

CELTIC WOMEN IN CONTEXT: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON STEREOTYPES
AND GENDER ROLES OF ANCIENT CELTIC WOMEN.

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to use this space to acknowledge the women of ancient antiquity whose lives have been lost, overlooked, and taken out of context for centuries. I hope this study goes some way to honouring their stories.

I started this MA during the 2020 lockdown, when my son was just 1 year old. Over these past 4 years I have received nothing but patience and support from my husband, Nick. He's witnessed this dissertation form from what had the potential to be 'a lockdown hobby', through to it being a fully formed passion and commitment. For me, Nick took on the roles of therapist, childminder, chef, motivational speaker and life coach, all whilst sacrificing his own projects and time so that I could pursue this study. Thank you for it all.

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the stories and stereotypes of Celtic women of antiquity. Evidence of the behaviour and roles of these women is sparse, and when they are mentioned, their true nature has the potential to be shrouded in bias, leading to a possible misrepresentation. Classical authors, such as Tacitus, Dio and Caesar had the propensity to write about the Celts through a kaleidoscopic lens that featured xenophobia, sexism, and propaganda, creating an entertaining but often fragmentary image. This study looks at whether these perspectives have altered the way Celtic women have been portrayed over time. The stories of lesser known historical women such as Camma, Chiomara and Eponina are explored alongside the more popular accounts of Boudica and Cartimandua. These women are compared to their Roman and Greek, female counterparts to discover if there is any truth to the stereotype that suggests Celtic women had more freedom and were equal to their male kin in both strength and society.

There is a glamorisation of the Celts, and by proxy, Celtic women. This research aims to tend to their truth as much as possible, to show how ‘one stereotype cannot fit all’; that these women are nuanced and that we only disrespect them when we mould them to fit our own ideals.

Introduction

'In a situation of war and conquest, it is easy to depersonalise the people involved by making them appear vastly different, as focusing on any similarities and shared beliefs would only blur the rationale for invasion'.¹

From the rugged hills of ancient Gaul to the mysterious landscapes of Britannia, the Celts have long captivated the attention of historians, both ancient and modern. Despite extensive studies encompassing their art, archaeology, language, movement, and myth, interpretations remain divided, and thus the Celtic enigma continues. Over time, a glamorised view of the Celts has emerged, and they are positioned as 'charmingly primitive and exotic 'others''.² Koch notices that modern depictions of the Celts tend 'to ignore recent re-examination of the ancient and medieval literary descriptions',³ and whilst he makes this comment in relation to *Druidism*, the same literary neglect is applicable to studies of Celtic *women*. In the same way that modern Druidry is not an authentic replica of ancient Druidic practice, questions arise about whether modern perceptions of historic women have been shaped by the same tendency to overlook the broader context surrounding ancient literature. There is little written about female members of Celtic society in the annals of history, and their portrayal has often been veiled in layers of interpretation, misconception and propaganda, leading to a tapestry of stereotypes that portray them as formidable, warrior leaders, which often obscures their verisimilar stories. Nonetheless, we have extant accounts of prominent figures such as Boudica and Cartimandua, and the lesser known Eponina from the 1st Century AD, through to Camma, Chiomara and Onomaris from the 1st to 4th Centuries BC.

When dealing with the representation of female figures in antiquity:

'We need to be aware of the individual writer's relationship to the period he is treating (and it should go without saying that our sources are invariably

¹ Nicki Howarth, *Cartimandua: Queen Of The Brigantes* (Gloucester: The History Press, 2008), p.24.

² John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 1 A-Celti* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 500.

³ *Ibid.* p. 500.

male). We should also be sensitive to the influences at work on him and the prejudices to which he is prone'.⁴

Some courtesy must be given to classical writers insofar as, they too, are not documenting history with a unanimous perspective. Each author/historian will have his own bias dependent on his background and beliefs. However, '*Celtic women*' are both a) Celtic and b) women, and their lives are documented by people who were *neither* Celtic, *nor* women. As such, they are potentially prone to either xenophobic or sexist bias, possibly both. Thus, this study will examine the damaging consequences these biases may have had on women's history.

Situating them within their specific historical contexts aims to determine whether depictions are unique to culture or whether they form part of a broader gender rhetoric applicable to *all* women, irrespective of their cultural background. The questions that weave the upcoming chapters together is whether there is a disparity between ancient and modern representations, and whether the stereotype of powerful female leaders among the Celts mirrors the social reality of the period. Therefore, the research explores the broad historical descriptions of Celtic society(ies), as well as the sparse stories of women to identify any correlations between the two. To support this, a simultaneous investigation of Classical accounts of Roman and Greek women has been conducted in order to help discern whether it is *all* women who are subject to gender rhetoric, or whether Celtic women are the subject of both ancient and modern propaganda, because of their cultural identity.

There is a modern tendency to assume that these women had more freedom than those of Roman descent,⁵ yet scholars, such as Jean Markale and Philip Freeman do not often elaborate on what this 'freedom' is attributed to, be that financial, political, sexual, or all of the above. Or rather, they only explore one avenue of 'freedom' and neglect the rest.

⁴ Peter Keegan, 'Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina And Agrippina The Younger. Independent Women Of Power And The Gendered Rhetoric Of Roman History', *Ancient History Resources For Teachers*, 34.2 (2004), 99-148 (p. 132).

⁵ Heather Payne Savino, 'The Lives Of Ancient Celtic Women', *Celtic Learning Project* (2002), <<https://www.celtlearn.org/pdfs/women.pdf>> [accessed 16 May 2024].

Therefore this study seeks to contextualise these women within their historical milieu to discern whether their representation is accurate, or if their stories have been embellished or manipulated for ulterior motives.

Chapter One examines the possible origins of the stereotypical ‘savage’ and ‘powerful’ Celtic woman. Ancient perspectives of the ‘Celts’, in a broader sense, are presented so that representations of Celtic culture and gender can be compared, with the intention of discerning whether Classical treatment of women is different to that of their male counterparts. Classical accounts, such as those from Ammianus and Caesar, are examined in chronological order, starting with the latest records by Ammianus in the 4th century AD, tracing back to Aristotle in the 4th century BC. This approach has been undertaken to distinguish any influence each classical author may have drawn from their predecessors. It is here that the study begins to tentatively pull at parallels in Celtic and Roman societies, to explore whether *xenophobic* bias infiltrates the perception of Celtic women.

Chapter Two compares the stories of lesser known Celtic women of antiquity, such as Camma and Chiomara, with their Roman counterparts. These comparisons provide the opportunity to witness a potential overlap in the actions and behaviours of women from both cultures. This chapter questions whether certain behaviours can be attributed solely to cultural group, or whether *all* women of antiquity are subject to a *sexist* bias. By centering the stories of those who are underrepresented, this chapter provides valuable insights into how their portrayal has evolved over time and how this then has the potential to endorse a broader stereotypical image of Celtic women.

Research naturally progresses to the renowned women of Celtic history, and thus in Chapter Three, discussion is focused on the complex nuances of Boudica and Cartimandua. Extensive research has already been conducted on these multifaceted Queens, by scholars such as

Graham Webster, Nicki Howarth and Richard Hingley. However, a vast amount of research inevitably results in many polarising views. As a result, representations of Boudica and Cartimandua are diverse. This chapter offers a detailed comparison between the two women whilst also comparing them to Roman and Greek women of the same period. The purpose of this is to discover if their portrayals epitomise the ‘stereotypical Celtic woman’, or whether there is a nuance to these women that is overlooked due to a *xenophobic* and/or *sexist* bias from both ancient and modern authors alike.

The conclusion to this research contemplates whether the stereotype of the all-powerful, Celtic female warrior might be a falsity and considers the possibility that women of antiquity may have shared more similarities than previously thought.

This investigation uses the knowledge of Barry Cunliffe and John Koch, two prominent names in the field of Celtic studies; Cunliffe having extensively researched Celtic life via archaeology, whilst Koch has heavily focused on linguistics. Peter Berresford Ellis and Miranda Aldhouse Green, on the other hand, have conducted comprehensive research into the lives of Celtic women, both historical and mythological, by focusing on myth, folklore, Druidism and spirituality. Then, there are studies, such as those by Lindsay Allason-Jones, Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant, who have explored the life of Greek and Roman women via ancient manuscripts, inscriptions and poetry. Yet, it has been difficult to find many scholars who merge these worlds and approaches. This is problematic insofar as it reinforces the notion that Celtic and Roman society were entirely different, and as such, the treatment of women from modern and ancient historians is shaped by this narrative. Despite recent research being scant, enquiry has led to the works of Peter Keegan and Anna McCullough, two academics who have started to interweave these narratives by looking at the similarities between Celtic and Roman women’s behaviour. Whilst it is impossible for any one person to be an expert in all of these fields, this study recognises that limitation and as such, is

informed by the above works in an attempt to bridge the gap within existing studies to provide further theory for Celtic Studies as a whole by interconnecting these fragmentary pieces of history. This aims to provide a more plausible, nuanced understanding of the lives, roles and behaviours of the women of the Celts.

For the purposes of this study ‘Celtic’ is attributed to those places where Celtic languages are known to have been spoken. This is due to the convincing argument put forward by John Koch who states, ‘language is arguably the most scientific, measurable, and generally tractable index of Celticity’.⁶

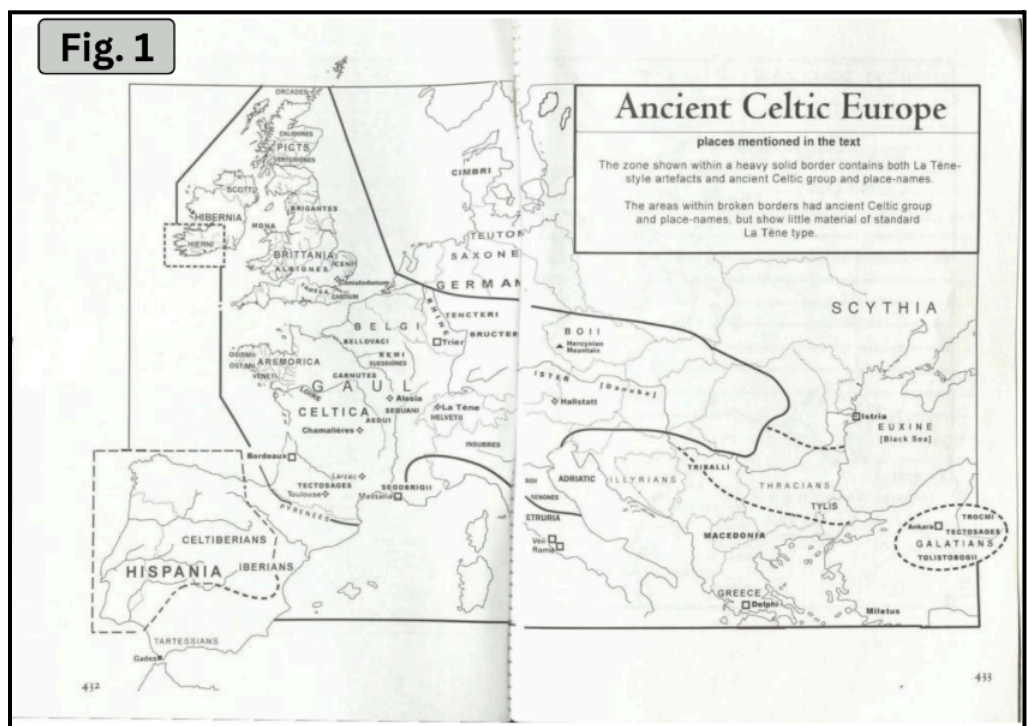


Figure 1 (above) shows the areas in which these languages were spoken. As such, the terms ‘Gauls’ and ‘Celts’ overlap, and both will be used throughout this study when explicit reference to them in this way has been made by ancient sources.

⁶ John T. Koch, ‘Celtic From The West Meets Linguistics And Genetics’, in *Exploring Celtic Origins*, ed. by Barry Cunliffe and John T. Koch (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), pp. 19-37 (p. 19).

⁷ John T. Koch, *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources For Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales* (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2003), p. 432-433.

Chapter 1: She swells her neck and gnashes her teeth.

Stereotypes are born from an inability to perceive a person as an individual.⁸ We group people together and from that categorisation form opinions of the group as a whole, and thus anyone falling into that group becomes adorned with the stereotype that has been formed. We can ponder whether stereotypes adapt to ever evolving groups of people or remain an unchanged baton for the successor to carry forward, none more so than in the instance of the Celts. The intention of this chapter is to see whether these representations of the broader Celtic society(ies) have been imposed onto Celtic women. To do this, we must first look at how the Celts, in general, have been depicted in both ancient and modern literature. Modern representations of the Celts are based on what we know historically by those who were literate enough to document their existence. The problem that arises is that the Celts did not document their own version of history, and so we are left with a unilateral perspective of them through the eyes of the societies and cultures *observing* them. Likewise, with regard to Celtic women, we are only shown a partial view into their world, roles and behaviours by those who were *not* women, since even amongst Roman and Greek peoples, it was not common for women to be literate.⁹ However, this is not to say that an internal view would have been more accurate. For example, Roman perspectives of their own society were biased, so should the Celts have documented their own existence, their accounts would likely have been subjective and shaped by their own cultural perspectives too.

