Warrior Queens in Holinshed’s Woodcuts

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Abstract: One of the most under-investigated aspects of Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles must be the study of the visual representations of British history that we find in the first edition of 1577. This article focuses on the woodcuts used in Holinshed’s Chronicles to illustrate the representation of warrior queens in England and surprisingly we find only two: Cordella and Boudica, from Britain’s prehistory and ancient history. It describes and analyses these images in order to demonstrate the historiographical and political objective of such works. This article also reviews the information known about the artist and tries to understand why these pictures were removed from the second edition of 1587.


At present the study of early woodcuts in England is like making bricks without straw.
Gordon Duff, 1893.

The 1580s in Tudor England witnessed the disappearance of the majority of visual illustrations in English printed histories. This was the case with Holinshed’s Chronicles which had included 1026 images in the first edition of 1577 and none in the 2nd edition ten years later. With only ten years between the two editions there was a huge gulf between the publications. Both were produced as expensive, de luxe history books. Both were written in English and served as almanac, travel guide, national archive and source book with their chorographic and historical descriptions of the kingdoms of England(-Wales), Scotland and Ireland, and both have been the

3 Wales had been incorporated into England under Henry VIII with the Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542. Wales does not figure in the subtitle of Holinshed’s Chronicles which covers the descriptions and histories of England (and Wales), Ireland and Scotland.

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subject of much research and speculation, especially since Holinshed’s Chronicles served as source material for many of Shakespeare’s history plays. However, some of the most under-investigated aspects of The Chronicles include the visual representations of British history that we find in them. For example, we do not know with certainty who designed the illustrations and there is also some disagreement among scholars as to whether they were produced from wood blocks or metal plates since the blocks themselves have not been traced.4 We also know very little about the revision of the 1587 edition, a revision which witnessed the disappearance of the illustrations and the cancellation of a number of passages.

In this study I briefly review some of the reasons suggested for the suppression of the woodcuts in the 1587 edition of Holinshed’s Chronicles. I then concentrate on a particular theme developed in the visual representations of history in the 1577 edition; that of female military leadership. This theme is examined in the woodcuts illustrating the reign and death of Queen Cordeilla in ancient British prehistory and in the woodcuts recounting the revolt of Boudica5 against Roman rule in England in AD 60/61 and against Roman rule in Scotland in AD 60/61 and AD 74.

Despite the fact that The Chronicles had originally been commissioned by the queen’s printer, Reginald Wolfe as a universal cosmography and history of the whole world6 the project had to be scaled down to just the British archipelago following Wolfe’s death in 1573 when Raphael Holinshed took over the project. Dedicated to Sir William Cecil, Lord Treasurer and member of Elizabeth’s Privy Council, with the address, “God save the Queene”, this political rhetoric did not protect the work from royal criticism and censorship.

As a general rule, Holinshed was interested in writers and texts which contributed to the national culture, and this can easily justify his inclusion of disparate and sometimes contradictory sources in the chronicles, such as his exploitation of the discredited work of Geoffrey of Monmouth for his story of Cordeilla’s female and unitied British rule. Yet, the inclusion of Boudica’s story in both the “Historie of England” and the “Historie of Scotland” also shows that unity and order were not always the maxims of Holinshed’s Chronicles, but in an effort to be objective Holinshed explains how and why he chose texts for inclusion in The Chronicles:

I have collected (the history) out of manie and sundrie authors, in whom what contrarietie, negligence, and rashnesse sometimes is found in their reports, I leave to the discretion of those that have perused their works: for my part, I have in things doubtful rather chosen to shew the diversitie of their writings, than by over-ruling

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5 Boudica is called Voadicea in the “Historie of England” and Voada (the mother) and Vodicia (the youngest daughter) in the “Historie of Scotland”. In the “Historie of England” Holinshed writes: she is “Voadicia, or Bondicia (for so we finde hir written by some copies, and Bonduca also by Dio)”. See “The Historie of England”, p. 64. She has also been known as Boadicea, Boudicca, Voada, Voadicia, Voadicea and Bunduca. A résumé is given by Antonia Fraser in Boudica’s Chariot: The Warrior Queens, London, Arrow, 1999, p. 4-6.
6 This is referred to in the dedication to William Cecil at the beginning of the first volume of The Chronicles, 1577.
them, and using a peremptorie censure, to frame them to agree to my liking: leaving it nevertheless to each mans judgement, to controll them as he seeth cause."

