

Catuvellaunia and Rome



Catuvellaunia and Rome

**Economic and political relations
during the final decades pre-conquest**

The role of grain from SE'n Britain and its
potential for maintenance of the Roman
military along the frontier on the Rhine

Alistair Marshall





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Front cover: *foreground*: gold stater of Cunobelinos, minted at Camulodunum; *obv*: ear of grain, Camu; *rev*: prancing horse; late 1st century BC; *midground*: wine amphora: Dressel 2-4; imported during the decades BC-AD; *background*: Channel coasts of SE'n England and NW'n Gaul.

Back cover: *foreground*: gold stater of Epaticus [Epaticu], ?brother of Cunobelinos, ?sons of Tasciovanos [Tasci F[ilius]]; *obv*: ear of grain; *rev*: mounted warrior; late 1st century BC; *background*: grains and ears of modern barley;

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-specific terminology:

..the **terms** Catuvellaunia, Atrebatia, and Dobunnia are used here as convenient alternative references to corresponding tribal areas, and have no historical basis, but take their lead from such forms as Brigantia, Belgica, Aquitania, and others that do;

..Celtic **personal names** rendered with Latin endings in Roman texts have been converted here to more likely native versions ending in -os: for instance: Commius to Commios;

..Celtic **place-names** appearing with Latin endings have been modified to the likely Celtic version, where the earlier context is clear: for instance: Camulodunum to Camulodunon.

-abbreviations used

..e-FIGURES: labelling individual layers:

exp Ordnance Survey maps: Explorer series;

LR Ordnance Survey maps: Landranger series;

..throughout the text:

BG Caesar: de Bello Gallico;

Keynote evidence

Two important references, highly relevant to the relationship between Catuvellaunia and Rome during the final decades of the pre-conquest period, are presented here, at the outset, since, together with the sudden appearance of the gold grain-ear staters [see Section 06: TE-Tribal emblems], suggesting the importance of grain-wealth under Cunobelinos, they prompted this entire study:

-Strabo: provides a contemporary historical comment, indicating routine grain-export from Britain:

Geographica: Book 4: 5: 2;
original editions: 7 BC to before 23 AD:

φέρει δὲ σῖτον
καὶ βοσκήματα καὶ χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον καὶ σίδηρον·
ταῦτά [τε]δὴ κομίζεται ἐξ αὐτῆς
καὶ δέρματα καὶ ἀνδράποδα καὶ κύνες
εὐφυεῖς πρὸς τὰς κυνηγεσίας·

[Britain] bears **grain**,
cattle, gold, silver, and iron.
These things, accordingly, are **exported from the island**,
also hides, slaves, and dogs that are by nature suited
to the purposes of the chase;

alternative emphasis:

This quotation is usually given with the translation of *κομίζεται ἐξ αὐτῆς* as ‘exported from [Britain]’. However, there are possible alternatives, involving not just shades of meaning, but important differences that relate to the nature of this transaction, specifically as it relates to corn, the key item for Roman economic strategy in N’n Gaul.

In the extract *σῖτον* [corn] is the item mentioned at the head of the list of British commodities, and this could reflect its prime importance as a product of particular economic interest to Rome, with Gaul the obvious initial destination.

The phrase *κομίζεται ἐξ αὐτῆς* could have various meanings: the active verb *κομίζειν*, ‘to take care of [in some way]’, when in middle, or passive voice, as in the case of *κομίζεται*, could be interpreted as ‘it is carried away, obtained securely [from Britain]’, the active agent being the buyer, rather than the seller. Consequently, this transaction could perhaps be better viewed as suggesting that the prime movers of this trade were *importers* on the Continental side of the Channel, actively securing supply as a matter of policy, rather than *exporters* on the British side seeking export-markets, although the two activities are of course complementary.

Had the text been in Latin rather than Greek, the transaction might have been more clearly stated: ‘*in-vehere*’, to import, and ‘*exportare*’ to export, requiring no further explanation.