The birthing of the stereotype of the Celts falls into what David Hamilton terms the ‘sociocultural approach’, which ‘focuses on a variety of means by which intergroup beliefs and attitudes are acquired and maintained through social learning and social

⁸ David L. Hamilton and Jeffrey W. Sherman, ‘Stereotypes’, in *Handbook Of Social Cognition Vol 2: Applications* ed. by Robert S. Wyer and Thomas K. Srull (Psychology Press: London, 1994), p. 3.

⁹ Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women’s Life In Greece And Rome: A Source Book In Translation*, 4th edn. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), p. xxxi.

reinforcements'.¹⁰ Thus, classical authors, such as Posidonius and Caesar, who documented their time spent in the company of the Gauls, are able to pass on their own social understanding of them, to others, and the stereotype becomes one that is deeply imbedded into what we know of Celtic culture. This sociocultural approach over time becomes what Hamilton calls the 'cognitive approach', whereby the stereotype becomes a belief system.¹¹ This is evidenced through the comparison of classical and modern portrayals of Celtic society, where the primary depiction is that 'the Celts believed that women could be strong leaders' with 'fearless attitudes' and 'brutal battle skills'.¹²

Hamilton confidently asserts that in viewing people not as individuals but as part of their wider group identity 'captures important elements of social structure and social life...categorising others into groups simply reflects social reality',¹³ but to what group does this truth belong? There have been centuries worth of debates regarding who comprised a Celtic society. Caesar, for example, states that the *Galli* are called *Celtae* in their own tongue,¹⁴ and over 2000 years later, scholars, such as Barry Cunliffe are still arguing whether 'all *Galli* regarded themselves as Celts' at all.¹⁵ In any instance, we must respect that the Celts, and their society(ies), are split into multiple tribes that cover much of ancient Europe and Britain. However, it remains questionable how much classical writers were trying to document the social reality of Celtic ethnicity, and how much was exaggerated for

¹⁰ David L. Hamilton and Jeffrey W. Sherman, 'Stereotypes', p. 2.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹² Kate Pankhurst, *Fantastically Great Women Who Made History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p.5.

¹³ David L. Hamilton and Jeffrey W. Sherman, 'Stereotypes', p. 4.

¹⁴ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars* (1.1).

¹⁵ Barry Cunliffe, *The Celts: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 10. See also Timothy Champion, 'Power, Politics And Status', in *The Celtic World*, ed. by Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge: 1995), p. 88, where he states that the term 'Celt' was given by 'outsiders' including Greek geographers and Roman historians who had their own perceptions of who the Celts were. Malcolm Chapman's book *The Celts: The Construction Of A Myth* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1992) also explores the theory that the term 'Celt' was imposed on a broad group of people spanning many continents, given by 'outsiders' – thus, people who were not Celtic themselves. This is a well discussed debate that this study does not have the time to give attention to in great detail, but for opposing views, one might wish to look to the work of John Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths And Inventions* (Gloucester: Tempus Publishing, 2003).

propagandistic purposes, as David Rankin identifies, Caesar's 'purpose was to dominate Gaul and exploit it for his own purposes, not to comprehend Celtic society'.¹⁶ In the instance of the Celts, it has evidently been very easy to create narratives that support the belief that *all* Celts were war minded, 'hard-drinking and belligerent people'¹⁷ based on a handful of classical accounts that testify this, such as Ammianus Marcellinus, who states they have an 'overbearing insolence'¹⁸ and Cato who says the Gallic people 'pursue two things industriously: the art of war and clever talk'.¹⁹ With little evidence to the contrary, modern scholars, historians and archaeologists continue to feed into this dogma, seemingly because this is the only justifiable interpretation because of *some* evidence that it was 'true' over two millennia ago.

Timothy Champion states, 'it is clear that categories of male and female were well established'²⁰ but his argument here is that this alone gives us very little knowledge about Celtic societies. In fact, women are so infrequently mentioned within the classical texts, that the 'traditional' stereotypes we have about the roles and behaviour of Celtic women are based purely on a few well known portrayals, such as that of Boudica and Cartimandua. Therefore, it could be considered that the representation of Celtic women is centred around a general Celtic stereotype and less about their specific gender.

Attempts to find a unanimous, Classical representation of Celtic women, despite documented evidence of this being scanty, is not that difficult given that these representations are so intricately woven into a stereotypical Celtic milieu. Consequently, a chronological order of historical accounts of the infrequent mentions of these women will be given, starting with the

¹⁶ David Rankin, 'The Celts Through Classical Eyes', in *The Celtic World*, ed. by Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21-33 (p. 29).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.23.

¹⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman Antiquities: Book XV*, Vol. 1, (12.1).

¹⁹ Enrica Sciarrino, 'Putting Cato The Censor's 'Origines' In Its Place', *Classical Antiquity*, 23.2 (2004), 323-357 (p. 345).

²⁰ Timothy Champion, 'Power, Politics And Status', in *The Celtic World*, ed. by Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge: 1995), p. 89.

latest records from Ammianus, working backwards to determine whether each successor was influenced by his predecessor's views. Ammianus states:

‘A whole band of foreigners will be unable to cope with one of them [Gauls] in a fight, if he calls in his wife, stronger than he by far and with flashing eyes; least of all when she swells her neck and gnashes her teeth, and poisoning her huge white arms, proceeds to rain punches mingled with kicks, like shots discharged by the twisted cords of a catapult. The voices of most of them are formidable and threatening, alike when they are good-natured or angry’.²¹

Ammianus wrote in the 4th Century AD, approximately 250 years after Boudica's revolt, and over three centuries after Caesar's Gallic war. As such, there are likely layers of propaganda that must be stripped away to determine if there is any truth to his claims. Ammianus has made it clear throughout his writings that he tries to honour the truth: ‘So far as I could investigate the truth, I have, after putting the various events in clear order, related what I myself was allowed to witness in the course of my life, or to learn by meticulous questioning of those directly concerned’.²² Thus, the information he gives us is a regurgitation from a line of predecessors that he, frankly, would not know was true or otherwise. Ammianus revered the works of Tacitus (an equally questionable source of reliable information) whom he frequently imitated.²³ This personal subjectivity should make readers dubious of Ammianus' own work.

In the passage above, he portrays Celtic women as being stronger warriors than their male counterparts, and the almost poetic description of them having ‘flashing eyes’, ‘gnashing teeth’ and ‘swelling necks’ gives a wild and animalistic quality to them, as if in some instance, at least in combat, women shapeshift and morph into formidable, feral creatures.

Benjamin Issac's remark on Ammianus' portrayal of the ‘Gallic Wife’ appears fitting, as he

²¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman Antiquities: Book XV*, Vol 1, (12.1).

²² Ibid. (1.1).

²³ J. C. Rolfe, ‘The Life Of Ammianus’ in *History: Books 14-19*, Vol 1, ed. by Ammianus Marcellinus, trans. by J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1935), via https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Ammian/Introduction*.html [accessed 31 January 2024] p. xvii.

posits that the depiction resembles a 'caricature,' akin to something from a comic strip 'rather than from real life'.²⁴ Though Isaac does not go into further detail about how other Gallic women are portrayed, we know that it is probable Ammianus' accounts are replicated information, implying that other portrayals of women of the same era are likely exaggerated. In the works of Cassius Dio, for example, (some 150 years prior to Ammianus) he writes of Boudica as being 'tall in stature [and] in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh'.²⁵ It is easy to be sceptical of such an image given that this is the *only* description we have of her, and it is written by a man who was not even conceived during her reign. Cassius Dio was born no less than 90 years *after* Boudica's downfall, so again, we must question where this bestial image of Celtic women comes from, especially if Cassius had not witnessed this behaviour or appearance himself. For this, we must look to his predecessor, Tacitus. Whilst Tacitus, also, did not have firsthand experience of the Roman conquest of Britain, his father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, did. Agricola was a Roman Politician and General who undoubtedly would have divulged stories of the conquest to Tacitus and may even have had other written testimonies of the wars that have since been lost or destroyed. How much these stories were elaborated for theatrical enjoyment or even for motivation is unknown, but we can at least be certain that Tacitus had direct information from a source who had witnessed the events that unfolded in Britain and perhaps how women were involved. It is from Tacitus that we get the infamous archetype of the untamed and wild Celtic woman, who 'in the style of Furies, in robes of deathly black and with dishevelled hair [brandish] their torches, while a circle of Druids lift their hands to heaven and shower imprecations'.²⁶ This fantastical scene invokes mythological images of underworld creatures coming to life as the Druids speak these incomprehensible curses,

²⁴ Benjamin Isaac, 'Gauls', in *The Invention Of Racism In Classical Antiquity*, ed. by Benjamin Isaac (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 411-426 (p. 425).

²⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Epitome Of Book LXII*, Vol. VIII, (2.1).

²⁶ Tacitus, *Annals: Book XIV*, vol. V, (30.1).

again, depicting Celtic women as not wholly human, but rather as being a hybrid creature that inflicts terror and violence. Prior to Tacitus, and whilst not directly referring to women, Diodorus Siculus describes the Gauls as ‘Satyrs and Pans’,²⁷ both of which are mythological, woodland dwelling Gods. These descriptors embellish the Celts with this otherworldly, fearful quality that amplifies their strength and ferocity, whilst subtly flaunting the bravery of Roman soldiers, for only they are brave enough to go to war with a God. What Diodorus does say of Gaulish women is that they are ‘not only like the men in their great stature but they are a match for them in courage as well’.²⁸ To make a comparison between the Gaulish women and the men which he called ‘satyrs’, and to name them as equal, continues to endow women with these eerie and fearsome qualities. However, it demonstrates that these qualities are not exclusively attributed to women.

The classical accounts of war make for wonderful stories that in turn portray the Roman, and similarly the Greeks, to be an advanced and sophisticated society, who even in the throes of terror invoked by the Celts, show utmost courage. This can be seen clearly in Plutarch’s comments on Marius’ battle with the Galloscythian tribes: the Teutones, Cimbri and Ambrones.²⁹ Plutarch claims that Marius bid his soldiers to ‘observe the enemy’ so as to ‘accustom them not to fear their shape or dread their cries, which were altogether strange and ferocious’.³⁰ Use of the word ‘strange’ again denoting ‘different’: the Gauls were different to the Romans, and this is how the stereotype was born in the first instance. Barry Cunliffe states that ‘in Roman literature Celts were presented as ‘different from us’’,³¹ though as we have seen, the scope of that difference may, or may not have been vastly exaggerated. However, in the process of asking his legions to witness the behaviour of these tribes,

²⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *Library Of History: Book V*, Vol. III, (28.1).

²⁸ Ibid. (31.2).

²⁹ Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives: The Life Of Marius*, Vol. IX, (11.4).

³⁰ Ibid. (16.2).

³¹ Barry Cunliffe, ‘Setting The Scene’, in *Exploring Celtic Origins*, ed. by Barry Cunliffe and John T. Koch (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), pp. 1-17 (p. 2).

Plutarch testifies to their humanness, and thus the metamorphosing of Gauls into otherworldly, beast-like creatures, is halted, at least temporarily so as to instil fortitude into his troops.

The inclusion of women in warfare is a major difference between these cultures that certainly would have made the Celtic women appear more feral, especially if in a Greek and Roman society, women were not seen behaving in such a way. It was traditional that Roman women ‘were excluded from military and political spheres’³² and had very strict rules to adhere to, including restraining from extravagance, not visiting other women often, not going out for meals, not engaging in worship, and that she must be neat and clean the home every night, she must feed her husband and have a pantry full of food for the servants.³³ These rules are found within Cato the Elder’s work on agriculture, which on reflection, seems a peculiar place to list these societal expectations for women, especially since it is unlikely that any agricultural labourers of the period were literate. Still, this small, but detailed, set of rules for women instead becomes a list for men to hold women accountable to; a rule book for men to ensure their wives were domesticated well. From this, it becomes evident that the societal norms for Roman women were recorded in Classical antiquity. It is important to acknowledge their documentation, especially since no parallel rules for Celtic women exist. The only people we have documenting Celtic society are the Romans and Greeks. Thus, it becomes evident that they held Celtic women to their own ideologies, regardless of whether these accurately reflected Celtic society.

It is now that the works of Caesar should also be examined. Whilst his accounts may have been elaborated for propagandistic purposes, it would be foolish to assume they exclude some

³² Vanessa Collingridge, *Boudica* (London: Ebury Press, 2006), p. 28.

