

**Miranda Aldhouse-Green.** *Boudica Britannia*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.  
xvii + 286 pp \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4058-1100-2.



**Reviewed by** Joseph Frechette

**Published on** H-War (November, 2007)

As a matter of fairness, it should be pointed out that this reviewer is not British and that reading *Boudica Britannia* often felt like an outsider looking in on a discussion of national myth and memory. An inhabitant of the United Kingdom, or indeed any area in which dramatic but ultimately vain resistance was offered in the face of eventual Roman conquest, may well have a far different emotional response. In fact, Miranda Aldhouse-Green intends this book for a British popular audience as she helpfully (and a bit redundantly) supplies certain basic facts, such as the location of Armenia (p. 74) and the definition of "prodigies" (p. 181). She also assumes that the reader has some previous knowledge of specifics about English geography.

That said, Aldhouse-Green provides a useful synthesis of current scholarship and an informative discussion for the uninitiated not only of Queen Boudica's revolt but of the relationship between Rome and Britain and its evolution from the first forays of Julius Caesar in 55 and 54 BC through AD 100. Certainly, Aldhouse-Green walks the reader neatly through Caesar's invasion, the

Claudian conquest, the revolt of the Iceni, and its aftermath. All the while, she pays due attention to the issues surrounding the narrative sources of Tacitus and Dio, as well as establishing, as far as possible given the archaeological evidence, the nature of the Britons facing off against the empire.

If there is a weakness here, it is that the author tends to include disparate pieces of evidence from wildly different contexts when attempting to illuminate a fairly specific period in immediate pre-conquest and post-conquest Britain. Obviously a discussion of preliterate Iron Age Britain requires certain allowances. However, on more than one occasion, and particularly in attempting to tease out the evidence for female empowerment in Iron Age Europe, Aldhouse-Green is determined to prove the adage that for the British, one hundred miles is a very long way, while for Americans, one hundred years is a very long time. Although female burials in what might have been a military context at the Roman settlement of Brougham in Cumbria, dating to AD 220-300 (pp. 94-95), are interesting in their own right and may

have much to indicate about Roman Britain in the third century, one wonders about their evidentiary value regarding the attitudes of essentially unromanized Britons two centuries earlier. Likewise, discussions of the body of a fifth century BC woman found in the Haraldskaer bog of Jutland (pp. 95-97); burials and grave goods of the third, fourth, and sixth centuries BC (pp. 97-101); and the fourth-century AD testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus regarding Gallic women in his own day (p. 102) are, at best, of questionable relevance.

Unfortunately, when the discussion moves beyond a straightforward narrative of ancient events into an attempt to elucidate Boudica's cultural echo through the ages and "iconicity," Aldhouse-Green tends to draw parallels that might best be described as awkward. Presumably, this was with an eye towards appealing to a popular audience, but more often than not simply misses the mark. This leads to puzzling anachronisms in which the author superimposes the vocabulary of current events on the ancient world and may mislead the unwary. She writes of the Romans as committing "war-crimes" (p. 200) and "genocide" (p. 212), which may be true by current standards but implies a modern system of international law and standards of behavior that simply did not exist in the ancient world. She also describes the Britons as engaged in a "freedom movement" against a "colonizing power" and "tycoons," which involved "spin-doctoring," "jihad," and "martyrdom" (pp. 145-149).

Using these sorts of emotionally charged modern terms may appeal to the lay reader, but is unlikely to help them appreciate the yawning differences between the ancient and modern worlds, the subtleties of the events and relations described, and the sometimes tenuous nature of the evidence. Likewise, comparisons of Roman annexation of former client-kingdoms to the current Anglo-American occupation of Iraq (p. 74) and the colony of Roman veterans at Colchester to Israeli

settlers in Gaza and the West Bank (p. 173) comes across as inflammatory and of limited relevance. In the final analysis, these discordant elements detract from the book's virtues of narrative and current bibliography.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

**Citation:** Joseph Frechette. Review of Aldhouse-Green, Miranda. *Boudica Britannia*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. November, 2007.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13824>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No  
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.