Does this show a lack of historical discernment? Or is it letting the reader be their own judge? Annabel Patterson argues that this reflects a deliberate policy by Holinshed and his collaborators to “register how extraordinarily complicated, even dangerous, life had become in post-Reformation England, when every change of regime initiated a change in the official religion, and hence in the meaning and value of acts and allegiances”. Surviving the censors and being authorised by the stationer’s company, the middle, fairly uncritical way of allowing the reader to be his own historian was a safe alternative to the dangerous route of critical analyst, as heavy censorship of the 2nd edition proved.

Whilst it is not known exactly why the illustrations were taken out of the 2nd edition of 1587 the origin of the suppressions has been traced back to the Privy Council which had found the woodcuts and other texts disagreeable to Queen Elizabeth. A number of historians have speculated that it was due to the advent of a Protestant aesthetic which, according to James Knapp, began to “affect the rhetorical privileging of verbal over visual representations”. It seems that the charge of idolatry was a powerfully damaging accusation and the majority of printers feared for their reputation and their livelihood. It should, however, be noted that England did lack a tradition of illustrating its historical writings and that Holinshed’s Chronicles, following John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs of 1563, was breaking new ground in including so many pictorial representations of the past. Even in Scotland Hector Boece’s Chronicles had only included one picture alongside the other more conventional woodcuts used for representing coats of arms and decorated capital letters. The chronicles in England, including those by Polydore Vergil, Humphrey Llwyd and John Stow, only include woodcuts for decorated capital letters, as do the majority of Richard Grafton’s historiographical writings with the exception of his chronicles of 1569 which do include a number of woodcuts in his sections on Britain’s early history.

Annabel Patterson, on the other hand, speculates that the suppression of the woodcuts in Holinshed’s 2nd edition was a cost-saving decision taken by the new editor, Abraham Fleming to save space and facilitate printing. It is certainly true that the 2nd edition is larger and longer than the first one so that cost and space were significant parameters to consider in the new layout and format of the book and scholars working on The Holinshed Project suggest that the “often lengthy résumés

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which preface each chapter of the pre-1066 history of England were also intended to compensate for the disappearance of the woodcuts”. A third possibility is an aesthetic one: the ink from the woodcuts sometimes penetrated the page making the text on the reverse side unreadable and may have incited some complaints from readers and bibliophiles.

Although we know the writers of the Chronicles included eleven other contributors apart from Holinshed himself the artist (or artists) of the woodcuts is uncertain. Very little is known about the artists who produced the designs for the Chronicles. Edward Hodnett identifies Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder as the designer of the majority of the woodcuts in Holinshed but James Knapp points to the lack of documentary evidence for this. Rather, Hodnett bases his assumption on the fact that the printer, Bynneman, had been known to use Gheeraerts for other work and that the woodcuts show traces of “Flemish realism”. Unfortunately, England had no tradition of representing narrative history in the visual arts despite Wynkyn de Worde’s experimentation in this field in the late 15th and early 16th centuries and this may explain Bynneman’s employment of Gheeraerts, a painter and etcher from Bruges. We can add that the Holinshed illustrations were numerous and small. In general, each block was meant to fit into a single column (4-7cm by 4-7cm) but some covered the width of the page (14cm by 7cm).

Because of the lack of documented evidence we do not know whether the artist worked directly from the original texts or from Holinshed’s account. If we follow Daniel Woolf’s research in this field familiarity with the historical sources and methods was expected of artists and poets of narrative history. With reference to Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apologie for Poetry (1581) Woolf states that Sydney’s definition of a poet was that of a man who combined all “the qualities of a good historian […] and the talents of a good poet”. Woolf also applies this definition to artists but quotes from Sir Joshua Reynolds’ work more than a century later when didacticism and anachronism had ceded their places to accuracy and coherence in the visual representation of history.