³³ Cato the Elder, *De Agri Cultura*, (143.1), trans. by W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1934), via https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cato/De_Agricoltura/J*.html [accessed 1 February 2024] p. 125.

reality of the people he was trying to domineer. Caesar writes seldom of women, but when he does, his accounts for the most part appear to be simple and factual. For instance, there is no fictionalisation of Celtic women nor any mythopoeic influence on their appearance and behaviour. He writes that:

‘Husbands have power of life and death over their wives as well as over their children: and when the father of a family...has died, his relations assemble, and, if the circumstances of his death are suspicious, hold an investigation upon the wives in the manner adopted toward slaves; and, if proof be obtained, put them to severe torture, and kill them’.³⁴

He also writes of how men chose their wives, such as in the instance of Dumnorix, Celtic chieftain of the Aedui tribe, who to ‘strengthen his influence, gave his mother in marriage among the Bituriges to a man most noble and influential there’.³⁵ The only physical description he gives of the Celts are those on the Isle of Britain, who ‘dye themselves with woad, which occasions a bluish colour, and thereby have a more terrible appearance in fight’.³⁶ To decipher truth from rhetoric when reading Caesar’s accounts, we must question what he stands to gain. In the instance of disclosing information about male control over the life or death of their wives, he benefits very little. If anything, he highlights the societal similarities between the roles and attitudes towards women from both the Celts and the Romans, especially since Roman marriage involved the conditions of *manus*. *Manus* was ‘the power a husband had over his wife’, whereby a Roman woman’s father would be exchanged for her new husband who then becomes her legal guardian.³⁷ Similarly, reporting that Dumnorix chose his new step-father as a tactical movement to support his own cause, does little to strengthen Caesar’s own character or advance his position. In actuality, despite instances of elaboration in his works, he represents Celtic society as a whole in such a way that does not belittle or degrade them. Rather, he highlights the differences and similarities

³⁴ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, (6.19).

³⁵ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, (1.18).

³⁶ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, (5.19).

³⁷ Susan E. Looper-Friedman, ‘The Decline Of Manus-Marriage In Rome’, *Tijdschrift Voor Rechtsgeschiedenis*, 55 (1987), 281-296 (p.281).

between Roman and Celtic cultures, focusing more on societal values and roles rather than explicitly addressing gender distinctions. Further discussion of these similarities in relation to women will be had in the following chapter.

Other evidence from the same era aligns with Caesar's portrayal of Gaulish values, as demonstrated by a 2nd Century BC statue aptly named *The Suicidal Gaul with Wife*. This statue is known to be a Roman replica of a Greek bronze statue that 'was dedicated by King Attalus to celebrate a series of victories over the Gauls who had attacked the Pergamene state'.³⁸ David Rankin suggests that the statue depicts a Gaulish man who is about to commit suicide after he has just killed his wife, 'we presume, so that she may avoid capture and defilement'.³⁹ This interpretation aligns with Caesar's descriptions, emphasising the perceived authority of the husband over his wife's fate. Rankin suggests that this is a well-meaning gesture, that death would be better than Roman capture. However, it does not align with later stereotypes depicting Celtic women as both frenzied and powerful leaders. The statue provides no clarity on whether the woman was murdered against her will or had agency in the matter. Contrarily, Iain Ferris comments that the wife appears 'beyond life [and that] her threatening wildness has been extinguished'.⁴⁰ Ferris' perspective reinforces the stereotypical 'wild woman' archetype described by Tacitus, however the statue lacks evidence to support that she ever engaged in battle (for it looks like she was robbed of this opportunity), nor that she was threatening or wild.

³⁸ Glenys Lloyd-Morgan, 'Appearance, Life And Leisure', in *The Celtic World*, ed. by Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge: 1995), pp. 95-120 (p. 96).

³⁹ David Rankin, 'The Celts Through Classical Eyes', p. 21.

⁴⁰ Iain Ferris, 'The Enemy Without, The Enemy Within: More Thoughts On Images Of Barbarians In Greek And Roman Art', in *TRAC 96: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference Sheffield 1996*, ed. by K. Meadows, C. Lemke, and J. Heron, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), pp. 22-28 (p. 23).



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In any instance, both of these views appear to forget that this statue was crafted after a victorious defeat of the Gauls, and as such, the portrayal of them is likely to be biased or skewed in favour of depicting them as a defeated, weaker people.

The earlier accounts of Celtic women seem to reveal more about their societal behaviour, and their portrayal as feral warriors is absent. For example, Aristotle's observations in the 4th Century BC highlight the unusual influence of Celtic women, challenging conventional expectations tied to sexual charm, for he states that the Celts were 'under the sway' of their

⁴¹ Museo Nazionale Romano, *Ludovisi Gaul (Galatian Suicide)*, [photograph of statue], Palazzo Altemps, Rome (2020) <https://museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it/en/palazzo-altemps/the-boncompagni-ludovisi-collection/#> [accessed 08 February 2024].

women, which he found unusual given that the men ‘have openly held in honour passionate friendship between males’.⁴² This emphasises the distinctiveness of Celtic women's impact, suggesting a remarkable quality in their ability to ‘sway’ men without relying on traditional Greek and Roman virtues like virginity and chastity. In Aristotle's succinct commentary on Celtic women, his perplexion inadvertently praises their honour and ability to influence.

Whilst this may have been baffling to Aristotle, it highlights two possibilities: first, that social hierarchy did not revolve around sexuality, and second, that women's role in childbirth as opposed to being products of purely pleasure, elevated their status and influence in society, making them significant contributors to governance and potentially even participants in war. While it may be an idealised perspective, it is not entirely implausible, considering that the capacity of women to give life might be seen as them serving as gateways to other worlds. For example, it is common knowledge that *by* the 1st Century AD some Gaulish and Celto-Germanic women were known for being *uidla* (seers), priestesses and prophetesses, such as Pomponius Mela's account of the women on the Isle of Sena, whom he claims:

‘Belong to a Gallic divinity and is famous for its Oracle... They call the priestesses *Gallizena* and think that because they have been endowed with unique powers, they stir up the seas and winds by their magic charms, that they turn into whatever animals they want, that they cure what is incurable among other peoples, [and] that they know and predict the future’.⁴³

The Celtic women of the 4th Century BC contrast to Aristotle's understanding and prevailing Greek norms of the time. Despite existing within patriarchal structures, these women emerge as intellectually capable and seemingly ‘equal’ figures within Celtic culture, challenging Greco-Roman societal expectations. The transition over three centuries from Aristotle's commentary to Mela's insights into the Priestesses of Sena in the 1st Century AD, further emphasise the transformation of these ostensibly ordinary women, into mystical,

⁴² Aristotle, *Politics*, (2.1269.20).

⁴³ Pomponius Mela, *Pomponius Mela's Description Of The World*, trans. by Frank E. Romer (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1988), p. 115.

shape-shifting figures. This evolution reflects a complex portrayal of Celtic women over time, consistent with other Classical portrayals during the same time period. It raises the question of whether these stereotypes are attributed specifically to women or to the Celtic people as a whole.

It is essential to contextualise Classical views of women to see how these opinions have been influenced, adapted and changed with time. For example, Aristotle might have known of figures like Onomaris, a leader from the 4th Century BC often depicted as a peaceful but determined figure seeking safe land for her tribe.⁴⁴ Her leadership could well have contributed to shaping Aristotle's accounts of Celtic women, potentially influencing the perception that *all* women were leaders within Celtic society. However, given the general omission of Celtic women from historical records, it is challenging to definitively assert the prevalence of female leaders within every Celtic tribe. If there were more female leaders, the novelty and absurdity of this undoubtedly would have caught the attention of those literate enough to document their existence. This alone exposes the caution needed when interpreting historical perspectives of women within their societal context, given that it appears that when one woman assumes a particular role or characteristic, her actions and attributes become emblematic, potentially influencing the perception, and creating a fictional stereotype, for *all* women.

Philip Freeman posits that Onomaris is the first in a 'long list of Celtic women who would cross the stage of history',⁴⁵ however identifying who would be on this list to make it 'long', is unclear. Despite the likelihood that women constituted a substantial portion of the Celtic population over the 800 years from Aristotle's commentary on the Celts to Ammianus' exaggerated descriptions, historical information pertaining to the lives of these purportedly 'many' well known women, is scant. In contrast to Freeman, Miranda Green's research shows

⁴⁴ Philip Freeman, *The Philosopher And The Druids: A Journey Among The Ancient Celts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 115.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 116.

that in Classical sources many Gaulish leaders are mentioned ‘but women are not among them’.⁴⁶ In Britain, the names of many *male* Celtic leaders are also absent from historical accounts, thus leading us to question whether the mention of Cartimandua and Boudica are such because they *were* women. Both could be exceptions to the norm of the time, leading to an infatuation with the idea that Celtic women were powerful leaders, which has since become distorted through a modern lens. Green also poses the possibility that the women rulers who *are* documented have become equated with primitiveness, given the social prominence of Iron Age women, and the deliberate image-projection of them as a primitive stereotype.⁴⁷

This illustrates how the stereotype of Celtic women evolved over time, transitioning from being seen as ordinary women who challenged Roman and Greek societal norms, to becoming wild, almost mythological beings. This may be how modern academics argue that the presence of female leaders in mythology means that powerful women *must* have existed in some reality, such as Jean Markale, who is committed to the idea that we ‘have to refer to Celtic legends about women...because legends hand down the realities of a past in a symbolic fashion’.⁴⁸ So much caution needs to be given when making such a bold claim, especially since we do not have any evidence of the origination of such myths. For instance, the powerful, shapeshifting women we see in mythological stories, such as *Blodeuwedd*, may well have formed from Ammianus’ impiety towards Gaulish wives, or Tacitus’ description of the raging women on the Isle of Mona, which would be an overexaggerated and fallacious representation of women at the time. Although myths can offer insights into ancient societal beliefs, they should not be considered reliable historical information. Myths served as orally told, entertaining stories, shaped by very specific environments and contexts, and as such

⁴⁶ Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warrior, Virgins And Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 22-24.

⁴⁸ Jean Markale, *Women Of The Celts*, trans. by A. Mygind, C. Hauch and P. Henry (London: Gordon Cremonesi Publishers, 1975), p. 17.

were constantly subject to change. The stories we have now may bear little resemblance to their original narratives, having undergone many alterations in their journey through history. In agreement with Miranda Green, there is very little evidence that the mythological world and the human are reflections of one another and that ‘even if there is evidence for a few powerful female leaders within a particular culture, that need not correlate with the position of women in general’.⁴⁹

Perhaps if attention were given to the gap in historical discourse regarding Celtic women, that is to say, what is *not* said about them, we could gather a more pragmatic understanding of their daily existence beyond the romanticised portrayals as intrepid and indomitable leaders cast on them. Classical accounts often neglect the mundane aspects of society, and as such daily chores, emotional expression, child-rearing practices, and interactions with other women went unnoticed or were not valued as necessary information. While some references, such as Strabo's acknowledgment of the ‘excellence of the [Celtic] women in regard to the bearing and nursing of children’⁵⁰ provide glimpses, they fall short of constructing the stereotype of Celtic women prevalent today.

Somewhere along the way, perhaps around the mid-1st Century with Plutarch and Tacitus’ glamorising of Celtic women as savage, feral creatures, their more accurate depiction underwent distortion, transforming into an idealised trope. The Celts, if we were to view them as a homogenous group (as the stereotypes imply), were not bound to the same societal behaviours of their Roman and Greek counterparts, causing confusion and instilling a sense of moral and refined superiority, to the latter. This alludes to the popular opinion that Celts were a ‘freer’ people. If this were true, this Celtic ‘freedom’ would naturally extend to the women in their society, so it is entirely plausible that women could become audacious leaders for their

⁴⁹ Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Strabo, *Geography: Book IV*, Vol. 2, (4.3).

tribes. However, we have to acknowledge that they still navigated within the confines of a patriarchal structure which was not all that dissimilar from Rome's during Caesar's rule. Fixation on 'savage' and 'strong' Celtic women not only diminishes the recognition of other significant women from the same era, but also detracts from acknowledging their humanity. Prevalent focus on the women who defy Greco-Roman social norms and customs, such as those on the Isle of Mona, further marginalises the overlooked stories of ordinary women, who, despite their equal importance within their communities, are dismissed, as they do not align with expectations of what it meant to be 'a Celtic woman'.

The Classical lens portrays Celts as 'other', contributing to the contemporary perspective that attempts to focus on making Celtic women distinctively different from their other female counterparts. These accounts only make explicit reference to gender when it served to enhance the perception of cultural difference, which disregards the accuracy of such portrayals.

Chapter 2: Women Suspended In Liminality

Lefkowitz and Fant state ‘we must wait for men to tell us about the social, legal and physical environments in which ancient women lived...It is men too who...tell us most about women’s achievements’.⁵¹ Men were the primary gender documenting ancient *history*, and thus some representations of women are such because of their gender, regardless of whether they are Celtic or otherwise. A second use of gender stereotyping is also observed, whereby the focus is predominantly on Celtic women and does not extend to women who are Roman or Greek (xenophobic). This particular representation sees Celtic women as feral, bestial and even mythological creatures who become narrative devices that serve to elevate Roman women by depicting them as embodying superior virtues and morals, as discussed in Chapter One. It must also be noted that there are instances when the Celts are portrayed as a ‘monstrous’ and barbaric *people*, where gender is irrelevant.⁵² This is yet another narrative tool that portrays the sophistication, elitism and bravery of Roman and Greek society.