-Horace: gives a poetic reference to S’n Britain and its clientship under Roman power during the reign of Augustus, and the last decades BC:

Odes: Book 3: ode 5, lines 1-4:

*Caelo tonantem credidimus Iovem
praesens divus habebitur
Augustus **adiectis** Britannis
imperio gravibusque Persis;*

We believe thunderous Jupiter rules the sky;
Augustus is considered a god on earth
for adding the Britons, and
the burdensome Persians [Parthians] to our power;

Quintus Horatius Flaccus [aka the poet Horace: life: 65-8 BC] was well connected to inner imperial circles at Rome, partly through his powerful patron Maecenas, and hence was likely to have been well informed on events relating to the political situation in the wider Empire. These two particular references, one to Britain, the other to Parthia, need have no less credibility by forming part of a poem, rather than a prose history.

Although comments in passing, they suggest existence of closer economic, perhaps military cooperation, or at least some form of non-aggression pact between each of these marginal nations and Rome. A closer date of around 20 BC is further suggested by a distinct military contract with Parthia, as outlined below, and is in agreement with publication date for Books 1-3 of the Odes in 23 BC, making the events recent. However, it remains possible that such references to subjugation of little known nations at the edge of Empire might be flattering stock-in-trade poetic formulae for the general military prowess of Augustus, but the specificity here, and dated political relevance, could suggest real content.

The use of *adiectis*, from the verb *adiocere*, here carries the definite meaning of addition. *Imperio*, from *imperium*, indicates power, influence, authority, rather than geographical inclusion as a province of the Empire under direct Roman rule, which indeed Britain eventually became under Claudius after 43 AD, but Parthia did not, until briefly 116-117 AD under Trajan, only resuming again under Severus after about 198 AD. The power of *imperium* itself was graded, down from that wielded by the emperor, through that delegated to provincial governors, and military commanders.

..Parthia: corroborating the overall date of the reference

Crassus, a member of the First Triumvirate of the late Roman Republic, partly motivated by the quest for personal glory, but without the necessary supporting authority, decided to invade Parthia, only to be decisively defeated at the battle of Carrhae [Harran: S'n coast of Asia Minor] in 53 BC, the enemy capturing several legionary standards, a matter of national disgrace, and many prisoners besides.

In 51 BC the Parthians mounted a major offensive W'ward into Roman Asia, besieging Cassius in Antioch, causing considerable alarm. Marcus Tullius Cicero, then governor of adjacent Cilicia, marched with two legions to lift the siege, successfully pushing the Parthians back. The Parthians invaded again in 40 BC, only to be defeated in 38 BC, with general Roman control of this unstable area restored. Lost standards, and prisoners of war were only recovered from Parthia in 20 BC, under Augustus, now as emperor, the Romans managing to contain the Parthians, exert influence, and extend their effective power E'ward into Mesopotamia without resort to renewed open warfare.

..Britain:

This reference, *adiectis Britannis*, appears to support the idea of a key area of Britain, brought into at least

localised compliance with the civil-military administration of Gaul, the SE'n empire of the Catuvellauni prominent (see Section 04: Tribal lineage and interaction/ Catuvellauni: an outline of tribal history), a clientship supported elsewhere in this volume. The date of around 20 BC for the Parthian negotiation would bring it into line with dates suggested for Addedomaros, but somewhat early for Cunobelinos, both regnal periods being imprecisely defined, and resting on epigraphic and stylistic content of British Celtic coinage (e-FIG 04 TL-03): also discussion of the Lexden Tumulus: (see Section 10: Camulodunum). It would also match with the earliest Augustan military activity along the prospective frontier on the Rhine, and the growing need for reliably sourced supplies to support the army in this outpost of empire (see Section 19: Rhine-frontier).

-Julian: the campaigns of Julian in Gaul: military grain-transport from Britain to the Rhine: further context from the 4th century AD:



gold solidus of Julian issued AD 361 in Ravenna; VIRTUS EXER[citus]
GALL[icarum]

Zosimus: writing as a historian, a century after the events:

In Book 3 of his *Ἱστορία Νέα* [New History: written in Greek at the end of the 5th century AD], Zosimus records a case where large stocks of grain were shipped at short notice from Britain to cover a civil emergency along the Rhine-frontier following devastation caused by a major incursion of German tribes. The narrative indicates ready supply from Britain, suggests a well established route, and the relative ease of repeat transport, first by short sea-crossing, thence along the Rhine, using 800 smaller, hastily constructed vessels.

