



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



Tacitus: Boudica For examination in 2022 and 2023 Section I

Section I

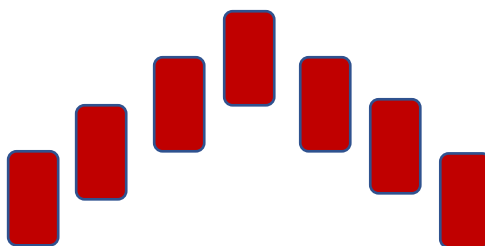
The Battle

In this passage, the two armies finally clash. With superior tactics the Romans easily overwhelm the Britons and go on to butcher even the baggage train. Rather than be captured, Boudica takes her own life.

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 **gradu immota**: the calm ranks of the Romans are no longer fazed by the Britons.
- 2-3 The translation is **postquam** (after) **exhauserat** (it had used up) **tela** (its javelins) **certo iactu** (with sure aim) **in** (at) **hostes** (enemies) **suggrossos** ([who had] approached) **propius** (nearer) **erupit** (it burst out) **velut cuneo** (as in a wedge formation)
A good summary of Roman tactics: the British battle-charge is quashed by a volley of spears into the space between the two battle lines, then the Romans employ their wedge formation to advance.



The wedge had the best soldiers at the points, and drove into the opposing army, squashing them together and also funnelling them inside the Roman lines. It was very effective, especially against larger enemy forces.

The first phase of the battle is described very briefly by Tacitus, implying a swift and effective Roman assault. The phrase **certo iactu** ('with sure aim') shows us how well-trained the soldiers are. The swiftness of the Roman charge is enhanced by the dramatic verb **erupit** ('burst out').

- 4 **idem auxiliarum impetus**: another quick phrase ('the attack of the auxiliaries [was] the same') with the main verb omitted to shorten it further. The Roman forces are acting in unison and with no delay. The cavalry seem eager for battle with their **hastis protentis** ('their spears stretched in front').
- 5-6 The word order here in the Latin mirrors the events in the text. The verb **perfringit** ('broke through') has been brought out of the normal word order and is now before the phrase **quod obvium et validum erat** ('what was in

the way and strong'). This is immediately followed by another short phrase - **ceteri terga praebuere** ('the rest retreated')- with a shortened verb (**praebuerant** has been *syncopated* to **praebuere**) which quickens the Latin to show us the speed of the sudden British retreat.

- 6-7** Again here the word order mirrors the events. The **circumiecta vehicula** ('wagons placed around') are in front of the **abitus** ('the exits'), with **abitus** further shoved to the very end of the sentence by the verb **saepserant** ('blocked').
- 7-9** The translation is **miles** (the soldiers) **ne quidem** ([did] not even) **temperabat** (restrain themselves from) **neci** (the slaughter) **mulierum** (of women) **que** (and) **iumenta** (the baggage animals) **etiam** (also) **confixa telis** (pierced by spears) **auxerant** (had increased) **cumulum** (the heap) **corporum** (of bodies)
There is a sign of some disapproval in the way Tacitus presents the Romans here as they slaughter the baggage train. The use of the verb **temperabat** ('restrain') implies that the soldiers are not able to control themselves. The phrasing of **ne mulierum quidem...etiam** ('not even the women...also') implies that they have gone beyond what was necessary. The harsh 'c' alliteration of **confixa...corporum cumulum** ('pierced...heap of bodies') draws attention to the killing of the baggage animals, hardly a glorious victory to end the battle. It would have been more common for the Romans to enslave the defeated who were not killed in the battle. The brutality of this response perhaps reflects the fear of the Roman soldiers in the midst of a British uprising in which the province was nearly lost and many civilians had already been tortured and slaughtered.
- 9-10** **clara et antiquis victoriis par ea die laus parta:** a rhetorical flourish linking this struggle with unnamed 'victories of old' which would probably have called to mind the wars with Hannibal when the Romans were outnumbered by a seemingly unstoppable force which was motivated by the goal of ridding the world of the Romans. This would seem to be an exaggeration – the Celts are hardly threatening Rome itself- but is an appropriately dramatic summary of events.
- 10-11** **quippe sunt qui...tradant:** by using a phrase like this ('indeed there are those who say that...'), Tacitus indicates to us that he has some reservations about the reliability of his source material. He is going to tell us what it says anyway!
- 10-12** **paulo minus quam octoginta milia Britannorum...militum quadringentus ferme:** casualty lists for ancient battles are problematic. The numbers are often inflated to exaggerate victories, or simply inaccurate due to bodies being miscounted, removed from the battlefield by relatives or scavengers, or abandoned in a retreat. The Romans, however, did keep records of those killed and wounded, and the bodies would have been recovered for burial wherever possible. This lends some credibility to the Roman reports here. The British numbers are more likely speculation, and the huge numbers involved would suggest some exaggeration. A decisive victory, however, seems certain.

