



Boudica Britannia. Rebel, War-leader and Queen by M. Aldhouse-Green

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Britannia, Vol. 40 (2009), pp. 370-371

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27793244>

Accessed: 26/10/2014 10:10

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This volume is admirable in its objectives and, in terms of creating statistics and identifying statistical patterns, it does deliver some of these aims. The appendices — a database of Romano-British tombstones — provide a useful resource, and the statistics generated — for example, how many men, women and children were commemorated, and how relationships between them were characterised — are often fascinating. However the volume also illustrates the pitfalls inherent in studying statistics and tombstone data and the need for careful and nuanced interpretations.

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Boudica Britannia. Rebel, War-leader and Queen. By M. Aldhouse-Green. Pearson Education, Harlow, 2006. Pp. 286, col. pls 25, figs 24, maps 5. Price: £21.99. ISBN 978 1 4058 1100 2.

The story of Boudica gifts any author with a plot-line rich in narrative causality, together with a set of characters and themes straight from a Jacobean tragedy or a nineteenth-century novel: a dead husband, a will, a wronged woman, abused children, villainous foreigners, a debt, lost land, slain innocents, bloody warfare, defeat and death. Even the pathetic fallacy is at hand, provided by Tacitus' blood-red sea and a ruined settlement formed by Thames mist. Little wonder the story has been worked and endlessly reworked by writers, composers and artists, and in recent years by many historians and archaeologists, each weaving his or her own particular subtext into the story.

In the Preface to her own contribution to the Boudica bookshelf, Aldhouse-Green defines the work as a 'quest-tale ... for an illusory figure', suggesting that we are in the realm of either fiction or at best faction, and she confirms this with 'it is precisely because we know so little that we can imagine so much', thereby excusing any personal agenda or excursions not rooted in historical text or archaeology. From the very first page it is easy to take issue with what she says — Boudica apparently led 'the earliest freedom movement recorded from Britain'. Where is the resistance against Caesar some hundred years earlier, and the years that Caratacus rallied the western tribes, let alone Venutius and the Brigantes, and the other unrecorded polities and individuals that contested the transformation of Britain into a Roman province? This is a warning both that the reader must expect sound-bites to be scattered throughout the text, as well as some inaccuracy and a shifting of perspective.

It is this blurring of detail that lets the book down, for these men do appear later in the body of the work, and both Cassivellaunus and Caratacus are later allowed to have led the British against the invading Romans. Caratacus is even called a 'freedom fighter' and credited with a 'freedom movement', which must make readers who are unsure of the time-line turn back to the Preface and then check the dates. He is called 'heroic', but he it seems does not earn A.-G.'s favour as he is 'less romantic' than Boudica. This same bias towards higher peaks, brighter colours and deeper emotions is exemplified in the section that defines the tribes of South-East Britain and briefly characterises them by their archaeological remains. Gold torcs and iron manacles are dealt with in some detail, but we are only offered a tantalising aside that fenland salt-winning may have contributed to the wealth of the Iceni. The mechanics of salt-winning and the economics of transmuting it into gold are not explained or even referenced, and a later aside that the salt industry may have been taken from the Iceni and gifted to the Corieltavi by the Romans is referenced only to a book review. This decidedly unromantic subject deserved to be expanded here and the literature does exist to support a closer look.

Throughout the book the reader is both informed and entertained but experiences an undertow of dissatisfaction at missed opportunities, patchy referencing, over-simplification, and the dissonance and inaccuracies arising from a use of cliché and emotive imagery that anchor the writing so firmly in today's politically-correct and media-driven culture. Once the eponymous heroine has appeared, she is swiftly established in the role of pro-active heroine by comparison with the treacherous and lecherous Cartimandua, and then equally swiftly she becomes a pawn of the druids. The interpretation of history in terms that will make it come alive for the students of today transforms the druids into 'spin-doctoring' political and religious agitators urging Boudica into what was bound to be a suicidal attack on the Romans. Even an acknowledgement that this image is also spin does not make it less dissatisfying, while its basis, the druidic belief in the transmigration of souls, is, like salt-winning, not taken up and expanded. There is no mention of the ideas of Plato, particularly that metempsychosis produced innate knowledge, that we merely have to be reminded of what we learned in a previous existence, which has

fascinating potential for our understanding of the power of rote-learning as used by the guardians of history, law and religious thought in a pre-literate society.