In addition, use of language in the original passage, referring to the actual process of procurement [κομίζεσθαι: present medio-passive infinitive of κομίζω], is relevant to that discussed in the entry from Strabo, as outlined just above.

The extent of devastation, and its duration can be assessed by the outline of main events:

-more detailed:

352-358 AD saw repeated Germanic incursions into N'n Gaul, six years of instability causing famine by AD 359, the situation easing only after AD 360. Repeated barbarian attack would have affected agricultural production, and disrupted supply-chains within the region, especially those dependant on the Rhine. The distribution of key military events shows a bias towards conflict, as recorded, in the middle

and upper reaches of the Rhine, beyond its junction with the Moselle, but with barbarian attacks recorded as far W'ward as Sens (e-FIG SG-05), so the devastated areas would have been appreciable, as was that left after the Gallic Wars.

AD

352..Alemanni [around the upper Rhine to the W of Strasbourg] and Franks [middle and lower Rhine] crossed the Rhine and defeated depleted Roman units, taking control of 40 towns between the Moselle and the Rhine;

354..withdrawal of Roman units were withdrawn back to Gaul after suicide of the usurper Magnentius;
..Alemanni and Franks crossed the Rhine and invaded *Helvetia*;

355..incursions into N'n Gaul by Germanic Letienses [upper Rhine; associated with the Alemanni];
..Franks beseiged Cologne for 10 months;

356..Julian was defeated at the Battle of *Durocortorum* [Reims], but was victorious at the Battle of *Brocomagus* [Brumath];
..Julian overwintered at *Senonae* [Sens in N'n Gaul]; his *foderati* deserted, and war-bands beseiged;

357..a major Roman victory at *Argentorium* [Strasbourg];

358..Salian Franks around the lower Rhine capitulated; Julian allowed their resettlement as *foederati* to help defend the Rhine-frontier;

359..widespread famine in the upper Rhineland;

360..Julian proclaimed emperor;

-according to Zosimus:

While Constantius II [reign: AD 337-361] campaigned in the East, Julian [Caesar in the West: AD 355-360, emperor AD 361-363] was sent to deal with a major incursion of Germans over the Rhine and into N'n Gaul, almost reaching coastal areas, the consequent extensive destruction of settlement and agriculture, and to effect the return of captives. Placed in full charge of the situation, he defeated the insurgents at *Argentorium* [Strasbourg], then pursued German tribes beyond the Rhine, restoring hostages to Gaul.

For those refugees and captives returning to the devastated areas, given the inability of other Gallic towns, also affected by the incursion, to cover the short-fall, the problem of restoring the basic food-supply remained a priority, both as grain for immediate consumption, and as seed-corn to ensure the next planting:

Zosimus: New History Book 3, chapter 4, section 5:

οὗ δὴ γενομένου καὶ πλήθους αἰχμαλώτων ἀποδοθέντος ὅσον εἰκὸς ἦν ἐκ τεσσαράκοντα πόλεων κατὰ κρατος ἀλουσῶν συνειλέχθαι, ἠπόρει περὶ τὸ πρακτέον ὁ Καῖσαρ, τὰς πόλεις ἄρδην

