BOUDICA, CARTIMANDUA, MESSALINA AND
AGrippina The Younger. Independent Women
Of Power And The Gendered Rhetoric Of
Roman History

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Reading and Using the Sources

This paper examines the literary sources that form the substance of the
historical record as it relates to the years leading up to the rebellion of
Boudica, ruler of the Iceni tribe, in the early years of the Roman rule in
Britain (43-60/61 CE). It attempts to show how these sources intersect with
the representations of contemporary females of historical significance
(Cartimandua of the Brigantes, and, more briefly, the Julio-Claudian women
of power and influence, Valeria Messalina and Julia Agrippina) and to
indicate some of the problems and difficulties encountered in their use.

1 Webster (1978) 15 argues plausibly that the name Boudica derives from the Celtic word for
victory ('bouda'). He suggests that Tacitus mistakenly added a 'c' to the spelling
(Boudicca), and a mediaeval copyist completed the transformation by transposing 'a' for
'au' and 'e' for the second 'e' (Boadicea). I use Boudica in the body of the text but retain
variations in citations from ancient and modern sources.

2 For more detailed information on the Roman contacts and the Roman invasion, see, inter
(1993), Scullard (1988), and Todd (1981) Unless otherwise noted, all dates in this article
will be in the C(ommon) E(ra). For an informative comment on the question of whether we
should drop BC/AD for BCE/CE, see Judge (2002). As far as the beginning of the British
revolt is concerned, scholars are divided in favour of dating the outbreak to the years 60 or
(following Tac Amm 14.29.1) 61. According to Carroll (1979) 199, the heart of the matter
is the answer to the question: did P. Petronius F. Tursilianus (cos ord 61) replace C.
Suetonius Paullinus (cos a inc) early in 61? If Petronius went to Britain in the spring of
61, then Tacitus made a mistake. I do not propose to settle the dispute, and will retain the
composite dating 60/61 throughout.

3 For useful surveys of these historical female subjects, see, inter alia, for Boudica, Andrews
(1972), Braun (1996) 132-146, Fraser (1988), Kenworthy (1996b), Scott (1975), Stevens
and Millett (1996), Webster (1978); for Cartimandua, Braun (1996: 124-132); Frere
(1987: 54, 61, 64, 67, 82), Freire and Millett (1996); for Messalina, Jashemski (1997), Wood
(2000) 252-255; for Agrippina the Younger, Barrett (1996), Eck (1993), Baldon and
Spawforth (1996). For historical notes on Cartimandua and Boudica, see Appendix 2.

4 For an analysis of the political and historical agendas and outlooks of ancient sources on
Britain in relation to issues of power and gender associated with Boudica and Cartimandua,
see Braun (1996) 118-146. Teachers of the NSW HSC Syllabus in Ancient History may
find this paper useful in the teaching of the Preliminary Case Study 'Resistance to Roman
Rule,' of Roman Society from Augustus to Titus, and in the Extension History Course of
the use of rhetoric in Tacitus.
will entail some comment on the representations in the same sources of the *principes* Claudius and Nero and their British contemporaries.

Apart from general considerations of distorted emphasis, distortions that arise primarily from the incompleteness of our evidence, others exist that are more specific to the individual type of source material. The particular distortion I intend to consider primarily in this article falls under the heading of ‘gendered rhetoric’ – the representation of gender roles within a given literary discourse. The exposition of sexual difference in the historical writing of Cornelius Tacitus and Cassius Dio concerning the rebellion of Boudica will be the focus of my discussion. Though outside the ambit of my present concern, it is important to note that the opposition of the sexes in ancient literary discourse generally is part of an interdependent system of social hierarchies (ethnicity, age, status, the spatial tension between domestic and public, and so on). The axis of identity relating to the domain of gender is only one of a number of variables in the region of social relations, each of which responds to or associates in any of a variety of ways with one or more of the other domains. When I speak about the gendered rhetoric of ancient historical writing, these attendant systems of difference should be understood, recognized and taken into account.

In the following discussion, I introduce each writer, and outline in discrete sections the rhetorical strategies by which Cartimandua, Boudica, Messalina and Agrippina are represented. For convenience’s sake, I restrict my

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5 The modern literature on Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus and Nero Claudius Caesar is extensive. Useful biographical references (with bibliographies) for Claudius: Momigiano (1934; repr 1961), Scramuzzo (1940), Levick (1990); for Nero: Warrington (1969), Griffin (1984), Shotter (1997), Holland (2000). For an introduction to the tribal leadership of Roman Britain, see Frere (1987); www.Roman-Britain.org (a useful internet gateway featuring a comprehensive list of Celtic nobles during the early Roman period: http://www.roman-britain.org/people/britons.html).

6 For a brief description of these distortions, see Appendix I.

7 There is a variety of modern scholarship treating this aspect of ancient historical writing in the light of Boudica and other important pre-industrial and modern female rulers and warriors. The following treatments are useful introductions to the issue. Fraser (1988) surveys the literary and iconographical representation of female types in relation to Judith, Penthesilea, Boudica, Zenobia, Elizabeth I, Margaret Thatcher et alia. Roberts (1988) identifies some of the predominant thematic concerns in Tacitus’ account of the revolt in Britain and its relationship with the larger representation of conditions in Neronian Rome. Mikhalchik (2000) offers a sophisticated exploration of the construction of personal and national identities in early modern England using the legacy of Boudica. For a recent overview of important primary sources (written and visual) for the lives of ancient women presented within their historical and cultural context, see Fantham et al (1994).
argument to contemporary or near-contemporary historical writing relating to the years 43-60/61.  

The Literary Evidence of Cornelius Tacitus

Born in southern (Narbonese or Cisalpine) Gaul (northern Italy) around 56, Tacitus was an advocate and politician. In 77 he married the daughter of Gnaeus Julius Agricola, a governor of Britain between 77/78 and 84. He became a praetor in 88, belonged to one of the four major colleges of the Roman priesthood (the quindecemviri sacris faciundis) and held various political positions, such as proconsul of Asia in 112-113. His published writings relevant to the Claudian-Neronian period are the Annals (more precisely, ab excessu diui Augusti), Histories, and the Agricola (de vita Iulii Agricolae). The Annals and Histories relate the history of Rome under the early emperors. He portrays Claudius as dominated by his wives and freedmen and gives precedence to the sexuality of Valeria Messalina (the great-granddaughter of Augustus’ sister Octavia, and the mother of Claudia Octavia and Britannicus to Claudius) and the political ambition of Julia Agrippina. For Nero, Tacitus contrasts the five years of judicious administration following Nero’s succession with the murder of Agrippina in 59 and the disintegration of government which ensues. Agricola is a biography of the life — and, for our purposes, a chronicle of his governorship of Britain — of his father-in-law. Throughout his work, Tacitus wrote with a moral purpose to show that power corrupts and is consequently abused. He shows bias against the early emperors, and against the system of government they established. He believed the early emperors and their actions exemplified the corruption of power in the hands of individuals. He is sorry for the loss of what he regards as the freedoms of the republican period.

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8 As Kenworthy (1996) 139 notes, ‘despite being ancient, [extant historical accounts of the Boudican rebellion] are secondary, not primary, sources of information’. Apart from the extant historical writings of Tacitus, Cassius Dio and Suetonius, contemporaneous sources which no longer survive (but which are referred to in the major sources) include the annalistic material of M. Cluuius Rufus (inter alia, suctex consul under Caligula and Nero’s herald), the history and biographical monograph(s) of Fabius Rusticus (friend of Seneca the Younger), and the annalistic history in thirty-one books of Pliny the Elder. Other information pertinent to the Claudian-Neronian period which has come down to us can be found in the prose-verse satire (Apocolocyntosis) and tragedy (Octavia) attributed to Nero’s teacher and adviser Seneca, and pertinent snippets from the pro-Roman Jewish nationalist writings of Josephus. In addition, we should note references in Pliny the Elder, Tacitus and Suetonius to the autobiographical texts (commentarii) of the emperors themselves, and of members of their family. Of importance for the present study are an autobiography Claudius wrote in eight volumes (Suet. Claud. 41 3; Tac. Ann. 13 43 4) and the memoirs written by Agrippina the Younger (Pliny, NH 7 46; Tac. Ann. 2 69 1, 4 53 3). For a brief excursus on non-literary evidence and gendered representation, see Appendix 1.
other words, his treatment of imperial history in the first century is coloured by the fact that he wrote as a member of a senatorial order aware of 'the gulf in political life between what was professed and what was practised'.  

**Cartimandua**

A snippet from the *Annals*, dealing with the problems that faced the new governor of Roman Britain, Ostorius Scapula, when he assumed command in 47, may help to clarify the Tacitean approach to the history of provincial expansion in Britain and to the representation of powerful Roman and native Briton females. Tacitus deals here with the progress of Caratacus, who took part in the resistance in Britain to the Roman invasion of 43, and who was defeated by Scapula somewhere in the hills of the Welsh border after renewing hostilities.

'Caratacus himself sought the protection of Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, but since usually adverse fortunes are dangerous, he was arrested and handed over to the victorious Romans in the ninth year after the war in Britain had begun (51).'

*(Annals 12.36)*

Here, Cartimandua's role in the affair suggests that she had a treaty of friendship with the Romans, but also that her hold on the widespread Brigantes was less than strong. Tacitus speaks of unrest on the Brigantian frontier on the arrival of the new governor Scapula (*Annals 12.32*). It also seems that her motive for removing Caratacus was not without a personal aspect. As Frere (1987: 64) comments, 'if Caratacus succeeded [in rallying those in Brigantia against Rome], her rule was over'. Certainly her actions must have enraged those of the tribe who still harboured anti-Roman sentiments – sentiments that Carataucus had probably hoped to galvanize into action. What Tacitus' citation makes clear is the striking ambit of Cartimandua's authority over the northern borders of Roman Britain, and the explicit acceptance of this fact by a fellow tribal leader and imperial Rome.

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9 Martin (1995) 1470
10 *OCD* (1996) 296, s.v. 'Cartimandua' (S. Frere, M Millett)
11 The Brigantes were the most populous tribe in Britain (*Tac Agr* 17) and held territory in northern England and had their capital at Isurium (Aldborough, North Yorkshire). Literary and archaeological evidence suggest a confederation of local groups rather than a centralized tribal organization. From the Roman point of view, the capture of Carataucus must have been a considerable stroke of luck, though it was to create as many problems as it solved.
Now consider Tacitus’ account in the *Histories* of Cartimandua’s actions:

‘These differences, and the frequent rumours about civil war, raised [the Brigantes’] spirits under the influence of Venutius, who, besides an innate wildness and a hatred of the name “Roman”, was provoked by personal spurs concerning the queen Cartimandua. She continued to rule the Brigantes, prevailing in relation to her high birth. She had increased her influence after the king Caratacus had been captured through deception, and was seen to have procured Claudius Caesar’s triumph.\(^{12}\) Thereafter came wealth and an excess of favourable things. Rejecting Venutius, who was her husband, she accepted into marriage and her rule his armour-bearer Vellucatus. Her household was shaken immediately by this disgraceful thing – for the husband, the devotion of the tribe; for the adulterer, the lust and ruthless cruelty of the queen. So Venutius summoning help, and at the same time a revolt by the Brigantes themselves, brought Cartimandua to an extreme turning-point. At this time, she appealed to the Romans for protection. As a result of various battles, our cohorts and cavalry regiments delivered the queen from danger. Sovereign authority was bequeathed to Venutius, the war to us.’ (*Histories* 3.45)

Tacitus’ emphases are particularly instructive with regard to his treatment of women in the public spaces of historical action (Roman or foreign). His narrative draws attention to Cartimandua’s

- treacherous relationship with Caratacus,
- treaty-friendship with an emperor regarded (by Tacitus) as far too dependent on the advice of his freedmen and the uxoriousness of Messalina and Agrippina,\(^ {13} \)
- susceptibility to the self-indulgence of wealth,
- erotic affiliation with a male of lesser status and birth, and
- ruthless cruelty.

Focussing for a moment on the Latin terminology Tacitus deploys in representing the Brigantian queen reveals his standpoint towards her (and, by reflection, towards Claudian Rome): Cartimandua may be a legitimate female ruler (*regina*) possessing distinguished parentage (*nobilitas*) and political influence (*potentia*). However, she is liable to act with guile and trickery (*per dolum*) and is susceptible to excessive display (*luxus*), inordinate desire (*libido*) and savageness (*saevititia*). The latter negative tropes are familiar in republican and imperial historical writing, and are normally linked with the depredations of corrupting authority (*regnum*). As these iterative traits can

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\(^{12}\) As already noted, Claudius celebrated his triumph in 43, well before Cartimandua handed Caratacus over to the Romans in 51

\(^{13}\) See below for comment on Tacitus’ representation of Claudius in relation to Messalina and Agrippina
usually be associated with depictions of non- or un-Roman individuals, most notably Eastern tyrants and barbarian rulers, their use illuminates clearly Tacitus’ view of Cartimandua and suggests implicit disquiet over her support by Roman military force operating under imperial sanction. Interestingly enough, that exploitation of intra-tribal rivalries may have ensured future loyalty and destabilized the social structure of the tribes concerned may be inferred from Tacitus’ account; but this effect of Rome’s provincial strategy during the Claudian-Neronian period is not part of his historiographical agenda.

