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BRITONS IN BLUE: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF CORPOREAL PAINTING IN GREAT BRITAIN, FROM THE IRON AGE TO THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

*El azul de los britanos: un análisis contextual de
la pintura corpórea en Gran Bretaña, desde la
Edad del Hierro hasta la Alta Edad Media*

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ABSTRACT: Ancient sources frequently mention body painting as a practice in Great Britain. This custom, which is mentioned in continuity from the days of Julius Caesar to the Anglo-Saxon era, has not yet been confirmed by archaeological and iconographic evidence, but there are enough indicators to promote continued research. Textual and archaeological analysis shows there may have been an evolution in the practice between the Iron Age and the Early Middle Ages, when new religious and cultural spheres would have led to eventual extinction. Although presented by Caesar as a military practice, corporeal painting may have extended to other spheres of ancient societies, including aesthetic purposes and religious rites.

Keywords: Britons; Picts; Body Painting; Woad; Tattooing; Anglo-Saxons; War Practices.

RESUMEN: Las fuentes antiguas mencionan con frecuencia la pintura corporal como una práctica en Gran Bretaña. Esta costumbre, que se menciona en continuidad desde los días de Julio César hasta la época anglosajona, aún no ha sido confirmada por la evidencia arqueológica e iconográfica, pero hay suficientes indicadores para promover la continuidad de la investigación. El análisis textual y arqueológico muestra que puede haber una evolución en la práctica entre la Edad del Hierro y la Alta Edad Media, cuando los nuevos contextos religiosos y culturales habrían llevado a su eventual extinción. Aunque fue presentada por César como una práctica militar, la pintura corporal puede haberse extendido a otras esferas de las sociedades antiguas, incluyendo los fines estéticos y los ritos religiosos.

Palabras clave: Britanos; Pictos; Pintura Corporal; Hierba Pastel; Tatuaje; Anglosajones; Prácticas de Guerra.

1. THE ENIGMA

Omnes uero se Britanni uitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum efficit colorem, atque hoc horribiliores sunt in pugna aspectu. (Caes. BGall. 5.14.2)

There are many unanswered questions regarding the matter of corporeal painting in ancient Britain. The allusions left by written sources do not originate from the populations said to have engaged in the practice, and the lack of archaeological evidence, together with the difficulty in interpreting how findings can be connected to this custom, make it particularly elusive. Nevertheless, the imagery has crossed the eras and became deeply associated with pre-Roman populations in Great Britain, from ancient times to the Victorian era. This study intends to analyse archaeological and written sources, as well as modern bibliography, to present possible approaches, both present and future, to the following questions:

- I. Did the populations of Great Britain use corporeal painting before and during Julius Caesar's campaigns in the first century B.C.E.?
- II. Was there a continuity in the custom throughout the Roman empire and the transition to the Early Middle Ages?
- III. If one can establish that corporeal painting was performed, under which circumstances did it occur?

2. THE WRITINGS

Before addressing the subject of corporeal painting, a note regarding the matter of terminology. Regarding this topic, terminology such as Briton and Gaul often appears intermingled with the word “Celtic”, which is, in itself, a contentious term. There has been substantial debate regarding whether it ought to be used in the first place¹, and its assigned meanings are so vast that it has been used for populations found across the European continent, the British Isles and even Anatolia, with a significant diaspora, and an even more significant variety. More recent studies, such as Pope (“Re-approaching Celts”), have offered a new definition of a term which, as the author reminds us, has been constantly revised and reinterpreted over the centuries. Pope has defined the “original use” of the word as one addressing “matrifocal Early Iron Age groups in central Gaul”, and opposes the latest scientific data to conclude the Celts, as a group, became defined during the Bronze Age, mostly around the area which is now Northern Italy, and then spread across Europe through several centuries of migrations; these groups developed their own particular cultures, a factor reflected upon archaeological data².

What does this mean for the study of corporeal painting? Pope states that “attempting to define Celts as a cultural entity is nonsensical”, for they “did not represent an ethnicity”, and that the word is more of “a *nickname* for a multiplicity of prehistoric groups”; it is, in short, “a categorization”, made by various civilisations throughout History, to define several groups. For the purpose of this study, the word “Celtic” will occasionally be in use, when the terminology has been originally applied to relevant bibliography; otherwise, we shall opt for Briton, Gaul and Germanic, among others, to avoid possible misinterpretations regarding the scope of the word “Celt”. As will be observed in the sequence of this study, ancient sources have left several reports regarding corporeal painting by European populations, particularly for the regions of Great Britain, Gaul and Germania; yet these practices may have continued in Great Britain well into the Anglo-Saxon era, at a time the insular space had already received new

1. See, for instance, Haywood, *The Celts*, 1, which introduces the question of the Celtic peoples, and whether they were a cohesive group or a modern creation; in the case of this specific study, it was considered that both possibilities are acceptable, and probably coexisted. See also Karl and Stifter, *The Celtic World*, particularly the first chapter of volume 1, and chapters 21 and 22 in volume 2. For a synthesis of military aspects among these populations in Gaul and Great Britain, see Wilcox, *Rome's Enemies*.

2. Pope, “Re-approaching Celts”.

migrations, and where the “Celtic” terminology would no longer apply, or would require substantial re-examination.