These differences have since been amplified and exaggerated by contemporary academics, such as Jean Markale, who desperately seek to find *themselves* within history.⁵³ The strong identification with Celtic ideology is seen within his scholarly work to accentuate the differences between the two societies. Whilst it is natural to seek resonance with a group or peoples who share our own values and beliefs, applying this lens to history and academia often results in a biased account of history influenced by personal perspectives. For instance, Markale is subtle in his blurring between fact and opinion: when speaking of *cowyll* (a

⁵¹ Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women’s Life In Greece And Rome*, p. 1.

⁵² See examples from Caesar (*Gallic War*, 6.16) and Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*, 5.29) who often refer to ‘The Celts’ and/or ‘The Gauls’ without denoting gender, rather they are grouped together. Whilst we could assume they are referring to the men of the Celts, there is no specification of this and as such they become a mass of people to whom the same traits and characteristics are attributed regardless of gender.

⁵³ Jean Markale, *Women Of The Celts*, trans. by A. Mygind, C. Hauch and P. Henry (London: Gordon Cremonesi Publishers, 1975) – In the opening page of his book, Markale proudly highlights in the ‘About the Author’ section that he is a Celt and that he is from a Breton family lineage.

maiden's virginity price) he gives readers no time period about which he is writing, though it is assumed he is referring to the Laws of Hywel Dda, which came into place in approximately the 10th century AD, though this is still unclear. In doing this, Markale obscures and coalesces timelines and appears to (falsely) show that ancient Celtic societies, through to medieval, were apparently unchanged. He states that *cowyll* was paid 'before the first night, whereas in Rome...it was given on the morrow following the night of nuptials'.⁵⁴ In a seamless motion he then states that this 'expresses the respect Celts had for women; they always considered woman morally superior'.⁵⁵ The giving of *cowyll* pre-nuptials is not indicative of how the Celts viewed women in their society, though if it were, Markale glosses over the fact that women were still being bought, and their virginity seen as a commodity. Inadvertently, he evidences that this was the case for women who were *not* Celtic as well. Though he may rebuke the idea, he unwittingly demonstrates that there were some commonalities between Roman and Celtic women due to their gender. He also omits the fact that if the bride was discovered to not be a virgin, or that she had begun menstruation, the *cowyll* would be taken back.⁵⁶ Thus, it is evident that Markale's own personal perception has infiltrated his ability to give a comprehensive view of how the Celts viewed women within society as his facts and opinions conflate.

Accounts of antiquity are often viewed through a subjective lens, and as such 'anyone dealing with the Celts has to range over a number of different disciplines: classical texts and historical criticism, linguistics, archaeology, art history, genetics [and] anthropology'⁵⁷ to get an integrative understanding of who the Celts were, if such a thing can be done. There is a tendency to seek evidence that reinforces these preconceived notions about ancient cultures,

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.34.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.34.

⁵⁶ Dafydd Jenkins, *The Law Of Hywel Dda: Law Texts From Medieval Wales Translated And Edited* (Dyfed: Gomer Press, 1986), p. 60.

⁵⁷ John Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths And Inventions* (Gloucester: Tempus Publishing, 2003), p. 12.

inherited from those who lived at the time. For instance, Peter Berresford Ellis comments that ‘the elements of fantasy, comic horror and the supernatural form an indispensable ingredient in the earliest folklore of the Celts’.⁵⁸ He notes how this has become a strong tradition ‘even among more modern generations of Celtic writers, who seem to have inherited the old ability to present breaks in natural laws as vivid and realistic’.⁵⁹ The concepts of elitism and savagery are personified and put at war with one another in accounts of the Romans versus the Celts, and in our longing for our own personal ideals of the past, it is all too easy to cling to tiny fragments of information that either may not have been true or are greatly exaggerated. This often comes at the detriment to both the Celtic culture and the culture with which it is being compared. It is especially prejudicial in the discussion of women, where *both* Celtic and Roman women are ensnared by specific stereotypes of the time. Taking a holistic approach to history, however, may reveal that these representations are not entirely accurate.

At a basic level of historical interpretation, the Celts seem to be representative of everything that the Romans and Greeks believed they were not. Consequently, there is an assumption that if Celtic women are represented as abhorrent and impertinent beings, then it must be true that non-Celtic women were the opposite: obedient, submissive and genteel. For example, in a chapter aptly named ‘*Men’s Words In Women’s Mouths*’, Lefkowitz and Fant explore different occasions where women’s inappropriate and seemingly behaviours are represented by a man’s belief. Whilst Euripides’ *Children of Heracles* is a fictional tragedy, to make it relatable to his audience, it would have represented some truths about society at the time. Thus, when a female character states ‘I know that for a woman it is best to be silent and chaste and stay quietly at home’,⁶⁰ we can confidently assume this is the prevalent belief

⁵⁸ Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Mammoth Book Of Celtic Myths And Legends* (London: Robinson, 2002), p. 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.22.

⁶⁰ Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women’s Life In Greece And Rome*, p. 15.

within the society for the era. Stories of ancient women from a women's perspective are non-existent, thereby we are reliant on the partial accounts from men.

The stories we have about Celtic women are scanty and the few that we do have, such as Onomaris, Camma, Chiomara, Cartimandua and Boudica, all portray Celtic women with 'warrior-like' qualities such as being fearless and independent. Therefore, one could be forgiven for thinking that these few stories are representative of *all* women across the entire Celtic culture, and that *all* Roman women were the opposite. These accounts span some 600 years, from the story of Petta (6th century BC) who chose her own husband by offering him a cup of wine,⁶¹ to Eponina (Empone) in the 1st century AD, who, during a failed revolt against the Romans, concealed her husband, Sabinus (Sabrann), and kept him alive for nine years.⁶² However, questioning the assumption becomes pertinent when comparing the mention of a handful of noteworthy Celtic women over a span of six centuries, to the mention of just as many Roman women within only one century, such as Livia, Agrippina, Messalina, Poppaea and Julia Drusilla (all 1st century AD). In order to spotlight other Celtic women of the era(s), Boudica and Cartimandua will be infrequently mentioned here. They are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.

In Tacitus' account of the Year of the Four Emperors (68-69AD), Verulana Gratilla emerges as a notable figure during the civil conflict between Vespasian and Vitellius, despite only having a few words describing her. She is identified as a Roman woman who 'was not

⁶¹ Clements R. Markham, 'Pytheas, The Discoverer Of Britain', *The Geographical Journal*, 1.6 (1893), 504-524 (p. 506).

⁶² Peter Berresford-Ellis, *Celtic Women: Women In Celtic Society And Literature* (London: Constable, 1995), p. 92-3. Berresford-Ellis suggests that Tacitus and Plutarch wrote about Eponina. Tacitus' account can be found in: 'Historical Works: Vol. II The History - Germania And Agricola', trans. by Arthur Murphy, in *Everyman's Library* (No. 274), ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: J.M Dent & Sons, 1908), p. 213. However, there is no reference to a woman called Eponina made by Plutarch. He mentions a woman called Empone, married to a Lingones chieftain, Sabrann, and their stories are near enough identical. We can assume that either 'Empone' and/or 'Eponina' are either evolutions of the same name or a mistranslation. Plutarch's story of Empone can be found here: Plutarch, *Amatorius*, (25), trans. by William W. Goodwin (Cambridge: John Wilson & Son, 1874), via <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0314%3Asection%3D25> [accessed 29.02.2024].

following children or relatives but was attracted by the fascination of war'.⁶³ Tacitus suggests that she was not alone in her unconventional stance, noting that 'some women even faced the siege' but that Verulana was the 'most prominent among them'.⁶⁴ Significance lies in the revelation that some Roman women actively took part, and certainly had an interest in war. Though Gratilla's mention is brief, her non-conformity suggests that she challenged traditional Roman gender roles. We do not know of her fate, and whether she was permitted to be part of the siege or whether she was turned away, but it is her desire to be involved that starts to bridge the gap between traditional representations of Roman and Celtic women in the context of warfare. This period of time for the Romans was considered to be 'chaotic'⁶⁵ and there is the possibility that this caused factions within society, contributing to women's attempts to create order, or using the opportunity to break conventional roles. However, similar to representations of Celtic women, the documentation of *some* women taking part in warfare does not imply that this became the norm for *all* women. The two noteworthy Celtic women of the 1st century AD who participated in politics and war are Boudica and Cartimandua, who have immortalised the stereotype of Celtic women as being able to exert power, which modern research favours and seeks out. This comes at the detriment of the Celts and contemporaneous cultures. Therefore, the importance of highlighting the accounts of Roman women in war is an offering for readers to challenge these stereotypes, but it does not mean that these women represented a whole, just as much as the contrary is also true.

In his *Annals*, Tacitus tells the story of a Roman woman named Munatia Plancina, whom he remarks 'instead of keeping herself within the proper limits of a woman, would be present at the evolutions of the cavalry and the manoeuvres of the cohorts'.⁶⁶ This may well be because

⁶³ Tacitus, *Histories: Book III*, vol. II, (3.69).

⁶⁴ Ibid. (3.69).

⁶⁵ Mary T. Boatwright, 'Imperial Women Abroad And With The Military', in *Imperial Women Of Rome: Power, Gender, Context*, ed. by Mary T. Boatwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 248-280 (p. 264).

⁶⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*, (2.55).

of her close friendship with Livia (Augusta), who had political ties at the time (her husband, Octavian (Augustus), was Emperor, who was succeeded by their son, Tiberius) which allowed her to cross the boundaries of what was societally acceptable for Roman women of the era. Both Plancina and her husband, Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, were accused of the murder of Germanicus. During discussions of their fate, Plancina promised Piso that in the instance of death, she would die with him. However, she secretly ‘secured her pardon’ with Livia, and ‘gradually withdrew from her husband and separated her defence from his’.⁶⁷ It is told that upon noticing his wife’s recession, he wrote a tactical letter telling his sons to side with their mother so that their names were not tarnished. He made no further mention of Plancina and took a sword to his throat.⁶⁸ This is not the first instance we have of a powerful female friendship. Tacitus also tells us of a Roman woman named Urgulania: during a financial dispute between Lucius Calpurnius Piso and Urgulania, she was able to go straight to the Emperor’s house and complain, because her friendship with Livia was ‘raised above the law’.⁶⁹ The dispute between the two was settled cunningly by Livia who discreetly paid Piso, which in turn did not dishonour him, and allowed Emperor Tiberius to show his support of Urgulania, which enhanced his reputation among women. Knowing that a Roman woman ‘had no political status and no vote; nor could she hold political office or join the army’,⁷⁰ this act would seem futile, except in the instance that Tiberius knew of the ‘invisible’ power that women had in society; that just as he was being manipulated by his mother, other women also had the ability to influence their husbands, fathers and sons too.

Urgulania’s friendship with Livia granted her unprecedented privileges, for instance, when asked to be witness in court, Urgulania refused to attend, instead making the *praetor* (a

⁶⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, (3.15).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (3.15).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* (2.34).

⁷⁰ Lindsay Allason-Jones, *Women In Roman Britain*, (York: The Council for British Archaeology, 2005), p. 6.

judicial officer) question her in her own home. This was unheard of, for even Vestal Virgins⁷¹ had to appear before the courts and judges to give evidence. Tacitus describes Urgulania as ‘formidable’ due to her exceptional influence in defying conventional legal norms of the time.⁷² In both instances, Livia’s authority surpassed that of her Emperor husband and son, allowing her to secure the fate of her female acquaintances. For instance, for as long as Livia lived, Plancina was safe from prosecution. Even after Livia’s death in 29AD Plancina remained untouchable for four years until she was accused again. Knowing that she no longer had any political safety, like her husband, she ended her own life.⁷³ It would surely be more accurate to describe Livia as ‘formidable’ as opposed to her female associates, given her significant influence within the political realms. Association with Livia indirectly meant sharing in her power and protection.

The stories of these three women start to defy the stereotypical view of Roman women being seen as entirely different from their Celtic counterparts. In actuality, the narrative is shifted entirely, especially when the stories of Plancina and Eponina are compared. Eponina was a Celtic woman married to a man named Sabinus. After a failed Roman revolt against the Galatians, Sabinus knew he would be killed, and whilst he could have fled to ‘the barbarians’, he could not leave his wife, nor ‘could he carry her conveniently along with him’,⁷⁴ thus he faked his own death and went into hiding. He heard of the distress this caused Eponina and sought to tell her the truth. On learning that her husband was still alive, she supported him for

⁷¹ The Vestal Virgins were six Priestesses who ‘committed to a minimum of thirty years service, lived together in a house beside the *aedes Vestae* in the Roman Forum and were responsible for the care and preservation of the city’s central hearth fire within this *aedes*... [They] performed many other unique religious tasks and duties and were marked out from other Roman women by a number of special privileges, chief among them the right to decide over their own properties and fortunes’. Robin Lorsch Wildfang, *Rome’s Vestal Virgins: A Study Of Rome’s Vestal Priestesses In The Late Republic And Early Empire* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

⁷² Tacitus, *Annals: Book II*, (2.55).

