



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin Component 3A Latin Literature (Narratives)



Tacitus: Boudica For examination in 2022 and 2023 Section B

Section B

The Druids gather for battle

In this passage, Tacitus describes the Druids and their supporters lined up against the Roman army and the effect they have on the Roman troops.

Notes

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate. The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

- 1** **stabat:** the verb ('was standing') has been placed dramatically at the start of the sentence. This helps the reader to imagine the scene on the shore slowly coming into the Romans' view.
diversa acies, densa armis: these words are arranged in the order adjective-noun-adjective-noun, with the repetition of 'd' and 'a', to make them stand out, emphasising how closely packed the lines are.
- 2-3** **in modum Furiarum:** the Furies were terrifying goddesses of vengeance who lived in the Underworld, often shown in funeral garb and brandishing torches (just like the women here). By comparing the Celtic women to these creatures, Tacitus is emphasising their barbaric nature and the level of fear they inspired in the Romans.
- 3-7** The translation is **circum Druidae** (around [them] the Druids), **fundentes** (pouring out) **preces diras** (fearful prayers) **manibus** (with their hands) **sublatis** (raised) **ad caelum** (to the sky), **perculere** (frightened) **militem** (the soldiers) **novitate aspectus** (by the weirdness of the sight) **ut** (so that) **praeberent** (they offered) **immobile corpus** (their motionless bodies) **vulneribus** (to wounds) **quasi** (as though) **haerentibus membris** (their limbs [were] stuck together)
preces diras...fundentes: another sinister description, with the vivid use of **fundentes** suggesting a flood of malevolence. The word **diras** suggests that these may be curses.
ut quasi haerentibus membris: a vivid simile to show exactly how fearful the Romans were.
- 9** **pavescerent, inferunt:** these two verbs are placed next to each other (*juxtaposition*) to show how swiftly the Romans, under the exhortation of their commanders, laid aside their fear and headed into battle.
- 9-10** **inferunt...sternunt...involvunt:** the speed and discipline of the Romans' action is reflected in this short list of three (*tricolon*), linked with conjunctions (*polysyndeton*).
praesidium posthac: the harsh (*plosive*) alliteration suggests the determination of the Roman response.

- 11 excisique luci saevis superstitionibus sacri:** the Druids did not conduct their religious practices in the same manner as the Romans, instead worshipping in natural settings. This was yet another sign of their barbarity to the Romans. The word order here mimics the meaning: **luci...sacri** enclose the **saevis superstitionibus**. The repeated hissing 's' (*sibilance*) sounds malevolent and disapproving.
- 11-13** The translation is **nam** (for)**habebant** (they considered it) **fas** (right) **adolere aras** (to sprinkle their altars) **cuore captivo** (with the blood of a captive) **et** (and) **consulere deos** (to consult the gods) **hominum fibris** (by [means of] the entrails of men)
cuore captivo adolere aras: the image is of human blood being sprinkled onto flames, causing the altars to smoke. The alliteration draws attention to the phrase.
consulere deos hominum fibris: a type of divination similar to the reading of animal livers and other organs which was part of Roman religion and carried out by a special priest called a haruspex.
- 13 repentina defectio:** emphasising the suddenness of Boudica's uprising, at least from the Roman point of view.
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Discussion

In AD 60 or 61, the Roman governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus had pinned down the last of the Druids upon the island of Mona (modern Anglesey). This passage briefly describes the battle at the Menai Strait (the water which separates Anglesey from the mainland). What followed was a brutal massacre of the Britons. Suetonius and his forces were not able to subdue the whole of the island at this time, however, as he was called away by the Iceni rebellion. Recent archaeological finds, including the outline of a marching camp, support Roman military presence in the area in the 1st century.

Surviving written accounts of the Druids come from Romans and Greeks who were not sympathetic and made little attempt to understand their practices. Caesar's description in the *Gallic Wars* (VI. 13-16) is the most detailed and explains their role in society.

Mona was one of the places most sacred to the Druids, who worshipped within a sacred landscape which included the groves, as mentioned by Tacitus. Lucan (*Pharsalia* III. 399-452) describes a sacred grove in lurid detail. Human sacrifice is associated with the Druids by other Roman authors, such as Caesar (*Gallic Wars* VI.16) and Strabo (*Geography* IV. 4-5), but the archaeological evidence also seems to support this (although there is some debate amongst experts). [This article](#) summarises some of the evidence in the UK. The preserved remains of [Lindow Man in the British Museum](#) have been suggested as proof of ritualised murder. It is noteworthy that the remains date from around the time when Suetonius would have been marching his army past the area to confront the Druids.

In Tacitus' description, the 'barbarous', uncanny appearance of the Britons is emphasised. With swift leadership, the Roman soldiers show their superior discipline

and are urged on to victory. It is important to discuss this stereotyping of the two sides as this will help students to read the rest of the narrative.

For more information (aimed at teachers) on the Druids, the [In Our Time podcast on The Druids](#) is excellent.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each section, asking leading questions so that the class comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

lines 1-3:

- How is the battle-line described? What were they doing and where?
- What were they close-packed with?
- What were the women doing?
- What were the women dressed in? Who was this in the style of?
- How is their hair described? What were they carrying in front of them?

lines 3-7:

- Where were the Druids? What were they pouring out? How are the prayers described? What were they doing with their hands?
- What effect did this have on the soldiers? What exactly was it that made them feel this way?
- What was it like their limbs were? What did they offer their bodies to? How are their bodies described?

lines 7-10:

- Who urged on the cohorts (two groups)? What did they urge them not to fear? How is this battle-line described?
- What did they carry forward? What did they do to those in their way? What did they envelope them in?

lines 10-13:

- What was imposed on the conquered? What happened to the groves? What were the groves sacred to?
- What did they sprinkle on the altars? What were they consulting? How were they consulting them? What did they consider this?

lines 13-14:

- Who was dealing with this? While he was dealing with this, what was reported to him? How is the uprising described?
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Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-2):
 - a. Where were the enemy?
 - b. Describe them in detail.
2. (lines 2-3):
 - a. Describe the appearance of women.
 - b. Explain the phrase 'in modum Furiarum'.
3. (lines 3-7):

- a. What exactly were the Druids doing?
 - b. Quote and translate the two Latin words which tell us what exactly frightened the soldiers.
 - c. How does Tacitus, through the style of his writing, make the effect of the Druids upon the Romans dramatic?
4. (lines 7-10):
- a. What prompted the Roman soldiers to lay aside their fear?
 - b. What exactly did the Roman soldiers do?
 - c. How does Tacitus, through the style of his writing, emphasise the discipline of the Roman soldiers?
5. (lines 10-13):
- a. What did the Romans do once they had conquered the Druids?
 - b. What does Tacitus tell us about the religion of the Druids?
 - c. How does Tacitus make his description here vivid and exciting?
6. (lines 13-14) What caused Suetonius to leave the conquest of Mona?
7. (whole passage): How does Tacitus contrast the Druids and the Romans in this passage?