Holinshed, writing the volumes himself on the history of England and Scotland, makes a number of contributions to representations of Cædwalla and Boudica in the Elizabethan period. Using the accounts of King Leir found in

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13 The Holinshed Project gives an excellent review and analysis of the history of the two editions: http://www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/index.shtml
18 Other artists who were influential in the history of book illustrations in England also came from the Continent and included Hans Holbein the Elder, and later his son, whose woodcuts were first obtained by Richard Pynson, the king’s printer in 1518. Op. cit., Duff, “England”, p. 239, 245.
Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*[^20] Holinshed tells the story of Cordeilla helping her father, Leir regain the throne of Britain and gives her later reign its own chapter heading in the margin. Leading an army with her father and her French husband, Aganippus, a prince of Gaul and ruler of one third of the French territory, their forces cross the Channel into England and defeat the British forces led by Leir’s two eldest daughters and his sons-in-law who had usurped the British thrones. Cordeilla is called “a woman of manly courage”[^21] and following the deaths of her father and her husband two years later she rules Britain alone for five years.

The woodcut below was placed within one of the two columns which make up the pages of the small folio format of the 1577 *Chronicles* and was included only once in the whole edition. It shows Cordeilla wearing the crown and scepter of kingship and sporting muscular arms and a stern expression. She is both a military and political leader, anointed by God and chosen by blood as the rightful female king of Britain. Holinshed names her “Q. [Queen] & supreme governoure of Britayne, in the yeere of ye World 355 before the building of Rome”.[^22] This is an interesting title since it is the one given to Queen Elizabeth as governor of the Church of England and reflects the religious and political rhetoric of the Elizabethan period; one which signified strong, powerful and stable rule for both queens.

![Cordeilla Queenet](image)

Figure n° 1: Holinshed’s Chronicles: the Historie of England, 1577, p. 20.

However, Cordeilla’s rule was not to last since her two nephews resented the rule of a single woman and led a rebellion against Cordeilla in which she was

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[^22]: Id.
defeated and committed suicide. The second woodcut, slightly larger than the first but still only the width of one column shows the death of Cordeilla.

Figure n° 2: Holinshed’s Chronicles: the Historie of England, 1577, p. 20.

Wearing Tudor dress and the crown of kingship she appears to be in her bedchamber under house arrest. Here, “despairing to recover libertie”,23 she thrusts a sword into her chest. Yet, this woodcut was not unique to Cordeilla’s story since it was reproduced a second time in the Chronicles when recounting the suicide of King Ferguse’s wife in the “Historie of Scotland” in the 8th century AD. And this suicide was for a completely different reason since the queen had murdered her husband, the King of Scotland because of his adultery and, after confessing her crime in the Scottish judgement hall, she stabbed herself.24

In recounting Boudica’s story Holinshed makes a number of changes to the accounts told by previous historians in the 16th century. For the first time he places her rebellion in its correct geographical location; that of Norfolk, Essex and London, whilst keeping the story of Hector Boece’s Voada in his “Historie of Scotland”, and even gives particular prominence to the two stories with the inclusion of three woodcuts in the 1577 edition of the chronicles of England, and a further two woodcuts in the Scottish treatment of Boudica’s story. For the sources concerning Boudica Holinshed used Boece25 for Scotland, even keeping Boece’s inclusions of

23 Id.
Tacitus\textsuperscript{26} and Polydore Vergil’s references.\textsuperscript{27} For England, Holinshed used Tacitus, Dio,\textsuperscript{28} Vergil, and again refers to Boece but this time to correct Boece’s errors regarding the confusion between the two Celtic kings, Prasutagus and Arurigaus, whom Boece seems to have merged into one,\textsuperscript{29} and to correct the geographic location of the British tribes.\textsuperscript{30} Although quoting Boece’s Tacitus in the “Historie of Scotland” Holinshed is quick to discredit any cultural authority Boece has assumed: “none of the Romane writers mentioneth any thing of the Scots, nor once nameth them, till the Romane empire began to decay, about the time of the emperor Constantius”.\textsuperscript{31}

The two accounts include images which had been recycled elsewhere in the chronicles and which were printed alongside individual woodcuts created for special moments in British history, such as Voadicea’s speech to her troops before their final battle with the Romans in the “Historie of England”, and the execution of her daughter, Vodicia in the “Historie of Scotland”. The inclusion of Boudica’s story and woodcuts in both the “Chronicles of England” and the “Chronicles of Scotland” show both the English and the Scottish claims to her personage and the fragmentation of her story.