Sources presented through the viewpoint of the Roman world will not be without bias against the Britons. They are, however, amid the most abundant materials for the observation of this subject³. If one is to analyse the topic through this prism, there seems to be little doubt that it was a concept with some diffusion within Rome’s sphere of influence between the first century B.C.E. and the fifth century C.E. The earliest known source to mention it is Julius Caesar, who was among the first Roman military commanders to cross into Great Britain and recorded his campaigns at length in *De Bello Gallico*. Amidst his accounts, one can find physical descriptions of the individuals encountered by the Roman army, including the passage at Caes., *B.Gall.* 5.14, which mentions some form of body painting. This section uses the verb *inficio*, which regards dyeing or staining, and the noun *uitrum*, glass, to describe the appearance of the Britons⁴. The information provided is fragmentary for the purposes of researching the custom, for is devoid of data regarding the processes used in making and applying the body paint, the materials that would have been in use, possible motifs and stylistic preferences for application, and in-depth explanations of the sociocultural reasonings behind the origins of the custom.

The one suggestion of the paint’s purpose is the use of the expression *in pugna*, “in combat”. Caesar only provides information about the usage of body paint in military contexts, in which it was meant to make the enemy more terrifying. This stands in opposition to Pomponius Mela, who, approximately a century after Caesar, also makes a mention of blue body paint in his description of Britain and its inhabitants but does not present an association with war activities (Mel. 3.52). According to this

3. For a list of references in ancient sources, see the appendix in Carr, “Woad, Tattooing and Identity”.

4. MacQuarrie, “Insular Celtic Tattooing”, 34. When analysing the historical interpretations regarding corporeal painting, MacQuarrie mentions nineteenth and twentieth-century precepts strongly set against the possibility of the Celtic world ever engaging in the practice and the influence of modern mindsets towards the interpretation of Celtic tattoos. The discovery of tattooed bodies dating to the fifth century B.C.E. is cited by MacQuarrie as influencing twenty-first-century constructions: “No classical author makes claims that the Celts, generally speaking, were tattooed; on the other hand, there is evidence in both classical and medieval sources that tattooing was customary among at least some tribes of insular Celts”. MacQuarrie’s definition of tattooing is that of “an indelible mark made on the skin by inserting pigments into punctures”. This is not necessarily in consonance with the legacy of all classical sources, several of which seem to mention staining, rather than tattooing, but it introduces a field of possibilities.

source, Britons would engage in corporeal painting either for the sake of beauty or other unknown causes; unlike Caesar, he specifies the entire body would be covered. Pomponius Mela lived during the reigns of two emperors who would have employed operations either in the island or its vicinities: Caligula (37-41 B.C.E.) and Claudius (41-54 B.C.E.)⁵. He may have had access to older sources with descriptions of Britons, but there could also be circulating reports.

The understanding of what specific colours would signify for the writers of these ancient sources adds difficulty to the matter. If one traces nomenclature back to Homer's *Iliad*, it will be observed that colour descriptions do not necessarily match those found in the modern-day English language⁶, and that we are yet to fully understand the context behind expressions such as the wine-coloured sea⁷, as seen, for instance, in Hom., *Il.* 345-349, and Hom., *Od.* 420-424. *Caeruleus* ("quod caeruleum efficit colorem") is used by Caesar to describe the colour of the dye, alongside the mention of *uitrum* ("se Britanni uitro inficiunt"). In one of the most comprehensive studies regarding colour in the Roman world, Mark Bradley signalled *caeruleus* as being associated with concepts such as the sea or "copious waters", the sun before the rain (found in Virgil), clouds, parts of the rainbow; it would not, however, "describe the clear blue sky"⁸. Alongside natural and geographic terms, *caeruleus* could also be associated with serpents, precious stones and even the Underworld⁹,

5. As stated in Romer's introduction to Pomponius Mela's *Chorographia*, together with an initial approach to the historiographic problems surrounding Caligula's "supposed invasion of Britain", and its "trail of fact and fiction in the ancient sources" (Romer, "Pomponius Mela", 2). The narrative regarding Caligula's projected invasion, which consists of taking seashells as spoils without crossing the channel (Dio Cass. 59.25), is not expected to make significant contributions to this discussion. As for Claudius, although there are extensive narratives surrounding his campaigns and the sixteen days spent in Great Britain, there is no mention of facial or corporeal painting by the sources either during military confrontation or the subsequent triumph (see, for instance, Dio Cass. 60.19-23; Tac., *Ann.* 12.31-40; Suet., *Claud.* 17; the latter also states that Britain's incorporation into Rome's sphere of influence was achieved without combat, and provides some detail into Claudius's triumph, particularly the usage of a *corona naualis* to celebrate naval achievements). Regarding the Claudian invasions, see Waite, *The Claudian Invasion*.

6. For an introduction to research regarding colour systems in Ancient Greece, see Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, 13-17.

7. Several hypotheses have been presented, such as symbolic meanings behind the colour red, or the connotation between the sea's colour and the time in which ships would have departed (sunset). On this matter, see, for instance, Moore, "Ships".

8. Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, 9-10.

9. Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, 11.

and one can also add to the equation the modern knowledge of the colour of Roman glasswork.

Together with the difficulties in understanding the terminology of colour, there is the added factor of Rome's own vision regarding corporeal painting. There seems to be somewhat of an association between body paint and foreignness in ancient sources, underlining its position (and that of those who practised it) of external existence in relation to the Roman world. This concept extends itself to Great Britain, whose inhabitants were described by Virgil as "et penitus toto diuisos orbe Britannos" (Virg., *Ecl.* 1); the Britons are presented as existing in separation from the remainder of the world. Pliny the Elder also associates the attribute of being foreign with corporeal painting, establishing its usage outside of military contexts: Plin., *Nat.* 22.2 describes it as a form of beautification of the self and also as a perpetuation of ancient rites: "formae gratia ritusque perpetui in corporibus suis aliquas exterarum gentium uti herbis quibusdam". Another novelty introduced by Pliny is a possible association with Gaul: it would have been from Gaul that the Britons retrieved *glastum*¹⁰, and it would be through this plant that the wives and daughters-in-law of the Britons would stain their bodies. This practice would be in use for the participation in religious ceremonies, and the shade attained is described as similar to that of the inhabitants of Ethiopia: "Britannorum coniuges nurusque toto corpore oblita quibusdam in sacris nudae incedunt Aethiopiium colorem imitantes". In the same chapter, Pliny describes several forms of facial and body painting, associating it, firstly, with barbarian women ("inlinunt certe aliis aliae faciem in populis barbarorum feminae"), and then alluding to the body inscriptions of Dacian and Sarmatian men ("corpora sua inscribunt").

