

# Unit 3

CS

## Roman Britain

The history of Britain up to 450 A.D.

Print version of the *Introduction to Culture Studies (UK & Ireland)* presentation on  
11 May 2017 (N.S.) / 28 April 2017 (O.S.)  
A.D. IV KAL. MAI. MMDCCCLXX A.V.C.

Robert Spence, Angewandte Sprachwissenschaft, Universität des Saarlandes

3.1



Figure 1: Way beyond Britain and way before Roman times: Sí an Bhrú (Newgrange).  
at Brú na Bóinne in County Meath, Ireland – constructed 3000–2500 B.C. (Source: shira  
/Wikipedia / CC2.5)

3.2

3.3

3.4

3.5

### Overview

- Physical advantages of Britain and Ireland
- Pre-Roman Britain
- Roman Britain
- Preview: Christianity in Britain

3.6

## Physical advantages of Britain and Ireland

### Physical advantages of Britain and Ireland

- very favourable climate (Gulf Stream) ... suitable for agriculture (Ireland: “the Emerald Isle”)

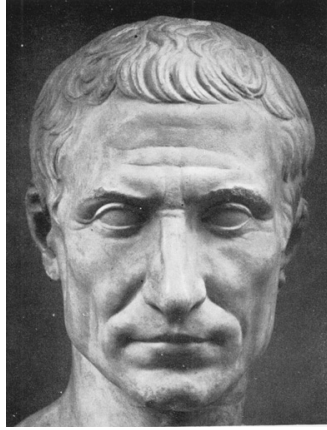


Figure 2: Gaius Julius Caesar, the leader of two military expeditions to Britain (55 and 54 BC). (Source: Wikipedia)



Figure 3: A bronze head of the Emperor Claudius, thought to have been removed from a statue at Camulodunum (Colchester) by British rebels during Queen Boudicca's [Boadicea's] revolt (AD 60). (Source: Wikipedia)

- minerals such as tin – important in the Bronze Age (there was interregional trade in the ancient world—and how would you cross the Atlantic during a period of glaciation?)
- no part was very far from the sea – later important in encouraging trade
- location in NW Europe – initially a geopolitical disadvantage, later (after AD 1453) an advantage
- the north of England: narrow, with mountains in the middle and fast-flowing streams (... under what conditions could this be an advantage?)

## Pre-Roman Britain

### Economy

#### Pre-Roman Britain (1): Economy

- palaeolithic: hunting and fishing after the glaciers melted
- neolithic: farming
  - initially in the south (chalk downs); <http://tinyurl.com/chalkdowns>
  - not in the east (marshy—“the Fens”);



Figure 4: Queen Boadicea by Thomas Thornycroft (1814-1885). Bronze. 1902. Westminster Bridge, London. (Photograph © 1999 by George P. Landow. [This photograph may be used without prior permission for any scholarly or educational purpose.]

- not in the river valleys: marshy);
- not in the north, not in the west (mountainous; most of the arable land was covered with thick forest)
- bronze age → iron age: typical development, but later than in the middle east

---

3.8

## Social organization

### Pre-Roman Britain (2): Social organization

- initially small nomadic tribal groups
- early settlements: roofed dwellings around the sides of holes dug in the earth; later: houses built on stilts on water
- later: farming villages (labour surplus needed to build e.g. Stonehenge)
- later: hilltop forts with surrounding geometrically laid-out farmland, suggesting an aristocratic system
- later: tribes had kings (or often queens) and capitals (towns), even coins

---

3.9

## Population

### Pre-Roman Britain (3): Population

(Difficulty of correlating what we know about three separate things: language families, cultural identity, genetics.)

The population of Pre-Roman Britain consisted of:

- an Iberian substrate (physical and cultural anthropology!)
  - some time after 5000 BC a lactose tolerance mutation spread westwards across Europe (population genetics!)
- a Celtic superstrate (the Celts seem to have been quite violent!)

- a more recent mixed Celtic-Germanic tribe in the south-east: the Belgae
  - one part of this tribe lived on the British (insular) side of the Channel
  - the other part lived on the Gallic (continental) side
  - ... and this was about to have interesting historical consequences.