If we return to his account of events in the *Annals*, any inconsistencies of the narrative are successfully effaced by his unremittingly hostile gaze on Cartimandua:

‘... since the capture of Caratacus the most distinguished individual in terms of military knowledge was Venutius from the tribe of the Brigantes .... He had long been loyal and protected by Roman arms while he stayed married to the queen Cartimandua. Presently, arising from their separation, and immediately by war, he had engaged in hostilities against us as well. At first, however, they merely fought among themselves, and by cunning stratagems Cartimandua intercepted Venutius’ brother and those near to him. Incensed at this and driven by shame lest they be subject to a woman’s rule, the enemy invaded her kingdom with a powerful and chosen band of young men under arms. We had foreseen this and cohorts sent to her aid fought a sharp engagement which, after an uncertain beginning, reached a more favourable conclusion ...’ (*Annals* 12.40)

The portrait of Cartimandua remains rock-solid in its invective and merciless devaluation. The queen is just as cunning as before, employing subtle and calculating artifice (*callidi artes*) to achieve her ends. Her relationship with a less-than-admirable Roman garrisoning force – sent to defend a personal sovereignty verging on despotism (*regnum*) – is highlighted (*missae auxilio cohortes*). Finally, her responsibility for internal tribal discord and external civil dissent is undeniable. Add to this the Brigantian tribesmen’s shame at the prospect of being subject to a woman’s rule (*stimulante ignominia, ne feminae imperio subderentur*), and we are presented with a clear-cut instance of the gendered rhetoric of ancient historical writing.
Boudica\textsuperscript{14}

Tacitus' rhetorical practices are similarly brought to bear on the Boudican rebellion.

'Prasutagus, King of the Iceni, noted for his prolonged affluence, had designated Caesar his heir and his two daughters, thinking that by such deference his kingdom and household would be far from harm. However, matters turned out otherwise, so much so that his kingdom was plundered by centurions, and his household by Roman slaves, as if they were the spoils of war. To begin with his wife Boudicca was flogged and her daughters raped. The nobility of the Iceni were deprived of their hereditary properties as if the Romans had received the whole region as a gift, and the king's relatives were retained like purchased slaves. As a result of this outrage and fear of worse, since they had been reduced to provincial status, the Iceni took up arms...' (\textit{Annals} 14.31)

'... under Boudicca as leader – she was a woman of kingly descent (and [the Britons] do not distinguish sex in matters of sovereignty) – all the people entered upon war.' (\textit{Agricola} 16)

Tacitus presents his readership here with a specific typological category of female. Boudica's affiliation is carefully linked with that of male rule – as wife of Prasutagus (\textit{uxor eius}) and inheritor of sovereign blood (\textit{generis regii feminæ}) – rather than emphasized in its own right. She belongs to an identifiable and commendable social order (\textit{praecipui Icenorun}); and it is that order which is compromised, sullied, and perverted, just as much as the individuals who fill out its contours (\textit{propinqui regis inter mancipia habebantur}).

A little later in his account, Tacitus outlines the confrontation between the XIV Legion, together with detachments from the XX and auxiliaries from the nearest stations, under Suetonius, and the forces of the Britons,

'... a multitude like no other with a spirit so headstrong that they brought their wives with them as well as witnesses to their victory and set them in carts which they had drawn up around the outer circumference of the battlefield' (\textit{Annals} 14.34)

Tacitus continues:

'Boudicca rode in a chariot with her daughters before her, and as she drew near to each tribe, she made it known that it was customary for the Britons to engage in warfare under the leadership of women. But, at this moment, she was not a

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{OCD}³ (1996) 256, s.v ‘Boudicca’ (C. Stevens, M. Millett).
woman descended from great ancestors avenging her kingdom and her wealth; rather she was one woman, from the common people, avenging the freedom she had lost, her body worn out with flogging, and the violated chastity of her daughters. The excessive desires of the Romans had advanced so much that they left nothing undefiled, not even the bodies of the old or those of young girls. Nonetheless the gods were at hand for just vengeance .... If the Britons considered the number of their men bearing arms and the reasons they were fighting, they must conquer on that field of battle or die. That was her purpose as a woman; as for the men, they could live on and be slaves (if they desired that)." (*Annals* 14.35)

In a discussion of the tropes of gender representation in a variety of Greek and Latin sources from the first four centuries of the Common Era, David Konstan ([2000] 7) observes that ‘an independent queen is an objective challenge to the premise that women are capable of ruling’. He later suggests that it is possible for ancient historical writers to defuse this potential threat to normative gender relations by removing powerful queens to the margins of the civilized world ‘where there authority stands outside and is complementary to the masculine order that reigns at the center’ (19 n.16). While this is a useful standpoint for interpreting the depiction of a number of non-Roman female rulers, it does not address all of the nuances adhering to the representation of Boudica in Tacitus (though more so, as we will see, in Cassius Dio).\footnote{Cf. the observations of Braund (1996) 132, 141 who sees Tacitus’ Cartimandua and Dio’s Boudica as instruments of *servitium* (servitude) to Rome and proponents of personal *licentia* (unrestrained liberty), and Tacitus’ Boudica as a victim both of *servitium* under Rome and Roman *licentia*. According to Braund’s thesis, Dio’s Boudica rehearses Tacitus’ viewpoint on ruling queens. This is seen in the latter’s depiction of Cartimandua as a reflection of Cleopatra, Semiramis and Berenice, daughter of Agrippa I. On the other hand, Tacitus’ Boudica is presented as a woman (wife of a ruling male), not a queen. As a result, she does not draw the historian’s usual approbrium towards influential female subjects.}

Unlike the women drawn up in carts around the field of battle, Boudica cannot be separated as easily from the arena of gendered rhetoric.\footnote{It is hard to know whether Suetonius Paulinus’ observation – recounted through indirect speech by Tacitus (*Ann 14.36*) – that ‘there are more women than fighting men to see in their ranks’ (plus ilic feminarum quam iuventutis aspici) should be read as indicative of a real female presence among the British forces or of a rhetorical feminization of Roman opposition. That Agricola was appointed by Paulinus as the senatorial tribune of one of the four legions stationed in Britain suggests a source for Tacitus’ account of the insurrection, though we do not know to which of the legions he was attached. Syme (1957) 2.765 posits that Paulinus may have written memoirs. For the view that participation by women in combat was a feature of barbarian peoples, see Plut. *Mar.* 19.7; Florus 1 38.16-17; cf. Tac *Germ.* 18.2-3.} In the words Tacitus gives her, Boudica declares her ancestral claims over (*tantis
maioribus orta), as well as her identification with, (una e uulgo) ordinary Britons. She is a mother to her children (filiae) and the tribes (quaque natio) bearing arms under her command (feminarum ductus). At the hands of lustful Roman men (Romanorum cupidines) she has suffered personally (confectus uerberibus) and as a result of the treatment meted out to her daughters (contractata filiarum pudicitia). Her purpose in fighting against these men is seen as justified in the eyes of the native population and the gods (adesse ... deos instae uindictae). From this reconstructed perspective, the choice she offers those gathered before her is that faced by every population faced with the threat of colonization by an imperial power: to live in freedom or as slaves (uituerent uiri et seruirent).

Messalina¹⁷

Let us see if Tacitus applies the same rhetorical strategies in his record of the lives of the imperial Roman women Valeria Messalina and Julia Agrippina.¹⁸ Little is known for certain about the life of Messalina, other than her descent through both parents from Octavia, Augustus’ sister, her prominence among the leading families in Rome, and her claim as mother of Claudius’ children Britannicus and Claudia Octavia.¹⁹ Equally frustrating, Tacitus’ account of the years 37-47 has not survived; the early years of Messalina’s relationship with, and marriage to, Claudius is thus lacunose.²⁰ What, in summary, we learn from Tacitus is: that Messalina participated in the extirpation of alleged enemies of state; that she entered into a very public extra-marital relationship with Gaius Silius, culminating in marriage; and that, her relationship with Silius revealed, she committed suicide in the company of her estranged mother.

Consider Messalina’s role in the accusation, apprehension, interrogation and suicide of P. Valerius Asiaticus, suffect consul under Caligula and a second time consul under Claudius in 46 with M. Junius Silanus.

¹⁷ For references to Messalina in Roman imperial literary texts, see Joshel (1997) 249 n2.
¹⁸ This study will refrain from rehearsing previous surveys of women in Tacitus and contributions to literary-critical and feminist work on Tacitus, Roman women and gender in ancient Rome. For the former, see, e.g., Hoffsten (1939), Königer (1966), Riposati (1971), Baldwin (1972), Rutland (1978) and Syme (1981); for the latter, see, e.g., Kaplan (1979), Marshall (1984-86), Viden (1993), Fisschler (1994) and Joshel (1997). Note that, in all that follows, I do not suggest that Tacitus is explicitly comparing the characters and actions of Roman and non-Roman women; rather, that he deploys strategies of gendered rhetoric similarly to represent historical agents and institutions.
²⁰ Missing are books 7-10 and the opening chapters of book 11.
'Mesallina believed that Valerius Asiaticus, twice consul, was one of [Poppaea's] adulterous seducers. At the same time she was gazing longingly at the gardens which, begun by Lucullus, Asiaticus was now decorating sumptuously. Messallina incited Suillius to accuse both [Asiaticus and Poppaea]. Associated was Sosibius, Britannicus' tutor, who, though the appearance of friendship, was to warn Claudius to beware of power and wealth hostile to the principate.' (Annals 11.1)

Tacitus informs us that Messalina 'incited' (immittit) a senatorial prosecutor (P. Suillius Rufus) and an imperial slave or freedman (Sosibius) to accuse Asiaticus of threatening the state. The reasons offered by Tacitus for Messalina's actions are twofold: jealousy (Valeriam Asiaticum ... adulterum eius) and greed (hortis inhiam). Jealousy, in that she gives credence (credidit) to the report that Asiaticus is one of Poppaea Sabina's former lovers,21 who in turn had been associated with one of Messalina's paramours, the actor Mnester; greed, in that Asiaticus possesses something that she very much desires — the gardens of Lucullus.

The resemblance of Messalina's portrayal by Tacitus to his representation of Cartimandua is close. Both women are influential (within their respective households and in the public domain)22 prone to relationships with men of lesser (in the case of Mnester, legally infamous) status, manipulative (of those close to themselves and their family), and susceptible to excess (whether of behaviour or of possessions). That Messalina is shown in the next section of Tacitus' account (Ann. 11.2-3) to pursue her rationale for action to a doubly fatal conclusion — the suicides of Poppaea and Asiaticus — mirrors to a large extent Cartimandua's purposeful betrayal of Caratacus through deception (per ludum) and her subsequent indulgence in the trappings of wealth (opes) and extravagance (luxus). Similarly, Messalina's determination to speed her perceived rival Poppaea to suicide in fear of prolonged torment (ipsa ad perniciem Poppaeae festinat, subditis qui terrore carceris ad voluntarium mortem propellenter) is reminiscent of Cartimandua's saevitia. Tacitus ensures that we understand clearly how Messalina should be regarded in this episode by leaving the final word to one of her victims. As he prepares for the most stoic of Roman deaths, Asiaticus declares that he would have much preferred to have fallen by the 'cunning' (calliditas) of Tiberius or the 'violence' (impetus) of Caligula than by the

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21 Poppaea Sabina is the mother of the more famous Poppaea, whom Tacitus describes as 'having surpassed in beauty all the ladies of her day' (Ann. 13.45: actatis suae feminas pulchritudine suppiggresa).

22 Videns (1993) 33 observes that Messalina is 'a woman of power and influence, even if it is exerted through other people'. This is in contrast to Cartimandua, who acts in her own right to achieve specific purposes.
'deception' (*fraus*) of a woman and the 'shameless mouth' (*impudicus os*) of an imperial sycophant (*Ann. 11.3*).  

How Messallina is shown to conceive of a desire – driven by a 'new and almost insane passion' (*novo et furori proximo amore*) – for Gaius Silius reinforces the parallel between the Brigantian queen and the wife of a Roman emperor.  

'She burned so for Gaius Silius, most handsome of the young Roman men, that she drove from his marriage Junia Silana, a high-born woman, and had her lover at leisure ... Messalina, now in contempt of the ease of her adulteries, proceeded to untried desires ... she coveted the name of wife, because of the extent of the infamy, which to the prodigal is the most extreme passion.' (*Annals 11.12, 26*)

The status of Messalina’s desired lover (a member of the elite in Roman society) may differ from that of Cartimandua’s (Velloca the armour-bearer). However, Messalina’s depiction as ‘inflamed’ (*exarserat*), drawn to ‘unknown passions’ (*incognitas libidines*), subject to the most extreme and prodigal of desires (*apud prodigos novissima voluptas est*) – namely *infamia* – revisits the extremity of the Brigantian queen’s disgrace and lust.  

Messalina’s fixation on Silius – to the exclusion of the most fundamental proprieties (she is ‘careless of concealment’, and ‘at no other time more wanton in passion’) and even of satisfying her basic instincts (her ‘cruelty’, ‘more aroused than ever’)  

– reminds us of Cartimandua’s situation in the aftermath of her choices. In a sense, Messalina faces the equivalent of Cartimandua’s ‘extreme turning-point’ (*in extremum discrimen ... adduxit*).  

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23 Messalina’s accomplice in ensuring Asiaticus’ condemnation – he of the shameful mouth – is L. Vitellius, whose reputation at Rome Tacitus records in these terms: ‘changed into a likeness of servitude so shameful, [Asiaticus] is held by posterity as an example of the ignominy that goes with sycophancy’ (*Ann. 6 32*).

24 cf. Tacitus’ earlier accounts of the relationship between Livilla (Germanicus’ sister, Nero Drusus’ wife, ‘Tiberius’ daughter-in-law) and Sejanus (*Ann. 4.3, 10, 39, 60; 5 3f incl. lost section of Book 5*) and Macro’s encouragement of the relationship between his wife Ennia and Caligula (*Ann. 6 45*).

25 Viden (1993) 37 sees Messalina’s *impudicitia* as the primary focus of Tacitus’ characterization. Everything else – her *impotentia and superbia*, her power and influence – is subsumed to lust, which, since uncontrolled, is the cause of her ruin. Whether or not Messalina was acting on ‘more than mere affection or lust’ (*Wood [2000] 255*) is an historical question outside the ambit of this inquiry. For discussion on this issue, see Mehl (1974) 65 n 353, 74-79, Griffin (1984) 28-29, Levick (1990) 64-67, Barrett (1996) 93-94.

