

**Houston Philosophical Society**  
**Minutes of 622<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008**

CALL TO ORDER: 8:02 P.M.

President Newell Boyd called to order the 622<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Society in its 87<sup>th</sup> year.

After the introduction of guests, Dr. Boyd introduced the speaker: David Furlow. Mr. Furlow is a senior partner with Thompson & Knight law firm and an amateur archaeologist and historian. He served as a consultant for The History Channel program, "Warrior Queen Boudica."

Mr. Furlow spoke on "Victory or Death: Boudica's Rebellion Against Rome," pointing out that history mirrors the interests and needs of people in every time and reflects the people in every age as those as those they are investigating.

Boudica was Queen of the Iceni, a Celtic people living in the northeast of East Anglia in Great Britain. At the time of her rebellion against Rome, in 60 B.C., her world was a rural world of round houses and huts. Archaeological finds show barley reflected on the coins, tankards for Celtic beer (cervasia), and urns to hold the ashes of cremated warriors. The people wore natural fabrics woven on looms from wool from their sheep and used woad as a dye for clothes and tattoos, leading to the Roman name for these people as the 'Picts.' It was a land of fens and swamps, a rich agricultural environment. The people kept woolly highland cattle and horses.

British society was aristocratic and marked by conspicuous consumption. People invested heavily in beautiful goods: warrior gear, spears of ash, patterned and welded swords, as in the Kelvedon warrior's grave. A warrior's sword was made of bog iron and was bent when the warrior died so that the sword could join him in the after life. The soldiers were fearless because how well they did on the battlefield determined how good their life was and how they would return. They carried wooden shields with a bronze boss and curvilinear decoration and used their swords as slashing and hacking weapons. An aristocrat's sword, like the Kelvedon sword, would be worked with inlays of coral and enamel and could be used to attack in one position and strike back in another. The soldiers wore no armor.

The Roman warriors carried a marching kit of heavy and light spears, the long spear being an innovation that could go through or over a shield or stick in it and make it awkward to use, and the short spear being used for penetration. The soldiers fought side by side and, therefore, did not hack or slash. They would throw their opponents off balance and strike downward with pinpoint accuracy. The Romans wore helmets; the Celts did not.

The Romans had discipline and numbers. The centurion stood at the front, and, when men tired, he would blow a whistle or turn his crest, and the front line would move to the back and the next line to the front so that the army was always fresh.

Among the Celts, all power was in the hands of warrior elites. Losers in a cattle raid would be taken prisoner and enslaved. The hill fort that was probably Boudica's still exists and is still 25 feet high.

The expansion of Rome into Britain began in 43 A.D. with Claudius's conquest, which began as invaders fanned out from a bridge head. The Roman Empire understood the conquest of underdeveloped countries as rape. The temple to Claudius in Camelodunum was a symbol of oppression because the people were drained for taxes to build it. The kingdom of Icenia was, however, a wealthy client-state of Rome and its friend and ally under Prasutagus, the puppet ruler.

Nero came to the throne of Rome when his mother Agrippina served poisoned mushrooms to her husband, Claudius. They ruled together until Nero had her murdered.

In 60 A.D. a bright star—a comet—appeared in the West and forbode disaster. Prasutagus died, and, while the comet was in the sky, Gaius Suetonius Paulinus marched legions to Britain to reduce Mona, now the Isle of Anglesea, home of the Druids, to submission. Druids and Druidesses greeted the Romans with curses, and the soldiers froze with fear, but Paulinus urged them forward, and they burned and reduced the island. But Paulinus had left the rest of Britain undefended.

Prasutagus had left his land and wealth half to his wife and daughters and half to Nero, hoping to ensure peace, but Nero decided to take it all. Catus Decianus, the procurator charged with collecting taxes, decided to take over. To send the message that resistance would not be tolerated, he had Boudica stripped and flogged and her daughters raped. The Romans seized the Icenian lands, carved them up with straight roads and farms, and gave them to the Roman soldiers.

Probably on one night in spring 60 B.C., Boudica attacked and killed every Roman her troops could find. Over 70,000 Romans were killed—and by a woman, very tall, harsh of voice, and most terrifying in appearance with tawny hair to her hips, a golden tongue, and a tunic of diverse colors. The tribal center at which she rallied her people and the Trinovantes was discovered by air during World War II. It had nine sets of fences (3 X 3, a holy number) and was constructed as an artificial oak grove because the oak was sacred to the gods. Boudica—whose name means 'Victoria,' or 'Raven Goddess,' or 'Commander'—prayed to Andraste, a female god, for the strength to kill, as she said, every one of these men who rape women, kill old people, and to drive every one of them into the sea because we are hares and foxes set upon by barbarians.