There is much to praise in this book, particularly its structure, breadth, depth of knowledge and educational value. The care taken to root the subject in its historical and social contexts is exemplary. The writing is clear and accessible, and the ideas it conveys can be thought-provoking. This is a valuable introduction to the subject and the sources, as well as an object lesson in how to alter perspective in order to enliven a familiar story. But ...

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Faces from the Past: A Study of Roman Face Pots from Italy and the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire. By G. Braithwaite. British Archaeological Reports, International Series S1651. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2007. Pp. xiii + 508, illus. Price: £46.00. ISBN 978 1 4073 0085 6.

Gillian Braithwaite's early research on face-pots appeared in *Britannia* 15 (1984). Restricting herself to the British material, she brought greater understanding to this distinctive but mysterious class of vessels. Face-pots beyond Britain's shores beckoned, and she expanded her geographical range for her PhD to encompass the western provinces, permitting the British pots to be re-examined in the context of continental finds. This BAR volume is the culmination of that mammoth study, presenting a typology and analysis of origin, distribution, use and identification of the faces.

The bulk of the book is taken up with the typology (chs 3–9). The problems of grouping such a variable body of material are apparent from the bewildering array of types, over 200, which are separated by body shape as well as facial details. The division of the typology by territory is sensible given the clear regional aspect of the forms. Some types did travel, though, and this has led to repetition. For example, a face-jar from Much Hadham, a standard product exported widely in the third and fourth centuries A.D., is FS type 10 when found in Belgium and RB type 31 in Britain. Vessels found in one region, but whose origins are suspected in another are also placed twice. The prospect of further duplication as new types emerge is perhaps why so many gaps have been left, rather unusually, within sequences (the British series ends with RB type 22 and resumes with RB type 28).

The remaining chapters take us into a discussion of distribution, meaning and function. B. compellingly argues that the army was responsible for the spread of the face-pot tradition, but acknowledges the divergent evidence (ch. 11). The presence of face-beakers in Raetia pre-dating the legionary presence there reminds us that face-pots could appear independently. In Britain, face-jars in Colchester may have been introduced by soldiers of Legion XX, which had left Neuss for Britain, although the absence of *phalli*, so popular on German vessels, points to a different origin or suggests that styles were not fixed and changed rapidly. B. makes a valiant attempt to link the spread of face-pots with veteran settlement and argues the case for Britain, attributing the concentration of face-pots in eastern England to veterans returning to areas in which they had been based as soldiers. The implication, however, is a peculiar pattern which limits face-pot use to former soldiers and their families. Soldiers on active duty seem to have done without these pots, while the possibility that use of such vessels became generalised across a wider population is played down.

Analysis of what the faces represented is more successful, though inevitably speculative (ch. 12). Perhaps the most convincingly identified are grotesque faces with hooked noses, goatee beards and occasional ear- and nose-rings that hark back to Etruscan head-pots depicting Charun, a terrifying underworld god. Masks with smiths' tools, found mainly in Britain, almost certainly refer to a smith-god and, given the reasonably strong association between the type and ironworking sites, were presumably used by metalworkers. Other face-pots are less easily identified, but drawing out the commonality across types and regions, the attributes of Bacchus, Sabazius, and Pan emerge more fully. The sense that the vessels served a religious or ritual use is supported by the range of features in which they were found (ch. 13). Deposition in graves was especially common across the Western Empire. The situation in Britain was different, since funerary use was rare. More usually the vessels were buried in other features, seemingly as apotropaic acts. B. reminds us of links with other vessels of possible ritual use. The spouts of RB type 1 recall triple vases, while the frilled rim of the Hadham face-jar (RB type 31) is reminiscent of tazze, suspected to be incense bowls. It is a shame that the numbers underpinning analysis of deposition are