⁷³ William Smith, *A Dictionary Of Greek And Roman Biography And Mythology By Various Writers*, Volume III, ed. by William Smith (London: John Murray, 1872), via <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0104:entry=plancina-munatia-bio-1> [accessed 6 March 2024].

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Amatorius*, (25).

seven months by bringing him food and water in secret, she even disguised him so well that they went undiscovered to Rome in order to be pardoned, but when this was not authorised, ‘she returned with him back to his den, and for many years lived with him underground’.⁷⁵

Plutarch tells readers that whilst living in hiding, she ‘endured the pains of her child-bearing alone by herself, like a lioness’.⁷⁶ When the pair were eventually discovered, their deception angered Vespasian and he killed them both. However, Plutarch implies that the death of Eponina was unjust, by stating that:

‘[During Vespasian’s] whole reign, there was not a more cruel and savage act committed; neither was there any other spectacle which in all probability the Gods and Daemons more detested, or any from which they more turned away their eyes in abomination of the sight’.⁷⁷

He then goes on to say that in her final moments, Eponina declared to Vespasian that ‘she accounted it a far greater pleasure to live in darkness underground as she had done, than to reign in splendour like him’.⁷⁸ However, there is no certainty that she made such a declaration. Mimicking Lefkowitz and Fant’s observation, these may be Plutarch’s words in the mouth of Eponina to embellish the event, though it is unclear whether this signifies Plutarch’s pride or distaste. Regardless, throughout the story, Plutarch praises Eponina with descriptors such as ‘the best of women’, ‘a heroine’, and ‘a lioness’.⁷⁹ These accolades symbolise her strength and imply his admiration for her character, perhaps highlighting his esteem for the virtues she conveyed, such as fidelity, loyalty and monogamy – those he considered honourable for *all* women of the era, regardless of cultural identity. In contrast, Plancina, who confronts similar challenges regarding loyalty to her husband, is given a negative portrayal by Tacitus, who states that she was ‘detested’⁸⁰ by many and is represented

⁷⁵ Ibid. (25).

⁷⁶ Ibid. (25).

⁷⁷ Ibid. (25).

⁷⁸ Ibid. (25).

⁷⁹ Ibid. (25).

⁸⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, (3.15).

as a malicious woman who defied female virtues. Despite this, her life was spared because of the political protection of her Empress, whilst the former had her life taken. Thus, we have a story where a Celtic woman embodies the moral virtues typically associated with Roman women, whilst a Roman woman exhibits behaviours more akin to those attributed to Celtic women, and the dismantling of stereotypes begins.

Malcolm Chapman comments that classical authors ‘were inclined to regard their own conception of the sexual order of things as given in nature and fundamentally normal; within this normality, women did not fight’.⁸¹ Therefore, reference to women who did fight is traditionally associated to those who defied societal expectations, in this instance Celtic and ‘abnormal’ Roman women. Chapman goes on to consider that the Celtic fringe created by classical commentators was a place of fantasy designed to ‘exorcise abnormality from itself, but keep its excitement close to hand’.⁸² There is a duality to the Celtic fringe Chapman speaks of: in this instance it is both a tangible, geographical region encompassing areas like the British Isles, whilst also being an abstract space where classical historians sought ‘sexual and moral anomaly’.⁸³ The symbolic ‘fringe’ has become a fictitious repository where modern historians and scholars continue to wander, not for ‘substance, but [for] perception and thrill’.⁸⁴ It is difficult to disagree with Chapman here given that we are frequently fed the narrative that Roman and Greek women did not display behaviours attributed to fighting or war,⁸⁵ despite the fact that this did happen, as evidenced above. It is in this libertine place that we find stories of other Celtic women, such as Camma and Chiomara, both from the 2nd century BC.⁸⁶ The story of Chiomara is first told by Polybius, though little of his work

⁸¹ Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction Of A Myth* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 171.

⁸² Ibid. p.172.

⁸³ Ibid. p.172.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.172.

⁸⁵ Philip Freeman, *War, Women And Druids* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 53.

⁸⁶ It is only speculative that Camma lived in the 2nd century BC, due to her being named by Plutarch as ‘Galatian’. Though an accurate date for the Galatians arrival is unknown, Colin Campbell believes that ‘by 278BC, a new people burst into Asia Minor (Anatolia) [and that this] was the true birth of the Galatians’. Colin Campbell, ‘The Little-Known Celts Of Asia: Who Were The Galatians?’, *The Collector*, 14 Nov 2021.

survives and thus her story endures by Livy and Plutarch. The story of Camma, however, is only relayed by Plutarch, who documents both women in his *Bravery of Women*. It does not seem unreasonable to believe that Plutarch favours women who demonstrate virtuous qualities that he finds befitting for women of the era, regardless of whether these women were Celtic or otherwise. It can be assumed that Chiomara is included in this list of women because, despite beheading the Roman soldier who raped her, she remains devoted to her husband. Supposedly on returning the decapitated head to her husband, he proclaims ‘Ah! My wife, it is good to keep faith’ to which she replies ‘Yes, but it is better still that only one man who has lain with me should remain alive’.⁸⁷ Sandra Péré-Noguès believes that Chiomara is ‘not only the representative of marital virtue...but also a barbaric woman in her manner’,⁸⁸ displaying feisty qualities similar to that of Eponina. The story of Camma echoes this theme: following the murder of her husband, Sinatus, by Sinorix, Camma tricks Sinorix into thinking she will wed him, but poisons their nuptial drinks. On witnessing Sinorix swallow the drink, she exclaims:

‘I have lived on after the murder of Sinatus, and during all that time I have derived no comfort from life save only the hope of justice; and now that justice is mine, I go down to my husband. But as for you, wickedest of all men, let your relatives make ready a tomb instead of a bridal chamber and a wedding’.⁸⁹

The speeches (supposedly) delivered by Eponina, Chiomara and Camma are synonymous with Plutarch’s narratives about Celtic women. Whilst the accuracy of these speeches is debatable, their addition both affirms Plutarch’s appreciation for the loyal qualities the women display towards their husbands. However, they also highlight Celtic ‘otherness’, for

<<https://www.thecollector.com/the-galatians-celtics/>> [accessed 17 July 2024]. Chiomara, however, ‘was made a prisoner of war along with the rest of the women at the time when the Romans, under Gnaeus, overcame in battle the Galatians in Asia’. (Plutarch, *Moralia: Bravery Of Women*) which we can assume refers to the war between the Gauls and Romans in 189BC. Thus, situating her confidently in the 2nd century BC.

⁸⁷ Plutarch, *Moralia: Bravery Of Women*, (XXII).

⁸⁸ Sandra Péré-Noguès, ‘Chiomara, Camma, and Other Princesses. Is A History Of Women In ‘Celtic’ Societies Possible?’ in *Pallas* [Online], 90, (2013), 159-176 <DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/pallas.647>> [accessed 19 February 2024].

⁸⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia: Bravery Of Women*, (XX).

the virtues of a woman during Plutarch's era are that 'she must control anger, and not be overcome by grief, and stronger than every kind of emotion'.⁹⁰ These speeches demonstrate that Eponina, Camma and Chiomara are not adhering to these restrained qualities. Therefore, Plutarch seems to employ the stories of these women as subtle examples of the virtues women ought to embody rather than celebrating them in their own right. These women have been woven in and out of the tapestry of Celtic stereotypes, but they are not secured there. On the one hand they display the feisty and uncontrollable nature attributed to Celtic women, a portrayal that modern authors and scholars, such as Philip Freeman and Peter Berresford-Ellis have embraced in their own depiction of Celtic women, that *favours* the view that they were independent and free. Paradoxically, these women also embody traditional Roman and Greek womanly virtues, noted by scholars such as Frederek E. Brenk, to emphasise the ambiguity surrounding the concept of 'Celtic' itself.⁹¹ Positioned in this liminal space, the stories of Camma, Chiomara, Eponina, and even those of Livia, Plancina and Urgulania to some extent, provide historians and scholars (both past and present) with material to support varied and personal perceptions of Celtic womanhood. Inadvertently, this perpetuates Classical gender norms - that women exist to serve others, even when they are dead.

The dualistic concept of the Celtic fringe as being a window into a world that is abhorrent but ultimately hedonistic for Roman society is no more evident than in the existence of female Roman gladiators. We have already seen above some women, such as Gratilla, who had an interest in fighting, but by Nero's rule in the 1st century AD, we have women who actively participated in behaviour considered 'barbaric', for pleasure, not civil service. It is remarkable that the comparisons between Celtic women 'warriors' and female Roman gladiators have not been explored extensively, considering that Celtic women are typically

⁹⁰ Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life In Greece And Rome*, p. 67.

⁹¹ Frederek E. Brenk, 'Setting A Good Exemplum: Case Studies In The Moralia, The Lives As Case Studies', in *The Unity Of Plutarch's Work*, ed. by Anastasios G. Nikolaidis (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 237-254.

portrayed engaging in war or murderous acts out of necessity or justice, whereas Roman women engaged with violent and aggressive acts, for pleasure. This observation could be linked to the stereotype that ‘Celtic women had more freedom’,⁹² due to their ability to engage physically in politics in ways Roman women could not. In contrast to this, it could imply the opposite, as fighting from a place of ‘necessity’ does not beget connotations of enjoyment nor freedom.

In a study on Roman Gladiators, Anna McCullough notices that female gladiators may be a rarity, give the ‘paucity of all types of evidence and the seeming repetition of the same events in the [classical] sources...female gladiators [are a] phenomenon especially known under Nero and the Flavians’.⁹³ This illustrates another parallel between Roman and Celtic women, as the concept of female Celtic leadership emerges from recurring mentions in ancient sources of the few instances it actually occurred. However, Roman occurrences of female gladiators span a short and specific period, whereas references to Celtic women as warriors are infrequent but repetitive across centuries (continuing to modern day), which gives further credibility to the theory that the Celts, in general, ‘have been constructed to serve the interests of a discourse external to them’.⁹⁴

Women who engaged in gladiatorial fights were generally ‘lauded for their bravery and skill and were valued for their novelty’ despite even low-ranking women knowing this was inappropriate behaviour.⁹⁵ Some classical accounts, such as those by Tacitus, state that these women ‘disgraced themselves’ by both participating or being witness to them.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, it appears that for some Roman women, engaging in gladiatorial combat

⁹² Freeman, *War, Women And Druids*, p.53.

⁹³ Anna McCullough, ‘Female Gladiators In The Roman Empire’, in *Women In Antiquity: Real Women Across The Ancient World*, 1st edn. ed. by Stephanie Lynn Budin and Jean Macintosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 954-963 (p. 956).

⁹⁴ Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction Of A Myth*, p. 262.

⁹⁵ McCullough, ‘Female Gladiators In The Roman Empire’, p. 959.

⁹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*, (15.32).

provided them an opportunity to resist and challenge societal expectations without being held accountable to the law. However, these women were restricted to fighting other women or animals, and were not permitted to fight men, subtly implying the prevailing belief that women were not equal to men in strength. Celtic women, in contrast are depicted in classical accounts (as seen in Chapter One) as being *just as* formidable to their male counterparts, but the biases should not be overlooked here. It could be that female Celtic warriors are portrayed in such a way to show the courage and triumphs of the Roman armies. Conversely, female Roman gladiators need not be portrayed (by Roman authors) as equal in strength, as this has the potential to invoke ‘inappropriate’ behaviour from women outside of the gladiatorial ring. Paradoxically, Roman women are being given a very restricted amount of freedom.

In another contrast, the Celts are known to have fought naked as an act of their bravery, or as Dionysius of Halicarnassus calls it, ‘barbaric boastfulness’;⁹⁷ a way of portraying their lack of fear in the face of death. Female Roman gladiators of the same time period also fought naked, yet this was seen as ‘a symbol of her low status and her profession’.⁹⁸ There is a societal and cultural double standard that occurs when comparing the behaviour of Celtic and Roman women, where both are expected to conform to, often contradictory, stereotypes. Again, we witness women suspended in liminality, where their behaviour, in all instances is subject to criticism. Roman women who engaged in behaviours deemed aggressive or unconventional faced criticism and judgement from their male counterparts at the time, the same way that Celtic women’s behaviour faces extensive examination from modern historians, archaeologists and academics. This then reflects a broader expectation that the majority of ancient women, regardless of their cultural heritage, cannot embody contrasting qualities

⁹⁷ J. N. G Ritchie and W. F. Ritchie, ‘The Army, Weapons And Fighting’, in *The Celtic World*, ed. by Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 37-58 (p. 53).

⁹⁸ McCullough, ‘Female Gladiators In The Roman Empire’, p. 958.

simultaneously, such as violent and nurturing, or strong and demure. They are only witnessed partially, through a subjective lens that does not allow their wholeness into existence.

