**A blue and white logo

Description automatically generatedBoudicca**

* **Boudicca** was a queen of the **Iceni** tribe, who lived in East Anglia, occupying areas of Norfolk, northeast Cambridgeshire, and the northern parts of Suffolk.
* The Iceni appear to have been a wealthy people interested in metalware and horses. Archaeological finds of horse-related objects are common, but weapons and imported pottery are rare.
* Icenian coins often show horses, while others featured women and horses, perhaps suggesting the presence of female warriors among the Iceni.

A close-up of a coin

Description automatically generated

First century BC Iceni coin

* After the Emperor Claudius’s conquest in AD 34 the Iceni became Roman allies. They were allowed to retain their land, have their own ruler, and mint their own silver coins, rather than use the coinage of their conquerors.
* Despite this alliance, the Iceni and their neighbours revolted in the winter of AD 47/48 after the Governor of the provinc, **Aulus Plautius** had left for Rome and his replacement, **Publius Ostorius Scapula**, had not yet arrived.
* The Iceni revolted along with the neighbouring **Coritani** and **Catuvellauni** (each tribe had previously made alliances with Rome) but were quickly suppressed by Publius Ostorius Scapula and a small force of auxiliaries.
* They had revolted against harsh measures taken against them, not against the Roman presence on the whole
* Prasutagus may have been installed as king following the defeat of a rebellion of the Iceni in AD 47 as recorded by **Tacitus** in his Annals (12.31):

The Iceni, a powerful tribe, which war had not weakened, as they had voluntarily joined our alliance, were the first to resist. At their instigation the surrounding nations chose as a battlefield a spot walled in by a rude barrier, with a narrow approach, impenetrable to cavalry. Through these defences the Roman general, though he had with him only the allied troops, without the strength of the legions, attempted to break, and having assigned their positions to his cohorts, he equipped even his cavalry for the work of infantry. Then at a given signal they forced the barrier, routing the enemy who were entangled in their own defences. The rebels, conscious of their guilt, and finding escape barred, performed many noble feats.

* Alternatively, Prasutagus may have been one of the eleven kings who surrendered to the emperor Claudius following the Roman conquest in AD 43.
* When Prasutagus became a client king of Rome, this is the first indication of the political organization of the Iceni. It’s possible they may not have had a king before this - they may have been ruled by a confederation of communities or another form of social organization.
* It’s unclear what role Prasutagus played in the rebellion but it seems the Romans saw him as a leader who could keep the peace between the Iceni and Rome.
* When Prasutagus died, he left half of his kingdom to his two daughters by Boudica, and half to the emperor Nero.
* After his death, however, all hope of the Iceni existing peacefully with Rome was lost. The kingdom was annexed and his property taken.
* According to **Tacitus** (Annals 14.31), Boudica was flogged and her daughters raped.
* **Cassius Dio** (Roman History 62.2) gives a different account, saying that previous imperial donations to influential Britons had been confiscated, and that the Roman financier and philosopher **Seneca** (tutor and adviser to Nero) had demanded the return of the money he had loaned to British leaders at high interest.
* **Cassius Dio** is the only author to provide a description of her (although he was born a hundred years after her death). He describes her in the following way *(LXII 2.2):*

In stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh; 4 a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips; around her neck was a large golden necklace; and she wore a tunic of divers colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch. This was her invariable attire.