26 *Ann. 11.12*: *non furtim*, cf 26: *non aliar solution luxa*; 11.12: *saevitia, commotior*. Messalina’s obsession for Silius – her ‘new and almost insane passion’ – outweighs her hatred for the younger Agrippina: ‘[P]ity for the mother of Germanicus, Agrippina, was increased on account of the cruelty of Messalina, who, always Agrippina’s enemy and now more excited than ever, was held back from arranging accusations and informers by a new and almost insane passion’ (*Ann. 11.12*)
Unlike Cartimandua, Messalina is unsuccessful in evading the danger incumbent on her choices. But Tacitus narrows the perceptual gap between the two women still further by depicting Messalina as prone to explicitly un-Roman behaviour; and, like her barbarian counterpart, he portrays Messalina as adept at deploying a range of strategies to avoid recompense. In the first instance, Messalina engages in a celebration of Greek mysteries (orgia) associated with Bacchanalian ritual.

'The presses were being trodden; the vats were overflowing; women girt with skins were dancing, as Bacchanals dance in their worship or their frenzy. Messalina with flowing hair shook the thyrsus, and Silius at her side, crowned with ivy and wearing the buskin, moved his head to some lascivious chorus.' (Annals 11.31)

By recording that this interpretation of Bacchic rites – described as a 'representation of the vintage' (simulacrum vindemiae) – takes place as Claudius is performing a sacrifice at Ostia (sacrificii gratia Claudius Ostiam proficisceretur), Tacitus foregrounds the disruptive significance of her (and Silius') un-Roman display.

Secondly, in regard to the way that Cartimandua demonstrated the ability to set in motion 'cunning strategems' (callidae artes) to forestall her enemies and to 'appeal for protection' (petita ... praesidia) in the face of serious personal threat, Messalina reveals a similar degree of acumen. Tacitus claims that, in the face of Claudius learning about her marriage to Silius, Messalina reacted as if her capacity to form a purpose had been excised (11.32: quamquam res adversae consilium eximenter). Yet she is sufficiently in control of her faculties to assess her situation accurately and arrange a series of responses designed to best represent her cause to Claudius. Messalina

- resolves to meet her husband face-to-face;
- asks her children Britannicus and Octavia to accompany her and embrace their father (to accentuate her emotional control over Claudius);
- requests the senior Vestal Vibidia to demand an audience with the princeps (also pontifex maximus) and to beg for mercy; and, when her access to Claudius is blocked,
- composes letters of entreaty.  

That Messalina fails – in large part due to the interventions of Vitellius and the freedman Narcissus – should not diminish the potential efficacy of her responses.  

27 Ann. 11.32, 37.
At only one point in Tacitus’ narrative is it possible to draw a comparison between Messalina and Boudica – and it is not a favourable one. After the revelation of her marriage to Silius, Messalina finds herself effectively alone. In order to meet with her husband, she must use whatever means of transport is available to her.

‘With just three companions – there was such desolation unexpectedly – traversing the length of the city on foot, by means of a vehicle in which garden refuse was taken away, she proceeded along the road to Ostia; not pitied by anyone, because the baseness of her shameful acts were stronger.’ (Annals 11.32)

Tacitus’ representation of the ignominy of Messalina’s journey and the extent of her social isolation stands against Boudica’s portrayal prior to her final confrontation with Suetonius (Ann. 14.35). The Iceni queen rides on a chariot, not a compost wagon; she is accompanied by her daughters, not strangers; and Boudica is esteemed by her people, certainly not reviled. The explanation for the starkness of the contrast is explicit in the rhetoric of Tacitus’ description. Boudica is a marker of the outrages enacted against the Britons by dishonourable Romans (proiectas Romanorum cupidines); in a sense, for Tacitus, this is ‘her purpose as a woman’ (id mulieri destinatum). Thus, Boudica’s representation accords with her rhetorical status. Messalina, on the other hand, is not the victim of depredation; she is the source. She is discarded – like the offscourings of Roman gardens (including, one is tempted to consider, those gardens of Asiaticus she coveted so much) – because her actions bring shame, on herself as a Roman and on her condition as a woman of the imperial household. Messalina may have been powerful and influential, but the vileness of her deeds is stronger (flagitiorum deformitas praevalet). Here, Tacitus embodies (literally and semantically) Messalina’s perversity. In the same way that the ancients believed that inferences could be made about a person from physical features of the body, Tacitus renders Messalina’s crimes as a distortion of the mind, an ugliness of character susceptible to observation and understanding. In other words, Tacitus marks Messalina’s body as a site for explicating the significance of her actions – the perfect medium for his brand of gendered rhetoric.29

In the end, what marks the difference between Tacitus’ portrayal of Messalina and the British queens is not so much the existence of a gendered

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28 As Wood (2000) 254 notes, Messalina ‘embodied both the past of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and Claudius’ hope for its continuation. Her dynastic and symbolic importance, combined with Claudius’ genuine affection for her, gave her enormous influence with the emperor’.

29 Ishel (1997) 242: ‘Tacitus’ Messalina functions as a sign of the imperial household, the city, and imperial power itself’.
rhetoric as its intensity. Cartimandua and Boudica, after all, are foreign queens, barbarian females. How they are represented will depend on the part they play in the interaction of Roman and non-Roman, of conquest and subjugation, within the liminal environment of a newly integrated province. Messalina, on the other hand, is the consort of a Roman emperor, by birth and marriage a constituent of imperial lineage, at the heart of the Roman state. As Joshel ([1997] 223) notes, Tacitus’ Messalina ‘functions as a sign in a discourse of imperial power that simultaneously informs, if not determines, her image’. Her fate, and the way in which it is recorded, is part of a broader historiographical project, one that depends as much on the representation of institutions and traditions as of individuals and events.

To understand this aspect of Tacitus’ gendered rhetoric, we should turn briefly to his representation of Agrippina.

**Agrippina**

Towards the end of his treatment of events in Britain from 47 to 58, Tacitus puts into Caratacus’ mouth a rhetorical speech delivered at Rome to the emperor Claudius, who spared his life. Tacitus follows his account of the captured Briton’s address with these words:

‘Released from their chains [Caratacus and his wife and brothers] also gave to Agrippina, conspicuous as she was on another platform nearby, the same honour in terms of praise and thanks as the Emperor. That a woman should preside before the Roman standards was clearly something new and without precedent in ancient customs, but Agrippina was conducting herself as a partner in an empire acquired by her ancestors.’ (*Annals* 12.37)

Tacitus’ treatment of Agrippina the Younger – eldest daughter of Germanicus and Vipsania Agrippina – is characteristically terse, oblique, and withering. Married to her uncle Claudius in 49, and aided by Pallas, the younger Seneca, and Afranius Burrus, Julia Agrippina, mother of the future emperor Nero, is portrayed by Tacitus as filled with ambitious purpose. His criticisms of Agrippina’s position of authority ‘before the Roman standards’ (*feminam signis Romanis praesidere*) and of her acting as a partner (*socia*) in the display of imperial protection are trenchant and explicitly gendered. ‘That a woman’ should dare to transcend the boundaries of customary law in these ways is, for him (and, by implication, for his audience) unprecedented, and

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30 *OCD* (1996) 777, s.v. ‘Julia Agrippina’ (J.P.V.D. Balsdon, A. Spawforth)
31 Viden (1993) 24 notes that ‘no other woman plays such a prominent part in [Tacitus’] narrative... Agrippina is openly present and dominates the scene’. For the view that Agrippina entertained manifest ambition, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.65.2, 13.2.2, 14.2.1, 14.9.3.
not a little disturbing. Tacitus contextualizes this transgression as exceptionally visible – to the city of Rome, and to the people of Italy, the Mediterranean and the provinces. Agrippina is accorded the ‘same honour in terms of praise and thanks’ as Claudius (isdem quibus principem laudibus gratibusque uenerati sunt) before a representative multitude of the people, the praetorian cohorts and other vassal-kings (Ann. 12.36). Tacitus depicts Agrippina’s desire for power as a physical performance, an exhibition of female influence and ‘almost masculine’ ambition traced on the scena of the imperial platform.

A measure of how seriously Tacitus (and the Roman male elite) viewed Agrippina’s power can be located in a strikingly similar scenario: an account of ceremonies marking the visit of a provincial embassy to Rome in 54. According to the historical tradition, after Parthia invaded Armenia early in Nero’s reign, many in Rome believed that imperial foreign policy towards the threat would find itself under the direction of Agrippina. When an embassy comprising pro-Roman Armenian interests came to Rome for clarification, Tacitus (Ann. 13.5.3) reports that Agrippina intended to join Nero on his tribunal to hear the representatives.

‘When envoys from Armenia were pleading their nation’s cause before Nero, she actually was preparing to mount the emperor’s platform and to preside at the same time; but Seneca, when others were struck motionless with alarm, urged [Nero] to go to meet his approaching mother. Thus, by the appearance of dutiful conduct, a disgraceful act was prevented.’ (Annals 13.5)

Seneca intervenes, advising Nero to descend from the dais and greet his mother, as if paying her special respect. Whether or not the gesture was intended to diminish her position and jurisdiction, it is clear that Tacitus considers her authority and status subject to specific limitations. More than this, he labels Agrippina’s attempt to share in imperial command (praesidere simul) in explicitly moral terms. What she intends to do is a cause of shame and dishonour (dedecus) and is rhetorically marked in the same way as Messalina’s infamia.

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32 Barrett (1996) 124 suggests that Tacitus is particularly upset to think that, by appearing to claim a near-equal status with Claudius, Agrippina may have been arrogating authority over members of the praetorian guard attending the ceremony. For the possible influence of the life-course and relationships of Berenice [daughter of M. Iulius Agrippa (Herod in Acts of the Apostles), supporter of the Flavian cause, and cohabitant with the future emperor Titus] on Tacitus’ view towards women in/with power, see Braund (1983; 1996, 126).
33 cf Tac. Ann. 12.7: quasi virile servitium.
34 Sen. Apoc. 4; Tac. Ann. 13.6.2; Suet. Nero 34.1.
35 cf Dio 61.3.3-4.
Interestingly enough, perhaps one of Tacitus’ most striking uses of gendered rhetoric occurs in relation to his account of the rivalry between Agrippina and Messalina’s mother, Domitia Lepida, dating to the year 54.

‘In beauty, youth, and wealth they differed not very much. Both were shameless, disreputable, and violent; they strove to excel no less in moral fault than in the advantages they had derived from fortune. It was indeed a most passionate contest whether the aunt or the mother should have more power over Nero. Lepida tried to overcome the young man’s heart by flattery and liberality, while Agrippina on the other hand, who could give her son empire but could not endure that he should be emperor, was fierce and full of menace.’ (Annals 12.64)

Tacitus incorporates a variety of rhetorical markers in his juxtaposition of these imperial women. In terms of their physical condition and social status, little distinguishes Agrippina and Lepida; in terms of their character, even less. They are, to all intents and purposes, dangerous females acting out within the corridors of imperial power. The characteristic tropes of sex and gender are assigned strategically and to best effect. On the one hand, they are beautiful, young and financially independent; on the other, they lack even the semblance of a moral code. They possess no sense of modesty (impudica), their conduct is notorious (infamis), and they are prone to vehement or impetuous displays (uiolenta). Those cultural values most prized in the literary and epigraphic commemoration of ‘proper’ Roman women – chastity, modesty, obedience, sociability, domestic diligence, piety, and so on – are extravagantly absent in Tacitus’ representation. Instead, the historian depicts Agrippina and Lepida vying for the title of most un-Roman of women – and, naturally, unfettered instinctive passion is at the heart of his portrayal (certamen acerrimum).

The object of this contest of female wills is nothing less than the empire itself – in the person of the young Nero. But the cause of the rivalry is more familiar. Prior to introducing this episode, Tacitus relates how Agrippina is anxious that Claudius may intend to take action against her disreputable conduct. Agrippina’s response is counter-intuitive, to say the least: she decides to eliminate Lepida. But a gendered argument is sufficient explanation (both for the historian and his readers): she does so ‘from feminine motives’ (muliebris causis).\(^{36}\) Tacitus reports that Agrippina is

\(^{36}\) For a brief study of Tacitus’ tendency towards stereotyping Agrippina – including the historian’s insertion of recurring patterns of explicitly gendered behaviour and narrative parallels with Livia – see Barrett (1996) 206-208
the winner of this contest, and allows the imperial freedman Narcissus to assess her motivation.

'... decency, shame, her own body, everything she valued less than power.'
(Annals 12.65)

Tacitus' representation of Agrippina's capacity for influential action, of her body and its uncontrolled desire for power, demonstrates the embedded nature of gendered rhetoric and its function as a sign-based system of meaning within the historical discourse of the Annals.

The Literary Evidence of Cassius Dio

We turn now to our other major literary source for Roman Britain during the Claudian-Neronian period, Cassius Dio. Born in Bithynia around 164, Dio went to Rome in 180. He entered the Roman senate during the reign of Commodus, eventually becoming praetor in 194 and then suffect consul around 204. Over the decade 218-228, he held several positions as curator, proconsul and legate of various Roman provinces. Dio wrote several works but the main one is a history of Rome from its beginnings to 229. Parts of this have been summarised by Byzantine historians – Xiphilinus in the eleventh century and Johannes Zonaras in the twelfth. Some parts have been lost. His work tends to concentrate on political aspects of Roman history, and is dominated by his interest in the change from republican to imperial government and his concern with how well individual emperors measured up to or fell short of senatorial expectations. It is of variable quality, making extensive use of rhetoric and fictitious speeches; the debt to Thucydides and the Roman annalistic tradition is clear. Dio tends to dramatize events and relies heavily on secondary, rather than primary, sources of information for his evidence – oral sources and earlier historical writings. His writing has a strong bias in favour of the Roman imperial system.

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37 Domitia Lepida is sentenced to death for making attempts on Agrippina through magic, and for disturbing the peace by imperfectly controlling a troop of her slaves in Calabria (Ann. 12.65).

