

## **Trousers to Tunics: Examining Cultural Interchange and Conflicts between Celtic and Classical Forces in Ancient Britain**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the history and identities of Celtic peoples in ancient Britain through their interactions with their Roman conquerors, starting with Julius Caesar's first invasion of the island in 55 BCE and ending with Emperor Severus's campaign to conquer Scotland in 208 CE. Due to the lack of firsthand accounts of these events from the Celtic perspective, the majority of source material on British Celts comes from primary sources written by Roman authors such as Julius Caesar, Publius Cornelius Tacitus, Lucius Cassius Dio, and Herodian. Those authors, each with their own political motives and personal biases, often portrayed Celtic people as distant barbarians. In fact, Celtic culture consisted of a complex, interconnected tribal system with elaborate trade networks. Still, much can be learned from the available reading, from secondary sources by modern historians who engage with Roman authors not only as reporters of history but also as historical figures themselves. These modern historians offer a clearer picture by accounting for those figures' motives and biases. Thus, this paper serves as a general introduction to Ancient Roman-Celtic interactions, evolving from complete unfamiliarity to mutual animosity, to an eventual coexistence and, in some cases, a fusion that laid the basis for modern British culture and identity.

## Introduction

In the past several years, political analysts and even average news readers have seen the word “Celt” pop up more and more. In addition to its frequent appearances in the media, the term has also entered the spotlight of historical discussion. Historians such as Patrick Sims-Williams and Simon James have debated whether Celtic identity exists, and, if so, where and when the Celts lived.<sup>1</sup> While most people think of “Celtic” as corresponding to the regions of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and people in these nations tend to use this term the most frequently, the British Isles are only the tip of the iceberg of Celtic identity.<sup>2</sup> During the actual golden age of Celtic influence (600 BCE–50 CE), peoples who would today be categorized as “Celtic” settled across the European continent from Spain to Turkey.<sup>3</sup> Defining what is or isn’t Celtic is far from a simple task; so-called Celtic groups throughout history possessed a high degree of lingual and cultural uniformity, while at the same time being divided along the lines of politics and religion.

Regardless of their tribal allegiances, Celts and their culture thrived throughout Europe during the early classical period and experienced independent cultural development. On the island of Britain in particular, Celtic migrations would lead to the establishment of a tribal system that would dominate the island well into the first century BCE. But this was not to last. On the other side of the English Channel, a group very different from the British Celts was beginning to conquer the peoples of mainland Europe. The Roman Empire began as a regional republic before expanding its reach throughout vast stretches of territory, all of which were governed by a central government in Rome. But what happened when the centralized Romans came into contact with the distant, unknown Celts of Britain?

Covering the period beginning at Caesar’s invasion of Britain and ending at the Severan campaign to conquer Scotland, this paper explores the evolution of interactions between Roman and British Celts, shifting from complete unfamiliarity to mutual animosity, to an eventual coexistence and, in some cases, a fusion that laid the basis for modern British culture and identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, ‘How are you finding it here?’ *London Review of Books* 21 (1999), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The term saw increased usage in Britain during the Enlightenment and today is also used to describe the historical inhabitants of Brittany and the Isle of Man.

<sup>3</sup> Rhys Kaminski-Jones and Francesca Kaminski-Jones, *Celts, Romans, Britons: Classical and Celtic Influence in the Construction of British Identities* (Oxford, 2020), p. 6.

## Caesar's Invasion of Britain

The first known account of contact between the Celts of Britain and the Roman Empire, written by Julius Caesar, provides a useful framework for understanding this intercultural relationship at such an early stage. Caesar's account, while filled with political bias, gives off a sense of mutual unfamiliarity and shock between two groups that would ultimately fight for dominance in the coming centuries. Caesar recounts the events of his invasion of Britain in 55 BCE in his overall account of the Gallic Wars, *De Bello Gallico*.<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that Caesar sought to portray himself and Rome as noble while mocking the Celts through misrepresentations of historical events and false stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, a description of this first contact, which more broadly recounts his campaigns through Gaul as well as Britain, provides a useful insight into the Roman view of Celts in Britain in 55 BCE.