The apparent aversion for corporeal and facial painting in the Roman world did not extend to every circumstance. The use of cosmetics across the Ancient Mediterranean is well-reported and attested by written and archaeological sources¹¹. More unusually, the description of Camillus's triumph by Pliny (Plin., *Nat.* 33.36) seems to suggest some form of facial painting. Claiming to quote a now-lost work of Verrius Flaccus, Pliny describes the way in which the victorious general would have likened

10. Although *I. Tinctoria* is usually assumed as the source of vegetable dye used in Briton body painting, Carr considers that *glastum* could have been a different plant. See Carr, "Woad, Tattooing and Identity", 278.

11. See, for instance, Olson, "Dress and the Roman Woman", 61-63, who mentions, amidst other components, the use of cinnabar, *minium*, *rubrica*, *fucus* and red chalk as equivalents to modern rouge; this study also mentions the use of cosmetics over the lids, lashes and brows, and the eventual possibility of lip colouring.

himself to Jupiter, or a statue of Jupiter: specific religious days would require the said statue to be coloured with *minium*, a form of red lead, and the custom would have been extended to the bodies of certain military commanders partaking in a triumph: “enumerate auctores Verrius, quibus credere necesse sit Iouis ipsius simulacra faciem diebus festis minio illini solitam triumphantiumque corpora; sic Camillum triumphasse”. The same chapter mentions its usage by populations in Ethiopia, for similar ritual and religious purposes¹². This passage, which seems unique in these contexts, has given rise to debate on the different possibilities regarding the colour red in triumphal contexts. Historiographic analysis suggests the possibility of the triumphing general impersonating the statue of Jupiter, rather than the deity, with an association of the ritual’s origins with the development of “commemorative statuary”¹³.

The very use of *minium* for the purpose of corporeal painting is problematic. *Minium* is a form of red lead, and although it was used for several purposes throughout ancient and medieval times, it is known to be toxic to humans. Its relation with corporeal painting raises even more questions if one observes that the toxicity of *minium* was not unknown in Ancient Rome¹⁴, and that Pliny (Plin., *Nat.* 33.40) mentions workers using some form of protection to avoid inhaling the powder generated during transformative processes. This toxicity would not have prevented Camillus from tinging himself, thus creating both a symbiotic relationship between the general’s triumph and the statue of Jupiter and an association between the colour red and the celebration of military successes. Despite the several theories regarding this red facial painting in triumphs, and as stated by Professor Mary Beard, Pliny himself makes no mention of it actively being used for corporeal painting during his lifetime: it would have been unlikely for it to be a regular practice for Roman generals in triumph, especially during the Late Republic and imperial eras¹⁵. Concrete

12. Kernel, *Colours and Colour Vision*, 15. Pliny the Elder’s mention of the Ethiopian practice bears some resemblance to Caesar’s description of the Britons: “et hodie id expeti constat Aethiopiū populis totosque eo tinguī proceres, hunc ibi deorum simulacris colorem esse, quapropter diligentius persequemur omnia de eo.”

13. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 231; n. 39 presents bibliographic resources, in particular Versnel, “Triumphus”.

14. As stated by Enghag. *Encyclopedia*, 35; Pliny (Plin., *Nat.* 33.39) mentions the replacement of *minium* with cinnabar for the sake of medicinal purposes, due to a confusion with names deriving from Ancient Greek.

15. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 231; this chapter includes an in-depth discussion of the subject.

evidence is scarce, and the practice may exist only in literature, or it may be a remnant of earlier traditions of Roman triumphs¹⁶.

Regarding ancient Britons, one can make a juxtaposition of different colours: the foreign blue contrasts with the Roman red. The colour blue thus develops connotations with northern European populations and their extant existence outside of the Roman world. Its association with being foreign can also be connected with physical appearance. Although the trait was not inexistent in southern Europe, blue eyes were often linked with certain unusual characteristics, capacities, or even medical issues¹⁷. This tradition is not specifically Roman but extends itself across other cultures in the Mediterranean: the *Physiognomonica* already speaks of certain blue-eyed individuals as less trustworthy¹⁸.

Tacitus speaks of the Germanic tribes as blue-eyed and red-haired: “truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora et tantum ad impetum ualida” (Tac. *Ger.* 4.2)¹⁹. These traits were less common across the Mediterranean basin, which often makes them noteworthy when ancient sources describe powerful individuals. Blue and grey-eyed personages occurred somewhat frequently amidst the early dynasties of emperors and are usually described either in conjunction with physical incapacities, or superior physical skill.

Suetonius describes the light-coloured eyes of several emperors, and all of them have uncommon characteristics: Augustus’s light eyes²⁰ would have a certain divine fulgor, although his left eye would have begun to falter in later years²¹. Tiberius, described by Pliny-the-Elder to have had an eye colour between blue and grey, is said to have had particularly good vision in the darkness, for a few moments upon waking (Plin., *Nat.* 11.53-54; also in Suet., *Tib.* 68). Pliny describes blue-grey eyes in general (*caesii*) as the most efficient for seeing in the darkness²². Suetonius speaks of Nero, one of the most infamous emperors, as having blue or grey eyes.²³

16. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 232-33; perhaps Etruscan in origin.

