



The Conquest of Britain: Power Dynamics of Rome Julio-Claudian Dynasty

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Abstract. Since transiting from the Roman Republic to Roman Empire, Rome experienced not only changes in the political system but also its expansion in Britain. After Caesar and Augustus, Rome had a short peace period, but then Claudius launched wars against Britain. This paper focuses on the Roman Conquest of Britain and its connection with Roman state power and aims to discuss how the journey of the conquest of Britain reflects the changing power of Rome during the times of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. The main discussion section is divided into four subsections: the war of Actium and the postponement of military, policy not to initiate military expansion, Claudius's conquest of Britain—solving the internal crisis and external aggression, and Boudicca's revolt. It is found that when Rome was internally stable and wealthy, the conquest of Britain went well, and vice versa. There is a positive correlation between the political state of the Empire and the degree of military expansion. This paper will not only provide a new perspective for the study of the Roman Empire, but also provide a historical reference for the study of the relationship between modern state power and war.

Keywords: Roman Empire · Roman Conquest of Britain

1 Introduction

As one of the world's most long-lived political entities, Rome is constantly studied. From the Iberian Peninsula to Mesopotamia, from Britain to Egypt, the empire has around 5 million square kilometer's territory by 117 A.D., surrounding the Mediterranean Sea [1]. While studies focus on imperial politics, the empire's economy, the life of emperors, etc., few studies put their efforts on Britain. In addition, most studies of Roman Britain ignore the connection between the Roman central government and the situation in Britain.

Despite the attention Roman Gaul and Roman Egypt get, the role of Britain in Roman history is less being researched as the center of discussion, not only do historians after the Rome have less focus on Britain, but historians in the reign of Roman rulers are barely mention specially. However, the Roman conquest of Britain was a feat that ran in the blood of several generations of rulers, reflecting not only the changes in Roman state power, but also the planning of the rulers of the time in their plans for the expansion of Europe as a whole [2–5].

From Julius Caesar's first try at invading Britain to Agricola's eventual conquest of Britain, the Roman Empire spent 139 years keeping Britain under its control. However, the empire was not always strong and stable, so did their situation in Britain.

This paper focuses on the Roman Conquest of Britain and its connection with Roman state power. Through analyzing primary and secondary sources, this study aims to discuss how the journey of the conquest of Britain reflects the changing power of Rome. The power of a country can be reflected through multiple dimensions, including the regime's stability, the political power of the central government, the safety of the emperor, the military strength, etc.

2 Overview of Roman Conquest of Britain

The conquest of Britain by Rome was a protracted battle that took several generations of rulers to finally achieve this expansion. Nevertheless, the idea of capturing Britain was not only conceived by the emperors of the empire, but also by Julius Caesar, the statesman of the Roman Republic. However, Caesar did not continue the incursions due to the ongoing Gaul War.

The map of the Roman Empire during the reign of Julius Caesar consisted of the Mediterranean coastal areas and the Gaul. According to the Roman historian, Tacitus, Britain was considered the northernmost place in the world, the edge of land [6]. Therefore, when victory in the War of Gaul was in sight after the conquest of Gaul, it made sense for Caesar to continue his conquests northward. In fact, one of the reasons emperors were keen on conquering Britannica is that conquering the world's edge is an honorable glory.

In 55 and 54 B.C., Caesar invaded Britain twice. But instead of taking control over Britain, he eventually retreated to mainland Europe. After much deliberation with the power struggle between himself and Pompey, Caesar gave up on continuing the invasion of Britain. After the death of Caesar, conquering Britain was viewed as even more glorious. Conquering Britannica not only represented ruling the whole world but also was a glory for inheriting Caesar's ambition.

Successive emperors adhered to Augustus's legacy of territoriality and focused on territorial duties. However, in 43 A.D., the plan to invade Britain was revived after meticulous preparation. Emperor Claudius invaded Britain and conquered areas near the sea (Southern England). In 70 CE, Brigantes (today's northern England) was conquered. In 75 CE, Southern Welsh was conquered. Agricola finally finished the conquest of Britain in 84 CE. Left with some land in northern England and Scotland, Roman finally took over almost the whole the Great Britain.

During the conquest, several incidents happened, dragging the empire from the final victory. In the following sections, these incidents will be further discussed to prove that the conquest of Britain was an indicator of the changes of Rome's state power.

3 Conquest of Britain and the Changes of ROME's State Power

3.1 The War of Actium and the Postpone of Military (32 B.C.–30 B.C.)

After Julius Caesar's death, the Actium War between Mark Antony and Caesar Augustus, also known as Octavian, began. At that time, Antony and Augustus were the two most

powerful leaders of the Roman Republic, each on his own side, forming two opposing forces.

Antony allied himself with Cleopatra, a female Egypt Pharaoh. The Roman senate didn't support Octavian to fight Antony until they realized Antony supported Cleopatra when Rome declared a war against her.