After conquering Gaul, Caesar claimed to have asked the natives if they had any knowledge of the inhabitants of Britain, but failed to receive useful information.<sup>6</sup> This goes to show just how unfamiliar the Romans, and even the Gauls, were with Britain's inhabitants. Whereas historians today tend to note the cultural similarities between the ancient French Gauls and the British Britons and categorize both as Celts, the limited contact between these cultures meant that most were not aware of each other's existence, or at the very least, did not regard each other as belonging to the same culture. This widespread lack of knowledge among Gauls and Britons, caused by geographical barriers such as the English Channel, was likely the reason why Caesar was so uninformed.<sup>7</sup> Caesar expressed this further in his account, frequently describing Britain as lying at the edge of the world, a statement that felt very real for the ancient Roman conquerors of his day.<sup>8</sup> When he arrived in Britain, Caesar's description of the Celts was one of a unified, monolithic people, referring to nearly all tribes he came into contact with as "the enemy," a drastic oversimplification that ignores the complexity of tribal British society, which contained political and cultural differences between coastal and inland population groupings.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he claimed many tribes were able to unite under one man, Cassivellaunus, and that the

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<sup>4</sup> Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico (The Gallic Wars)*, trans. W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn, (New York, 1869), Bk. 4, ch. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *The Real Lives of Roman Britain* (New Haven, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Kaminski-Jones & Kaminski-Jones, *Celts, Romans, Britons*, p. 7, noting that the Gauls are today considered Celts by modern historians; Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, Bk. 4, ch. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Kaminski-Jones & Kaminski-Jones, *Celts, Romans, Britons*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, Bk. 4, ch. 36.

tribes were so unified that they collectively decided to renew their war against Rome at a conference.<sup>10</sup> The Romans were used to coming into contact with monarchs and emperors, but their assumption that they would find a similar governmental structure in Celtic Britain was misguided. While Cassivellaunus was likely able to unite several tribes against the Romans, this was only possible due to the unique case of an outside threat to all Britons. In fact, as Caesar himself notes, there was evidence that the tribes had been fighting amongst themselves years before the Roman arrival, making tribal unification the exception rather than the rule in Britain.<sup>11</sup> Caesar's view of the Britons as a homogeneous group of people with a fairly centralized command structure was based on ignorance of Britonic culture.

However, Caesar's perspective may have also been based on internal factors in Rome. Caesar's invasion in 55 BCE came at a time of major political reforms within Rome, marked by the transition from republic to empire, and a massive civil war. The senate's power was weakening and was replaced by the First Triumvirate, three individuals (including Caesar) who ruled Rome. However, at the time of Caesar's writing, the relationship between these individuals was growing increasingly tense, with this internal instability likely influencing Caesar's description of the Celts.<sup>12</sup> Wanting to take control during this power vacuum, Caesar hoped to boost his popularity with his account, glorifying both himself and the army to attract Romans to his cause.

Taking part in the competition between the Triumvirate members, Caesar desperately hoped to gain more power and establish himself as the sole ruler of Rome. However, to do so, he needed the approval of both the Senate and the Roman people at large. His tactic was to spread propaganda, which likely played a big role in his writing of *De Bello Gallico*. His account of Britain is not only filled with descriptions of Celts but also goes into detail on the actions of both the Roman army and himself, such as the army's crossing of the English Channel and Caesar's useful naval tactics during coastal battles.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Caesar's description of Britain as an "unknown" but "espied" land at the edge of the world may not only be due to the lack of Roman knowledge of the island but perhaps also serves to make himself seem like a brave explorer and exemplary leader, and thereby a potential emperor.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, his mention of Cassivellaunus may not just be an accidental