38 The historical writer is sometimes confused with the 1st century Greek orator and philosopher Dio Cocceianus of Prusa, later known as Chrysostom.

39 On dreams and portents foreshadowing Septimius Severus' succession and a history of the wars after Commodus' death.

40 Barrett (1996) 203-204 regards Dio's critical judgement of his sources as extremely limited, his annalistic scheme as unreliable, and the gaps in the surviving text as problematic.
Boudica

We first meet Boudica in the epitome of Dio’s book 62 of the *Roman History*. After briefly detailing grievances of a more economic nature as contributing to the rebellion, Dio continues:

‘... she who most roused [the leading Britons] to anger and persuaded them to go to war against the Romans, she thought worthy of leading them and who directed the course of the whole war, was Buduca, a woman of the British royal family who possessed more spirit than is usual among women. Having collected an army of 120,000, she mounted a tribunal made in the Roman fashion out of earth. In stature she was very tall and grim in appearance, with a piercing gaze and a harsh voice. She had a mass of very fair hair which she grew down to her hips, and wore a great gold torque with a multi-coloured tunic folded round her, over which was a thick cloak fastened with a brooch. This was how she always dressed. And now, taking a spear in her hand so as to present an impressive sight to everyone, she spoke as follows.’ (*Epitome* 62.2)

It’s hard not to be impressed; but that’s precisely the kind of effect intended by a rhetorical writer like Dio. Note the way in which he represents his protagonist. First, Boudica’s extraordinary nature is carefully foregrounded. She is the person who most roused and persuaded (*malista ... erethisas kai ... anapeisasa*) the important male tribal leaders, and the person regarded as fit to champion the cause of rebellion and supervise the strategies of resistance (*aiotheisa kai tou pole mou pantos strategiesasa*). She is singled out in terms of the status conferred by birthright and marital affiliation – a ‘Briton woman of the royal family’ (*gyne Brettanis genous tou Basileiou*). She is identified as something special with regard to her aptitude for military leadership – she ‘possessed more spirit than is usual among women’ (*meizdon e kata gynaika thronema ekhousa*).41

Second, Boudica’s physical appearance and attributes are catalogued with attention to specific, indicative details. The conflation of signifiers like ‘tall’, ‘grim’, ‘piercing gaze’, and ‘harsh voice’ only serve to set her apart from the expected female figure in historical narrative.42 In terms of gender, the

41 Dio depicts Boudica as directly and openly in command of native British forces at 62.7.1 and 62.8.2
42 Following the analysis of material traces from excavations at Poundbury in south-west England, Allason-Jones (1989) 15, 137 notes that the average height of native women contemporary to Boudica was 1.55-1.60m, but that red hair was commonplace. The queen of the Iceni may have been above-average in the former respect, at least in comparison with her peers; with regard to the latter, however, she would have been extraordinary only in Greek and Roman eyes. Along similar lines, Tacitus tells us that Caledonians had ‘red-gold
rhetorical implications of such qualifiers tend to reflect the masculine imperatives of Boudica’s nature. So, too, neither her hair, nor her clothing, nor her jewellery classifies her as anything other than the epitome of the Celtic warrior.\(^{43}\) That Boudica sought to symbolically invest herself with the authority of a Celtic warrior-chieftain is not only within the boundaries of plausibility, but makes perfect sense in view of her situation. This possibility does not so much conflict with Dio’s portrait of Boudica as highlight the difficulty faced by the historical writer. In essence, his representation of Boudica is just as much designed to accommodate the problematic centrality of a female within acceptable rhetorical boundaries as it is a representation of a known historical agent.

After Boudica’s speech to the assembled tribal forces, Dio resumes his account with a description of British atrocities, the governor Paullinus’ reasons for bringing the issue to a decisive engagement, the speeches he is supposed to have made, and the battle itself. The structure of the narrative exhibits a deliberate repetitive pattern, providing an underlying order to the account that better allows the audience to assimilate the overall content. Boudica’s speech is a set-piece, mirroring Paullinus’ later addresses to his men. In the same way, the Britons are guilty of ‘every possible outrage’,\(^{44}\) ameliorating (or, at least, answering) the Roman barbarities perpetrated against Boudica, her daughters, and the tribespeople of the Iceni and Trinovantes. These ‘bestial’ acts\(^{45}\) similarly provide a grounding for the decisive military action the Roman governor now takes against the rebels, just as the Britons’ political, personal and economic grievances precipitated the sacking of three cities and the slaughter of 70-80,000 Romans and provincials.

Importantly for Dio’s rhetorical approach to the insurrection, the atrocity he treats in detail is explicitly gendered.

‘They hung up naked the most well-born and most comely women and then cut off their breasts and sewed them to their mouths, to make the victims appear to be

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43 Jewellery such as torcs, armlets and finger rings are well described by the ancient sources as accoutrements of male Celtic fashion and there is ample representation within the archaeological record. The fibula or pin used to fasten Boudica’s cloak to her shoulder is the only specific item of clothing known from archaeological finds which we may associate with an ancient Celtic woman.

44 Dio 62.7.1: ‘Under the Britanni, every kind of most terrible thing happened to those who fell into enemy hands’.

45 Dio (62.7.2) describes a particular act of the forces under Boudica as ‘the worst and most savage in nature’.

eating them. Afterwards, they impaled the women on sharp pegs run through the
length of the entire body. And they did all these things together with sacrificing,
feasting and committing wanton acts ... (Epitome 62.7)

Situated by the historical writer as a direct response to Boudica’s speech and
under her leadership, this description of native British savagery emphasizes
the relationship Dio sees between female-led resistance and separation from
civilised male order. Mikalachi ([1998] 15) regards the story as ‘a gruesome
parody of maternal nurture’ and emblematic of Boudica’s ‘monstrous
reversal of the role of maternal leadership and protection she claimed at the
beginning of the revolt’. It should also be clear that this 1st century equivalent
of the modern war-crime effectively mirrors the feminised savagery Dio has
described taking place at Rome under Nero.46

Messalina and Agrippina

Dio’s treatments of Messalina and Agrippina are unremittingly negative and
display a striking degree of similarity. Indeed, Dio claims at one point that
Agrippina ‘quickly became a second Messalina’.47 As such, a parallel look at
Dio’s representation of both imperial Roman women seems appropriate.

We meet Messalina for the first time in the act of accusing Julia Livilla of
various charges, including adultery with the younger Seneca. Dio reports
Messalina’s reasons for engineering the banishment of her niece. These are
standard, gendered, and should by now be familiar to the practised reader:
anger (orgistheisá) towards Livilla, because she neither paid Messalina
honour nor flattered her; and jealousy (zdelotupesasa), because Livilla was
extremely beautiful and often alone with Claudius).48 Agrippina, too, is
portrayed in a similar fashion early on in Dio’s account of her marriage to
Claudius. According to Dio, Agrippina ‘destroyed’ an undisclosed number of
important women ‘out of jealousy’.49

It should be noted that both Messalina and Agrippina are represented from
the beginning as transgressors of customary and civil codes of behaviour.
Messalina encourages Claudius to ‘fill up on blood and carnage’ (haimatos
kai phonon anapimplasthai); she is nothing less than ‘the most abandoned
and lustful of women’ (pornikotate te kai aselgestate ouse).50 Agrippina,
from the first, and even before her marriage, is ‘more effeminate in speaking’

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46 Dio begins his account of the rebellion by referring to Nero’s activities as ‘child’s play’.
47 Dio 60.33.21.
48 Dio 60.8.4-5.
49 Dio 60.32.4.
50 Dio 60.14.1; 60.14.3.
to Claudio\'s \textit{than [should] a niece} (\textit{trupheroteron n kat\' adelphiden prosephereto}). After she comes to live in the imperial household as wife to her uncle, she begins to amass wealth and property on behalf of her son (the future emperor Nero), \textit{\text{"merging many\' (pollous ... phoneuousa)} in her quest for every possible source of revenue.\footnote{51} In both cases, Dio registers his subjects from the outset as distortions of the ideal of the elite Roman woman. The intentions and actions of Messalina and Agrippina reflect an inverted image of female unchastity, immoderation, cupidity and criminality. Dio renders concrete the un-Romanness of these imperial women by ascribing to each a ferocity usually assigned to the barbarian. He depicts Messalina participating (along with Narcissus and his fellow-freedmen) in the accusation, torture, execution and post-mortem display of many men and women. Like the atrocities perpetrated by the Britons following Boudica\'s call-to-arms, the consequences of Messalina\'s actions are explicitly gendered:

\begin{quote}
\textit{[T]he women, too, were led bound onto a platform, like captives, and their bodies, also, were cast down upon the Stairway; for in the case of those who were executed anywhere outside the city, only the heads were displayed in that place.}\footnote{52} \\
\textit{(Roman History 60.16)}
\end{quote}

Like Boudica\'s followers, Messalina is driven by \textquote{vengeance}. Unlike the rebels, however, Messalina is shown as willing to spare \textquote{some of the most guilty} \textit{(tines kai ton panu hupatition)} in return for \textquote{favours or bribes} \textit{(hoi men kharisin hoi de kai khremasin)}. Suborning one instinct for another – in this case, revenge for greed – only confirms the malignancy of her moral fibre and her proximity to everything that is savage in nature.\footnote{53} In like fashion, Dio demonstrates the depth of Agrippina\'s depravity by dwelling briefly on the aftermath of the banishment and subsequent suicide of one of her first victims, Lollia Paulina (wife of Caligula and candidate for marriage to Claudio\'s after Messalina\’s death). Paulina\’s head was brought to her, and Agrippina \textquote{opened the mouth with her own hands and inspected the teeth which had certain peculiarities}.\footnote{54} Dio shows Agrippina as uncivilised and unnatural through his representation of her extremity: her insensitivity to customary boundaries of taste and her detachment from expected female sensibilities.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{51} Dio 60 31 6; 60 32 3
\item \footnote{52} Dio 60.16.1
\item \footnote{53} Dio 60.15.5-16.3.
\item \footnote{54} Dio 60 32 4.
\end{itemize}
If there is one aspect of Dio’s characterisation of these women that differs, if only in degree, it can be found in his portrayal of their ultimate motivation. Significantly, his judgement in this regard corresponds neatly with Tacitus’ more critical assessment. For Dio, what drives both women is desire: Messalina, for money and sex; Agrippina, for money and power. According to Dio’s account, Messalina and the imperial freedmen offer up for sale, sometimes to individuals and sometimes to whole groups, what it means to be Roman: enfranchisement as a citizen of the empire. Messalina is charged with nothing less than the devaluation of Rome’s birthright for personal gain.\(^{55}\) So, too, Dio informs us that Agrippina accumulates wealth, ‘neglecting ... not even [the money] of the most humble and despised’. That she is amassing a small fortune on her son’s behalf does not deflect the primitive zeal with which Agrippina pursues it, to the extent that she ‘flatters everyone who is in any way whatever well off and murders many for this very reason’.\(^{56}\)

Dio’s Messalina fixates on her own sexuality and its manifold applications. She is an exhibitionist, a dominatrix, and a pimp, ‘displaying herself’ (\textit{aute te eselgaine}), ‘compelling other women to be equally licentious’ (\textit{tas allas gynaikas akolastainein homoios enaghazde}), and pandering to her husband’s desires by providing ‘some female slaves to lie with’ (\textit{therapainidia tina sumparakatekline}).\(^{57}\) She implicates Claudius in her numerous adulteries, pretending that he ‘countenances her unchastity’ (\textit{sugkhorountos hoi akolastainein}),\(^{58}\) openly prostitutes herself within the imperial palace itself, and forces other women ‘of the highest rank’ to do the same (\textit{tas allas tas protas ekathizde}).\(^{59}\) According to Dio, Messalina’s fatal relationship with Gaius Silius was to be only the first of many such marriages, for ‘she conceived a desire to have many husbands’ (\textit{epethumese ... andras ... pollous ekein}).\(^{60}\) Throughout his account of her marriage to Claudius, Dio represents Messalina as a sexual performer, more than anything else focused on finding different ways to express her delight in explicitly sexual behaviour. She is the antithesis of the chaste, pious and domesticated Roman \textit{matrona} and conspicuously ineffective as a model of propriety, dignity and tact befitting her high position as consort of the \textit{princeps}.

\(^{55}\) Dio 60.17.5-8.
\(^{56}\) Dio 60.32.3.
\(^{57}\) Dio 60.18.1, 3
\(^{58}\) Dio 60.22.5.
\(^{59}\) Dio 60.31.1.
\(^{60}\) Dio 60.31.2.
In contrast, Dio’s record of Agrippina’s sexual manifestations is limited to scandalous rumour and implication. Agrippina is said to have seduced Claudius after Messalina’s death, to have associated in a vulgar and objectionable manner with the imperial freedman Pallas, and to have established improper relations with Seneca. But the motivating factor underpinning these suggested liaisons is the same, in Dio’s view, as for every other action Agrippina takes: her unfettered desire for power. As soon as Agrippina comes to live in the imperial household, she gains complete control over Claudius. From the Senate, she obtains the right to use the carpentum at festivals; from the princeps, the title of Augusta. Dio is at pains to emphasize the extent of Agrippina’s power and influence: she ‘possessed everything, holding sway over Claudius and claiming as her own Narcissus and Pallas’ (edunato de panta, tou Klaudiou kratousa kai ton Narkisson kai ton Pallanta oikeiosamene); ‘all the things that Livia possessed [Agrippina] had been given also, and some other things of more importance had been voted’ (osa te he Libia eskhe kakeine ededoto kai all’ atta pleio epsephisto). More than this, however, Dio credits Agrippina with an overweening desire for more: ‘nothing seemed to be enough for Agrippina’ (ouden de arkoun to Agrippine edokei); ‘although she exercised the same power (isokrates) as Claudius, she desired to have his title outright (antikrus onomazdesthai). Directly implicated by Dio in Claudius’ death, Agrippina oversees the management of imperial business on Nero’s behalf. Her position in the state is, in all but name, equivalent to that of her son. Only when Agrippina attempts to join Nero with the Armenian ambassadors on the imperial platform (see above) does her display of power become untenable. From that time on, Seneca and Burrus – identified by Dio as the ‘most prudent and powerful of men about Nero’ (phronimotatoi te hama kai dunatotatoi ton Nerona andron) – labour to prevent Agrippina from engaging in public affairs, and her position in the imperial household is shown to steadily diminish due to the influence of other women (Claudia Acte and Poppaea Sabina).