ἀπολλυμένας δρῶν, τὴν δὲ γῆν χρόνον οὐκ δλίγον μείνασαν ἀγεώρητον, τροφῆς τε οὐκ ὀλίγης δεομένους τοὺς ἐκ τῶν βαρβάρων ἀποδοθέντας, ἥτις οὐδὲ ἀπὸ τῶν πλησίον πόλεων εὐπόριστος ἦν διὰ τὸ μηδὲ ταύτας ἀπειράτους γενομένας τῆς τῶν βαρβάρων ἐφόδου τροφῆς ἀρκούσης οὐκ εὐπορεῖν οὐκ ἔχων οὐδ' ὅ τι χρήσεται τοῖς παροῦσι, τοιόνδε τι μηχανᾶται. τοῦ Ῥήνου πρὸς ταῖς ἐσχατιαῖς τῆς Γερμανίας, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἔθνος Γαλατικόν, εἷς τὸ Ἀτλαντικὸν πέλαγος ἐχθιδόντος, οὗ τῆς ἠϊόνος ἢ Βρεττανικῆ γῆσος ἐνναχοσίους σταδίοις διέστηκεν, ἐκ τῶν περὶ τὸν ποταμὸν ὑλῶν ξύλα συναγαγὼν **ὀκτακόσια κατεσκεύασε πλοῖα**: μείζονα λέμβων, **ταῦτά τε εἷς τὴν Βρεττανίαν ἐκπέμψας κομίζεσθαι σῖτον ἐποίηε**. καὶ τοῦτον τοῖς ποταμίους πλοίοις ἀνάγεσθαι διὰ τοῦ Ῥήνου παρασκευάζων, τοῦτό τε ποιῶν συνεχέστερον διὰ τὸ βραχὺν εἶναι τὸν πλοῦν, ἤρκεσε τοῖς ἀποδοθεῖσι ταῖς οἰκείαις πόλεσιν εἷς τὸ καὶ **τροφῆν χρήσασθαι καὶ σπεῖραι τὴν γῆν** καὶ ἄχρις ἀμητοῦ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἔχειν;

...having done this, Caesar [Julian] recovered as many captives as it seemed had been taken from the 40 cities which the barbarians had sacked, but was uncertain what to do, seeing that the cities were completely ruined, and that the land had long remained uncultivated, causing great scarcity of provisions among those captives released by the barbarians. Nor was there a ready supply to be brought in from neighbouring towns, their own inhabitants who, unused to barbarian attack, and having been denied their regular resupply of food, were not sufficiently well stocked, even for present needs. So [Julian] planned as follows: the Rhine flowed into the Atlantic at the coast of Germany, where the Gaulish folk lived; the shore of Britain was 900 stadia away [note 1, below]; collecting timber from around the Rhine **he had 800 boats constructed**, mostly small, sent specifically **to obtain grain from Britain** [note 2], bringing this up the Rhine by a continuous line of river-barges, because the voyage was short; he protected those inhabitants who had been displaced from their towns by **supplying the grain and seed-corn** they needed immediately, sufficient to last them until the next harvest.

Notes:

1: one stadium = 1/8th of a mille passum = ~185m; so 900 stadia = ~166km; direct sea-passage of 166km W'ward from the coastal Rhine-mouth would have given landfall in Britain, at the tip of Kent, or in the Colchester area, a known port, and particularly relevant in this analysis (e-FIG SG-04); see also Section 10: Camulodunum; the use of the terrestrial measure 'stadia' here suggests reference to maps, perhaps with more specific destinations in mind.

2: the boats constructed here were smaller craft ['πλοῖα; λέμβων; ποταμίους πλοίοις'], more suited to riverine than to marine navigation; this raises the question of the marine leg of the journey, certainly requiring larger sea-going vessels, perhaps supplied by the civilian merchant-marine, or Roman navy itself; the *Classis Germanica* was still active at the time, not disbanded until AD 417 (see Section 15: Ships and boats).

Ammianus Marcellinus: writing as a contemporary participant in events:

The same campaign by Julian in N'n Gaul, and on into *Germania transrhena*, is covered by Ammianus Marcellinus [life: AD 330-391/400] in his *Res Gestae* [written: 380s AD; 31 books, of which the last 18 survive, these covering AD 353-378].