One of the main characteristics of the perceived Celtic woman is that they had more freedom and power than their Roman and Greek counterparts, but in the examples of the few Celtic women mentioned here, it becomes apparent this is not wholly true. In the example of Camma and Chiomara, both women actually had very little power. Camma's husband was murdered and Chiomara was a Roman prisoner. Their acts of brutality are not made from a place of pleasure or desire but are from a place of justice and in some instances, necessity. Eponina is perhaps a slight exception here as she has the freedom to choose whether to live with her husband in hiding or to continue her life without him. Whether her choice to stay with Sabinus was made from an act of love or fear, we will never know. Whilst it is not certain that this was the case for all Celtic women, this sentiment is certainly echoed back to Onomaris in the 4th century BC who led the Scordisci tribe into south-eastern Europe. Deborah Gera rightly asserts 'the fact that Onomaris' fellow tribe members are ready to follow whoever is willing to lead them and that no man steps forward indicated that their situation was fairly desperate'.⁹⁹ Of course this testifies to Onomaris' courage, but it also demonstrates that this was an imperative decision not based on privilege or thrill. Some Roman women, on the contrary, especially those in what could be termed 'secondary political power', appear to have had a different type of freedom, one that allows them to influence politics and defy societal laws. However, and this cannot be reiterated enough, there is no way of determining what the 'norm' was for *any* woman, given that the most mundane and routine aspects of ancient society would have been undocumented.

⁹⁹ Deborah Gera, *Warrior Women: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus*, 1st edn. (Boston: Brill, 1996), p. 223.

Power and freedom come in many guises, so whilst it could be said that some Celtic women had the freedom to participate in warfare, leading armies and tribes, whilst some Roman women were limited to gladiatorial fights against animals, this is a reductionist view that has not taken every aspect of the lives of these women, nor their context, into consideration. 'Fighting' as a form of necessity, for example, does not connote freedom.

With the few examples that have been given above, it starts to become apparent that the behaviours of Roman and Celtic women are not limited to their societies alone. The lives of historical women were documented by Greco-Roman men; thus *all* women are being viewed through a predominantly sexist lens that holds them to the same societal expectations, regardless of their cultural identity; there is little nuance in their similarities. These parallels are often overlooked in order to further fuel a sexist and cultural agenda that no longer serves a purpose.

Chapter 3: 'Her warfare was conducted in the bedroom'.

Researching representations of historical women has naturally led to the two most prominent Celtic women recorded: Boudica, leader of the Iceni, and Cartimandua, Queen of the Brigantes. Their approaches to both leadership and the Roman invasion of Britain diverge somewhat drastically, yet they are often positioned together as convincing evidence that Celtic women were equal to their male counterparts, inasmuch as politics and warfare was concerned. This, through a chain of misinterpretations, has left an indelible smear on the broader historical narrative of what it meant to be a Celtic woman.

Peter Keegan's study on the ancient representations of Boudica, Cartimandua, Agrippina and Messalina, focuses on 'gender rhetoric: the representation of gender roles within a given literary discourse',¹⁰⁰ which removes attention from cultural background to focus predominantly on gender in general. Keegan's study has been insightful insofar as showing that despite the differences between such contrasting women, treatment of them has been similar, whereby, the sexual behaviours of (Celtic) Cartimandua and (Roman) Messalina are painted by Tacitus as amoral and inappropriate behaviours for *all* women. Tacitus implies that it is through her sexual deviancy with Velloctatus, that it was Cartimandua that initiated the war with her ex-husband, Venutius: '[Venutius] who, in addition to his natural spirit and hatred of the Roman name, was fired by his personal resentment toward Queen Cartimandua'.¹⁰¹ Tacitus is known for his 'anti-Roman' rhetoric which permeates his texts, usually for dramatic effect, which is clear to see here as he emphasises the violent actions of a man who has been shamed by his wife, despite Venutius being against Rome. This directly challenges the comments made by Aristotle (discussed in Chapter One) that since homosexuality was apparently prevalent in Celtic society, that women must have had a

¹⁰⁰ Keegan, 'Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger', p. 100.

¹⁰¹ Tacitus, *Histories*, (3.45).

different type of ‘power’ over their husbands, that was not linked to sexuality. Alternatively, it implies that *any* woman, regardless of her cultural background, with the ability to influence and/or lead a man is an act of emasculation for the latter, which is considered shameful. This is mimicked in Tacitus’ story of Messalina cuckolding Claudius with Silius, whereby her sexual deviancy is seen as an act of humiliation and as such, she is sentenced to death. However, Claudius’ emasculation comes not from Messalina’s promiscuity, but directly from Tacitus. He states that after hearing of his wife’s betrayal, Claudius’ mood towards her softened and ‘he bade someone go tell the ‘poor creature’ to come the morrow and plead her cause’.¹⁰² It is then Claudius’ men that interfere and secretly order the death of Messalina so as to save the Emperor’s dignity. Claudius’ leniency towards Messalina depicts him as weak, contrasting sharply with Tacitus’ depiction of Venutius, who, despite being Celtic, is portrayed as taking justified action to restore his honour and assert his masculinity. Thus, Tacitus demonstrates that emasculation is shameful for *any* man, regardless of cultural background whilst implying his disapproval of the Emperor’s weakness. This perspective aligns with Tacitus’ broader critique of Roman leadership, as seen in his condemnation of the Roman army’s treatment of Boudica and her daughters:

‘She was avenging, not, as a queen of glorious ancestry...but as a woman of the people, her liberty lost, her body tortured by the lash, the tarnished honour of her daughters. Roman cupidity had progressed so far that not their very persons, not age itself, nor maidenhood, were left unpolled.’¹⁰³

Tacitus acknowledges the misconduct of the Roman army, in turn highlighting his own antipathy towards the Empire. Whilst not quite compassion, he demonstrates sympathetic understanding as to why Boudica took such extreme retaliation. As Vanessa Collingridge states ‘such treatment of women was beyond belief: under Roman law it was unlikely that any free women would ever be flogged even in punishment, while any man found guilty of

¹⁰² Tacitus, *Annals*, (11).

¹⁰³ Tacitus, *Annals*, (35.1).

rape would face execution'.¹⁰⁴ Collingridge believes Tacitus' account of the violent actions against Boudica are told 'with barely concealed bile towards his own countrymen'.¹⁰⁵ It seems that regardless of whether Boudica was Celtic or otherwise, it is the actions against her *as a woman*, that garner sympathetic speculation from Tacitus. This is not to say that Tacitus sides with the Iceni, rather his *Annals* merely reinforce his beliefs of 'approved' societal virtues. We can confidently assume that even though Tacitus can see a justification for the Boudican revolt, for a woman to engage in politics and warfare, as has been previously discussed, would have been outrageous and considered improper behaviour for *any* woman to display.

From this we can start to draw parallels and contrasts to the ancient accounts of Boudica and Cartimandua. Records of both women come primarily from Tacitus and Cassius Dio, which goes some way to showing that despite both being female, Celtic leaders, why their classical portrayal is vastly different. Dio generally exhibits a pro-Roman stance, highlighting Roman virtues and achievements, whilst Tacitus is often more critical of the Roman Empire. Both men wrote between fifteen and some hundred years post the Boudican revolt,¹⁰⁶ and as such their historical accounts should be scrutinised for personal bias.

Keegan highlights that Tacitus' reports of Cartimandua 'reveal his standpoint towards her...Cartimandua may be a legitimate female ruler...however, she is liable to act with guile and trickery, and is susceptible to excessive display, inordinate desire and savageness'.¹⁰⁷

Here, Keegan is referring to Tacitus' *Histories*, where Cartimandua's 'treacherous' capture of her Celtic kin, Caratacus, gained her popularity with Claudius Caesar, from which 'came her wealth and the wanton spirit that success breeds'.¹⁰⁸ She is also described as having a 'savage

¹⁰⁴ Collingridge, *Boudica*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 190.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 193.

¹⁰⁷ Keegan, 'Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger', p. 103.

¹⁰⁸ Tacitus, *Histories*, (3.45).

spirit'.¹⁰⁹ Rather than simply recounting historical events, Tacitus employs a creative, literary flair akin to that of a malicious queen in a fairytale, to show his distaste of power, greed and debauchery. However, the fact that Cartimandua is Celtic seems secondary to his scrutiny of her gender. As explored in Chapter Two, Tacitus uses similar literary techniques in his depictions of Plancina, Urgulania and Agrippina, as he does in his portrayal of Cartimandua. These techniques serve as a means for Tacitus to convey his moral judgements. However, in Cassius Dio's representation of Agrippina and Messalina, he 'renders concrete the un-Romanness of these imperial women by ascribing to each a ferocity usually assigned to the barbarian'.¹¹⁰ This contrasts with Tacitus; for Dio, cultural background is primary in depicting the undesirable actions of these women. Once again, stereotypes of Celtic and Roman women become blurred, with Roman women assigned the barbarism of the Celts, while a Celtic woman is portrayed with the treachery that is often attributed to power-hungry Roman women. Cartimandua, however, is a confluent of the two, as a native Celt who has adopted Roman ideologies and as such, is treated with a double dosage of critical scrutiny by ancient historians.

Despite this, modern representations uphold Boudica and Cartimandua as heroic Celtic Queens, who because of the Roman exclusion of women from such positions, are then used as the identifying symbol that *all* Celtic women must have had more political freedom than their Roman equivalents. Whilst her research of these women is exceptional, Collingridge falls into this ideological trap, by stating that:

'Cartimandua proves it was not beyond the realms of the Iron Age imagination to have a woman serve as an independent ruler. [It] seems from the classical writers and the Celtic legends that women could not only hold powerful positions within society, they could also transcend more modern gender roles in taking their people to war'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, (3.45).

¹¹⁰ Keegan, 'Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger', p. 119.

¹¹¹ Collingridge, *Boudica*, p. 194.

There is some truth to this declaration, insofar as it will not be contested that Cartimandua and Boudica were *politically* powerful, influential women. The first problem, however, is that Collingridge's assumption that Celtic Iron Age society allowed for female leadership is based on one historical woman and then the fictional women of Celtic legend, as opposed to naming any other historical, female leaders. Cartimandua then becomes emblematic of Celtic Queendom, despite the fact that (other than Boudica), no other female leaders have been recorded. Whilst we cannot rule out that they did exist, Cartimandua's rule should be seen as the exception to the theoretical Celtic 'norm', as opposed to creating a fictional narrative that *all* Celtic women could be leaders if they decided to be. This statement has also not taken into consideration Cartimandua's societal position, where she has 'the influence that belongs to high birth'.¹¹²

Jacqueline Borsje states in her study on modern literature surrounding the Celts, that 'idealisation is a form of romanticism',¹¹³ which is perhaps why modern interpretations deem it acceptable to suppose that *any* woman during the Iron Age could become a leading ruler (as discussed in Chapter Two). Archaeologist, Rachel Pope, believes that 'women were not excluded from high-status roles',¹¹⁴ an opinion founded on a modern and feminist perspective of archaeological grave goods, whereby swords and torcs have been attributed to the wrong gender due to a longstanding and stereotypical view that 'Iron Age women were viewed primarily as wives, with any authority due only to male absence'.¹¹⁵ Tacitus, for example, does not seem to acknowledge Boudica's reign as her own, rather she was a woman of 'kingly descent',¹¹⁶ and thus 'affiliation is carefully linked with that of male rule – as wife of

¹¹² Tacitus, *Histories*, (3.45).

¹¹³ Jacqueline Borsje, 'The Secret Of The Celts Revisited', *Religion And Theology*, 24 (2017), 130-155 (p.148).

¹¹⁴ Rachel Pope and Ian Ralston, 'Approaching Sex And Status In Iron Age Britain With Reference To The Nearer Continent', in *Atlantic Europe In The First Millennium BC: Crossing The Divide*, ed. by Tom Moore and Xosê-Lois Armada (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 375-414 (p. 409).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 378.

¹¹⁶ Tacitus, *The Life Of Cnæus Julius Agricola*, (16).

Prasutagus and inheritor of sovereign blood – rather than emphasised in its own right'.¹¹⁷

However, Pope challenges what defines 'high-status' by acknowledging that this would have been different regionally, let alone globally. For example, at an ancient cemetery in Hallstatt:

'skeletal evidence for hard physical work (with female muscle development in some cases exceeding that of males) indicates that it was the salt miners, the workers, who were buried with such valuable and by extension high-status items'.¹¹⁸

Given that the Iron Age was predominantly governed by patriarchal societies, it is logical to suppose that women were confined primarily to domestic roles. However, the evidence of excessive female muscle development implies that Iron Age women engaged in manual labour too. Women of antiquity are often pigeonholed into limited roles that do not fully respect, nor acknowledge their broad contributions to society. Whilst the Hallstatt excavation is not representative of the entirety of Iron Age civilisation, it supports the (apparently absurd) idea that women had multifaceted aspects to their lives. Moreover, it grants plausibility to the theory that there were perhaps more Celtic women in 'high' positions throughout the Iron Age. However, since the Celts did not document their own history, we do not know how they defined status, nor if there was a hierarchal structure to their society(ies). Instead, we are subject to a Greco-Roman definition of status, based primarily on accumulation of wealth, land, and lineage. Boudica and Cartimandua, therefore, cannot be representative of the 'average Celtic woman' given that their legacies are not only survived purely by Greek and Roman men, but that both are from the British Isles at a very specific time period.