During the Actium War, two sides used almost all their power. More specifically, Octavian gathered almost 200,000 Roman legionaries. Antony and Cleopatra gathered 500 ships and 100,000 soldiers. Just in one single battle on September 2nd, 31 B.C., Antony used about 230 battleships while Octavian used about 400 ships [7]. Finally, Octavian won the war and earned the throne.

To repel foreign aggression, one must first secure domestic peace. In this situation of chaos and strife, Rome was so busy with the internal struggle for power that it consumed so much of its military strength that it could not afford to expand externally.

During the Actium War, the state power of Rome was so decayed. The country was divided into parts, and the legions were bonded to Egypt. If a powerful enemy had risen and attacked the republic during the civil war, it would not be able to resist. At such a low point of state power, Rome ceased the plan of invasion.

3.2 Policy Not to Initiate Military Expansion (50 B.C.–37 B.C.)

After the huge victory of the Actium War, Augustus successfully established the Roman Empire, transforming the state from a republic to an empire. Since then, Augustus started the preparation to expand the empire, conquering more lands around the Mediterranean Sea. In 34 B.C., 27 B.C., and 25 B.C., Augustus prepared several invasions of Britain, but all ended in failure.

At the end of Augustus' reign, he decided to stop military expansion and stay satisfied with the current borderline. Augustus' successors followed this non-expansionism policy and created a period of "Roman Peace" that lasted for about 2 centuries. Under the reign of Emperor Augustus and Emperor Tiberius, the Roman Empire postponed its military expansion to Britain.

A classic interpretation of this policy is that Rome had. Attained a satisfying borderline, especially having a border that gave them terrain benefits for defending against Germanians, like the Rhine River [8].

Though some may argue that this theory is not convincing enough, it still gives us a clue that Germania was a huge concern for the empire. The Roman Empire tried to conquer Germania as it did in Gaul but failed several times. In fact, "Barbarians" in Germania were continuous threats to the empire. The people of Germania constantly disturbed the empire, and they were seen as the "northern threat" that had been weakening Roman imperial power. Julius Caesar's conquest of Britain was cut off by his defeat in Germania. His two successors, Emperor Augustus and Emperor Tiberius, both fought in Germania on several occasions. By looking at the military activities of Emperor Augustus and Emperor Tiberius, we could have a glance at how concerning Germania was to the empire.

In 16 B.C., the Roman army was defeated along the Rhine River. Augustus went to the battlefield to take command, but by the time he arrived, the battle had been over [9]. It is believed that Augustus adopted a more aggressive policy toward Germania, as

Augustus prepared for three years in Gaul, establishing more legions and supply lines with the aim of attacking Germania. However, none of the subsequent military actions undertaken by the empire produced strategically beneficial results.

In 8–7 B.C., 4–6 A.D., and 10–11 A.D., Tiberius campaigned in Germania. In 6–9 A.D., Pannonia, a province near Germania was revoked and suppressed by Tiberius. In 9 A.D., in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, the Roman Empire lost three legions in Germania. This battle cost a great deal of the Roman Empire's military strength and money. It is noteworthy that although Vespasian fought in Britain before he became emperor, it was very rare to go to the front as a monarch to command a battle. This is enough to show how much of a threat Germania was to the Empire. During this period of "Roman Peace", the empire entered a phase of "defensive imperialism". Military activities outside the empire still existed, but most happened near the borderline. There were few military expansions. The development of defensive imperialism is a proof of weak military power, which is considered as the state power. If the empire had enough military power, they would conquer rich places like Mesopotamia or one of their biggest concern- Germania.

The revival of military expansion in Britain was preceded the other battlefields in Roman Empire. The emperor Claudius (10 B.C.–54 A.D.) ordered Vespasian (9 A.D.–79 A.D., later became an emperor) to invade Britain in 43 A.D. This action was seen as a succession of the plan by Caesar. Julius Caesar planned to conquer Britain and Germania. He failed militarily in Germania and didn't start the conquest of Britain.

3.3 CLAUDIUS'S CONQUEST OF BRITAIN SOLVED INTERNAL CRISIS AND EXTERNAL AGGRESSION (A.D. 41–A.D. 54)

By understanding Claudius' life and ascension to the throne, it becomes clear why military service was so important to Claudius.

Claudius was not a descendant of Caesar and Augustus. Secondly, he ascended to the throne as *Fuhrer* by accident and faced serious rebellion and murder from the very beginning of his succession. Claudius commanded only one battle, and it was a minor and insignificant one. Therefore, in order to be truly recognized, he had to build military success, win honor and consolidate his political position. During this period, Claudius did not adhere to Augustus's policy that no to extend the Roman Empire beyond its existing boundaries. Instead, "The Roman army began its transformation from a field force into a border garrison" [10].