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, Bk. 4, ch. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Bédoyère, *The Real Lives*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, Bk. 4, ch. 23; Bk. 4, ch. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Bk. 4, ch. 26; Bk. 5, ch. 8.

misconception of Britonic culture but perhaps an intentional reframing to give his story a worthy villain and a captivating story arc. The Roman population's general ignorance of much of British Celtic culture allowed Caesar this opportunity to spread misinformation and suited his political motives, despite his very patchy knowledge of Celtic society. Rather than learning more about British Celts, Caesar's true motive in his British campaign and *De Bello Gallico* was to strengthen his political power and fame. Furthermore, Caesar likely hoped his account would also have the effect of bolstering Roman patriotism, as Caesar frames his victory as one for Rome and civilization. In this regard, *De Bello Gallico* was a resounding success. As historian Guy de la Bedoyere notes, while Caesar's invasion was militarily inconclusive, he managed to turn it into a "box office success" with the Roman people by writing a "distinctly partisan" account of the events, giving him more approval, and eventually, more power as Rome's dictator.<sup>15</sup> While it is impossible to know if Caesar really cared about supplying the Roman people with knowledge of a previously foreign culture, or if his descriptions in *De Bello Gallico* are just one of many propaganda tools used to bolster his image and help him seize power, it is clear that Caesar, and Rome more broadly, lacked sufficient information on Celtic culture. However, as Rome and the Celts gained more knowledge of each other, accounts would shift away from Caesar's depiction of Britain as a mystical foreign land, and to a heightened sense of animosity toward a known enemy.

### **Claudius's Invasion and Boudica's Revolt**

Through centuries of warfare, the Romans' curiosity about the Celts evolved into a deep hostility towards their British foe. This can be seen clearly by comparing earlier accounts of British Celts written by Julius Caesar and Publius Cornelius Tacitus to their later counterparts written by Lucius Cassius Dio. While Caesar's invasion ended in withdrawal so that he could return to Gaul to put down local rebellions, the Romans eventually returned to Britain, nearly a century later, during the reign of Emperor Claudius (41-54 CE). Lucius Cassius Dio, a Roman senator who was born 112 years after this invasion, writes about these events and portrays the Celts in a very different light than did Caesar. Rather than focusing on, or perhaps overemphasizing, the unity between tribes, Dio describes them as extremely fractured.<sup>16</sup> In his account, there is no mention of a central figure uniting the tribes such as Cassivellaunus, and he explains how different tribes pursued drastically

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<sup>15</sup> Bédoyère, *The Real Lives*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Cassius Dio, 'Claudius' Invasion of Britain', trans. Mary Beard and Neil Wright in Graham Webster, *The Roman Invasion of Britain*, (London, 1980 repr. 1993), p. 200.

different policies towards Rome.<sup>17</sup> While some chose to fight, many others entered negotiations, and violence between these factions was surprisingly common, with Romans even having to act as mediators.<sup>18</sup>

By emphasizing divisions within the tribes, Dio likely hoped to influence the historical narrative by degrading the Celts as fractured and barbaric, in contrast to the supposedly unified Roman forces. Due to the interconnectivity of the Roman Empire, made possible by road systems and sea routes, propaganda like this was able to spread at an incredibly fast rate, influencing Roman culture, art (as is shown by depictions of the Celts on the Continent such as “the dying Gaul”), and especially the attitudes of Roman people towards their foe.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, emphasizing disunity in contrast with Roman unity would have had lasting implications on the governance of Britain. By stressing the difference between Celts and Romans, Dio indirectly claimed that the two cultures were in direct conflict and incompatible. As author Edwin Hustwit notes, this may have been a strategic move to prevent the British Celts from gaining Roman citizenship or participating in government, as had happened in Gaul.<sup>20</sup>

While Dio used his historical account to denounce the Celts and their culture, just as Caesar had done before him, unlike Caesar, he was not the only Roman author covering the story. The abundance of primary sources on this period allows historians to gain greater insight into the evolution of Roman-Celtic relations and Roman views on the Celts of Britain. These sources recorded the events following the initial invasion of Britain when the Romans were faced with a massive Celtic uprising from Boudica, the wife of King Prasutagus of the Iceni tribe. Prasutagus chose to divide power equally between his wife and the Romans upon his death.<sup>21</sup> However, the Romans were not content with this arrangement, removing Boudica from power, and perhaps even raping her daughters.<sup>22</sup> In response, Boudica was able to gather a confederation of tribes and begin a revolt against the Romans, which was covered by two Roman historians, Tacitus and Cassius Dio.