Professor Richard Hingley boldly states that 'Britain was effectively a theatre for classical Roman views of women'.¹¹⁹ This, he attributes to Boudica and Cartimandua who he comments were 'two powerful female figures who emerged during the first century AD to

¹¹⁷ Keegan, '*Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger*', p. 105.

¹¹⁸ Pope and Ralston, '*Approaching Sex And Status In Iron Age Britain With Reference To The Nearer Continent*', p. 376.

¹¹⁹ Richard Hingley and Christina Unwin, *Boudica: Iron Age Warrior Queen* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p. 59.

feed Roman fascination'.¹²⁰ Hingley's comments present a perplexing paradox: on the one hand, he suggests that Celtic society reflected the idealised feminine behaviour that was common in ancient Roman culture, yet he proceeds to give two examples of women who defied these conventional Roman virtues. Alternatively, Hingley is implying that Boudica and Cartimandua are the 'lead roles' in representing behaviours that conflict with Roman ideals of female virtue, therefore challenging societal norms. In either interpretation, the irony is evident: Hingley initially proposes that *all* women across Britain typified Roman views of femininity, which he immediately contradicts in his inability to provide examples beyond Boudica and Cartimandua. This supports the idea that Boudica and Cartimandua were not representative of the 'common norm', especially if they 'fed Roman fascination'. Rather, it implies that their behaviour and actions were somehow exceptional. Thus, their documentation has a dual purpose, which is to serve as lessons in appropriate feminine virtue, and to provide entertainment. Hingley's observations falsely assume that Roman society had not encountered women in positions of political power before invading Britain, and as such Boudica and Cartimandua further epitomise the stereotype of the strong, female leaders of the Celts.

In exploring representations of powerful women in antiquity, one notable figure appears that undermines Hingley's analysis: Fulvia. Fulvia died in 40BC, some 80 to 100 years pre the reign of both Cartimandua and Boudica. She was a Roman noblewoman who was the wife of three important, political figures. She was first married to Publius Clodius Pulcher, after his murder she married Gaius Scribonius Curio, and after his death she married Mark Antony. In ancient accounts written approximately 20 to 50 years after her death, she is described as having 'nothing of the woman in her except her sex',¹²¹ and in an impressive testimony by Plutarch some 200 years after her death, he states 'she was a woman who took no thought for

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 59.

¹²¹ Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History*, (2.74).

spinning or housekeeping...she wished to rule a ruler and command a commander' before continuing to say that Antony's next wife, Cleopatra (another significant woman in a ruling position), should be indebted to Fulvia because she taught him how 'to endure a woman's sway'.¹²² Dio also tells the gruesome tale of Fulvia spitting on the decapitated head of Cicero before opening the mouth, pulling out the tongue and piercing it with the pins that she used for her hair.¹²³ The existence of Fulvia is just one example that the Romans were more than aware of the political power women could have, even within their own society.

Furthermore, there are striking similarities between Fulvia and Boudica which obscure the stereotypical representations associated to both Roman and Celtic women. Boudica, for example, is described by Dio as having very masculine features, such as being 'tall', having a 'harsh voice' and a 'piercing gaze',¹²⁴ which 'only serve to set her apart from the expected female figure in historical narrative'.¹²⁵ Dio infuses her description with these masculine qualities in order to differentiate her from other women, which in turn demonstrates his own view of female virtues and qualities. The fact she is a mother does not seem to be enough to consider her 'feminine'. This is incredibly similar to the description we have of Fulvia, where her sex is acknowledged as female, but her actions are defined as masculine. Dio provides evidence that Fulvia participated in physical combat, stating that 'she would gird herself with a sword [and] give out the watchword to the soldiers',¹²⁶ a similar description he ascribes to Boudica: 'She now grasped a spear to aid her in terrifying all beholders'.¹²⁷ How fascinating that these weapons are typically symbolic of phallic imagery, as testified by literary scholars, including Dennitza Gabrakova and Kenneth Hodges,¹²⁸ and here these women are, holding

¹²² Plutarch, *Antony*, (10.3).

¹²³ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, (47.8).

¹²⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Epitome Of Book LXII*, Vol. VIII, (2.1).

¹²⁵ Keegan, 'Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger', p. 116.

¹²⁶ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, (48.10).

¹²⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Epitome Of Book LXII*, Vol. VIII (2.1).

¹²⁸ These are examples of those who suggest the sword is a phallic symbol, though this is a widely accepted stance. Dennitza Gabrakova, 'Queering Shame And The Wound Of Ethnicity', *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 48.1 (2015), 99-114. Kenneth Hodges, 'How Galahad Regained His Virginity: Dead Women, Catholicism

them. There is a myriad of ways this could be interpreted, but given the context for their appearance, it is likely that Dio demonstrates the strangulation of masculine empowerment, for these are women who are controlling the actions of and are leading men. Equally, holding the sword and spear in this context could be an iconographic symbol of masculine power, as Sophie Strand identifies, the sword ‘either attacks or defends, affirming that every interaction is conflict, and every story is about domination and tragedy’,¹²⁹ which contrasts to the archetype of the maternal, nurturing and loving feminine. Likewise, the savage imagery of Fulvia stabbing the tongue of Cicero mimics the imagery of Boudica’s army:

‘They hung up naked the noblest and most distinguished women and then cut off their breasts and sewed them to their mouths, in order to make the victims appear to be eating them; afterwards they impaled the women on sharp skewers run lengthwise through the entire body’.¹³⁰

There is no way of knowing whether either of these macabre events took place, but what is certain is that Dio documented these events over two centuries after they ‘happened’. Thus, it can be confidently assumed that these grim descriptions are nothing more than a narrative technique used to entertain and shock his intended audience with this rhetorical propaganda. Yet, in doing so, Dio continues to merge the stereotypes of both Celtic and Roman women. Thus, it becomes ostensible that the representation of Celtic ‘warrior’ women is less about their Celtic identity, but rather about their defiance of traditional gender roles.

Keegan states that Dio’s ‘representation of Boudica is just as much designed to accommodate the problematic centrality of a female within acceptable rhetorical boundaries as it is a representation of a known historical agent’.¹³¹ This reiterates Dio’s desire to recognise Boudica’s historical significance, while also acknowledging the societal expectations and limitations placed on women during this period. The same is true for his representation of

And The Grail In Nineteenth Century British Poetry’, in *Arthurian Literature XXXVIII*, ed. by Megan G. Leitch and K. S. Whetter (Rochester: D. S Brewer, 2023), pp. 273-301.

¹²⁹ Sophie Strand, *The Flowering Wand* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2022), p. 1.

¹³⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Epitome Of Book LXII*, Vol. VIII, (7.2).

¹³¹ Keegan, ‘Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger’, p. 117.

Fulvia. Therefore, Dio emphasises the typically masculine behaviours of both women in an attempt to express his disdain of their societal disobedience. Nevertheless, there may be a degree of truth hidden amongst Dio's literary creativity. It is plausible that both women asserted themselves with traditional masculine behaviour and appearance in order to gain respect from their male peers. Boudica, for example may have used this approach to gain traction for her cause – to appear before her potential army as both a noble woman, a mother who has been wronged, and with the masculine disposition of being a confident and capable leader, she would have garnered the sympathy and attraction of both men and women alike. Malcolm Chapman believes that Boudica's position 'may have been as unique as Margaret Thatcher's...her very existence seemed to make anything possible'.¹³² Chapman implies it was uncommon for women to be in power up until the 1980's. Yet, his comment that their existence offers a sense of hope, imprudently projects modern aspirations onto a historical narrative, where Boudica's position of power reflects a broader contemporary desire to prove that, if they wanted to, many women could have been in power. However, his comparison to Thatcher is not entirely misplaced. Thatcher is said to have exercised 'her feminine wiles, and even her sex appeal, in pursuing her aims with traditionally minded males...she had steel, even a harshness, that is not usually associated with the fairer sex'.¹³³ This is similar to the description of Germany's Angela Merkel, known affectionately as *mutti Merkel* (Mother Merkel). However, The Telegraph writes 'it would be a mistake to write her off as a kindly mother-figure. The Chancellor's pleasant exterior often belies a much harder interior. She is a formidable operator'.¹³⁴ Both Thatcher and Merkel mirror the dual characteristics attributed to

¹³² Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction Of A Myth*, p.171.

¹³³ Gerard Baker, 'A Biographical Masterpiece - Review Of 'Margaret Thatcher: Herself Alone By Charles Moore', *Commentary* (2020) <<https://www.commentary.org/articles/gerard-baker/a-biographical-masterpiece-on-margaret-thatcher/>> [accessed 28 May 2024].

¹³⁴ Matthew Qvortrup, 'Inside The World Of Ruthless 'Mutti' Merkel - Europe's Iron Lady', *The Telegraph*, 3 May 2017. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/politics/inside-world-ruthless-mutti-merkel-europes-iron-lady/>> [accessed 28 May 2024].

Boudica and Cartimandua, suggesting that despite there being approximately 2000 years between them, the complex blending of gender roles and expectations in leadership remains strikingly similar.

Through appearance, behaviour and morals, Fulvia and Boudica are portrayed in an androgynous manner since neither adhere to either male or female gender norms of the time. As such, similar to Camma and Chiomara, they are suspended in a liminal place, where modern historians and academics alike can manipulate their narratives to fit their own agendas by emphasising certain aspects of their stories and focusing on specific events to mould these women into whatever serves their purpose. Though, as evidenced by comparison to Thatcher and Merkel, this is not just a phenomenon that women of antiquity are subject to. In contrast, Cartimandua's appearance is never commented on, which could be interpreted as her lack of threat to the Roman Empire. Though, this is not uncommon for the time, given that the appearance of most women and men is excluded unless it serves a narrative purpose. It also reflects the gender rhetoric prevalent in ancient texts, for example, the description of Boudica's appearance is clearly shown to be a narrative device that persuasively exhibits Dio's perspective of her to his prospective audience. However, Tacitus only makes comment to Cartimandua's actions, as Nicki Howarth states, 'Tacitus cannot judge [her] as a queen for she was a staunch Roman ally, so he must focus on her faults as a woman ruling her people'.¹³⁵ Howarth believes that there were many faults that can be attributed to Cartimandua, such as 'she discounted the wishes of her subjects [and] divorced one of their tribal leaders',¹³⁶ but Tacitus focuses solely on her fault being that she was a 'sovereign barbarian queen'.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, Tacitus still likens her behaviour to that of Machiavellian Roman women as opposed to comparing her to Boudica – the only other female Celtic leader.

¹³⁵ Nicki Howarth, *Cartimandua: Queen Of The Brigantes*, p. 127.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 127.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 127.

However, while it cannot often be said, Tacitus is justified in refraining from such a comparison, given the differing circumstances and contrasting approaches to rulership exhibited by both women. Miranda Aldhouse-Green highlights one fundamental difference between the two women when she comments that Cartimandua's 'warfare was conducted in the bedroom',¹³⁸ which contrasts with the image of the battlefield-ready Boudica, who wields her spear, 'at the head of an army of about 230,000 men, [riding] in her chariot'.¹³⁹ Cartimandua's acts of power are subtle and diplomatic, such as her capture of Caratacus, which Keegan states was in her best interest as 'if he succeeded in rallying those in Brigantia against Rome [Cartimandua's] rule was over'.¹⁴⁰ This tactful decision is imitative of the Roman women who had political influence (as discussed in Chapter Two), and aligns with traditional notions of femininity, where power is exerted through manipulation and negotiation rather than direct confrontation. Boudica, on the contrary, is represented in a way that aligns more with traditional notions of masculinity, where power is associated with physical strength and military prowess, evidenced by her direct involvement in warfare and her ability to lead her army into battle. The modern stereotype of *Celtic* women is thus dismantled, as we are presented with two very different approaches to the only well documented, extant female Celtic rulers. Boudica is portrayed as the stereotypical barbaric, warrior woman associated to the Celts, whilst Cartimandua, despite being Celtic, is portrayed akin to guileful Roman women. However, there is a blurring of these gender roles, as Boudica's role as a mother plays a significant motivator for her revolt, highlighting the intersection of traditional feminine roles with the masculine acts of rebellion and military engagement. The fact that she is a woman and mother are the reasons Tacitus understands her vengeful uprising. Similarly, Cartimandua's position as a Queen in her own right

¹³⁸ Miranda Aldhouse-Green, 'Viragos And Virgins: Women In The Celtic World', in *Women In Antiquity: Real Women Across The Ancient World*, 1st edn. ed. by Stephanie Lynn Budin and Jean Macintosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1008 – 1026 (p. 1020).

¹³⁹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Epitome Of Book LXII*, Vol. VIII, (8.2).

¹⁴⁰ Keegan, 'Boudica, Cartimandua, Messalina and Agrippina The Younger', p. 102.

challenges the gender roles of the time, as it was uncommon for women to hold legitimate positions of authority and therefore, she could be considered to be in a masculine position of power. Thus, whilst there are aspects of traditional masculinity and femininity in the behaviours of both women, their approaches to political leadership and warfare reflect the broader societal expectations and stereotypes associated with gender rather than solely being defined by their cultural backgrounds.