The most well-known woodcut of Boudica’s rebellion in Holinshed’s Chronicles is that of Boudica addressing her troops. Inserted into the English history it breaks up both columns of text since it covers the width of the page and illustrates the political and cultural significance of such images in Elizabeth’s reign. Part of Holinshed’s project is to show readers what it means to be a subject of Elizabeth’s protestant realm. The Chronicles gives voice to a new nationalist discourse of Elizabeth’s protestant land in which the themes of isolationism and patriotic identity are voiced in Boudica’s oration, taken from Dio. By reproducing almost verbatim the ancient texts, the early modern writers expressed ancient Roman ideals of nationalism and gender politics that had already been attained by the citizen subjects of the Roman Empire. Literary writers, thereafter, gave body to English, and British, nationalism by using the ancient representations of nationalism in their own historical works. Effectively, both Tacitus and Dio treat Boudica as a spokeswoman for national self-consciousness and for political and sexual freedom, and Holinshed includes her two speeches in his Scottish and English accounts.

In “The Historie of England” Boudica’s oration before her troops is one of female patriotism and liberty:

\begin{quote}
If ye therefore (said she) would wey and consider with your selves your huge numbers of men of warre, and the causes why ye have mooved this warre, ye would surelie determine either in this batttell to die with honour, or else to vanquish the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, chapter 9, p. 493.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}
enimie by plaine force, for so (quote she) I being a woman am fullie resolved, as for you men ye maie (if ye list) live and be brought into bondage.32

Figure n° 3: Holinshed’s Chronicles: the Historie of England, 1577, p. 61.

Here, Boudica is wearing Tudor dress, as are her men, and she carries the Elizabethan paraphernalia of sovereignty which infers a direct parallel between her and Queen Elizabeth but was originally inspired by Dio’s description of the Briton queen:

In stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh; a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips; around her neck was a large golden necklace; and she wore a tunic of divers colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch.33

Holinshed brings this description to the public’s attention, really for the first time, but in Elizabethan expression:

Hir mightie tall personage, comely shape, severe countenance, and sharpe voyce, with hir long and yealow tresses of heare reaching downe to hir thighes, hir brave and gorgeous apparell also caused the people to have hir in greate renounce. She ware a Chaine of golde, greate, and verye massie, and was clad in a lose kyrtle of sundrie colours, and aloft thereuppon shee had a thicke Irish mantell: hereto in his hand (as hir custome was) she bare a speare.34

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33 Dio Cassius, Roman History, lxii, 1, 1-12.
Furthermore, Holinshed has included the prophetic hare that Dio tells us was under Boudica’s cloak, the hare that was about to be released in order to prophesise victory for the Britons.

What is more intriguing though is Dio’s references to Boudica’s “tawny” hair and “thick mantle” which become “yellow tresses” and “a thicke Irish mantel” in Holinshed’s English account. This is not repeated by any other historian after Holinshed. The question is why did Holinshed introduce the idea of Irish clothing for Boudica in 1576, especially since it does not look very Irish in the illustration? Is the covert image one of economic exchanges within the British archipelago or are we to understand that Boudica was in fact an Irish princess united with a British king following some political and military alliance? In A View of the State of Ireland Edmund Spenser does refer to the origin of the Irish mantel by stating that it is a Scythian custom. When discussing the origins of the Northern Irish and the Scottish he further adds that both peoples are descended from the Scythians: “the Irish are very Scots or Scythes originally”. This may underline the popular belief in an affiliation between the Scots and the Northern Irish and helps us to understand the reference to Boudica’s “Irish mantel” as one which could infer Scottish origins but a geo-political Irish background.

Furthermore, within the context of English foreign policy, the 1570s also witnessed an increase in England’s expansionist colonial policy in Ireland when private English colonists such as Sir Thomas Smith and Walter Devereux, 1st Earl of Essex, were given active support from Elizabeth. Elizabeth even named Devereux earl marshal of Ireland and loaned him money to finance his military expeditions but other writers did not follow Holinshed’s dangerous Irish connection for Boudica. John Clapham’s Historie of England (1602) actually refers to Boudica as “a Lady of the blood of their [British] Kings”, as does Camden and Speed. However, her dead husband, the king of the Iceni, did not leave the kingdom to her in his testament but to his daughters, which implies that Boudica was an outsider to the Iceni royal household.