Shown divesting themselves of the traditional limitations to which their sex is subject, these imperial women attract a markedly pejorative judgement from

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61 Dio 60.31.6, 61.3.2, 61 10.1.
62 Dio 60.33.21, 2a.
63 Dio 60.33.3a, 12.
64 Dio 60.33.12.
65 Until this occasion, Agrippina had ‘often attended the emperor in public, when he was transacting ordinary business or when he was giving an audience to ambassadors, though she sat upon a separate tribunal’ (Dio 60.33.7)
66 Dio 61.3.3-4.
67 Dio 61.7.1-3 (Acte); 61.11.2-4 (Sabina).
Dio. What is most confronting for the historian – and vital, therefore, for him to represent – is the manner in which Messalina and Agrippina appear to have taken on the dominant, active role reserved in affairs of state and the imperial household for men. Messalina initiates sexual liaisons; she manipulates the outcome of imperial decisions; she garners favour in matters of appointment and acquisition; and she compels obedience from foreigners and citizens alike. Agrippina exerts substantial influence over the senate, the military, and the people; her position is officially recognized by the state; she prepares the way for and precipitates the imperial succession; and she participates significantly in the public administration of the empire. The adoption by imperial women of attitudes and actions characteristic of masculine agency can only be represented negatively. Messalina, product and affect of her desires, clothes herself in the attributes of her shameless behaviour; Agrippina, in emulation of the military cloak worn by Roman imperatores, wears a chlamys woven with golden thread (khamudi diakhruso).68 Dio marks these women as morally corrupt(ing) and socially transgressive: by indulging openly and without apparent limit in the gratification of their immoderate and excessive desires (for sex, money and power), Messalina and Agrippina assume and subvert the roles and privileges reserved in Roman society for men.

Representations of Imperial and Barbarian Men in Tacitus and Dio

The foregoing discussion suggests that the rhetoric used by Tacitus and Dio in relation to narrative accounts of barbarian and imperial women should be seen as part of a discourse of representation, a cultural process mediating definitions of gender. To catch a glimpse of how deeply embedded and influential this rhetorical practice is, let us look briefly at the manner in which Tacitus and Dio deploy acculturated paradigms of gender to categorize and represent (some of) the men associated with Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina.

Men in Tacitus

To begin, a parallel reading of Annals 12.40 and Histories 3.45 (see above, section 2A) leaves us with a somewhat schizophrenic view of Cartimandua’s spurned husband, Venutius. He is on the one hand ‘long loyal to Rome’; yet, on the other, he is consumed ‘with a hatred of all things Roman’. Of course, the piecemeal narrative of the progress of events reflects the writer’s

68 Dio 61.33.3 For comment on Agrippina displaying her desire to be an imperator by choosing to wear the chlamys, see Kaplan (1979) 413-414.
admitted conflation of operations carried out by two governors over a number of years. Nonetheless, what Tacitus manages to convey about Venutius – as a man and a leader of men – in each historical item is conceived in relation to the pivotal role Cartimandua plays in driving him to war. Venutius is 'provoked by personal spurs [in regard to Cartimandua]' to rise up in arms; he engages in hostilities in part due to his temperament and in part because of factors 'arising from [his and Cartimandua's] separation'. Civil war (bellum civilis) is shown to be the consequence of domestic upheaval (concussa domus); Venutius' restoration (through revolt) of tribal devotion (studia civitatis) is motivated by Cartimandua's dissolution (through lust) of conjugal ties (discidium). Household outrage (flagitium) affects a nation's sovereignty (regnum Venutio); the display of a woman's power (feminae imperium) results in a people's shame (hostes ... ignominia) and a reciprocal display of male aggression (armis iuventus). In a sense, Tacitus is playing out, through his narrative of barbarian revolt, the kind of tensions that arise in cultural conflict between hierarchical categories of gender.

This discursive sensitivity to the contingencies of social perceptions regarding manliness and womanliness also colours Tacitus' portrait of Boudica. Here, though, Tacitus creates an instructive association between his representation of the Iceni Queen and that of Roman officers, troops and ex-soldiers who display such licence in their treatment of the household of Prasutagus, the estates of Iceni elders and the settlement of Camulodunum. Treated illegitimately as the 'spoils of war' (uelut capta), Prasutagus' kingdom is plundered by centurions, his household by slaves (regnum per centuriones, domus per servos ... vastarentur); Iceni aristocrats are deprived of their inherited property (praecipui Icenorum ... autis bonis exuuntur) and relatives of the royal family treated like slaves (propinquii regis inter mancipia habeabantur). To emphasize the nature of this violation (contumelia), Tacitus' stigmatisation of the un-Roman excesses of (Roman) men is performed, according to the rules of gendered rhetoric, on the bodies of (non-Roman) women: an elite Iceni female is flogged and her daughters raped.

69 Venutius divorced Cartimandua, fought her and revolted against Rome under the governorship of Aulus Didius Gallus, who sent in auxiliary cohorts and then committed a legion, successfully confirming Cartimandua on the throne (52-57). Under M. Vettius Bolanus, the Brigantian client kingdom disintegrated, with Roman military aid given to Cartimandua against Venutius (69-71).
71 If these images constituted the sole representation of Boudica and imperial provincial administration that Tacitus wished his readership to recognize, then we might agree with Robert's argument ([1988] 129) that 'the revolt of the Iceni under Boudicca against Roman
Tacitus is keen, however, to demonstrate that these transgressions of social hierarchy and moral conduct are deviant and uncharacteristic. This is best seen in Tacitus’ comparison of the manner in which the native resistance and invading army conduct themselves following the initial maltreatment of Prasutagus’ widow and her daughters. As Tacitus informs us, Camulodunum was overrun and destroyed, and the Britons marched on Londinium, defeating infantry under the command of the legate of the IX legion, Petullius Cerialis, on the way. The governor, Suetonius Paullinus, abandoned Londinium, deciding to sacrifice the town and regroup elsewhere.

‘Unappeased by the lamenting and tears of those pleading for his help, he gave the signal to move, and took into his part of the column any who could accompany him. If he had delayed for those who were unfit for war because of their sex, or infirm with age, or due to the agreeableness of the place, they would have been overwhelmed by the enemy. There was a similar massacre at the city of Verulamium, for the barbarian British, happy about booty and tardy about work, passed over the forts and garrisons of the soldiers, sought out the richest of spoils and unguarded property formerly defended. As I recall, close to 70,000 Roman citizens and other friends of Rome died in the places mentioned. The Britons took no prisoners and sold no captives as slaves – the traffic of war. They made haste with slaughter – forked gibbets, fires, and crosses. It was as if they would be delivered to retribution while their vengeance was carried off prematurely.’ (Annals 14.33)

Since the aggregate army of native Britannii is attested by Tacitus (and the historian’s version of Boudica herself) to be under the command of the widowed queen of the Iceni, their depredations (caedes, patiunt, ignes, cruces) must be intended to reflect on her leadership. That not only Roman citizens but natives collaborating in the provincial resettlement are subject to these extremities speaks directly to the blurring – with respect to Tacitus’ representation of Boudica’s mindset – of justified nationalist fervour and instinctual undiscriminating revenge. We also find this discontinuity between the stereotypical categories of masculine discipline and feminine passion embedded in the rhetorical narrative of the rebellion in Agricola:

‘... no sort of barbarian cruelty was overlooked in the hour of victory and vengeance.’ (16.1)

Significantly, after the rout of the British forces in the final battle of the rebellion, the victorious Roman soldiers perpetrate a similarly comprehensive annihilation of the enemy:

imperial oppression can serve as a conceptual model for Tacitus’ larger account of responses to repression in Nero’s Rome'.
Tacitus is able to differentiate between the loss of life and property at Camulodunum, Londinium and Verulamium and that on the battlefield by appealing to the rhetorical tropes of bloodthirsty barbarian rebel and pacifying Roman soldier. Boudica’s tribal forces are responsible for citizen and allied slaughter and widespread catastrophe – a massacre by the disaffected (barbari ... caedes ... festinabant); Suetonius’ imperial troops demolish all serious resistance with the courage and arms of rightful conquerors – a glorious victory, comparable with bygone triumphs (clara et antiquis victoriis par ea die laus parta). In this context, Tacitus’ gendered rhetoric deploys Boudica as a symbolic representation of how even the stereotypical ‘noble savage’ (and female in the bargain) can become (or perhaps revert to being) uncivilised when exposed to the least worthy in Roman society.

The representations in Tacitus of the principes and leading men most associated with early Roman Britain require the reader to be just as familiar with the figures of literary narrative and the position occupied by women and men in the hierarchical social structure of early imperial Rome. Thus, modern scholarship might argue that Claudius ‘dominated’ his situation rather than ‘was dominated by it’, however, it is clear that a contemporary of Tacitus would have no recourse but to acknowledge the emperor’s undue dependence on his imperial freedmen and his wives. Similarly, it is possible for recent commentary on Nero’s principate to suggest that ‘much of the material’ underpinning the accepted model for his character was generated by the ‘complex strategies of Neronian self-fashioning’, but the ancient reader would be excused for finding it difficult to see beyond a depiction of Nero as the antithesis of the ideal Roman statesman.

We have already seen how Messalina was able to manipulate Claudius in relation to the accusation of Valerius Asiaticus. Tacitus depicts Claudius as receptive to Sosibius’ ostensibly well-meaning warning and precipitate in his response. The princeps accepts the testimony of his wife’s agent ‘without examining the matter further’ (nihil ultra scrutatus) and sends the Praetorian prefect Rufius Crispinus with a military contingent to find Asiaticus ‘as if to suppress a rebellion’ (tamquam opprimendo bello). More than this, Messalina

72 Tac Ann 14 33.3; 14 37.2
is seen to participate openly in the accused’s examination, which occurs within a domestic space (*intra cubiculum*) – albeit the imperial household – and face to face with a woman (*Messalina coram*) – albeit the wife of the *princeps.*

Thus, Messalina is shown to be a prominent player in a process that effectively circumvents traditional protocols – Asiaticus is not given access to the Senate (*neque data senatus copia*) – and manages to engineer the suicides of Asiaticus and Poppaea Sabina without Claudius’ knowledge – ‘Caesar was ignorant to such a degree’ (*adeo ignaro Caesare*).

Tacitus ensures that we are in no doubt of Claudius’ diminished capacity in relation to Messalina’s exercise of power, even if it is achieved through her husband, and represents the consequences of such an unprecedented intersection of domestic influence and civic policy as ‘shaking the foundations’ of the imperial household (*domus principis inhorrerat*).

Tacitus applies his representative strategy to other Roman men in this episode. For instance, he states that the senatorial prosecutor P. Suillius Rufus not only brings charges of military corruption against Asiaticus but impugns him in explicitly gendered terms. Suillius accuses Asiaticus of dishonourable and disgraceful activity in relation to his military and administrative responsibilities (*stupro in omne flagitium*), and of adultery and effeminacy with respect to his personal relations (*adulterium ... mollitiam corporis*). That Asiaticus is otherwise depicted by Tacitus as a man of duty wrongly maligned and Suillius as Messalina’s creature is sufficient to highlight the irony of the accusations and their rhetorical implications for the characters of both men.

Tacitus observes this most un-Roman of conjugal relationships between Claudius and Messalina from the perspective of legitimate and questionable male commentators: on the one hand, the leading men of Rome (*penes potentia*); on the other, the imperial freedmen Callistus, Pallas and Narcissus. The *communis opinio* is most clearly expressed when action is contemplated in the aftermath of the marriage between Messalina and Silius. Of utmost importance here is not so much that the situation should be revealed but how it should be revealed. According to senator and freedman alike, in this matter it would be a turning-point if Claudius were to hear Messalina’s defence, and

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75 Tac *Ann.* 11 1-2.  
77 Tac *Ann.* 11.28.1 Tacitus represents the impact of domestic upheaval on the state in similarly metaphorical terms in his account of Cartimandua’s relationship with Venutius; see *Ann.* 12.40 (above): *concussa domus.*  
78 This episode has its gendered sequel (Tac *Ann.* 13 42-3) in the prosecution of Suillius for administrative corruption and malicious prosecution. *Inter alia,* he is accused of ruining Asiaticus and ‘surrendering his voice to that savage, shameless female [Messalina]’. 
so 'his ears should be closed (clausae aures) to her confession' (Ann. 11.28.2). In rhetorical terms, Tacitus uses the metonymic associations of speech and hearing to define and encapsulate his gendered critique of Messalina’s relationship with Claudius and of its potent effect on the person of the emperor, the institution of the principate and the administration of the empire. Whether viewed by those who have much to fear from a revolution (the elite senatorial class) or by those who wish to maintain recently acquired power (the imperial administrators), the judgement of the emperor (Claudius’ aures) is assessed in relation to the potestas of a woman’s voice (Messalina’s defensio).

