



Cassius Dio
Complete Works

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History of Rome (by Cassius Dio) on the 43-44 Britannia Campaign

... At the same time that these events were happening in the City Aulus Plautius, a senator of great renown, made a campaign against Britain. The cause was that a certain Bericus, who had been ejected from the island during a revolution, had persuaded Claudius to send a body of troops there.

This Plautius after he was made general had difficulty in leading his army beyond Gaul. The soldiers objected, on the ground that their operations were to take place outside the limits of the known world, and would not yield him obedience until the arrival of Narcissus, sent by Claudius, who mounted the tribunal of Plautius and tried to address them. This made them more irritated than ever and they would not allow the newcomer to say a word, but all suddenly shouted together the well-known phrase: "Ho! Ho! the Saturnalia!" (For at the festival of Saturn slaves celebrate the occasion by donning their masters' dress.)

After this they at once followed Plautius voluntarily, but their delay had brought the expedition late in the season. Three divisions were made, in order that they might not be hindered in advancing (as might happen to a single force), and some of them in their voyage across became discouraged because they were buffeted into a backward course, whereas others acquired confidence from the fact that a flash of light starting from the east shot across to the west, the direction in which they were sailing.

So they came to anchor on the shore of the island and found no one to oppose them. The Britons as a result of their inquiries had not expected that they would come and had therefore not assembled beforehand. Nor even at this time would they come into closer conflict with the invaders, but took refuge in the swamps and in the forests, hoping to exhaust their opponents in some other way, so that the latter as in the days of Julius Cæsar would sail back empty-handed.

Plautius accordingly had considerable trouble in searching for them. — They were not free and independent but were parcelled out among various kings. — When at last he did find them, he conquered first Caratacus and next Togodumnus, children of Cynobelinus, who was dead. After the flight of those kings he attached by treaty a portion of the Bodunni, ruled by a nation of the Catuellani. Leaving a garrison there he advanced farther.

On reaching a certain river, which the barbarians thought the Romans would not be able to cross without a bridge, — a conviction which led them to encamp in rather careless fashion on the opposite bank, — he sent ahead Celtæ who were accustomed to swim easily in full armor across the most turbulent streams. These fell unexpectedly upon the enemy, but instead of shooting at any of the men confined themselves to wounding the horses that drew their chariots and consequently in the confusion not even the mounted warriors could save themselves.

Plautius sent across also Flavius Vespasian, who afterward obtained the imperial office, and his brother Sabinus, a lieutenant of his. So they likewise got over the river in some way and killed numbers of the foe, who were not aware of their approach.

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The survivors, however, did not take to flight, and on the next day joined issue with them again. The two forces were rather evenly matched until Gnæus Hosidius Geta, at the risk of being captured, managed to conquer the barbarians in such a way that he received triumphal honors without having ever been consul.

Thence the Britons retired to the river Thames at a point near where it empties into the ocean and the latter's flood-tide forms a lake. This they crossed easily because they knew where the firm ground in this locality and the easy passages were; but the Romans in following them up came to grief at this spot.

However, when the Celtæ swam across again and some others had traversed a bridge a little way up stream, they assailed the barbarians from many sides at once and cut down large numbers of them. In pursuing the remainder incautiously they got into swamps from which it was not easy to make one's way out, and in this way lost many men.

Shortly after Togodumnus perished, but the Britons so far from yielding stood together all the more closely to avenge his death. Because of this fact and his previous mishap Plautius became alarmed, and instead of advancing farther proceeded to guard what he had already gained and sent for Claudius. He had been notified to do this in case he met with any particularly stubborn resistance, and a large reinforcement for the army, consisting partly of elephants, had been assembled in advance.

When the message reached him, Claudius entrusted domestic affairs (including the management of the soldiers) to his colleague Vitellius, whom he had caused to become consul like himself for the entire six months' period, and started himself on the expedition. He sailed down the river to Ostia, and from there followed the coast to Massilia.

Thence advancing partly by land and partly along the water courses he came to the ocean and crossed over to Britain, where he joined the legions that were waiting for him near the Thames. Taking charge of these he crossed the stream, and encountering the barbarians, who had gathered at his approach, he defeated them in a pitched battle and captured Camulodunum, the capital of Cynobelinus. Next he extended his authority over numerous tribes, in some cases by treaty, in others by force, and was frequently, contrary to precedent, saluted as imperator. The usual practice is that no single person may receive this title more than once from one and the same war.

He deprived those he conquered of their arms and assigned them to the attention of Plautius, bidding him to subjugate the regions that were left. Claudius himself now hastened back to Rome, sending ahead the news of the victory by his sons-in-law, Magnus and Silanus. The senate on learning of his achievement gave him the title of Britannicus and allowed him to celebrate a triumph. [A.D. 44 (a. u. 796)]

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They voted also that there should be an animal festival commemorating the event and that an arch bearing a trophy should be erected in the City and a second in Gaul, because it was from that district that he had set sail in crossing over to Britain. They bestowed on his son the same honorific title as upon him, so that Claudius was known in a way as Britannicus Proper. Messalina was granted the same privilege of front seats as Livia had enjoyed and also the use of the *carpentum*. These were the honors bestowed upon the imperial family.

Portions of Britain, then, were captured at this time in the manner described. After this, during the second consulship of Gaius Crispus and the first of Titus Statilius, Claudius came to Rome at the end of a six months' absence from the city (of which time he had spent only sixteen days in Britain) and celebrated his triumph. In this he followed the well-established precedents, even to the extent of ascending the steps of the Capitol on his knees, with his sons-in-law supporting him on each side.

- He granted to the senators taking part with him in the procession triumphal honors, and this not merely to the ex-consuls ... for he was accustomed to do that most lavishly on other occasions and with the slightest excuse.
- Upon Rufrius Pollio the prefect he bestowed an image and a seat in the senatorial body as often as he would enter that assembly with him. And to avoid having it thought that he was making any innovation, he declared that Augustus had done this in the case of a certain Valerius, a Ligurian.
- He also increased the dignity of Laco (formerly *praefectus vigilum* but now procurator of the Gauls) by this same mark of esteem and in addition by the honors belonging to ex-consuls.

Having finished this business he held the festival following the triumph and assumed for the occasion some of the consular authority. It took place in both the theatres at once. In the course of the spectacle he would frequently absent himself while others superintended it in his place. He had announced as many horse-races as could find place in a day, but they amounted to not more than ten altogether.

- For between the separate courses bears were slaughtered and athletes struggled.
- Boys sent for from Asia also executed the Pyrrhic dance.
- The performers in the theatre gave, with the consent of the senate, another festival likewise intended to commemorate the victory.

All this was done on account of the successes in Britain, and to the end that other nations might more readily capitulate it was voted that all the agreements which Claudius or the lieutenants representing him should make with any peoples should be binding, the same as if sanctioned by the senate and the people.

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