Tacitus’s account of Boudica’s rebellion, written much closer to the events, displays a similar curiosity with the Celtic culture that Caesar

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 201

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Edwin Hustwit, ‘Britishness, Pictishness and the “Death” of the Noble Briton: The Britons in Roman Ethnographic and Literary Thought,’ *Studia Celtica* 50 (2016), p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Tacitus. *Annals: Books 13-16*, trans. John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library 322 (Cambridge, MA, 1937), Bk. 14, ch. 31. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

had previously espoused while simultaneously offering critiques of Roman society and government. Tacitus lived from 56-120 CE and wrote of the events a little less than a century after they happened. He was a Roman historian, senator, and a frequent critic of the emperor who wrote a series of annals on the history of the Roman Empire from the death of Augustus in 14 CE to the end of the reign of Emperor Nero in 68 CE. Focusing on a relatively brief section of history gave Tacitus plenty of time to elaborate and often offer opinions on the state of Roman governance, seeking to criticize the imperial system and disliked emperors such as Nero. He usually did this by writing speeches for historical characters to express his grievances with Rome. Boudica is one such character, and Tacitus's speech for her was filled with anti-imperial, and sometimes even pro-Celtic narratives and arguments. Boudica was portrayed as a wronged Queen, with Tacitus having claimed she "was subjugated to the lash, and her daughters violated."<sup>23</sup> In her speech before the battle, Tacitus wrote that Boudica described herself as a "woman of the people," and constantly brought up the importance of freedom in opposition to slavery, something that Tacitus himself had mentioned many times, as he himself saw the Roman government as enslavers of the people.<sup>24</sup> Following the battle, Tacitus claimed Boudica poisoned herself.<sup>25</sup> As Tacitus lived much closer to the Boudican Rebellion, he did not see the same amount of British history as Dio and wrote at a time when Britain was still relatively unknown to the bulk of Roman citizens. This lack of knowledge likely gives Tacitus a similar sense of curiosity to Caesar. He was eager to gain new knowledge about the Celts while also using them as a propaganda tool for his own personal motives. What distinguishes Tacitus from Caesar, however, is the nature of his complaints against the Roman government. Whereas Caesar used the Celts as a tool to boost pro-Roman morale, Tacitus used them as a weapon against the leadership of the Roman Empire. As author Eric Adler notes, while Caesar and Tacitus were both driven by their political agendas, the nature of their agendas differed heavily. Adler cites Tacitus's speech as evidence against the premise that Roman historians are always biased against opponents of Rome. In fact, they are sometimes biased towards them.<sup>26</sup>

Writing more than a century after Boudica's rebellion, and from a more pro-Roman stance, Dio's perspective shows how Roman attitudes towards the Celts and the events of the past evolved with centuries of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Adler, 'Boudica's Speeches in Tacitus and Dio,' *The Classical World* 101.2 (2008), p. 184.