---

3.10

## Roman Britain

### Overview of Roman Britain

#### Overview of Roman Britain

1. First Roman contact with Britain
2. Roman conquest of Britain
3. Life in Roman Britain
4. The end of Roman Britain
5. The legacy of Roman Britain

---

3.11

### First Roman contact with Britain

#### First Roman contact with Britain

- trading contacts between Britain and the continent had existed since neolithic times
- in the middle of the first century B.C. a tribe in south-east Britain, the Belgae, sent troops to help their kinsmen resist the Roman conquest of Gaul
- the Roman general Julius Caesar led two military expeditions to Britain (55 and 54 B.C.) against Cassivellaunus.
  - Julius Caesar was “a husband to every woman, and a wife to every man” (according to a song that his troops used to sing while they were on the march)

C. Iulius Caesar: *Commentarii de bello Gallico*

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>

- after Caesar’s expeditions, there continued to be economic and cultural contact (e.g. the title “Rex Brittonum”—in Latin!—on a British coin)

---

3.12

### Roman conquest of Britain

#### Roman conquest of Britain

- 43 A.D. the emperor Claudius ordered a full-scale Roman invasion
  - Claudius: initially chosen as a puppet emperor by the imperial bodyguard that murdered the previous emperor, Caligula (Claudius’ nephew)
- Rome annexed the region south of the Humber and east of the Severn to the Roman empire
- 61–63 A.D.: revolt by Boudicca (Boadicea), Queen of the Iceni.
- serious attempts were later made by Rome to conquer the rest of the island
- Cambria (Wales) proved easier to subdue than Caledonia (Scotland)
- Hibernia (Ireland) is not part of Britain and was never part of the Roman Empire; sometimes the Romans called it Scotia, because the Scots originally lived there.

---

3.13

## Life in Roman Britain

### Life in Roman Britain

1. South of the Humber, east of the Severn: a normal part of the Roman Empire.
2. North of the Humber: Roman towns and roads, but countryside not romanized
3. Wales: militarily subdued by 77 A.D.
4. Scottish lowlands: briefly under Roman control (80–98 A.D.; 142–184 A.D.)
5. Scottish highlands: twice invaded, never subdued.

3.14



Figure 5: Roman Britain 410 A.D.

[Click here for larger resolution](#)

3.15

### A shockingly brief interlude: Roman music

- Roman civilization lasted for a thousand years ...
- and left us precisely:
- 15 seconds of music
- and even *that* is now of doubtful authenticity (!)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4enIpgfUrk>

3.16

## The end of Roman Britain

### The end of Roman Britain

- in 285 A.D. the administration of the Empire was split into two halves: East and West
- from about 330 A.D. onwards, the main capital of the Roman Empire was Byzantium (Constantinople; later Istanbul)
- from 408 A.D., the port of Rome was besieged → widespread famine and starvation
- in 410 A.D., the city of Rome was briefly conquered
- from 410 A.D. onwards, Rome began to withdraw troops from Britain to defend Italy
- normal Roman procedure was to take soldiers from one part of the empire to maintain order in another
- but in Britain: the “Saxon Shore“ (Saxon mercenary soldiers guarding the coast against... Saxons)
- in 446 A.D. Rome refused to send any more troops
- between 447 and 597 we have no reports from travellers going to Britain: the Dark Ages, i.e. the coming of the English.

3.17

## The legacy of Roman Britain

### The legacy of Roman Britain

- location of London
- road system
- a few place names and vocabulary items
- not as much permanent influence as, e.g., on the continent: a case in point is the legal system
- climate unsuitable for a Roman lifestyle (?)
- Christianity
  - the official ‘state religion’ of the later Roman Empire
  - *pontifex maximus* – etymology?
    - \* Brückenbauer?
    - \* Pfadbahner?
  - (read Malinowski on the difference between magic and religion)

---

3.18

## Preview: Christianity in Britain

### Brief overview

#### Overview of Christianity in Britain

- C1: Christianity as underground movement
- C4: Christianity becomes official Roman religion
- C5: Anglo-Saxon Paganism
- C7: Roman Catholicism
- C16: Protestantism (‘established’ church)

---

3.19

### More detail

#### Preview: Christianity in Britain

- 1st century A.D.: first Christians in Britain → beginnings of Celtic Christianity (with own local saints and traditions)
- 313 A.D.: Edict of Milan: toleration of Christianity by Emperor Constantine
- 325 A.D.: Council of Nicea: establishment of doctrinal orthodoxy (Nicene Creed)
- 393 A.D.: all pagan cults banned; Christianity the sole official religion of Rome; persecution of pagans by Christians
- 597 A.D.: Pope Gregory sends Augustine to Canterbury in Kent to bring (back) (Roman) Christianity.
- 663 A.D. (not 664): Synod of Whitby: Roman Christianity preferred over the Celtic form of Christianity
- 1170 A.D.: Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered by four knights of King Henry II

---

3.20

#### Preview: Christianity in Britain

- 1172 A.D.: compromise of Avranches: Henry II reconciled with Rome after the murder of Thomas Beckett.
- 1529–1536: Henry VIII: Church of England breaks with Rome.
- 1688: Charles II is removed from the throne for being a Catholic; he is replaced by William and Mary of Orange.
- 1701: Act of Settlement regulates succession to the throne of England; the monarch must be Protestant.
- 2009: PM Gordon Brown proposes allowing English monarchs to marry Catholics:
- 2011: the Commonwealth agrees to the idea.

---

3.21