Res Gestae: Book 18, chapter 2, section 3:

[Julian], since the season of the year was favourable, assembled all available forces for a campaign, judging it to be a priority, that before the heat of battle, he enter the towns, long since destroyed and abandoned, to regain, and fortify them, and furthermore to construct granaries to replace those that had been burned, in which **grain, which was regularly brought over from Britain, could be stored;**

*...ipse anni tempore opportuno, ad expeditionem undique milite convocato, profectus, id inter possitissima mature duxit implendum, ut ante proeliorum fervorem, civitates multo ante excisas ac vacuas introiret, receptasque communiret, horrea quin etiam extrueret pro incensis, **ubi condi possit annona, a Britanniis sueta transferri.***

This passage, provides evidence for long-distance transport of emergency grain-supplies from Britain to deal with severe shortages in devastated areas of N'n Gaul but, unlike Zosimus, provides no further detail of the route, nor method of transport, but does indicate regularity ['sueta'] of this means of supply for grain. How far this particular trade extended back in time remains unknown, but if such adverse conditions required such a solution in the late 4th century AD, then this might provide a parallel for a similar situation, suggested in this study, that existed three centuries earlier (see Section 20: Grain-supply: problems and solutions), thereafter forming a more regular, long-term component of supply for the Rhine frontier and its hinterland.

The account by Zosimus [lived: Constantinople; historian, writing late 5th century AD; sources necessarily secondary] was made about a century later than that of Ammianus Marcellinus [historian and soldier; writing in the 380s AD; served under Constantius II in the East, and Julian in Gaul, so close to events]. The two accounts of this episode do not overlap in detail, and do not conflict, sharing only the most general features of the crisis in common.

Summary

Cunobelinos, direct ruler of the combined Catuvellauni and Trinovantes, prominent tribes of SE'n Britain during the early decades AD, was the last effective, and perhaps strongest member of an important dynasty exercising, via clients, and other family-members, considerable influence, and control over much of the adjacent South, and its tribes.

Cunobelinos was styled as *rex* on certain issues of an extensive, varied, and rich coinage, hence was probably recognised formally as a client-king by Augustus, and likely by his immediate successors, until he disappears from the record before the Claudian conquest of 43 AD. He was also singularly described as *Britannorum Rex* by Suetonius (*De vita Caesarum: Gaius_Caligula: 44, 2*), although this was written about 119 AD, some 76 years after the Claudian invasion, and the end of autonomous Celtic rule in S'n Britain, with no indication of how widely the *Britanni* were defined as being subject. At the very least, this extended styling *Britannorum* could imply some increased sense of national influence, if not direct leadership, or indeed kingship, however this latter may be defined, his power extending well beyond that of the core-tribe, indicating more than a passing coalition, less than an organised empire.

The long reign of Cunobelinos, estimated as covering some 30 years, on the basis of evidence from inscribed coinage, appears to have ended a phase of dynastic instability, entering a period of political consolidation, although not without turbulence. Certainly this period was one of material wealth, and increased economic, diplomatic, and cultural contact with the Romanised world, its military entrenched in N'n Gaul since the later 50's BC, distant only by the readily navigable width of the English Channel.

This analysis considers certain key aspects of this terminal phase in dynastic SE'n Britain, their economic basis, and their political consequences, using one particular material element as a starting point: bulk-supplies of grain, vital to the Roman world.

-The later gold coinage of Cunobelinos, and less prominently that of his probable uncle, and deputy regional ruler Epaticcus, is remarkable in its near universal use of one particular motif, clearly breaking from the usual combination of obverse head and equine reverse, prevalent amongst earlier Catuvellaunian-Trinovantian issues, those of other British tribes minting coins, and indeed those of Celtic Gaul. Whilst retaining the equine reverse, the motif shown prominently on the obverse, in isolation, without distraction by accessory symbols, is that of the ripe grain-ear, fronting the clearly emblazoned mint-mark CAMU, indicating Camulodunon, the capital, and major port of the tribal confederation, indicating here not only the source of coinage, the usual function, but also perhaps the destination for a tradable commodity.

-The theme of such coinage appears to move from being simply personalised towards, and validated by, the named ruler, to carrying commercial advertisement, and perhaps including some more specific economic function as indicating valid currency within the trade itself, suggesting the possible existence of larger-scale inter-tribal agri-business, of major regional importance, and with potential for developing export-markets in Romanised Gaul, and along the German frontier. A few other cases of distinctive obverse-motifs do exist on British coinage of the period, persisting over a series of rulers, in the case of the branched emblem for the Dobunni, apparently tribal, or appearing fleetingly as the vine-leaf for Atrebatia Verica, perhaps here suggesting links with the wine-trade, or as some statement of allegiance to romanised cultural values. However, neither of these examples match the issues of Cunobelinos in terms of volume, potential commercial content, and visual impact.