In her study on gladiatorial women, Anna McCullough concludes that there is a tendency from modern historians and academics to want to see ancient women in heroic, powerful positions because it allows us to 'reclaim ancient women from hegemonic literary sources written by men; and it assists optimist historians and classicists in saying that women have been, and can be, powerful'.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Donald Meek considers that "Celtic' culture is created largely for the consumption of 'outsiders' and nonspeakers of Celtic languages who continue to colonise the 'Celtic Fringe', either physically or spiritually'.¹⁴² Both of these observations hold true for the classical world too, where historians, such as Dio and Tacitus, had their own motivations for portraying Celtic culture and women in a manner that supported their personal perspectives and rhetorical agenda. While McCullough's analysis pertains specifically to female gladiators, her observation resonates with the broader narrative surrounding ancient women, especially those of Celtic origin. Significant focus on Boudica and Cartimandua as exceptional leaders has overshadowed the diversity and complexity of Celtic women's experiences. These two, juxtaposing women, who were of high social status, have become representative of the entirety of ancient, Celtic women and as such, our understanding of their lives has become distorted. The weight of unrealistic expectation hangs around the necks of Boudica and Cartimandua, who have become symbolic figures representing a powerful, female-led history, which likely never existed as we imagine it.

¹⁴¹ McCullough, 'Female Gladiators In The Roman Empire', p. 962.

¹⁴² Donald Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 2000), p. 79.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, it becomes apparent that ancient depictions of Celtic women are open to bias based on ethnicity (xenophobia) and gender (sexism), sometimes both depending on the context in which their story has been documented, and who wrote it. There may be instances whereby these biases are expressed subconsciously through unchallenged conditioning, yet in either instance – intentional or otherwise, these depictions are moulded by ancient and modern historians to reflect an intended personal perspective. Consequently, these accounts often contradict one another. These inconsistencies challenge us to look deep into the panoply of perspectives to consider a broader context to decipher which views obscure the realities of Celtic life, and those which reveal it.

For instance, Chapter One recognises that cultural identity, rather than gender, is the dominant bias in the stereotyping of these women. Aristotle, for example, gives us one of the earliest testimonies of Celtic society when he comments that the men were under the sway of their women despite engaging in homoerotic acts. Yet, Aristotle's comment appears to be an observation that challenges his own understanding of feminine 'norms' of the time, whilst also presenting the possible theory that Celtic social hierarchy did not revolve around sexuality, implying a small degree of social equality for women. However, Caesar's portrayal of Celtic women is grouped with his observations of their societal structure, noting that men had the ability to take the life of their wives. This, however, clashes with the later views that appear around the mid-1st century, whereby ancient historians, such as Ammianus and Tacitus, begin to ascribe feral, animalistic and fantastical qualities to these women, that depict them as equally strong and fearless as Celtic men. Whilst gender has been mentioned, these elaborate and creative portrayals served to emphasise the otherness of Celtic culture(s), reinforcing Roman and Greek ideologies that showcase their own superiority. Readers should be aware that these earlier depictions highlight a xenophobic bias, and as such, should

question whether Celtic women are portrayed with such bestial and savage attributes purely because the *Celts* are described as such: ‘The Gauls are terrifying in aspect and their voices are deep and altogether harsh’¹⁴³ and that ‘when they [the Gauls] dine, they all sit, not upon chairs, but upon the ground, using for cushions the skins of wolves or of dogs’.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, it seems reasonable to state that the representation of the Celts becomes emblematic of Celtic women, and the actions and behaviours of known Celtic women becomes emblematic of Celtic culture, as though they are entirely synonymous. Celtic women are ensnared in a net of stereotypes that distinguish the Celts as a homogenous group of fearless, barbaric and primitive warriors. This perpetual cycle of misrepresentation obscures the nuanced realities of their lives and contributions, leaving an inaccurate lasting legacy on their modern depiction. This study suggests that these bestial and savage attributes do not provide a plausible narrative for all Celtic women, and by proxy, Celtic society(ies).

Chapter Two further evidences the above by demonstrating how the image of the strong female leader has become iconographic of Celtic identity and serves the narrative that Celtic women are endowed with positive qualities such as courage, bravery and freedom.

¹⁴³ Diodorus Siculus, *Library Of History*, (31.1).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (28.4).

**Finding time
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be a battle**

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As Vanessa Collingridge states, ‘we shape our heroes to serve specific purposes, regardless of whether the facts actually fit the story’.¹⁴⁶ Thus, there appears to be no disparity between ancient and modern representations of Celtic women, as their narrative purpose is to support the belief of the historian, academic or author documenting them. When it benefitted the narrative, cultural background was emphasised in order to highlight superiority. For example, Plutarch informs his audience that Camma, Chiomara and Eponina are Celtic, so that when their feisty, immoral behaviour and actions are revealed, they epitomise the stereotype of the uncivilised Celt, whilst also acting as a reinforcement of the appropriate behaviours for women at the time. Similarly, Markale’s strong identification with the Celts implies a

¹⁴⁵ George Madenian, ‘For The Hero Behind The Heroes’, *LinkedIn* [Social Media Post], 28 January 2024. <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/george-madenian-251999b3_for-the-hero-behind-the-heroes-activity-7138591920464830465-2EHT/> [accessed 28 July 2024]. A video advertisement can also be found here: QuickBooks UK, *QuickBooks Online Accountant For Accountants And Bookkeepers. For The Hero Behind The Heroes* [video]. 2023 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msx1QnfnxQI>> [accessed 28 July 2024].

¹⁴⁶ Collingridge, *Boudica*, p. 3.

personal bias evident in his emphasis on only the positive attributes of the Celts, without taking into consideration the original context.

For example, Chapter Two shows how Markale neglects to understand the intricacies of *cowyll*. Had he given this attention, it would reveal that Celtic men were still purchasing their young, virgin wives, suggesting that Celtic society did not respect their women any more than their Roman counterparts. Consequently, this highlights the pro-Celtic/anti-Roman bias (and vice versa) that is prevalent in modern, as well as historical, writing. This bias inevitably sees Celtic women synonymously linked to their cultural identity in order to highlight either their bravery *or* bestial qualities, dependent on the author's views. This supports the argument threaded throughout this study that their portrayal was used to reinforce a broader cultural stereotype, instilling the notion of 'otherness', rather than offering an accurate depiction of their roles and identities.

However, there are many instances where ancient depictions of women, whether Celtic or otherwise, primarily focused on gender behaviour and virtue as opposed to cultural identity. This is most evident in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, where the portrayals of women of the Celts are compared with their Roman counterparts. The stereotypes associated with Celtic women start to untangle, as evidence comes to the fore that *some* Roman women displayed behaviour attributed to 'barbaric' Celts, and *some* Celtic women were portrayed with the wiliness usually attributed to Roman women. The behaviours of Roman women appear to be distinctly attributed to their gender, given that their cunning conduct seems to be recognised independently from their male counterparts. Though, it could be argued that they are being compared against the norms of 'acceptable' *Roman* femininity of the time, evidenced by the lack of same rules applied to Celtic women. However, their stories are used as a means to govern the appropriate social behaviour for women of the period, by which the Celts are also measured. It must not be forgotten that the stories of the women of antiquity within this study

are documented primarily by Greco-Roman men. As such, Celtic women are being held to the virtues and standards set about by Roman society as ‘the norm’. Any deviation from this ‘norm’ only widens the gap of disparity.

The stereotyping of Celtic women as raging, rebellious leaders has always been a captivating narrative device. However, when we no longer isolate their portrayal to their culture, it becomes evident that they are subject to a sexist, gender bias that encompasses *all* women. In Chapters Two and Three, examples have been provided that compare the behaviours and actions of Celtic and Roman women, revealing an overlapping of gender roles and societal expectations. Nonetheless, evidence of Celtic women’s lives is sparse, and we are reliant on the stories of a handful of women who have become representative of *all* Celtic women. This is problematic insofar as these women’s stories have been documented primarily because they serve a narrative purpose, or because they have done something either exceptional and/or transgressive. Ordinary and mundane tasks and activities have been largely overlooked, leaving us with a dramatised portrayal of Celtic life. Timothy Champion asserts that ‘we must resist the temptation to reconstruct Celtic society as we would like it to have been’,¹⁴⁷ which is just as true for today as it was nearly two thousand years ago, as the nuanced lives of Celtic women are never fully acknowledged. Rather, their stories function as narrative devices that can enhance the views of whoever writes about them. It could be argued this is not necessarily linked to xenophobic bias, provided by the modern examples of Merkel and Thatcher in Chapter Three. Their roles in political power are still under the same scrutiny as their ancient peers, implying that *all* women’s behaviour, regardless of cultural background, is still something to be governed and critiqued. Should the ancient Celts have committed their own version of history to writing, we could identify whether women of their society(ies) were held to the same expectations as their Roman and Greek counterparts or whether there is any

¹⁴⁷ Champion, ‘Power, Politics And Status’, p. 88.

truth to the frequently asserted, modern declaration that Celtic women really did have more freedom. Alas, this information is non-existent and thus caution must be exercised when denoting women of antiquity.

Chapter Three comes to find that Boudica and Cartimandua have erroneously come to epitomise Celtic women as strong, political leaders. The considerable focus on these women, combined with their extensive classical accounts, highlights their importance both historically and in contemporary studies. However, this emphasis overshadows the diversity and complexity of the average life of a woman in Celtic society. It cannot be assumed that these two women represented that cultural ‘norms’ of the period, as the behaviour of the ‘typical’ Celtic woman is not documented. This chapter explores the overlap between xenophobia and sexism. Sexist bias, for example, is apparent in Tacitus’ accounts of Boudica and Cartimandua, where comment of their behaviour has been shaped by the virtues and behaviours that he believes women *should* have, as opposed to what their own Celtic society(ies) deemed acceptable. Tacitus highlights gender again when he alludes to the ‘appropriate’ behaviour of Roman men and the improper treatment of the Roman army towards Boudica. Sexist bias also becomes evident when Boudica and Cartimandua are compared with Roman women of the same era. Their narratives reflect broader societal expectations placed on *all* women, rather than being unique to Celtic culture. Boudica, for example, shares more commonalities with Fulvia, than she does her Celtic counterpart, Cartimandua.

Xenophobic bias, however, is evidenced by the ‘barbaric’ attributes Dio applies to Agrippina and Messalina, whereby identifying that a feisty and aggressive attitude is usually assigned to the Celts. The difference in approaches by Tacitus and Dio also highlight the importance of recognising that, just as one stereotype cannot be applied to *all* Celtic women, neither can one be produced that represents *all* classical authors. Each will have their own unique opinion on

culture and gender, which when documented, has the potential to significantly alter the way the stories of women are told. The stark differences in the portrayal of these two Queens, influenced by the biases of each author, demonstrate the potential for xenophobic and sexist perspectives to distort historical narratives and obscure the true complexity of women's lives in Celtic society; we cannot accurately understand the lives of *all* Celtic women when the primary sources are already skewed by the personal biases of their authors.

Research for this study has been limited due to the scant evidence of the lives of Celtic women. Their stories are rare and the few we do have need to be situated in historical context to decipher truth from rhetoric. However, this would require such a vast knowledge of antiquity, with expertise in linguistics, archaeology and historical law. This study goes some way to support the repositioning of Boudica, Cartimandua, Eponina, Camma, Chiomara and Onomaris, in their historical environments. Further research could explore whether Celtic men are beholden to similar tropes as their female counterparts, and whether experiences of fatherhood, sovereignty and relationships are scrutinised, inaccurately portrayed, or underrepresented. Whilst this study contributes to a broader understanding of the complexities of Celtic portrayal, examining the roles and behaviours of men could help situate these women more accurately within their societal contexts. This would provide further clarification on whether gender rhetoric was exclusively directed towards women, or also applied to men.

This study encourages a more balanced perspective by taking historical and social context and complex nuances into consideration, as it challenges and highlights the stark polarisations in how Celtic women are perceived. It has produced an analysis which indicates that the lives of women of antiquity were not so dissimilar. Those discussed within this research show that women, Celtic or otherwise, were subject to the same rhetoric that ensured virtues such as loyalty, fidelity and chastity were upheld. The modern stereotype of the Celtic

woman as fearless and free is not an accurate representation of the lives of *all* Celtic women, in the same way that the portrayal of a few devious Roman women is not inclusive of *all* Roman women. This assumption trivialises the struggles and efforts of women who had to ‘fight’ for their positions *or* who had their paths of war, violence, and leadership thrust upon them by circumstance. Their ‘power’ is often assumed to be a given purely because they were Celtic, yet this perspective is laced with insensitivity as it overlooks the complexities and challenges these women faced. The hope is that this research goes some way to showing a richer picture of the intertwined and intricate tapestry of the lives of women of antiquity; that Celtic women especially cannot be bound to a cultural stereotype, and we should approach with sensitivity to allow their complex wholeness into existence.

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