At the same time, the Rhine garrison became very strong and already posed a danger, which gave Claudius a good opportunity to send troops to weaken the power of the Rhine garrison and conquer Britain (*Britannica*). During the times of Claudius, Rome's power grew tremendously, not only in terms of military expansion but also in terms of political success. Also, the abundant mineral resources were the material attractions for Romans [11]. Overall, the decision to conquer Britain was made with meticulous consideration from different aspects. This conquest was not only conducted to obtain more mineral resources and to alleviate external wars but was also a strategy used by Claudius to consolidate his leadership position. As mentioned before, conquering Britain means ruling the whole world. It is clear that the reason Claudius resumed the conquest of

Britain was to establish his reputation and restore the fame of the Roman Empire after a series of political events.

As Roman Empire started to expand its boundaries, Claudius launched the invasion of Britain in 43 A.D. Under the command of General Aulus Plautius and four legions: the Second Legion Augusta, the Ninth Legion Hispana, the Fourteenth Legion Gemina, and the Twentieth Legion Valeria, Britain was conquered by Roman Empire gradually. During this conquest, instead of leading the army at the very beginning, Claudius came to the frontline when the war was almost won. In addition, Claudius also exerted diplomacy with inducements to bring many Britain tribes into the fold. This process of conquest continued for a considerable period of time, and General Aulus Plautius became the first governor of Britain. By the death of Claudius in 54 A.D., the Roman Empire effectively controlled the southeastern part of Britain.

3.4 BOUDICCA'S REVOLT (61 A.D.)

According to Tacitus, sayings like "in battle, it is the braver who takes the spoil; as things stand with us, it is mostly cowards and shirkers who rob our homes, kidnap our children and conscript our men" were on the land of Great Britain [12], and when such words appeared around people in Britain, their desire for rebellion was aroused. Thus, in 61 A.D., Boudicca led a rebellion and sacked a Roman colonial city in southern Britain.

The rebellion in Britain never stopped. When Paulinus, the Roman general in Britain, was fighting on the Isle of Anglesey, Boudicca started the rebellion. Boudicca's rebellion is so important that almost every study on the Roman conquest of Britain mentions it. After Boudicca's rebellion, general Paulinus retreated from the Isle of Anglesey, suppressing the rebellion in the south. It is obvious to see the reason for her act of attack at this time was the low number of Roman troops (legionaries), which indicated that the empire did not have enough military power to defend regions already being conquered while the general was away on campaign, conquering other regions. In addition, efforts on assimilating and stabilizing Britain were not enough. In fact, unlike the Hellenization in Asia that happened along with Alexander the Great's conquest, assimilation in Britannica during the conquest was never a thing. Boudicca's Revolt demonstrates the instability within Britain at the time, which created the conditions for the subsequent Roman invasion. Roman's lack of sufficient military support gave Boudicca and her people opportunities to fight back. The general was dragged away from the frontier and battlefield due to unsatisfying state power.

4 Conclusions

Overall, Rome's power dynamics during the period of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty can be reflected through the conquest of Britain. When Rome has been internally stable and wealthy, the conquest of Britain has gone well, and vice versa.

The foundation of the country was not yet stable when it was first established. Therefore, Augustus' policy was to refrain from territorial expansion and to focus on domestic economic, defensive borderline, and political development. His successors also followed the same policy, until Claudius ordered to start the conquest of Britain. There

were multiple factors intertwined in this policy change, within the gradual strengthening of the country was the main one. In the course of the relationship between the Roman Empire and Britain, the one-way view that conquering Britain reflected Rome's Julio-Claudian Dynasty's power dynamics does not provide the whole picture. Future research can focus on examining military activities in other time periods of Rome, so that to develop a border understanding of the relationship between power dynamics and wars. For example, Emperor Vespasian also invaded Britain and took the Brigantes area during his reign. Emperor Vespasian was the first emperor of the Flavian dynasty. He took the emperor's position by starting another civil war. After emperor Nero's death, a vacuum of power appeared. Vespasian used his relations with political elites in the east and Roman senates to gain support. His army fought for him while he stayed in Egypt, his base. Finally, on 1st July, 69 A.D., Vespasian was named the emperor of the Roman Empire. Vettius Bolanus was the governor of Roman Britannica at that time, he did not start the conquest also because of the civil war, which led to weak imperial power. Because this civil war's impact was relatively small and Vespasian restored the economy soon after he became the emperor, the empire recovered fast. One year after Vespasian became an emperor, the Brigantes (northern England) were taken by the Roman army. In addition, examining whether the conquest of Britain was good for Rome could also be considered. In other words, if the expansion strengthened the imperial power, then the expansion was the right choice to make. If the expansion weakened the imperial power, then the conquest might result in the shift of throne, the bad performance of the empire's other battlefield, or an unsatisfying domestic economic state. The expansion can influence state power from multiple aspects: military, political, economic, sociocultural, and languages.

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