17. As will be seen, however, these particular characteristics extend themselves to light eyes in general, rather than just blue eyes.

18. See Ley, “Beware of Blue Eyes”.

19. Pliny also speaks of the Serae, a people of Asia, as being blue-eyed (Plin., *Nat.* 6.24). These two mentions, together with others by Juvenal and Horatius, are noted in Bradley 2009, 11.

20. Described in Plin., *Nat.* 11.54 as having a greyish hue.

21. Suet., *Aug.* 79.

22. Regarding Tiberius. See Plin. *Nat.* 11.5.

23. Suet., *Ner.* 51. Emperor Galba’s eyes are described as “oculis caeruleis” (Suet., *Galb.* 21); as mentioned by Bradley (2009, 11), this is included in a list of the emperor’s physical deformities, although it may not have been meant as such by Suetonius.

Plutarch associates light eyes with Germanic tribes, together with greatness of stature;²⁴ he also describes Sulla, a controversial figure of the Late Republic, as having greyish eyes.²⁵ Blue or grey eyes can also be divine: Minerva is occasionally described as having *caesi oculi*, and Neptune as *caerulei oculi* (“caesis oculos Mineruae, caeruleos esse Neptuni”, seen in Cic. *Nat. D.* 423)²⁶.

There is a negative connotation found in Propertius that regards both hair dye and facial (cosmetic) painting. Prop. 2.18.23 makes a case against both the application of colour on the face and hair dyeing, making adverse comparisons with the Britons, and speaking of blue facial paint in derogatory terms²⁷. This invective seems to indicate practices and habits that would create an association, both ideological and physical, with the populations of central and northern Europe²⁸: characteristics seen as foreign were sought by Romans. Marguerite Johnson also mentions the practice of importing hairpieces from these locations, from whence the said hair would also have been, in many cases, red or blonde²⁹. This creates a stark contrast between literary discourse and popular practices: the contradiction of said barbarian tendencies was set against the popularity of habit.

Thus, cultural distancing was not so evident in practice, and materials potentially used for corporeal and facial painting were part of Roman life in different contexts. We revert to *De Bello Gallico*. The well-known passage may have been composed to underline the fierceness of the opponents and their differences from the Roman world: considering the difficulties and relative lack of accomplishments in the invasions to Great Britain, Caesar promoted the crossing into the location, yet unexplored by Rome, as one of the principal achievements, and likely made use of

24. Plut., *Vit. Mar.* 11.3.

25. Plut., *Vit. Sull.* 2.1.

26. See, for instance, Magini, *Astronomy and calendar*, 56, and Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, n. 52; for an in-depth analysis of the cultural significance of physiognomy, including the connotations of hair and eye colours in ancient Rome, see Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, 137-60.

27. Red facial dye was used by the Maxyges, according to Herodotus (Hdt. 4.191). See M. Johnson, “Race”, 114.

28. Regarding Propertius, see M. Johnson, “Race”, 131. On the matter of hair, culture, and statues, see Stewart, “Class and Social Status”. This contrasts with Martial (Mart. *Ep.* 9.53), who writes “Claudia caeruleis cum sit Rufina Britannis edita, quam Latiae pectora gentis habet!”: even though she has her origins amidst the blue Britons, her heart belongs to Latium. Once again, one can notice the connection between Britons and blue.

29. M. Johnson, “Race”, 123. Red hair could also be used as a sign of military insurrection. As seen in Tac., *Hist.* 4.61, Gaius Iulius Ciuilis would have dyed his hair red at the time of his rebellion against Rome, in C.E. 69 (as seen in M. Johnson, “Race”, 124).

narrative forms to enhance his prowess further³⁰. To underline this distancing between Britons and Romans through an unusual form of war practice may have been one of the purposes, but there may be indications of its being factual practice in archaeological findings and writings of the early Middle Ages, as we shall see below.

3. PLANT DYES AND MINERAL DYES: THE CASES OF COPPER AND *I. TINCTORIA*

If we consider the possibility of corporeal painting as a practice among the Britons, the question of fabrication and materials follows. Sources aren't particularly clear, and except for Pliny the Elder, who mentions what seems to be a vegetable dye, most of the information merely indicates the colour that would have been achieved. It is predominantly presented as a blue or greenish hue (through mentions of *uitrum* and *caeruleum*) and has led to two predominant theories: the vegetable-based dye, which supports the use of the plant *Isatis Tinctoria*, and the mineral-based dye, which suggests the use of copper-based pigments.

Isatis Tinctoria, commonly known as woad, was the chief source of blue dye in Europe until its eventual displacement for indigo, in the Early Modern era³¹. This plant, native to Middle Eastern regions, has been found in the European continent since, at least, the La Tène period, starting in the fifth century B.C.E., and likely since the Neolithic; in Great Britain and other European regions, it was mostly cultivated to create pigment for dyeing fabric³². During Victorian times, several works tried to establish connections between *I. Tinctoria* and pre-Roman populations. In 1856, Edwin Lees³³ mentioned the growth of this plant next to what he presented as a place of worship of "*Teut*, or *Teutates*", in Sarn Hill³⁴, raising the possibility of it having grown there since what he calls "the Celtic period". Lees underlines its existence in profuse amounts in that precise site, which lies next to the River Severn; in another book, he states that *Isatis Tinctoria* does not occur abundantly in the wild, aside from "the

30. On this subject, see Dantas, "Mare Nostrum", 110-16.

31. Phipp, "Global Colors", 126. Regarding how woad may have functioned on fabric, see the results of experimental archaeology described in Hartl et al., "Searching for blue".