Boudica then advanced on Camelodum (Colchester) where she had hidden allies from a fifth column of slaves and Roman Britons. The Col (i.e., Colonia) River turned blood red. The Romans had not fortified the town and were open to invasion. A relief force was sent from Peterborough, but Boudica had her troops waiting in ambush and annihilated the legion on the way to Colchester. On the way into town, the Britons destroyed the Roman tombstones. The Romans retreated to the Temple of Claudius and held out for two days until the Britons got on the roof, pried off the tiles, and poured fire down. A statue of Claudius on horseback found with its skull smashed and throat cut, and thrown into the river—the 'triple death'—may have been sacrificed to the gods of air, earth, and water.

Boudica next moved on Londinium, the big port city with bridges crossing a marshy Thames. Decianus, the procurator, got on a ship and sailed for France, leaving the people behind. A layer of ash 3 to 6 feet thick in the mercantile center of London testifies to Boudica's destruction of this first London, which she and her warriors wiped off the map. The Britons hung, crucified, and burned the Romans and Romanized Britons. They took the noblest Roman women, transfixing them on poles thrust through their bodies, and cut off their breasts and stuffed them in their mouths, similarly to Celtic warriors in France, who transfixed large numbers of people on poles and kept them there for decades.

Paulinus, who now had the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion destroyed and the 2<sup>nd</sup> immobilized, came down to London with an advance guard and, realizing he could not save the city, left the old and the sick to be killed, and retreated to Verulamium (St. Albans), which Boudica likewise wiped off the map.

Boudica decided to pursue and annihilate. Paulinus was outmanoeuvred and his reputation was in tatters because he had left Britain undefended to destroy the Druids. He could save his reputation only by drawing Boudica into a situation where he could use Roman tactics. He withdrew to a prepared position in which the Britons could be forced uphill into a funnel and he could take them straight on with his much smaller force against a vast highland charge of troops in chariots with hatred on their minds.

The Celtic war horns blared, and the chariots surged forward. Paulinus ordered the spears hurled, killing thousands of unarmored Britons, to stop the British attack in its tracks and break their mobility and momentum. He had told his soldiers not to be concerned with the clamor and noise of the Britons, but to kill them all and have all the plunder at the end. British iron faced Roman steel, which shattered and bent the British swords. The British line compacted against the wagons at the back of the battle scene where the British women and children had been placed to see the great Celtic victory. The men were slaughtered en masse, and the women and children taken as prisoners. According to Tacitus, over 80,000 died in a single day, "a glorious victory like the ones of old." The number killed was the same as at Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped.

Boudica drank poison and killed herself. Many proud and noble Britons killed their wives and then themselves. Posthumus, who had earlier refused to leave his post to relieve Paulinus, took his own life. Boudica was richly buried, and after her death the Britons ended their rebellion. Tacitus says nothing about her daughters, however, probably because he did not know. However, an Iceni torc found in Scotland suggests that Boudica may have taken her own life after spiriting her daughters out of Britain. We do not know, but there were refugee flows. The Romans carved up the Iceni lands into rectangular fields (the centuriation) and turned them over to their own soldiers.

A tombstone has been found in the Roman wall at London to the procurator who took over from Decianus, who fled. After the battles, a wall was likewise built around Colchester using burned stones and bricks from the burned out temple to Claudius. Female gladiators appeared in Rome as the Romans, having experienced women fighting, turned the enslaved Britons into gladiators. The Roman city of Venta still survives, underground, with the circular round houses from Boudica's Britain beneath, but it has not yet been excavated.

Boudica's story was revived after the Dark Ages. At Monte Casino, Petrarch told Boccaccio he should save the ancient works, and there Boccaccio found and saved the decomposing manuscripts of Tacitus. Boudica's story inspired Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth and appeared in Holinshed's Chronicles. In the seventeenth century, Boudica became a contemporary lady who flashed a breast; in the time of William and Mary, she appeared as an armed matron, like Mary; in the eighteenth century, she was portrayed by Mrs. Glover on the stage as a British housewife; in the Seven Years War, she was shown in a chariot with a spear and shield looking much as she did in life, but dramatized. She became a full romantic heroine during the Victorian period and one of the most important figures to Victoria, who shared her name. She was Lady Liberty at San Jacinto and, in other guises, Britannia and Lady Liberty. A statue of her now stands on the Victoria Embankment next to Parliament, at the heart of imperial power in the city she torched to the ground.

In the Edwardian period, Boudica was transformed into both a sex kitten and a symbol of women's suffrage. Margaret Thatcher was later shown as Boudica. And today Boudica is still recognized in the symbol of Britannia. Her name has graced ships from the Napoleonic era through World War II, and she can be recognized in modern female warriors, who are now 10-15% of the armed services of the Western countries and are sometimes seen even in Islamic forces. Tacitus attributed to Boudica the statement, "We Britons are accustomed to following women in war."

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45.