<sup>25</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, Bk. 14, ch. 37. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Adler, 'Boudica's Speeches,' p. 173.

warfare. Dio lived from 155-235 CE, more than a century after Boudica's rebellion, and therefore is able to write about a much larger period than Tacitus. Though his speech for Boudica somewhat mirrors Tacitus's, agreeing on basic events and giving Boudica a similar speech, everything else about his account seems to side with Rome. He denies the claim that Boudica's daughters were raped by claiming the war was started by "an excuse" due to "the confiscation of the sums of money that Claudius had given to the foremost Britons."<sup>27</sup> He also puts much more focus on Boudica's atrocities, saying her army would wreak "indescribable slaughter" and they even "impaled the women on sharp skewers."<sup>28</sup> According to Cassius Dio, Boudica's death was far less dramatic, as he claims she died of sickness rather than poison.<sup>29</sup>

Despite some minor similarities to Tacitus's annals, overall, Dio's account represents a more mainstream Roman view. It was written at a significant chronological distance from the events, when the Celts and Romans had become all too familiar with each other as adversaries, likely fueling Dio's biased perspective. After seeing centuries of this warfare, knowing more about the Celts, and seeing the political situation in Britain collapse with more revolts, Dio likely did not share Tacitus and Caesar's curiosity for Celtic culture. Rather, he probably wanted to attack Rome's longtime enemy by degrading the Celts through his written accounts. By comparing Tacitus and Dio, it is clear that as Romans and Celts became more familiar with each other, often through war, the Roman attitude shifted from one of curiosity to a strong sense of animosity, but the Roman use of the Celts as a political tool for their own means remained.

### **The Hadrian and Antonine Walls**

After Boudica's rebellion had been completely subdued, the Romans could finally advance farther north into Scotland, but they were faced with a new threat. Like Boudica, Galgagus, a Scottish native, had managed to create a coalition of tribes to halt the Roman advance.<sup>30</sup> His forces confronted the Romans at the battle of Mons Graupius (83 CE), where they were outflanked by Roman cavalry and cut down, leading to a Roman victory.<sup>31</sup> While this story may seem very similar to that of Boudica, it should be noted that historians today know extremely little

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<sup>27</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Volume IX*, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classic Library 177 (Cambridge, MA, 1927), Bk 77, ch. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Tacitus, 'Life of Gnaeus Julius Agricola,' trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodrick, *Ancient History Sourcebook* (Fordham, NY 1996), ch. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



about Galgacus and his cause. Much of the known information comes from Tacitus, whose descriptions of both Galgacus and Boudica's speeches before the battle espouse similar ideas. Furthermore, both Boudica and Galgacus's battle tactics seem strangely familiar to Ostorius (a previous opponent to Rome), showing that Tacitus put little time into distinguishing both the words and military actions of different Celtic leaders, regardless of when and where they lived.<sup>32</sup> Tacitus once again combined his curiosity for Celtic culture with his grievances against Rome, as he chose to write a speech for Galgacus that heavily mirrored his political views, equating Roman rule to infection with the "contagion of slavery" and saying Roman soldiers rely purely on "fear and terror."<sup>33</sup>

Following Mons Graupius, Roman policy, and arguably the overall Roman perspective towards the Celts, shifted drastically. Whereas previous emperors, such as Trajan, had been largely focused on conquest and subjugation, the new Emperor Hadrian put more emphasis on peace and gained a reputation for being a builder.<sup>34</sup> His approach to Britain is an example of this peaceful approach, choosing to halt Roman expansion on the island in favor of constructing a massive wall to divide conquered from unconquered land.<sup>35</sup> The wall was not the first Roman presence in the area, and many forts had already existed as part of the "Stangate System,"<sup>36</sup> but it was nonetheless an unprecedented project; the wall was more expensive and time-consuming than any previous Roman project in the area, with major implications both economic and cultural for both the Roman defenders and Celtic tribes beyond the wall.<sup>37</sup> Following Hadrian's death, he was succeeded by his adopted son, Antoninus. Antoninus was seen as inexperienced, and, in hopes of boosting his reputation, he expanded the frontier and constructed a new wall that was situated farther north, using his adopted father's wall as a supply depot.<sup>38</sup> The result was the creation of a buffer zone between the two walls.

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<sup>32</sup> Hustwit, 'Britishness, Pictishness,' p. 98.