32. See Orna, *March of the Pigments*, 71-3.

33. Edwin Lees was a Fellow of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh, and also the Vice-President of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club. He was also involved in Natural History studies.

34. Lees also associates Sarn Hill with *Taranis*, "the British god of thunder, who was adored upon such high places" (Lees, *Pictures of Nature*, 93).

precipitous marl cliff at the Mithe Tout, an ancient British Tumulus by the side of the Severn, above Tewkesbury³⁵.

The Victorian interest in *I. Tinctoria*, and the attempt to connect its areas of growth to sites linked with ancient populations, represents a historiographic effort of cause and causality, in an attempt to correlate it with pre-Roman populations and partly connected with the Victorian construction of Celtic identity. As we saw above, the term Celtic is, in itself, controversial, as is its association with the tribes that Julius Caesar may or may not have encountered. *De Bello Gallico* presents pre-Roman populations through an exclusively Roman look, and even Caesar's description seems to find sources of disparity between them, which creates even further doubts regarding their origins and practices, and even more so concerning the materials that would have been used in something as specific as body painting. The report of the second invasion, which occupies the majority of the fifth book, offers a distinction between the administrative powers of the maritime towns and those of the hinterland, where one would find the territories led by chief Cassiuellaunus. The latter, by exceptional circumstances, would be commanding both his armies and those of maritime communities³⁶.

According to Caesar, hinterland tribes would consider themselves autochthonous inhabitants, and the tribes that dwelt by the ocean would have derived from continental populations connected to Belgium, receiving their names from their cities of origin. This section could raise questions regarding the influence of continental populations in the practice of body painting in Great Britain, particularly if one observes Pliny's quote about *glastum* and its connections to Gaul. Genetic distinctions between the north and south of Great Britain during the Iron Age, together with comparisons with Ireland and the north of France³⁷, may contribute to

35. Lees, *Pictures of Nature*, 146. Anne Pratt, a popular Victorian-era illustrator of fauna and flora, also speaks of woad as being commonly used for the purpose of producing dye before the introduction of indigo (Pratt, *The Flowering Plants*, 1:110-11).

36. There is an ongoing debate regarding the landing site of the first Roman fleets. Possible locations are modern-day Dover and Ebbsfleet. See the discussion in Dantas, "Mare Nostrum", 110-16.

37. Patterson et al., "Large-Scale Migration": recent genetic data has established that the 1st millennium B.C.E. brought more significant changes to the south of Great Britain than the north, via the arrival of continental migrants. The migrations of the Middle Bronze Age have been established as having contributed towards distinct genetic backgrounds in the south and north of Great Britain during the Iron Age, and the Late Bronze Age migrations appear to have been more significant towards demographic and linguistic dynamics in the south than the north. Concurrently, the migrations of EEF (early European farmers), more prevalent in the south of Great Britain, have been equated by this study with the

understanding potential connecting practices between Great Britain and continental Europe through a comparatist analysis. Specific genetic connections, if chronologically established, may also help our understanding of when body painting reached Great Britain, and whether practices of corporeal tinging or tattooing predate or accompany the migrations of continental populations during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages.

A more difficult task is the understanding of whether different traditions of corporeal painting entered Great Britain via distinct waves of migrations, or even whether different practices develop among groups that arrived together and then, through the course of History, developed separately³⁸. Successive waves of migration throughout the Iron Age and the Roman period may have resulted, as suggested by Pope, in the development of differentiated traditions and practices as social identities amid populations with shared genetic backgrounds, separated by generations, diverging through the “continuous coming and going of individuals and small groups³⁹”. In parallel, similar archaeological cultures may be found amidst populations with no shared genetic backgrounds⁴⁰. Associating the results of genetic studies and archaeological data with written sources is equally difficult, for Greco-Roman sources may have elaborated distinct terminologies for populations who may have shared ancestry.

introduction of Celtic languages in Great Britain. On the other hand, Leslie et al. have concluded that the migrations which occur before Roman presence “show that in non-Saxon parts of the United Kingdom, there exist genetically differentiated subgroups rather than a general ‘Celtic’ population”. Leslie et al., “Fine-scale genetic structure”.

38. Geographic proximity does not always signify genetic proximity. The north and south of Wales are “as distinct genetically from each other as are central and southern England from northern England and Scotland”, while significant differences were found between Cornwall and Devon as well as between the Orkney Islands. See Leslie et al., “Fine-Scale Genetic Structure”. Simultaneously, connections have been established between the British Isles and Normandy that have potential links to the Bronze Age, as well as between western Brittany, Ireland and the west of Great Britain; populations north of the Loire were also determined as closer to the British and the Scandinavian than those who live south of the Loire, although this may be partly explained by demographic movements throughout the Middle Ages and subsequent periods (Alves et al., “Genetic population”).

39. Pope, “Re-approaching Celts”. This is particularly relevant regarding the “Celtic” world. As mentioned by Rachel Pope, some “Celtic” populations are not entirely integrated into Hallstatt or La Tène archaeological cultures: “In fact, “Celts” as a historical label does not map neatly onto any archaeological tradition; it overlaps with late Hallstatt traditions in northeastern France and less ostentatious archaeologies farther west” (56-57).

40. As an example, a recent study found cases of Pictish culture being divulged in Orkney not as result of demographic influence but cultural practices (Morez et al., “Imputed genomes”).