The importance to imperial Rome invested by the historian in the actions of imperial women, as much as in the decisions of imperial men, is neatly illustrated in Tacitus’ record of an early conflict between Messalina and Agrippina. At the celebration of Secular Games in 47, Messalina’s son Britannicus and Agrippina’s son Domitius Ahenobarbus perform the battle of Troy before Claudius (Ann. 11.11-12). Here, Tacitus interweaves the tangled skein of dynastic ambition and female intention into his narrative of imperial display and popular enthusiasm. On the one hand, the princeps (incumbent) is enthroned amid circus games (sedente Claudio circensibus ludis); on the other, the elite youth of Rome (designate) enact the ultimate narrative of male rivalry over a woman (pueri nobiles ... ludicrum Troiae). The subtext — that is, imperial succession and its contested status — is neatly underscored by Tacitus’ contextualising references to national birth (the foundation of Rome) and rebirth (Augustus’ celebration of the ludi saeculares in 17 BCE).79 In this scenario, the right to rule is not reserved solely for a scion of imperial blood (imperatore genitus); inheritance is sometimes offered to an adoptive child (Domitius adoptione ... in imperium). Just as significant as those instances where the historian explicitly genders his rhetorical description of imperial men, we see here a narrative episode in which Tacitus implicates ambitious and influential women in the imperial succession. Here, Nero’s precedence over Britannicus is conditional — as far as the Roman people are concerned (inclinatio populi) — not only on the filial relationship with his beloved father Germanicus but in part due to the objectification of Agrippina as the target for Messalina’s persecution.80 Through the interplay of historical, literary and cultural references, Tacitus foregrounds the priority and consequences of sanguine and affective relations within the imperial household.

As such, Tacitus can be seen to deploy gender as one of a variety of rhetorical tools for representing the character of imperial males like Claudius

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79 Tac Ann 11.11.1.
80 Tac Ann 11.12.1.
and his critical assessment of historical affairs. In relation to Tacitus’ Nero, while it is possible to identify a number of pertinent episodes, a single example of the historian’s gendered representation of Claudius’ successor should suffice to illustrate the argument. We meet Nero for the first time as princeps in the *Annals* (13.1-2) immediately after Claudius’ funeral. It is frequently noted that Augustus was nineteen years of age when he first intervened decisively in affairs of state; that Nero was only sixteen on his accession to the principate in 54 is often unstated. Tacitus, however, makes a point of Nero’s youth – he has ‘hardly left childhood’ (*vixdum puertiam egresso*) – in the same breath as associating his elevation with Claudius’ murder by poison – ‘having obtained the empire by crime’ (*imperium per scelus aepcto*). In this context, Tacitus reports that Agrippina removes a potential threat to Nero’s recently acquired power – Junius Silanus, proconsul to Asia and related by blood to Augustus – ‘without Nero’s knowledge’ (*ignaro Nerone*). The resemblance to Messalina’s duplicitous relationship with Claudius is considerable. That Agrippina’s action is characterized as ‘deceptive’ (*per dolum*) is by now a familiar allegation. What is important to note is how carefully Tacitus portrays Nero in terms of his boyhood, his unmanly disposition, and his proximity to the dominating influence of his mother. Nero’s adolescence is a ‘dangerous’ quantity (*lubricam principis aetatem*); he is disposed by inclination to reject what it means to be a Roman man (*si virtutem asperraretur*); and it requires the combined ministrations of Nero’s tutors (Burrus and Seneca) to protect the young *princeps* ‘from the savageness of his mother, burning with all the excessive desires of an evil tyranny’ (*contra ferociam Agrippinae, quae cunctis malae dominationis cupidinisbus flagrans*). Tacitus’ Nero – styled in an earlier citation as prematurely assuming an adult’s clothes and the trappings of command (*Ann. 12.41*) – is little more than a boy, subject to the vicissitudes of a childish temperament, and disposed to indulgence. He is shown to be governed (at this point in time) by the military diligence (*militaribus curis*), seriousness of character (*seueritate morum*), and obliging decency (*comitate honesta*) of

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81 e.g Tac. *Ann. 13* 53 (Agrippina’s attempt to meet with the Armenian legation on the imperial platform); 13 12-13 (Agrippina’s extreme responses to Nero’s profession of love for the freedwoman Acte); 14 8-9 (Agrippina’s desire for her executioner Obaritus to strike at her womb and Nero’s observation about his mother’s figure immediately following her death); 14 11 (Nero’s public vindication of Agrippina’s death); 14 60 (Nero’s domination by his former mistress and now wife Poppaea)

82 Tac. *Ann 13* 1.1

83 Tac *Ann 13* 2.1

84 Tacitus reports that Nero assumed the *toga virilis* in 51 ‘to appear suited to engaging in matters of state’, namely as consul-elect (*designatus*) and ‘prince of the youth of Rome’; he also notes that Nero attracted popular attention by wearing triumphal robes at circus games in the same year
older men, acting *in loco parentis* and equally strong (*ex aequo pollebant*) in opposition to the ferocity of a powerful female.

**Men in Dio**

Dio may be seen to characterize elite political and military protagonists associated with the conquest and early history of Roman Britain in similar relation to his representation of influential barbarian and imperial women. For instance, despite stressing her instrumental role in the origin and management of the uprising, Dio always contrasts his exposition of Boudica's agency with the actions and reactions of Roman men. At the outset of book 62 (1.1), he observes that the terrible disaster that befell Britain in 60/61 could be blamed on a woman, 'a fact which in itself caused [the Roman people, that is, the Roman male elite] the greatest shame'. In addition to this radical diminution of masculine honour, Dio details the economic grievances contributing to the rebellion. He singles out the severe exactions of Catus Decianus and Seneca in recovering imperial and personal loans from the native elite (62.2.1). This allegation of unnecessarily harsh and ill-timed debt-recovery by the appointed financial representative and a close adviser of the emperor complements the narrative's initial emphasis on Boudica's affront to the Mediterranean value system of honour and shame. Catus and Seneca may be viewed as misusing the prerogatives of Roman hegemony in a debasing display of personal acquisitiveness.\(^85\) The shame occasioned by the integral part a native woman played in the sacking of two cities and the death of eighty thousand Roman citizens and their allies is rhetorically linked to the demeaning project of a Roman procurator and a member of the senatorial order.

Following the account of Boudica's role in the rebellion (according to Dio's epitomators) is a speech assigned to her.\(^86\) Bearing in mind that Boudica's

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\(^{85}\) Tacitus (*Ann. 14.32*) explicitly associates Catus Decianus' flight from Britain with his alarm over the disastrous turn of events, his anxiety about provincial hatred towards him and his greed. Similarly, Dio (62.2.1) emphasizes the excessive nature of the loans: Seneca contracted with the native elite (to the value of ten million *denarii*) only to be extracted by enforced repayment all at once. Allen (1970) 16 notes that coin-hoards related to the Iceni were (probably) 'buried before or at the time of the Boudiccan troubles, no doubt in an effort to save something from Roman acquisitiveness'. The large output may have been in part to repay the exactions, and to pay for Boudica's troops and corn supplies.

\(^{86}\) In this regard, it was never an ancient writer's intention (whether historical writer or biographer) to suggest that the speeches which are interspersed through the narrative were actually given in the style as chronicled. Rather, they are included to invigorate the narrative with feelings and opinions suited to the event, and in a fashion aiming to capture the ancient love of oratory. The existence at times of parallel speeches from the Roman side reveals their origins in the *suasoriae* (exercises in imaginary advice) and *controversiae*
speech in Dio has no more validity than the fabrication Tacitus attributes to her, it is instructive to ask what particular standpoint the writer sought to emphasize in the following citation.

'... the whole mass of people shouted for joy and Boudica raised her hand to heaven and said: I thank you, Andraste, and I call upon you woman to woman, not as one who rules over Egyptians with their burdens as Nitocris did, nor over Assyrian traders as did Semiramis – this much we have learned from the Romans – nor yet indeed as one ruling over the Romans themselves, as once Messalina did, then Agrippina and now Nero – for though he has the title of man, he is in fact a woman, as his singing and playing the lyre and painted face declare – but as one who rules over Britons who have no knowledge of tilling the earth or working with their hands, but are experts in the art of war and hold all things in common, even their wives and children. Through this the women too possess the same valour as the men. As queen, then, of such men and women I pray to you and ask for victory; safety and freedom from men who are insolent, unjust, insatiably and impious – if indeed we ought to call them men when they bathe in warm water, eat fancy food, drink unmixed wine, smear themselves with myrrh, sleep on soft beds with boys – boys past their prime at that – and are slaves to a lyre-player – and a bad one at that. May this woman, Domitia Nero, reign no longer over me or you men; rather let her lord it over the Romans with her singing; for they deserve to be slaves to such a woman, whose tyranny they have put up with for so long. For us on the other hand may you alone, Lady, for ever be our leader' (Epitome 62.6)

In the finest tradition of reported public performance, the content of Boudica's appeal to the goddess Andraste includes a consistent strain of invective in which she impugns her rivals' masculinity. We can note particularly the way the attributed speaker applies specific gender terms to the Romans and to their emperor Nero. Roman men are characterized as 'insolent' (hubbreston), 'unjust' (adikon), 'insatiably' (apleston) and 'impious' (anosion) and are associated with behaviour that connotes emasculation: succumbing to the appeal of luxurious living, exhibiting a penchant for indolence and frivolous entertainment, and embracing an extreme sexual lifestyle all combine to produce an elaborate portrait of the affect of the effeminate man. Nero's feminization - he is, after all, a man in name only (onommen gar andros ekhe) – is realized through the assignation of a mocking title that conforms to the conventions of an elite Roman female's
nomenclature (he Neronis he Domitia) and of attributes and attitudes typically associated with feminine accomplishment and preference: he sings (adei), plays the lyre (kitharizdei), and makes ‘his’ face beautiful (kallopizdei). Dio is explicit in identifying the association of these qualities as the collective signifier (sermeion) of Nero’s effeminacy. More than this, Dio’s Boudica impugns the indulgence exhibited by the imperial representative Nero and its impact on the body politic and military. The gender of a Roman princeps is rendered uncertain, recast by Dio through a barbarian female’s eyes. Dio’s Nero is effectively alienated from the virility particular to the Roman people; he lacks virtus, the manly virtue and military courage that, according to the Roman view of the individual and the state, traditionally retained the highest claim to honour. In consequence, Dio’s representation of Nero’s public image disqualifies him from the very role he was meant to fulfil: imperator. As Griffiths ([1984] 222) observes, popular sanction for the rule of a princeps – and justification for inheriting the title of military commander – must be won by ‘virtuous performance’. Clearly, Dio’s Nero, problematised through the voice of a female queen ‘expert in the art of war’, is inadequate to the task.

In terms of rhetorical protocols, locating Dio’s representation of Boudica (reported in action and speech) in the wider historiographical context of what precedes and follows his account of the rebellion is also instructive. The latter section of Book 61 (11-21) of the Roman History deals with the failed murder attempt on Agrippina the Younger and her eventual assassination at the hands of Anicetus, procurator in command of the Misenum fleet in 59, along with Herculeius, a trireme captain, and a naval centurion, Obaritus. Dio is at pains to stress the dilatory nature of public outrage to this event – only the senator P. Clodius Thrsea Paetus openly questioned Nero’s justifications for his mother’s death; any remaining disquiet found expression in anonymous graffiti and private rumour. The rest of the book chronicles intensification in the openness of Nero’s depredations – he is said to have poisoned his aunt Domitia for her estates in Baiae and the vicinity of Ravenna. It also addresses his growing tendency to un-Roman extravagances – including the institution of the Juvenalia festival in honour of his beard and the quadrennial games known as Neronia. The moral depths to which Rome and the emperor have sunk are symbolized for Dio by the participation of the

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87 For an extended discussion of the associations between Nero’s representation as a performer, the status of the actor in the Roman world, and the role of acting as a metaphor for other aspects of Nero’s life, see Edwards (1994)

88 For a similar approach to Tacitus’ account of the rebellion, see Roberts (1988). For the view that it is necessary to pay due attention to the significance of the context of references to women within the overall narrative, see Marshall (1984) 170.
senatorial order as performers in the orchestra, circus, and hunting-theatre, and by Nero’s appearance in the garb of a lyre-player.

After recounting affairs in Britain, Dio takes up his narrative of imperial and civic disintegration (62.13ff) with news of the divorce and murder of Octavia Augusta, the poisoning of Burrus, and the appointment of the licentious and bloodthirsty Ofonius Tigellinus as one of the Praetorian commanders. Again, only a single voice is raised against the prevailing moral climate. That the complaint belongs this time to a female slave attendant of deceased Octavia, Pythias, and drawn out under torture, rehearses the same ignominious treatment, personal indignation and moral refusal to acquiesce that precipitated the rebellion of Boudica. Nothing can overturn the decline, however, and the rhetoric of outrage escalates from scenes of Nero driving a chariot in public and frequenting brothels to his exposure as deliberately planning to set the city of Rome on fire. Appropriately enough, Dio depicts Nero ascending to the roof of the imperial palace, assuming his lyre-player’s garb, and singing the self-styled ‘Capture of Troy’ as the city burned. Emasculated in appearance and occupation, giving voice to the epic of duplicitous female desire and dysfunctional male rivalry, Nero is portrayed in terms which echo his representation in Boudica’s speech and expose the intra-textual resonances of Dio’s rhetorical narrative structure.

In sum, Dio applies the principles of gendered rhetoric to each of his subjects in order to negotiate the representation of destabilized social and political hierarchies found in the historical record of early imperial Rome.