* At this time, the governor of the Province of Britannia, **Suetonius Paulinus**, was 250 miles away on the island of Mona (modern Anglesey).
* He was attacking the **Druids** - the religious chiefs of Britain - who had gathered in the sacred groves on Mona with those who had supported **Caratacus** and refused to submit to Rome.
* The Romans, usually tolerant of the religious practices of others, eliminated them.
* **Tacitus** provides a summary of the rebellion in his *Agricola,*dividing it into three main stages: the destruction of **Camulodunum** (Colchester), the burning of **Londinium** (London) and **Verulamium** (St Albans), and the final battle.
* **Camulodunum** had been the focus of the invasion of the emperor Claudius. As an **oppidum** (fortified town), **Camulodunum** was an area of concentrated settlement, but not necessarily a town.
* First-century evidence suggests an amalgamation of local and Roman practices in housing, food, hygiene, religious rituals, mortuary practices, and other cultural concerns. Imported goods from around the Mediterranean attest to the increased wealth of the area, including containers for wine, olive oil, and garum (fish-sauce).
* Within the veteran colony, Roman construction projects arose. **Cassius Dio** mentions a theatre, senate house, and statue to Victory. A temple to the divine Claudius was built and maintained by local funds, and priests appointed from the native population imposed taxes for its upkeep.
* As the governor **Suetonius** was away on the island of Mona, the Roman citizens appealed to imperial agent and procurator **Catus Decianus** for help.
* He sent a lightly armed force of 200 men who proved ineffective.
* After a two-day siege, the **colonia** was engulfed in flames. Burn evidence from the Boudican destruction layer suggests a widespread fire.
* Boudica capitalized on the momentum and ambushed the IX Legion on the road. almost completely annihilating them.
* The rebels advanced upon the trading settlement at **Londinium**.
* When **Suetonius** heard about the devastation he advanced ahead of his XIV Legion, with detachments from the XX Legion, auxiliary infantry and cavalry.
* **Catus Decianus** fled to Gaul.
* **Poenius Postumus**, acting commander of the II Legion in Isca Dumnoniorum (Exeter), refused to send any forces or to join **Suetonius** in **Londinium**.
* **Suetonius**, learning that Boudicca's forces far outnumbered his own, left the city to its fate. With no walls to protect them and fewer than 10,000 troops, **Suetonius** advised everyone to abandon the city.
* **Suetonius** and his troops retreated with the refugees from **Londinium** along **Watling Street** seeking a place more advantageous for battle. The rebels killed those that remained.
* From **Londinium**, Boudica’s army continued on their destructive path to **Verulamium** (St Albans), a possible ***municipium*** (free town) of Rome and former centre of **Catuvellaunian** power.
* As a ***municipium***, **Verulamium** would have been allowed a degree of self-government, and those holding official positions may have had the possibility of becoming Roman citizens. This site suffered because of its pro-Roman sentiments.
* **Tacitus** declares some 70,000 Roman citizens and allies fell from these three sites, although scholars have estimated the death toll was closer to half that number.
* Exaggerating the effectiveness and scale of the Britons revolt made the subsequent Roman victory even more glorious!
* From **Verulanium**, Boudica and her rebels continued their march north.
* Retreating north, **Suetonius** formulated a plan. Although wildly outnumbered, lack of food and the approach of the enemy forced him to engage in battle.
* **Cassius Dio** claims Boudica’s numbers had swelled from 120,000 to 230,000 Britons. **Tacitus** claims that there were an “unprecedented” number of forces.
* In reality, it was probably around 100,000 Britons fighting against 11,000–13,000 Romans, as well as several thousand auxiliaries and cavalry.
* The location of Boudica's defeat remains unknown.
* Some historians favour a site somewhere along the Roman road now known as **Watling Street**, perhaps close to High Cross, Leicestershire, on the junction of **Watling Street** and the **Fosse Way**. This site would have allowed the Legio II Augusta, based at Exeter, to rendezvous with the rest of Suetonius's forces, had they not failed to do so. This route up the **Fosse Way** would also have been the one taken by the detachment of the XX Legion Valeria Victrix from Usk (Wales).
* **Manduessedum** (Mancetter), near the modern town of Atherstone in Warwickshire, has also been suggested.
* Other suggestions include Arbury Banks, Hertfordshire, or Church Stowe, Northamptonshire.
* Tacitus records that while the Britons were destroying **Verulamium**, Suetonius chose a position in a defile with a wood behind him (*Annals* 34):

Suetonius had already the fourteenth legion, with a detachment of the twentieth and auxiliaries from the nearest stations, altogether some ten thousand armed men, when he prepared to abandon delay and contest a pitched battle. He chose a position approached by a narrow defile and secured in the rear by a wood, first satisfying himself that there was no trace of an enemy except in his front, and that the plain there was devoid of cover and allowed no suspicion of an ambush. The legionaries were posted in serried ranks, the light-armed troops on either side, and the cavalry massed on the extreme wings. The British forces, on the other hand, disposed in bands of foot and horse were moving jubilantly in every direction. They were in unprecedented numbers, and confidence ran so high that they brought even their wives to witness the victory and installed them in waggons, which they had stationed just over the extreme fringe of the plain.

* Suetonius chose a strategic location, a narrow pass cut off by a forest at the back.
* The rebels rushed into battle with the sound of the war horn (*carnyx*), fighting without armour, protected only by oval shields stretching from chin to knee. They rode in chariots and leapt off to attack with spears and flat, double-edged swords.
* The Romans wore helmets and body armour and carried javelins and short swords. They advanced in a wedge-shaped formation, cutting through the rebel lines in hand-to-hand combat, their cavalry on the wings.
* The Britons became caught in the narrow defile and could not use their long swords. When they retreated, they were hemmed in by the women they had placed in wagons on the edges of the battlefield to watch the assumed victory.
* Thanks to **Suetonius'** choice of battle site, Boudica's superior numbers were no advantage in the narrow field and, in fact, worked against her.
* In a single conflict, the Britons were almost completely obliterated.
* The Romans pursued them into the forest, killing many and capturing others.
* **Tacitus** claims 80,000 Britons and 400 Romans were killed. Such disparity of numbers is common element in ancient writing about battles, emphasising Roman strength, bravery and ability against that of the shambolic disorganised Britons.
* According to **Tacitus**, Boudicca poisoned herself so as not to become a Roman captive. **Cassius Dio** records she died from sickness. But with her death, however it occurred, the revolt came to an end.
* Following Boudicca's defeat, **Suetonius** instituted harsher laws on the Britons.
* While other, smaller, insurrections were mounted in the following years, none gained the same widespread support nor cost as many lives.
* **Cassius Dio’s** account ends with Boudica’s death, but **Tacitus** gives us some of the aftermath.
* After the Roman victory, the **XIV Legion** was named Martia Victrix (martial and victorious), and the **XX Legion** was supposedly given the name Victrix (victorious) - if that particular epithet was not awarded at an earlier time.
* **Poenius Postumus**, who ignored the request for assistance, killed himself.
* The Romans routed the remaining barbarians, burning settlements, killing rebels, and taking slaves. Famine destroyed many more - Boudica’s army had taken much of the local agricultural produce, and the inhabitants had failed to plant, harvest, and store up supplies for winter in the year of the revolt.
* **Camulodunum** was rebuilt twice as large with a defensive ditch and thick defensive wall. The reconstructed Temple of Claudius remained a symbol of Roman authority for the next 350 years.
* **Camulodunum** was the religious centre of Roman Britain, but the capital of the province was now moved to **Londinium**.
* The **Iceni** and **Trinovantes** never reached prominence again.