Body painting has been present across the European continent since remote times, whether through staining or the early examples of tattoos found in central Europe. As of now, regarding the case of Great Britain, conclusions are still premature. Perhaps Caesar's proposition has some fundament and may insinuate that body painting entered the island through the migrations of continental populations in the late Bronze and Iron Ages, through a potential connection to Gaul and Pliny's *glas-tum*. Perhaps it predates their arrival, and perhaps it was one or several cultural practices among the varied populational backgrounds of the inhabitants of Great Britain, with distinct origins, distinct methods, and distinct materials. One can only reinforce that, during the time of Caesar, blue body paint was a practice of the North and the Atlantic, rather than the Mediterranean. The cultural and mental impact of Caesar's Britons in blue was such that it crossed into etymological studies. The idea of corporeal painting having a contributing role towards the name of Great Britain arose as early as the sixteenth century and is found in William Camden's *Britannia*⁴¹. In the eighteenth century, Rapin de Thoyras suggested, alongside other possibilities, that the name Britain may have been derived from Brith, which he claimed to be the ancient Britons' word for woad, "because the ancient Britons used to dye their skins blue with the plant"⁴²; in the Victorian era, the same explanation was presented by Richard Green Parker as being objectionable, as "the name Britain, or Britannia, must have been given by foreigners; because the original inhabitants never called their country *Britain*, nor themselves Britons"⁴³. It is not this study's purpose to analyse the etymology of the word Britain, and the connection between Britannia and woad may rest on unsteady foundations, but these few examples, which are allied to many more similar writings from the Elizabethan to the Edwardian era⁴⁴, show the impact of the image of the Britons in blue⁴⁵.

41. First published in Latin, in 1586; the etymological study associates it with the Picts. As reminded by Whittaker, *William Blake*, 44.

42. Thoyras and Tindall, *History of England*, iv.

43. Parker, *Outlines*, 91.

44. Such as George Alexander Cooke's *Topography of Ancient Britain: Or, British Traveller's Directory*, 1817; *The History of Origins. Containing Ancient Historical Facts with Singular Customs, Institutions, and Manners of Different Ages*, 1824; or Rev. Thomas Moore's *The History of Devonshire from the earliest period to the present*, 1829-31.

45. Comparatist studies would also be relevant regarding Germanic tribes, particularly regarding the possibility of body staining, rather than tattooing. The Harii, for example, are described by Tacitus under the terminology of "tincta corpora" (Tac., *Germ.* 43: "ceterum Harii super vires quibus enumerates paulo ante populos antecedent truces insitae feritatis arte ac tempore lenocinantur nigra scuta tincta corpora").

4. ABOUT THE PICTS

The term Pict was not present in early periods in association with corporeal painting⁴⁶. Its connotations come mostly from late Imperial sources, creating a significant temporal distinction between the early contacts of Julius Caesar's armies and the late imperial populations⁴⁷. Caesar's experiences were also mostly established with southern and eastern populations, particularly those that lived below the Thames; his interaction with tribes from above the Thames was less significant⁴⁸. Archaeological evidence is limited, as will be discussed below, and the only known location with possible indications for body paint production to date is Dragonby, 240 km north of London⁴⁹.

This may lead one to question how late imperial sources came to associate corporeal painting with the Picts. One of the said sources is found in the *Panegyrici Latini*: Panegyric VIII.11 (*Incerti Panegyricus Constantio Caesaris Dictus*), written by an anonymous writer circa C. E. 297, states that amidst those whom Caesar would have faced in Great Britain would have been the Picts and the Hiberni: "ad hoc natio etim tunc rudis et solis [Brittani] Pictis modo et Hibernis adsueta hostibus adhuc seminudis, facile Romanis armis signisque cesserunt, prope ut hoc uno Caesar gloriari in illa expeditione debuerit quod nauigasset Oceanum" (11). In this passage, there is a clear association between the tribes met by Caesar and the Picts, and also a reinforcement of the underdevelopment of the inhabitants of the British islands, in juxtaposition with the Romans, as part of its panegyric functions.

46. Wagner and Konstam, "Pictish Warrior", 25-28.

47. Our knowledge of the origins of the Picts and their identity is still limited. The word Pict is believed to have a meaning connected with corporeal painting (see, for instance, Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 270; S. Johnson, *Later Roman Britain*, 51). There are traces of two distinct archaeological cultures among Pictish lands (Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 272: "Atlantic and North-eastern Provinces"), and a recent 2023 study has revealed significant genetic continuity "between the Late Iron Age and early medieval periods" in Scotland, albeit with "evidence of some genetic differentiation between samples" (Morez et al., "Imputed genomes"). The early populations (1st century C.E. and earlier) are occasionally called Proto-Picts or Proto-Pictish (Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 271).

48. Roman focus on Great Britain will remain on its central and southern regions throughout imperial times, with Hadrian's Wall forming a barrier; as one advanced north through Roman Britain, it would become growingly militarised, for the main threat, as stated in Salway, *Frontier People*, came from the north; nevertheless, that did not prevent central and southern regions from rebellion.

49. Carr, "Woad, Tattooing and Identity"; Greep, "Needles".

Panegyric VI (Panegyric of Constantine)⁵⁰, believed to have been delivered in Trier sometime between C.E. 307 and 311, when commenting on Constantine's last campaign, describes it as the gods having summoned the emperor towards the final border of the world: "cuius etiam suprema illa expeditione non Britannica tropaia, ut uulgo creditum est, expetiuit, sed dis iam uocantibus ad intimum terrarum limen accessit". This campaign is thought to have occurred in modern Scotland, across the northern border of Hadrian's Wall⁵¹. Although the descriptions of the Picts are not as derogatory as those found in Panegyric VIII, there is a concept of northern lands being a remote location, distant and difficult to reach, and the subdivision between the north and south of Great Britain is underlined.