**Conclusion**

In dealing with the representation of an historical female figure in ancient sources, then, we need to be aware of the individual writer’s relationship to the period he is treating (and, by now, it should go without saying that our sources are invariably male). We should also be sensitive to the influences at work on him and the prejudices to which he is prone. In addition to our recognition of the capacity of authors like Tacitus and Dio to direct the

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89 These parallels of violated physical integrity, criminal purpose, and justified resistance are encapsulated in the citation of Pythias’ explicitly gendered response to her torture: ‘My mistress’ private parts are cleaner, Tigellinus, than your mouth’. Refusing to follow the line established, according to Dio, by Nero’s concubine Poppaea Sabina, and literally spitting in the face of an individual embodying the worst excesses of the period, Pythias signifies a(nother) reversal of traditional social relations – in this instance, the usual superiority of the dominating male (even if a low-born Sicilian) While the praefectus praetorio is superordinate in terms of his status and controlling actions, Pythias occupies a position of incontestable moral eminence over Tigellinus (and, by implication, Nero).
treatment of their subject to a predetermined and often biased end, we must also accept that their aim was as much the production of literature as the provision of information. As a result, they were susceptible to a whole range of embellishment for the sake of their literary function. Returning to the rebellion of Boudica in 60/61 CE, this may even apply to the outcome of the battle at Camulodunum. We know that Paulinus was victorious over the Britons – Tacitus is at pains to note that British casualties on the day mirror the 80,000 lost in the provincial uprising – and that the rebellion came to a rapid end in its aftermath. As Tacitus notes in Agricola 16.2, '[t]he favourable outcome of a single battle restored the province to its old submission'. Yet neither of our sources can agree on the fate of the rebellion’s leader. Tacitus tells us that ‘Boudica ended her life with poison’ (Annals 14.37). Dio, however, notes [12] that

‘... many [Britons], however, escaped and got ready to fight again, but when in the meantime Boudouica died by sickness the Britons mourned her terribly and performed her funeral rites in the costliest manner, and then they disbanded in the belief that now they really were defeated.’ (Epitome 62.12)

Why Dio alters Boudica’s fate is moot. But his accuracy is not necessarily in question; for Tacitus’ ascription of ‘poison’ may just as easily be explained as a stock element in reporting female suicide as the product of critical historical research. She may well have died a natural death, instead of succumbing to the Stoic virtues of a more typically Roman response to defeat in battle. Equally valid is the fact that Boudica would have known that the Romans liked to parade captive queens in chains in their public triumphs; like Cleopatra, her options were drastically limited. The point is that either explanation is potentially valid; and therefore that the way in which Boudica died is not as significant to our understanding of events as its reality, its proximity to the end of the battle near Verulamium and its effect on the afterlife of the rebellion.

In many ways, then, we are left with the familiar mystery of historical female experience, mediated through the gendered rhetoric of masculinist interpreters.\(^9^0\) Not necessarily the most satisfying of conclusions, but in the end a necessary exploration of the discursive practices which colonize the lived realities of real women in ancient (and modern) times, and which must constantly be exposed. After all, under a woman known as Boudica the Iceni, assisted by the Trinovantes, rose in rebellion against Roman provincial mismanagement while the governor, Suetonius Paullinus, was occupied in

\(^9^0\) To paraphrase Barrett (1996) 208, the most serious obstacle facing a modern historian of ancient women (imperial or otherwise) is the hesitation of the sources to see women as ‘distinctive personalities with their own individual qualities and faults’.
the west. Camulodunum, Londinium and Verulamium were successively sacked, and the might of the Roman military machine was challenged for a brief time (if unsuccessfully). If there is agreement about nothing else, the implications of this skeletal narrative frame for the representation of gender relations in Roman Britain and the wider Mediterranean milieu are clear-cut. Tacitus and Dio apply the principles of gendered rhetoric to each of their subjects to negotiate the representation of destabilized social and political hierarchies found in the historical record of early imperial Rome. Engaging with this record requires the modern reader to recognize the sometimes simplistic, occasionally simplifying, but always illuminating formulations of gender espoused by the ancient historical commentators.

Appendix 1: Other Types of Evidence relating to Roman Britain in the Claudian-Neronian period

I begin with an observation about pre-modern source material in general. Faced with a body of evidence that is incomplete, we have to recognize and accept that there are times when ignorance of events is almost total. From a practical standpoint, these gaps in our knowledge of the ancient world are often the result of our removal from the topic of enquiry by almost two thousand years and the virtual annihilation of many of the ancient world’s accumulated records. We must also deal with the ideological and theological whims of copyists in the scriptoria of mediaeval monasteries and the deliberate or accidental preservation in whole or part of material remains from the ravages of re-use, or of wanton destruction. The cause for concern in this discontinuity of the historical record is considerable: that is, the danger of our uncritically accepting what in more favourable circumstances might well be dismissed as conjecture or fabrication on the part of the author, coincidental or insignificant survival in the case of physical evidence.

Material Evidence\textsuperscript{91}

It is usual to dispense with the material record relating to the representation of women and men native to Britain during the Roman invasion (43-83/84) fairly readily. Apart from the lack of good chronological control, much of the archaeological information gathered and organized in the twentieth century is

\textsuperscript{91} For the purposes of this paper, I incorporate epigraphic evidence pertinent to the discussion of Boudica, Cartimandua and Agrippina the Younger (primarily inscriptions on tombstones and public monuments) as non-literary written source material. This category of evidence is discussed below.
tied to a narrative, text-based history of the period. Collections of studies on individual topics — like towns and villas, population distribution and supply patterns, ceramic wares and metalwork, spatial topography, army fortifications and movements — are numerous. However, there is little in the way of material culture which speaks directly to the lives, habits and thoughts of 1st century native Britons, even individuals mentioned by classical authors.

Material deposits and individual finds dating from the Claudian invasion until the beginning of the Flavian period tell us next to nothing directly about Cartimandua or Boudica. According to Sheppard Frere (1987) 54, it is ‘likely’ that Cartimandua ‘already ruled the Brigantes in 43’. This would mean that she entered into a treaty-relationship with Claudius himself, and that she is one of eleven British rulers whose surrender is recorded on the inscription of his triumphal arch dedicated in 51. With the exception of this anonymous epigraphic testimony, no material remains attest to Cartimandua’s existence or history. The archaeological record pertaining to Boudica and the revolt of 60/61 is only slightly more extensive. It includes layers of ash and burnt debris found in strata dated to 60 at the sites of Camulodunum (Colchester), Londinium (London) and Verulamium (St Albans), skulls discovered in Walbrook stream at London that may date to this period, and tombstones of Roman soldiers stationed in Britain. While the relevant evidence may reflect the damage wrought by the Britons during the revolt, it offers little to help us decide issues of representation or historical subjectivity about Boudica.

Despite the lack of direct material evidence, it is possible to hazard informed guesses about certain aspects of the historical experience of subjects like Cartimandua and Boudica based on sets of pre- and post-conquest deposits.

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92 For a representative sample of available literature on military, political, social and economic aspects of the history of 1st century Roman Britain found in the archaeological record, see, e.g., the bibliographical references in Frere (1987) 384-385, Millett (1990) 231-245, Sallway (1993) 532-534.

93 According to Dio (60.21), Claudius arrived very late in the campaigning season of 43 at the request of the commander of the invasion army Aulus Plautius. He took direct command of the expeditionary force of three legions and captured Camulodunum. He also won over a number of tribes, some by diplomacy and others by force, before returning to Rome. The senate voted Claudius a triumph and the title Britannicus. Of the triumphal arches voted by the senate in Gaul and Rome, fragments of the latter refer to ‘the surrender of eleven British kings, defeated without loss’. If Frere’s assumption is correct, Cartimandua must be one of the ‘xi reges’.

94 For the literary references to Cartimandua (Tac. Ann. 3.45, Hist. 12.36.40), see above.

For instance, Millett (1990) 36-7 cites the possible significance of late pre-Roman Iron Age mirrors found in geographically circumscribed Celtic burials. It is thought that the elaborately incised or enameled abstract decoration on the backs and handles is characteristic of high-status display, and may point to women with a similar important leadership role in the Durotriges and Dobunni as Cartimandua and Boudica among the Brigantes and Iceni. Some excavated material – items of dress, jewellery, cooking utensils, furniture and the like, found in domestic and burial contexts – can be used to reconstruct details about the lives of the native and Roman female population of town and country during the first seventeen or eighteen years of Roman rule. These women had been enslaved, displaced or resettled by the military; many were dependent on veterans, merchants, traders and camp-followers; a large number worked as midwives, wet-nurses, bath-attendants, agricultural workers, craftswomen and prostitutes, or otherwise in trade or industry. Most women’s lives appear to have centred on their homes. In addition to these material traces, infant, child and adult skeletal assemblages can provide clues to the incidence of death in childbirth, congenital conditions, infant mortality, medical ailments, and life expectancy in Roman Britain.

In general terms, the archaeological record can show us how the Roman invasion of Britain affected native women and men – how it undermined the tribal system, fragmented extended family units and displaced the native population through the introduction of towns. Complementarily, it can provide us with an understanding of broad structural changes in society – how the invasion reinforced the power of the native elite in areas which transferred peacefully to Roman rule (including the Brigantes) and destabilized the social order where native opposition led to confrontation (like the Iceni). As such, while the surviving material culture cannot speak directly to the lived experiences of individual women like Cartimandua and Boudica, it can allow us to interpret traditional literary accounts of their historical activities in the light of pertinent archaeological information.

The material sources for Agrippina the Younger are more substantial. These relate entirely to her public image, and may be categorized as portraits on coins, marble statuary and reliefs, and cameos. Whether small or large scale, the surviving representations of this imperial Roman woman – as the

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96 For a discussion of the indirect structural influences of the Roman invasion strategy, see Millett (1990) 40-64

97 For a useful catalogue of the material sources for Agrippina the Younger, see Barrett (1995) 215-229; for a detailed overview of her numismatic, sculptural and glyptic images, see Wood (1998) 289-314
sister, wife and mother of emperors – offer considerable scope for study. As tools for the historian, they constitute not only units of economic exchange, life-size representations of a recognizable individual and luxurious ornamental decorations; they provide us with an understanding of how those who controlled the means of producing these objects wished select audiences or the general public to view them. Imperial and local issues of coins depicting Agrippina, for instance, not only help us to ascertain her appearance, and are the primary means of identifying her image in other representational media; they illuminate a variety of constitutional and political issues. Commenting on the light numismatic evidence sheds on Agrippina, Barrett (1990) 224-5 suggests that coins of the period ‘provide a vivid impression of the prominent role that she played alongside three emperors … and they illustrate the progress that Agrippina made towards a form of shared rule’. Wood (1998) 316 concurs, observing that Agrippina was the first living woman ever to appear in recognisable portrait likenesses with identifying inscriptions on coins of the Roman mint … and share[d] the obverses of coins with her son [Nero], in formats that suggested near equality of power’.

While there is much to say about the material evidence pertaining to representations of this important woman, for the purposes of this article I will focus here on two particular sculptural portraits of Agrippina the Younger – as Ceres and Fortuna in relief panels of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias\footnote{For photographs and discussion of these sculptured panels, see Rose (1997, 164-169, no. 105, pl 204); Smith (1987, 90, 127-132, pls 24-26); Wood (1998, 298, 301-2, pls 141-142).} - and compare these with a dedication to the imperial family on an arch commemorating Claudius’ victory in Britain.\footnote{For a detailed elaboration of this arch, see Barrett (1991)}

Consider the representation of Agrippina as she appears in a relief panel from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias probably dating to the reign of Claudius. Agrippina grasps the right hand of the emperor with her own, and holds above her a bouquet of corn ears with her left. Simultaneously, Claudius is crowned with an oak wreath by a toga-pennisification of the Roman senate or people.\footnote{Smith (1987, 110, with n.70) suggests that the oak wreath may have been used to associate Claudius with the corona civica, awarded for the saving of citizens’ lives, or the prize in the imperial games (Sebaste Romaia) at Pergamon.} According to Smith (1987) 107, the basic meaning of the handshaking motif in Greek and Roman art is ‘the equality of rank between the figures involved’. As the gesture is used in Roman art to indicate the concept of fides or concordia, we may readily assign a meaning of Roman marital harmony to the relationship expressed between Agrippina and
Claudius\(^\text{101}\) Given Tacitus' portrayal in *Annals* 12.37 of Agrippina's position in relation to Claudius on the imperial *suggestus* or platform, it is interesting to speculate about a more specific meaning for the act in the context of this relief. Since *fides* or *concordia* explicitly denote notions of reliance, agreement and union, the act of shaking hands can also symbolise an alliance in political terms. Whether this meaning was intended by the composer of the panel or produced in the minds of those who viewed it, we cannot avoid the importance which the local patrons of Aphrodisias invested in Agrippina. Wood (1998) 301 argues that the bouquet of corn ears held by, as well as the drapery and pose of, the figure type associate her directly with the goddess Ceres. This suggests recognition on the part of those who paid for a portrait sculptor to carve her figure of Agrippina's growing significance in the imperial family, and may be used as a measure of her developing relationship with the Roman emperor.

The problem of a woman adopting the vocabulary and trappings of hegemonic masculinity and employing the dominating protocols of male power is expressly reflected in the second of the relief portraits at Aphrodisias depicting Agrippina the Younger and her son.\(^\text{102}\) This panel may be dated to a few years after Nero's accession, during the limited period of reputedly good government known as the *quinquennium Neronis*.\(^\text{103}\) The significance of the relief lies in the representation of the relationship between Agrippina and Nero. Agrippina is shown, with the attributes of the goddess Fortuna, placing an imperial oak crown on the young Nero's head. Although Nero appears in a general's armour, the gesture should be seen as alluding to Agrippina's precedence and pre-eminent status.\(^\text{104}\)

While this representation of the position and influence of an imperial Roman female in relation to a ruling male obviously caused no connotative dilemmas among the local patrons at Aphrodisias, its production in Rome would have been provocative to some. The notional reconstruction of Claudius' British victory arch in Rome provides a point of comparison. According to Barrett (1991) 17, this arch — dedicated by the Senate in 51 or early 52 to

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\(^{101}\) On the significance of the handshake in classical funerary art, see Davies (1985).


\(^{103}\) For this allegedly Trajanic assessment of the first five years of Nero's reign, see Aurelius Victor, *liber de Caesaribus* 5.2 and the anonymous *epitome de Caesaribus* 5.2; on this period in relation to Agrippina, see the discussion in Barrett (1996) 238-40.