- 13 Boudica vitam veneno finivit:** a short and final epitaph for Boudica. If captured, Boudica could have expected humiliation and violence. The Gallic leader Vercingetorix had been held by Julius Caesar for almost six years before being paraded in a military triumph and then ritually executed. Boudica's suicide also recalls that of Cleopatra, the last Pharaoh of Egypt, who took her own life rather than be captured by Octavian. Poison was seen by the Romans as a woman's method of death. This account, however, is disputed by the other Roman historian who described Boudica's rebellion. Cassius Dio says that she fell ill and then died (*Roman History* 62.12).
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Discussion

The Roman army was a professional standing army with a highly organised structure. It is important that students understand the tactics that the Romans were employing in the battle with Boudica and the meaning of terms such as *veteran* and *auxiliary*, but there is a great deal more to explore, time and enthusiasm permitting. A very [simple site](#) from the BBC on the Roman army aimed at KS2.

The life of the legionary soldier is described in detail in the Cambridge Latin Course, [Book III, Stage 25 \(pages 82-87\)](#).

Vindolanda Museum's very clear and informative [video](#) on the structure of the Roman army.

A slightly more student-friendly [video](#) on the Roman army from TedEd.

There are many legends concerning Boudica's burial site, with the most famous being under King's Cross Station in London. What is indisputable is the influence of her image in British history. There have been several novels and dramatisations created of her life, although few are suitable for directing students to without careful content control. Queen Elizabeth I identified strongly with her, as did Queen Victoria in whose honour the statue of Boudica was erected on the banks of the Thames in London. The Suffragette movement also made use of her image and name as they campaigned for votes for women. Despite being Celtic, she has often been held up as an example of a quintessentially English hero. Students could discuss the aspects of her story which have made Boudica such an inspirational figure, despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of concrete evidence we have about her life.

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:

- What did the legion do at first? What did they keep as their fortification?
- What did they use up? How did they do this? What did they do after they had done this?

lines 4-5:

- What did the auxiliaries do?

- Who else entered the battle? What did they break through? What did they have extended in front of them?

lines 5-7:

- What did the rest of the Britons do?
- What was difficult for them? What was blocking their exits?

lines 7-9:

- What did the soldiers not even restrain themselves from?
- What was the heap made of? What else also increased this heap? What had happened to them?

lines 9-13:

- What was acquired? When was it acquired? What was it equal to? How else is it described?
- What do some people say? How many Roman soldiers were killed? How many were wounded?
- What did Boudica do?

Questions on Content and Style

- (lines 1-3):
 - Explain the tactics which the Romans are using here.
 - How does Tacitus make this sentence exciting through his choice of vocabulary?
- (lines 4-5): describe the actions of
 - the auxiliaries
 - the cavalry
- (lines 5-7):
 - What did the Britons attempt to do?
 - Why was it difficult for them to do this?
- (lines 7-9):
 - What did the Romans do when they reached the baggage train?
 - How does Tacitus, through his style of writing, express his disapproval of the Roman behaviour here?
- (lines 9-13):
 - What does Tacitus say about the Roman victory here?
 - What casualty numbers does Tacitus report?
 - Why does Tacitus say 'quippe sunt qui...tradant'?
 - In your opinion, are these numbers likely to be accurate?
 - What happened to Boudica? Why do you think that she did this?
- (whole section): how does Tacitus, through the content and style of his writing, emphasise the superiority of the Roman forces in this encounter?