Ammianus Marcellinus, writing during the mid-late fourth century C.E., refers to the Picts and the Scotti as *gentes ferae* ("in Britanniiis cum Scottorum Pictorumque gentium ferarum excursus"; Amm. 20.1), describing their insurrections and the difficulties caused along the borders. In Amm. 26.5, when referring to C.E. 364, he also states that the Picts, the Saxons, the Scotti and the Attacotti would have attacked the Britons ("Picti Saxonisque et Scotti, et Attacotti Britannos aerumnis vexavere continuis")⁵². For this individual, writing during the Late Imperial era, the Picts and the Britons were distinct enemies. Mentions of the northern warriors are continued in Amm. 27, in which the Picts, now presented as two separate tribes (Dicalydones and Verturiones), together with the Scotti and the Attacotti, would have caused significant devastation across Great Britain, while the Saxons pillaged Gaul.

Amm. 28 continues to present the Britons as their own entity, with the mention of commander Theodosius, who would have departed from

50. Nixon and Rodgers, *Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 212.

51. Nixon and Rodgers, *Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 226, n. 27.

52. On the origins of the Attacotti and the matter of the invading populations during the late imperial period, see, for instance, Gerrard, *The Ruin*, particularly regarding methods of approach to the topic and its interpretation (11-21), and specifically observing the "Picti, Scotti, Saxones and Attacotti" (21-28); it is now "accepted that the events may have been exaggerated" (21). See also Rance, "Attacotti", regarding their progressive integration in the Roman army, distinctive traits between Attacotti and Picts / Scots, and a possible Irish origin, together with notes on possible influence and settlements in Great Britain. This study particularly points towards the "reciprocal relations with the *barbaricum* of the West and the unique conditions of this frontier". See also S. Johnson, *Later Roman Britain*, 42-5: "The Picts are best known for a series of carved stones (...). The exact meaning of these carvings is not known, but they probably date from a time when the Picts were Christian. It was the pagan ancestors of these men, or proto-Picts as they are sometimes called – who were assaulting the northern frontier of Roman Britain"; the north of Scotland and the Orkney islands would have "traces of a separate people"; on the matter of the Irish Scotti, see S. Johnson, *Later Roman Britain*, 59-69.

Augusta (Londinium). This section creates an even more severe distinction between Britons and the peoples who were raiding Roman-controlled regions, claiming that Theodosius retrieved the cities of Britannia “a barbaris” (Amm. 28.14), a term that is repeated in the same chapter when describing ambushes (“ad insidiandum barbaris praevenis loca”). According to this source, the conditions of the Britons continue to deteriorate. In the reign of emperor Valentinian, in the late fourth century C.E., they are described as being unable to defend themselves from enemy hosts without additional aid (“itidemque Britannos, catervas superfusorum hostium non ferentes, spe meliorum assumpta, in libertatem et quietem restituit placidam, nullo paene redire permissio grassatorum ad sua”)⁵³.

Thus, whereas earlier sources do not mention the Picts, and associate corporeal painting with the Britons in exclusivity, some of the late Roman sources seem to distinguish between Britons and Picts, ascribing the practice to the people who lived north of Hadrian’s Wall. Whereas Caesar never creates a nominal division between the Britons ruled by Cassiuelanus and those living in coastal regions, he does, as mentioned above, claim the existence of a distinction between the indigenous inhabitants of Great Britain and the migrants from the continent, who would have had closer ties to Gaul and Belgium. Future studies may help understand whether corporeal painting amidst the populations of northern Great Britain was somehow connected to the Britons of the south, or whether its origins are distinct and unrelated. If the Picts and the northern tribes of Britons are distinct populations, they may, at least, have shared the practice of corporeal painting.

5. THE ANGLO-SAXON WORLD

Victorian-era historians believed there would have been some degree of continuity in corporeal painting practices between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons⁵⁴, which would slowly come to an end through the influence

53. Yet Ammianus is an arguable historian. See Thompson, “Ammianus Marcellinus”, regarding the narrative of Ammianus and the disparities found between his work and archaeological findings. Thompson underlines the difficulties of Ammianus as a source, and how this creates a struggle in understanding the identities and origins of the invading populations of Great Britain. Thompson proposes, via Libanius and Firmicus Maternus, that emperor Constans did not go to Great Britain to repel invaders, but rather to “forestall a rebellion of the Britons”.

54. On modern perspectives regarding continuity and contacts between Britons and Anglo-Saxons, see, for e.g., Dumville, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*.

of religious reforms introduced by Christianity⁵⁵. Strutt (1842)⁵⁶ and Percy (1823)⁵⁷ both refer to a 785 papal edict that would have established the legal prohibition of the practice. The aforementioned edict, which would have been promulgated by Pope Adrian, speaks of the elimination of pagan rites and habits in chapter 19⁵⁸: “ut reliquias paganorum rituum quisque abjiciat”. Theological justifications are given, stating that God made Mankind beautiful (“Deus enim formavit hominem pulchrum in decore et specie”), and thus:

1. The superimposition of “scars” would be a diabolic habit (“pagani vero diabolico instinctu *cicatrices* teterrimas superinduxerunt”). The mention of scars, rather than dye, may refer to processes different from those in use at Caesar’s time, which could indicate a dissociation between practices.
2. Nevertheless, the term “*tincturae*” is subsequently used, which may indicate tattooing or corporal staining, rather than scarification. If that were to be the case, one could question whether this is a habit derived from cultural exchanges between invaders and pre-existing tribes, which would then have developed it into new art forms, or whether it was completely separate from local practices, and brought to England by subsequent invading populations.
3. To use “*tincturae*” would have been deemed acceptable only when one was applying them towards medicinal purposes; otherwise, if they were only meant for “superfluous” intentions related to superstition (“sed quisquis ex superstitione gentilium id agit”), it brought no benefit (“non ei proficit salute”). The use of *tincturae* for medicinal purposes may provide a stronger argument in favour of plant-based dye, as the use of *I. Tinctoria* for medicinal purposes has long been established⁵⁹; it remains to be understood how woad could be transformed into a viable pigment for body staining or tattooing purposes.