<sup>33</sup> Tacitus, "Life of Gnaeus," ch. 30, 32.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Symonds, *Hadrian's Wall: Creating Division* (London, 2020), p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook* (London, 2008), p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> A system of forts constructed on the Roman frontier to monitor neighboring tribes and secure Roman economic interests.

<sup>37</sup> Symonds, *Hadrian's Wall*, p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> Sources from 'The Hadrianic and Antonine Frontiers' in S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*, p. 95.

This buffer zone created a unique example of Roman-Celtic coexistence.<sup>39</sup> By this point, the area around the wall, and Britain more broadly, no longer contained just Roman explorers or soldiers. It also included Roman civilians who chose to reside in this more incorporated province, often within the Hadrian and Antonine walls, which became more of a narrow city than a military fortification. This is evident from the archeological discovery of several writing tablets at the Roman fort of Vindolanda (a part of the Hadrian Wall). While one might assume this fort served a purely military purpose, only one of the tablets discusses its intended purpose: protection against the neighboring Celts. The majority of the tablets go into detail on everyday life in this part of the ‘narrow city,’ such as residential areas and trade arrangements.<sup>40</sup> The massive presence of Roman civilians in the area and the more pacifist Roman approach gave the local tribes more exposure to Roman culture. Furthermore, providing goods to the Romans proved to be a great economic opportunity for the native population.<sup>41</sup> Wealth within Celtic society was starting to become increasingly determined by how “Romanized” a person was; Celts who possessed Roman goods or knowledge of Roman culture were seen as having a higher standing in society. While this idea had been taking shape for centuries, its evolution accelerated during this period, and because tribes to the northeast of the wall were deemed more peaceful by the Romans than those from the northwest, they could participate in trade and gain more Roman goods.<sup>42</sup> For their part, the Romans gained some customs from the Celts in the area by adopting Celtic soldiers into their ranks. These soldiers influenced Roman culture in and around the walls by helping Romans better communicate with and learn the tactics of the Celts, acting as a link between Roman and Celtic culture.<sup>43</sup> While violence and animosity were still present north of the wall, centuries of interactions between Celts and Romans, as well as a major policy shift under Emperor Hadrian, led to more cooperative relations. Gone were the days of Britain seeming “unfamiliar” or filled with Roman enemies, in favor of more permanent Roman civilian settlements, trade, and even some form of cultural fusion between these two previously distant groups.

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<sup>39</sup> Lesley Macinnes, ‘The Impact of the Antonine Wall on Iron Age Society,’ in David. J. Breeze and William S. Hanson, *The Antonine Wall: Papers in Honour of Professor Lawrence Keppie* (Oxford, 2020), p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> Vindolanda Tablets Online.

<sup>41</sup> Macinnes, “The Impact,” p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## The Severan Campaign

Although the Hadrian and Antonine walls would provide Britain with a long period of stability, that would come to an end with a Roman campaign in 208 CE, a final attempt to conquer the areas beyond the wall. After infighting within Rome, Septimus Severus established himself as Emperor and aimed to claim the title of ‘Britannicus’ by conquering the remainder of the island. The north of Scotland remained in Celtic hands, inhabited by the Maetae and Caledonii, tribes who had pushed back Roman assaults for centuries.<sup>44</sup> In conquering Scotland, Severus hoped to teach his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, the duties of being emperor, thereby cementing the future of Rome and his bloodline.<sup>45</sup> While the Severan campaign brought about a significant amount of bloodshed, this era proved to largely evolve relations between both Romans and Celts beyond the wall, on an economic, political, and cultural basis by exposing firmly Celtic areas to Roman influence and cementing a more established Roman presence throughout the entire island.