The Chronicles also had a clear didactic purpose, as with most historical texts including the ancient ones, and this is stated in the “Preface to the Reader”. When Holinshed writes: “the incouragement of woorthie countriemen, by elders advancements; and the daunting of the vicious, by soure penall examples, to which

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36 John Speed refers to the “tresses of her yellow hair” and “a kirtle thereunder very thicke pleited”: The Theatre of the empire of Great Britaine, London, 1612, book 6, p. 199.
38 Ibid. p. 62. See also p. 44, 45, 63, 64.
end (as I take it) chronicles and histories ought cheefelie to be written”,\(^{42}\) he is giving us the traditional humanist philosophy of history which is that of teaching through example. Didactic themes here, as with the woodcut of Cordeilla, include female and national power, justice and obedience to the monarch. Both pictures, with their implicit reference to Elizabethan power, is clear Tudor propaganda.

However, in these woodcuts, anachronism appears to be a primary fault in their pictorial representations of the past. The anachronistic representations of the ancient world with the cultural references of the present was the recognised way of comprehending the past. Whilst over-simplifying this point F. J. Levy condenses it into the following statement: “the late medieval chronicle may be seen as a compilation, loosely organised, whose author had no firm grasp of the essential differences between past and present, who thought of the events of a hundred years before his own time as occurring in a context identical to the world in which he himself lived”.\(^{43}\) This was not so much of a problem to the early chroniclers who saw all history “as present history, either because it expressed a theological schema that was equally valid in all times or places, or finally, because it listed facts useful to one or another group of readers”.\(^{44}\) Yet, in the case of Holinshed’s woodcuts, the anachronistic policy of Holinshed and his team was deliberate; it was certainly an economic cost-saving policy since the same woodcuts were recycled for different events, different dates and different places in the Chronicles.\(^{45}\) Holinshed himself also offers his readers an apology when he lists the “faultes escaped” in his English history:

And where as in the pictures of battle, ther are in sundrie places gunnes before the invention of that kind of engine [see figure 6 below for the “Historie of Scotland”], whereby the reader may discern some error, and desirous peradventure to know when they came first in use, he shal understand that we read not of any to bee put in practice, till the yeare 1380, in the warres betwixt the Venetians and the Genoweyes, at Chiozza.\(^{46}\)

Knapp informs us that Holinshed’s “willingness to both include and produce anachronistic representations of history, knowingly and without any attempt to claim representational accuracy (even alerting those readers who may have missed it), indicates the priority of didacticism in the conception of the Chronicles. To ensure that history teach, the designers were aware that they would have to bring the records to life, out of the musty annals and into the contemporary imagination”.\(^{47}\)


\(^{44}\) Ibid. p. 21.

\(^{45}\) The re-use and re-cycling of woodcuts in the late medieval and early modern periods was frequent since it was a cost-saving technique for book illustration. The same woodcuts could appear several times in the same book or in different books and were even loaned between different printing houses. They could also remain in use over many years. See Driver, “Woodcuts in Early English Books: Sources and Circulation”, Op. cit., Image in Print, p. 33-76.


\(^{47}\) Ibid. p. 205.
This may also explain the emblematic significance of the woodcuts over that of their naturalistic representation of history, and as Martha Driver adds: “Naturalism was also limited by the reuse of wood-blocks, so essential for printers from a practical point of view”. Economic reasons may provide the real explanation for some of the anachronistic representations of the past.

The anachronistic view of the British past was to change in the latter part of the 16th century thanks to the influence of humanism and the work of European historicists such as the Italian Lorenzo Valla. By using the tools of philology in order to analyse the form and meaning of a text Valla was able to expose a text’s temporality and develop the concept of anachronism, which Levy suggests was a “decisive factor in the rewriting of the record of England’s past”. Economic reasons may provide the real explanation for some of the anachronistic representations of the past.

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The second woodcut I look at in the account of the Britons’ revolt in “The Historie of England” is one of Paulinus Suetonius, the Roman governor who led the occupying Roman forces. In the text he is presented as a suitable and glorious opponent to Boudica when he is described as “a man most plentifully furnished with all guts of fortune and virtue, and therewith a right skilfull warrior”. Here we see him clothed in Tudor armour and embroidery with a plumed and crowned helmet, and with a sword and royal sceptre. This woodcut was reproduced nine times elsewhere in the Chronicles as a small image cut into one column and can be found to represent both generals and kings in the histories of England and Scotland.