\(^{104}\) Wood (1998, 301) suggests that the increased financial output invested in depicting Agrippina may reflect that 'local patrons had gained an increased respect for the status of the Augusta'.
commemorate Claudius’ successful invasion of Britain — displays an equestrian group, probably between a pair of trophies, and a substantial commemorative inscription (on the attic); a ‘historical’ battle frieze (on its architrave); a relief depicting a victory procession (on the lower register between the columns of the inside of the arch); and pairs of slabs with dedications to the imperial family (on the piers of the arch).

Of special interest are the ‘secondary’ inscriptions, notionally accommodated on dedication slabs located at the base of each pier of the arch. Like the main inscription on the attic of the arch, these dedications would probably have appeared in parallel on the north and south faces of the arch. Barrett (1991) suggests that two family groupings may have been honoured: on one column base, Germanicus, Antonia, Agrippina and Nero; on the other, Britannicus, Octavia, Drusus and Livia. Though conjectural, the relationship between these dedications to male and female members of the imperial family and the subject of the arch pinpoints a fundamental difference between the public image in Rome and outside Italy of the princeps (in association with one or more imperial women). Whereas the Aphrodisian reliefs foreground Agrippina’s (developing and acquired) potency as an imperial female (in relation to her husband and her son), the representational template of the victory arch celebrates Claudius’ successful performance as imperator and the continuity of his family’s victories over Rome’s enemies. Projected in designation and dress, the context of Claudius’ image establishes his claim to honour and justifies his right to power. He is the one who ‘received into surrender eleven kings of the Britons’ and who ‘first brought the barbarian peoples across the Ocean under the authority of the Roman people’. By contrast, the imperial women are represented as members of the Claudian family; they are designated in their conventional role as the daughters, wives and mothers of imperial Roman men. In the city of Rome, then, it would seem that the public image of women – albeit imperial females like Antonia, Julia Agrippina and Livia – conforms to defined parameters of

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105 Suet, Claud. 7; Dio 60.22.1. The arch is located on the Via Lata and forms a part of the Aqua Virgo (restored in S1/2).

106 See CIL 6.921a-c for the extant text of these inscriptions; cf ILS 220 (an inscription found in the grove of Diana at Aricia honouring Claudius, Agrippina the younger, Britannicus and Nero).

107 (1) Designation: inter alia, military commander (imperator) and Father of Rome (pater patriae); (2) Dress: (perhaps) as a military figure riding on a horse with a sword and parasolatum in one hand and the other hand raised (cf BMC 29, one of a series of Claudian auresi and denarii beginning in 46/7); (perhaps) as a laureated figure in a military procession of standard-bearers and musicians.

social expectation. The status of the women commemorated with Claudius on this arch may be elite; their relationship to men of power, intimate. However, the degree of influence assigned explicitly to each is subordinated to the representational context and intention of the commemorative monument – and the focus of Claudius’ British victory arch is very much the triumphant princeps of Rome.

**Epigraphic Evidence**

Epigraphic sources make up the majority of the evidence regarding individual women in Roman Britain, and inscriptions enhance our perception of the honours paid, titles allotted, relationships adhering, and status accorded to Messalina and Agrippina the Younger. I include this material under the heading of non-literary written sources for a specific reason. The texts pertinent to this study – inscribed on the durable stone surfaces of tombs, altars, statuary and relief bases – include a miscellany of information and are expressed in an abbreviated and often formulaic manner marginal to the traditional narrative and verse genres of ancient literary discourse. In the collections of Latin and Greek inscriptions found in Italy, the Greek East and Roman Britain, the historian can find records about aspects of social history otherwise excluded from literary sources:

- female names and condensed references to individual tribal identities;
- indications of family relationships, ties of social dependence, and provisions for slave ownership;
- information about rights to inheritance and procedures of bequest;
- data relating to child and adult mortality, ages at which marriage conventionally occurred, and the types and duration of heterosexual cohabitation;
- familial obligations concerning burial and commemorative practice; and
- categories of occupation, status and affiliation

Additionally, we are able to learn about the ways in which the Roman imperial system accommodated a woman like Agrippina the Younger within the developing discourse of official memorialization – as

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109 For a very useful (if incomplete) list of women living in Roman Britain as cited in inscriptions, see Allason-Jones (1989) 193-198. For a discussion of women appearing in the occupational inscriptions of late republican and imperial Rome, see Josel (1990, passim); and of Ostia, see Kampen (1981, passim)
revered imperial female [Augusta, great-granddaughter of the first princeps C. Iulius Caesar Octavianus (Augustus)];
- daughter [of (Germanicus) Iulius Caesar], wife [of Tiberius (the emperor Claudius) Caesar Augustus Germanicus], and mother [of (Nero) Claudius Caesar];
- divine in the eyes of provincial Greek dedicators (the goddess Augusta, Agrippina Augusta Demeter, Aeolian Demeter);
- slave owner and patroness of freed dependents; and
- imperial benefactress of regional Italian and provincial Greek cities.\textsuperscript{110}

Appendix 2: Historical Notes relating to Cartimandua and Boudica

Female Rule in Celtic Society

It is important to note at this point that only in Britain do we have women such as Boudica of the Iceni and Cartimandua of the Brigantes in control of their tribes.\textsuperscript{111} There is no evidence demonstrating the presence of women with political influence in Gaul, nor do we find references to them in any position of authority such as queen.\textsuperscript{112} While women may have participated significantly in Celtic society and seem to have had equal rights with men in

\textsuperscript{110} Augusta: e.g., CIL 2.963; AFA (Smallwood 196; 21 17, 32); ILS 220; AE 1927 2, 1930 85; IGR XII 2.172b (= ILS 8729 = IGR 4.78), 211 (= IGR 4.81); Ditt\textsuperscript{1} 809; Price (1984: 86); IGR 4.208. *Filia, uxor, mater:* e.g., ILS 222, 223; CIL 6 8720, 8834, 31287; 9 6362; 10 1418; ILG 629. Divine, goddess: e.g., CIG 2960, 2183; IGR 4 560; IGR XII 2.208 (= IGR 4 22); IGR XII Suppl. 134. *Domina, patrona:* CIL 6 20384, 36911, 37591. Euergetis: e.g., CIG 3858, IGR IV 2.602, 603; AE 1980 855. For a very useful (if incomplete) list of inscriptions, see Barrett (1996: 219-224).

\textsuperscript{111} Apart from his references to Cartimandua (Hist. 3.45, Ann. 12 36, 40) and Boudica (Agr. 5, 15-16; Ann. 29-39), Tacitus refers to an anonymous Brigantian female who ruled over the tribe at a time (between 71 and 89) when they set a colonia on fire and destroyed a Roman fortification. He (or a later copyist) may have confused the Brigantes for the Iceni. The female leader Tacitus mentions (in the reproduction of an impassioned speech by the otherwise unknown Calgacus to the Caledonian army before the battle of Mons Graupius) is more likely to be Boudica than a still reigning Cartimandua, given the latter’s pro-Roman stance until expelled in 69.

\textsuperscript{112} Cremin (1992) 94 observes that the system of dynastic rule suggested by the stories of Cartimandua and Boudica contrasts with that of the mainland Gallic tribes – ‘where there were no kings’ – and those of the Irish – ‘where kings were elected in each generation from a royal clan’.
the social sphere, they were not prominent politically in mainland Europe.\textsuperscript{113} As already noted, archaeological evidence suggests that the average Celtic woman was employed in occupations such as spinning, weaving, basketry, leatherworking, grinding grain and possibly food gathering and production.

Nonetheless, Boudica’s rise to political power does seem to support Tacitus’s statement that she was of royal birth. Her royal blood and her reputed strength of character may well have been the reason for her position as leader of the Iceni revolt. However, Allason-Jones (1989: 17-18) points out that there is no suggestion that Boudica had a right to her husband’s throne in her own name. Nor did she actually claim the throne. Instead, she acted on behalf of her daughters. Prasutagus had attempted to preserve his kingdom by making his daughters, and Nero, co-heirs. This scenario would seem to concur with the evidence available to us that pertains to female roles in Celtic societies in general. For instance, Julius Caesar (BG 6.19.1) describes how Celtic husbands and wives in some mainland Gallic tribes had to provide a portion of their property estimated to be of equal value as dowry to their marriage. A joint account was maintained for this dowry, and any profits earned put to one side. When one or the other died or brought an end to the marriage, shares in the original dowry and any accumulated earnings would be apportioned. Political marriages between noble men of one tribe and daughters of important men in others are mentioned as taking place, especially in Gaul. Cremin (1992: 14) notes that, while Celtic society was patriarchal, ‘outside the political sphere, however, women are seen as equal with men, in the very few representations we have and in the amount of wealth buried in their graves’.

Causative Factors of the Boudican Rebellion

The horrific treatment (\textit{contumelia}) of the Iceni in 60/61 has been attributed to the procurator, Catus Decianus, the arbitrary predisposition of the local functionaries and the base character of the army veterans, but none of these interpretations completely addresses what happened.

Frere (1987) 71-2 cites the eviction of legitimate native property-owners at Camulodunum by Roman colonists – under the principle of \textit{agri captivi}, which treated territory as if surrendered by a defeated enemy. He also stresses the exactions of money-lenders – including Seneca the Younger, in

\textsuperscript{113} Kenworthy (1996a) 124 notes that ‘the richness of the archaeological evidence discovered in the tomb finds at Vix in Germany and Reinheim in France may point to some women having had political importance in Europe, but historians cannot be certain’.
his own interests, according to Dio; and Catus Decianus, in those of Claudius – in service to the processes of Romanisation and the newly introduced imperial cult. Millett (1990) 67 is uncertain about the extent to which the burden of taxation weighed on the native population, but suggests that ‘it is unlikely to have been as severe as has sometimes been assumed’. Salway (1993) 80-1 notes the emphasis of ancient historical writers on Roman provincial administration and the speculative excesses of senatorial and imperial usury. It is also plausible to register the disarming of the Iceni – under an application of the lex Julia de ui publica, which prohibited the possession of weapons except for hunting or self-defence on a journey (Dig. 48.6.1) – by P. Ostorius Scapula in 47, and their subsequent, short-lived armed resistance, as a factor contributing to rebellion in 60/61.

Of course, the specific allegations of harsh treatment meted out to Boudica and her daughters (Ann. 14.31) are a reasonable cause for outrage and an understandable flashpoint for spontaneous response. Flogging was not a punishment usually allocated to freeborn citizen or native females for any illicit misconduct, while rape, far from being condoned, was a capital crime. A woman could not take legal action for rape herself but her relatives were granted claims to do so and if they did not observe their obligations it was legitimate for other interested parties to bring accusations without any restriction to duration. According to a very early code of punitive provisions of military law attributed to the otherwise unknown legal writer Rufus, the consequence of a successful petition meant that ‘a soldier who takes a girl by force and rapes her shall have his nose cut off, and the girl be given a third part of his property’. As Allason-Jones (1989) 18 remarks,

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114 We have already seen how Tacitus characterizes the actions of certain Roman authorities and their supernumeraries as contumelious. How the historian depicts the way in which the British perceived Claudius invites comparison. In the same passage where he describes Roman depredations against the Icen and Trinobantes, Tacitus inserts a reference to the temple of the divine Claudius (at Camulodunum). In the midst of Roman ‘lawlessness’ and licencie (impotentia, licentia), the temple stands ‘ever before the [non-Roman] people’s eyes, a citadel, as it were, to perpetual tyranny’ (Tac Ann. 14.31.6). That a space delimited and inaugurated as sacred to a Roman princeps should be seen in this aspect reflects the depth of the outrage perpetrated by soldier and statesman alike. That, by association, Claudius is identified qualitatively as a tyrant renders the emperor (temporarily at least) as possessing the primary affect of the foreign or barbarian ruler, the antithesis of the Augustan princeps.

115 For a close reading of the boundaries not to be crossed involving (actionable offences against) the sexual integrity of freeborn women and men, see the discussion of the law of stuprum in Williams (1999) 119-124.

116 Rufus, usually spelled Rufus, is mentioned in the catalogue of the library of the Palatine Elector in Constantinople, according to Johann Lowenklaupf, compiler of a large collection of Byzantine law published in the late 16th century. The military law cited above can be found more conveniently in Brand (1968) 162-3.
‘for anyone to flog the widow of a client king and rape his daughters was not only reprehensible according to contemporary mores, but also an act of political folly, and it is hardly surprising that the Iceni revolted, supported by the Trinovantes.’

In his account of the causes of the rebellion, Tacitus chooses to concentrate on the political and personal grievances of the Iceni, also citing the overbearing Roman treatment of the neighbouring Trinovantes tribe. He touches on the theme of the rebellion in the biography of his father-in-law Gnaeus Julius Agricola. There too his treatment of British complaints constitutes an indictment of Roman rule.

‘There was nothing to be accomplished by submissiveness except that heavier penalties should be imposed upon a people who seemed to tolerate them without difficulty. Formerly they used to have kings one at a time; now two were set over them – a governor to vent his fury on their life-blood, a procurator on their property. For those who had been subdued, it was destructive if there was dissension or agreement among those set over them. Those under their control, centurions on one side, slaves on the other, added insult to injury.’ (Agricola 15)

It is significant that the treaty-relationship existing between the emperor Claudius and the Iceni failed to secure protection from Roman mismanagement and maltreatment. Unlike the scenario played out with Cartimandua, there was no advantage in voluntary submission for Prasutagus or Boudica, for the royal family or the tribal unit. Here, reduction to the basest level of Graeco-Roman social hierarchy – the deracinated, illegitimate, and statusless stratum of the slave – is the incontrovertible destiny of Iceni and Trinovantes alike.

As such, Tacitus’ representation of a British queen may be located among his abiding historiographical concerns: namely, the Roman tendency to abrogate treaty rights at will, combined with a heavy-handed certainty in a military juggernaut that could be oblivious to warning signs. This penchant was to serve as the spark to ignite much of the eastern part of the province. For many Britons the liberation from native oppression that early surrender to Rome offered had quickly become ruinous and heavy-handed exploitation from which the only escape lay in rebellion.
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