The heavy Roman presence in Scotland during the Severan campaign proved to be more peaceful and economically valuable than one might assume, with frequent non-violent interactions between Scottish tribes and the Romans. Even in York, well within Roman territory, Caledonian women from above the wall were reported to have socialized with Roman female elites, with one female elite even meeting face-to-face with Severus’s wife and debating Roman laws on adultery.<sup>46</sup> While one might assume that a militaristic campaign of this degree would lead to absolute violence on the frontier itself trade nearby and north of the wall grew significantly during this period. While there were indeed many battles during the Severan campaign, several tribes enjoyed good relations with Rome, trading frequently and even using Roman goods as status symbols. Additionally, unlike Boudica, Galgacus, or almost any other previous Celtic military leader, the tribes north of the wall actively sought out good relations, a dynamic mentioned in several Roman sources. For example, Roman historian Herodian claims that when Severus arrived in Scotland, he immediately encountered tribal envoys who sought to avoid war, with similar encounters being common even after the campaign had begun.<sup>47</sup> As they had become more familiar with

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<sup>44</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Bk. 77, ch. 12.

<sup>45</sup> *Herodian of Antioch’s History of the Roman Empire*, trans. Edward C. Echols, (Berkeley, 1961, repub. 2021).

<sup>46</sup> Rupert Jackson, *The Roman Occupation of Britain and Its Legacy* (London, 2020), ch. 13, p. 184.

<sup>47</sup> *Herodian of Antioch’s History*, Bk. 3, ch. 14.

Rome, and realized that their longstanding enemy brought more than just subjugation, the Celtic response had shifted from one of revolution to a more widespread eagerness for economic cooperation and even peace with their Latin foe.

For their part, the Romans had also become much more accustomed to both Celtic culture and the island of Britain itself by this point. Whereas Julius Caesar had regarded Britain as at the edge of imperial authority, Emperor Severus's military interest in the island had moved Britain from a distant frontier to the center of his Empire. Bringing his entire family to Britain, Severus made the modern-day city of York, in northern England, the capital of imperial governance.<sup>48</sup> While both he and his son Caracalla campaigned in the north, his other son, Geta, was surrounded by imperial advisors and effectively ruled Rome from one of its most northern provinces.<sup>49</sup> Even the lands that Romans would have still considered distant were impacted by Roman influence. Many forts, such as those at Carpow and Cramond, were established north of the Hadrian Wall. Rather than serving as a military staging group, Carpow was used as a Roman outpost, meant to patrol the surrounding areas. The soldiers stationed at the fort likely interacted heavily with the native inhabitants of the region.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the south of Britain had long felt the Roman presence, the previously desolate north had gone from a foreign frontier to a Roman capital in a matter of two years. Although the Severan Campaign would end in failure, and Rome was restored as the Imperial capital, this era left an integral mark on the history of Roman-Celtic Britain, exposing previously untapped areas to new Roman influences that would shape the region for centuries to come. Even as the last Roman ships departed the isles centuries later, their influence would remain in the Celtic language, British cities, and the permanent shifts in the economy of the former frontier.

## Conclusion

When Julius Caesar first stepped foot on British soil, he could have hardly imagined the implications his expedition would have. What followed his fateful journey were centuries of interactions between Romans and Celts. These interactions began with curiosity when Roman generals such as Julius Caesar witnessed the peculiarity of Celtic chariot warfare, evolving into animosity when Romans were faced with the Boudican revolt and confronted at fierce battles such as Mons Graupius,

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<sup>48</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Bk. 77, ch. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> N. Hodgson, 'The British Expedition of Septimus Severus,' *Britannia* 45 (2014), p. 49.

and finally, became more cooperative when the Roman Hadrian Wall facilitated increased trade and contact.

While it is easy to see both Roman and Celtic elements in British culture in the twenty-first century, whether it be the origins of the city of London or the Gallic languages in the Scottish Highlands, the historical processes by which that cultural evolution occurred have been partly obscured by a dearth of Celtic primary sources. However, extant sources are sufficient to establish that the Celtic-Roman interactions were a significant force in the ancient world, shaping British history through frontier trades that introduced new Roman goods and the adoption of Roman-based hierarchies that would go on to shape social life in medieval and modern Britain.

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