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The third woodcut describing Boudica’s rebellion is made up of two blocks to cover the width of the page and shows the final battle between the Romans and the British warriors who are fighting with bows and arrows, swords and spears. Boudica is not in this scene but again we are confronted with an anachronistic vision of the past as the two armies confront each other with 16th century weapons and armour. Whilst the image of Boudica addressing her men was produced only once in Holinshed’s Chronicles this woodcut was repeated again and again; it was produced seven times in the “Historie of England”, five times in the “Historie of Scotland”, once in the “Historie of Irelande” and a further three times in the detailed accounts of the reigns of the kings of England. For the 1577 edition only 212 woodcuts were used for over 1000 pictures. Although this was a cost-cutting measure the re-use of the same images throughout the Chronicles gives the impression that history is a repetition of battles, executions and sieges.
Furthermore, the Elizabethan reader was confronted, really for the first time, with Dio’s account of the Britons’ savage excess in war, which is not seen in these illustrations. Not only did Holinshed’s account cover female leadership, giving particular prominence to this, but it also describes in lurid detail the war atrocities perpetuated on the bodies of the female captives by the British forces over which Boudica had command. These representations of Boudica are also of interest as evidence of early modern representations of ancient Britons. We should note that the pictorial representations of early Britons are based solely on information gleaned from the ancient Greek and Roman texts and fleshed out with contemporary cultural references to dress, weapons and armour.\textsuperscript{52}

Turning to the “Historie of Scotland” we again find an anachronistic illustration of Boudica made up of two blocks covering the width of the page. Here she is called Voada and is represented once again in a military context. It shows Boece’s Voada in 16\textsuperscript{th} century dress fearlessly leading her army of 5,000 ladies into the raised guns of the Roman army. The woodcut of Voada and her female army was used only once in the Chronicles whilst the block on the left, showing the soldiers with guns, was reprinted twice in the “Historie of Scotland”. The tree in the middle was to facilitate the disassembly and the reassembly of different blocks in other parts of the book. As noted earlier Holinshed had apologised in the “Historie of England” for the use of guns in illustrations of military conflict before the invention of guns. However, since the woodcut of soldiers with guns was re-used only twice in the Chronicles, both times illustrating events in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD it was probably not commissioned expressly for the Chronicles but was used first in another publication. I have not identified which publication but it seems to have been quite common for printers to lend, sell and pass on their woodcuts to other printers.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{holinshed_woodcuts}
\caption{Holinshed’s Chronicles: the Historie of England, 1577, p. 65.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{52} Burke briefly discusses the confusions and anachronisms in the visual representations of Roman costume in the Italian Renaissance, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 27.

Figure n° 6: Holinshed’s Chronicles, the Historie of Scotland, 1577, p. 45.

The final woodcut, placed within one column, shows Voada’s daughter, Vodicia, being executed by the Roman soldiers for her insurgence and the renewal of the rebellion first initiated by her mother. It was produced only once in Holinshed’s Chronicles and is given one short paragraph to describe how Vodicia was ambushed, taken prisoner and interrogated by Petilius. Vodicia is wearing an Elizabethan dress and the four men are in Tudor military costume and are even sporting the fashionable Tudor beards. Vodicia is represented as the weaker vessel as she faces the reader and is stabbed in the back by a Roman soldier. A second soldier is about to add a second sword thrust while two other Roman soldiers/guards look on. The soldier standing in the foreground is the highest ranking soldier, judging by his helmet and could possibly represent Paulinus. This picture was also dangerous material in that readers could not help but think of Mary Stuart, the ex-queen of Scotland, who had been honoured with a woodcut in Holinshed’s accounts of the “Historie of Scotland” and was now a prisoner in Elizabeth’s custody as a Catholic claimant and threat to both the English and Scottish thrones. Mary was finally put on trial for her participation in the Babington Plot in 1586, and was executed in February, 1587. This would clearly justify the removal of this woodcut from the second edition of Holinshed’s Chronicles, especially since it represents Vodicia as a victim of tyranny.