More detailed issues surrounding the production, context, and potential use of a grain-supply in deliberate excess of localised needs, with its economic, and political implications, are examined for S'n Britain as follows:

-evidence for arable systems: type, scale, distribution, and associations in Britain, and NW'n Europe; limiting factors of geology, and climate, with Continental comparisons;

-analysis of productivity for grain during the Iron Age: matching this against arable area required, and capacity of the yield to sustain population, using all available data in an adaptable spreadsheet-model;

-tribal distribution in S'n Britain: evidence for more complex regional grouping of settlement within traditionally designated tribal areas, using the final pattern of hillforts as an index; distribution of regional coinages, and use of their degree of overlap to suggest the direction, and extent of late-period interaction;

-Catuvellauni: their lineage, and hegemony over other tribes in S'n Britain; Cunobelinos: the nature of kingship; the growing personalised depiction of rulers, and increased projection of militarism on coinage indicating increased tribal assertion;

-Celtic coinage in Britain, and Gaul: an overview, providing a broader context for the Catuvellaunian grain-motif;

-Roman conquest of Gaul: campaigns of progressive N'ward expansion, with consequent problems of sustaining adequate military grain-supply in N'n latitudes;

-transport of grain: problems of bulk-supply by land; potential of sea-, and riverine routes along the coastal zone of the NW'n Atlantic; the extent of relevant navigational information; traditions of ship-building, and availability of appropriate vessels during the Iron Age, and earlier Roman period; the logistics of Roman military grain-supply, with case-studies for N'n Britain, and the Rhine frontier;

-Roman grain-supply: sources, and wider organisation in Rome, and the provinces;

-political implications of Catuvellaunian grain-wealth: early development of Roman diplomatic, tributary, cultural, and commercial inroads into Britain; the romanisation of well-connected British hostages, from the time of Caesar's expeditions to Britain in 55 and 54 BC; cultivation of Catuvellaunian, and other rulers politically as client-kings, and materially through general trade; changing Roman policy towards a nominally independent Celtic Britain, and the inevitable need to annexe this potential asset, including its more stable grain-wealth.

Nature of the evidence:

The evidence for co-operative, and mutually profitable grain-trade between Catuvellaunia and the Roman military on the Rhine remains circumstantial, given the absence of explicit contemporary records. The approach here has been to outline the conditions, context, capacity, means, need, and viable alternatives for such transactions, with assumptions examined as follows:

-the grain-motif suddenly adopted on staters of Cunobelinos was indeed a declaration of commercial intent;

-S'n Britain was able to produce an extensive grain-surplus, as a deliberate source of external revenue, this exchange reflected only unilaterally by the growing material wealth, and range of Continental imports evident in wider Catuvellaunia;

-those specialist, and general maritime merchants that were certainly in evidence by the 2nd century AD as trading extensively between Britain, Gaul, and the Rhine also operated during the earlier 1st century AD;

-suitable vessels existed, capable of carrying considerable, unstable bulk-cargo such as grain, as indicated indirectly for Celtic, but well-established for Roman ship-building traditions;

-well established open-water, and riverine routes along the coastal NW'n Atlantic margin were in extensive use during the later Iron Age;

-Roman naval supervision of a largely civilian grain-trade, as specified for the Mediterranean fleet, was also undertaken as a priority by the *Classis Britannica*, and *Classis Germanica* in the NW'n Atlantic, given the strategic, and political importance placed by Rome on ensuring adequate, predictable grain-supply for both civil, and military markets;

-that grain-supply matched the growing needs of the Roman military, heavily committed in the frontier-zone along the Rhine; the general absence of recorded grain-shortage, and related unrest, suggests a successful policy of procurement, at least in part, from more reliable sources beyond N'n Gaul, given the likely insecurity of its tributary grain, and inability of the less fertile and productive hinterland of the Rhine to provide adequately;

-convenient alternative markets for Catuvellaunian grain seem unlikely beyond those of N'n Gaul, whether for civilian, or military use.