, Boudicca, warrior Queen of Iceni, is regarded as a heroine, a leader who stood her ground against foreign invasion. The misfortunes brought upon Boudicca and her tribe resulted in her vengeful seeking war against the Romans. The significant events which destroyed thousands of Romans, is a clear exemplar of her courage and leadership qualities. Despite fragmentary sources she rose as a strong female leader recruiting an outsized army. Her gender along with her achievements contributed immensely to her eminence and important place in history. Her name and history will constantly serve as a brutal yet remarkable reminder of Britain's past.