Apart from the anachronisms in the Scottish chronicles there is a huge split in Boudica’s story and a confusion in the dates as it is spread over several pages. Voada’s rebellion takes place during the reign of the Roman emperor, Nero (as had Voadicia’s rebellion in Holinshed’s English history), but Voada’s daughter, Vodicia, renews the rebellion in Scotland during the reign of Vespasian in 74 AD. This is further complicated by the fact that between the two revolts Holinshed adds Corbreyd’s uprising against the usurper of his throne in Scotland, Dardane, which also takes place in Vespasian’s rule. Corbreyd, called Galde, was Voada’s nephew and had been brought up by his aunt. He defeats Dardane and has him executed (this is illustrated with a woodcut but the same woodcut is also used to represent fifteen other executions in the histories of England, Scotland and Ireland). A head and shoulders portrait of both Corbreid and Dardane is also given but both were reproduced elsewhere in the Chronicles.

Corbreid then has to defend his land against Roman advances. After a fixed battle Corbreid is defeated. Although injured he manages to escape but it is his cousin, Vodicia who continues the fight. After a few skirmishes in Scotland Vodicia manages to muster enough men to attack the city of Epiake, now a Roman stronghold. She is able to bring down the city and burn it before she is finally captured and executed.

Although Holinshed wrote the “Historie of Scotland” and allows a lot of Hector Boece’s chronological and historical discrepancies to stand he does forewarn the reader:

> Here have wee thought good to advertise the Reader, that although the Scottish writers impute all the travayles whiche Petilius spent in subduing the Brygantes, and Frontinus in conquering the Silures, to be employed chiefly against Scottes and

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid. p. 45
Pictes: the opinion of the best learned is wholy contrarie thereunto, affirming the same Brygantes and Silures not to be so farre North by the distance of many myles, as Hector Boetius and other his countrymen do place them [...] nevertheless we have here followed the course of the Scottishe Historie, in manner as it is written by the Scottes themselves, not binding any man more in this place than in other to crede them further than by conference of authours it shall seeme to them expedient.39

To conclude, it is apparent that the major objectives of Holinshed’s “Historie of England” in describing Cordeilla’s reign, and Boudica’s rebellion were not ones of historical accuracy but ones of didacticism, English patriotism and political propaganda. The principal objective of the woodcuts was not one of dramatic illustration but one of English nationalism under the stable rule of a single and female warrior king, even hinting at English domination within the British archipelago. The story of Cordeilla shows the legitimacy, justice and strength of female rule following the dynastic bloodline whilst the account of Boudica seems to show the beginning of Elizabeth’s imperial reign since the picture of Boudica addressing her troops would have brought to English minds their own Tudor queen successfully defending their realm against the North, and even expanding it abroad into Ireland. In contrast, the representations of Voada and Vodicia in “The Historie of Scotland” show only impending death, defeat and execution for those who challenged the Roman(English) hegemony within the newly emerging British empire.

One final reservation needs to be made regarding the representation of female warriors in Holinshed’s Chronicles. The most visual representation of female power is placed within the chronological framework of British prehistory and the Romano-British period whilst any references to female leadership in the medieval period are restricted to the written word only. There are no woodcuts of Matilda, direct heir to the throne after the death of her father, Henry I in 1135. The throne was seized by her cousin, Stephen, despite Matilda’s military intervention. We find no woodcut of her daughter-in-law, Eleanor of Aquitaine who led a rebellion against her husband and King of England, Henry II. There is no woodcut of Queen Isabella, wife to Edward II, who challenged her husband in order to place their young son on the throne of England and run the country in the name of her son; perhaps because the chronicles represented her as a French adulteress who was guilty of treason. The final military leader of significance is Margaret of Anjou, the “she-wolf of France” according to Shakespeare’s Richard Plantagenet in Henry VI.40 Despite the charge of female military aggression Margaret, as the French wife of Henry VI, was Queen of England and she was fighting the usurper, Edward IV in order to protect the throne for her son. However, both her husband and her son were killed in the Wars of the Roses and Margaret returned to France. The only tentative conclusion I can make to this point is that the powerful women in medieval England were all of French origin whilst Cordeilla, Boudica and Elizabeth I were all represented as one hundred percent ‘British’. Elizabeth’s sister, Queen Mary (1553-1558) had lost Calais, England’s last territorial claim in France, and from this military and political

39 Ibid. p. 48.
40 William Shakespeare, Henry VI, part III, Act I, Sc.4, l. 141.
withdrawal Elizabethan England began to concentrate more on a policy of British unity (ruled through England), protectionism and isolationism.

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