55. This is seen, for instance, in Strutt, *A Complete View*, and Percy and Percy, *Percy Anecdotes*.

56. See Strutt, *A Complete View*, 1:72-73. The edict would have followed the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity. Strutt also mentions his belief in the Saxon practice of hair dyeing, stating that “in the manuscript paintings of the Saxons, the figures frequently appear with blue hair”.

57. Both paragraphs are practically identical between the sources, including subtle censorship of the habit of “face painting” among Victorian women (Percy and Percy, *Percy Anecdotes*, 19:62).

58. See Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 3:458-59.

59. See Speranza et al., “*Isatis Tinctoria*”.

As mentioned by Strutt, the legislation would have had scarce practical impact, if one is to judge from William of Malmesbury's *De Gestis Regnum Anglorum* (3, 245)⁶⁰. The latter presents a particularly detailed description of the Angles: "Ad summam, tunc erant Angli vestibus ad medium genu expediti, crines tonsi, barbas rasi, armillis aureis brachia onerati, picturatis stigmatibus cutem insigniti". Short-haired, beardless, carrying golden bracelets around their arms, their skins marked with "stigmata": thus were described the Angles in the year 1066, following the Battle of Hastings. Malmesbury's depiction does not derive from first-person observation, for he was born around three decades afterwards, and it may be a misrepresentation, but it seems in consonance with the edict's concerns.

Between Pope Adrian's edict and the Battle of Hastings, almost three centuries passed. If William of Malmesbury is giving an accurate portrayal of insular practices regarding corporeal painting, it seems the growth of Christianity could not undermine it. If body painting, in any of its forms, has been practised in some degree of continuity since, at least, Caesar's invasion in 55 B.C.E., it may have been performed by some of the populations in Great Britain for, at least, one thousand years. This would attest to it being a long-standing and deeply ingrained habit, which survived social and aesthetic impositions carried into the island during the period of Roman presence, and throughout the migrations of Angles, Saxons and Jutes following the collapse of the empire. Nevertheless, warfare aesthetics among Anglo-Saxons may have been considerably different from those of Britons and Picts, not only due to societal changes but also the shifting nature of battlefield operations and equipment.

6. MINERAL POSSIBILITIES

Although woad is the most widespread possibility regarding the material used by the Britons to produce corporeal painting, recent studies regarding pigments in the Iron Age have suggested mineral options. Marlies Hoecherl underlines the chronological disparity between the different depictions of Briton corporeal painting: the sources closest to the British Iron Age, such as Julius Caesar, Pliny, and Ovid, suggest that the Britons would use pigment as a body stain, and later sources create imagery that may indicate elaborate designs, and even tattooing.

60. See William of Malmesbury (3.245, in Hardy, *Gesta Rex Anglorum*, 2:418-19).

Hoecherl suggests the possible use of azurite or malachite to produce pigment for corporeal painting⁶¹. Both minerals are found in copper deposits, and tonalities produced by their pigment oscillate between the blue and green apparently suggested by the sources. Nevertheless, there is a substantial difference in the impact on human bodies and health. Whereas woad has confirmed medicinal benefits, malachite, azurite and other copper-based pigments, when handled in a raw state, can be extremely toxic for humans⁶².

One of the reasons behind the mineral compounds hypothesis comes from the examination of the bog bodies found in Lindow Bog, Cheshire. Pyat et al. present an argument against woad being used for corporeal painting, going as far as to disclaim it having existed abundantly in Great Britain during the Iron Age⁶³. This article suggests that other authors, such as Cunliffe and Webster, are misinterpreting Caesar's passage, and also states that there is a lack of pictorial evidence to sustain the thesis of body decoration. The X-ray performed on Lindow III suggests the presence of iron and copper fragments on the skin, whereas Lindow II has possible remains of "woad or indigo"⁶⁴. Neither is sufficient to proclaim the practice of body painting, and the disparaging results do not confirm or disprove either mineral or plant-based dye.

Lindow II, however, may pave the way for new interpretations. There is an ongoing debate regarding the circumstances that surround the death of this individual. The analysis has ascertained violent death as the cause, probably involving both garrotting and throat cutting. The doubt lies in understanding whether it was a ritual death; current research raises the possibility of ceremonial executions, and thus of Lindow Man having been prepared for death through the application of body paint⁶⁵. This would mean that corporeal painting was not only associated with war or aesthetic purposes but also with specific ceremonies that would involve ritual death. As war and casualties are interconnected, there may be a link still to be discovered.

61. Hoecherl, *Controlling Colours*, basing this possibility from Pyatt et al., "Non isatis sed vitrum", 69.

62. See, for instance, Culp and Beland, "Malachite Green".

63. Pyat et al., "Non isatus sed vitrum".

64. See Aldhouse-Green, *Bog Bodies Uncovered*.

65. Aldhouse-Green, *Bog Bodies Uncovered*, particularly chapters 4 and 6; see also Chapman, *Iconoclasm*, 104-5, and Hoecherl, *Controlling Colours*, 93.

7. THE TATTOO HYPOTHESIS

The wording used to describe the procedures in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* is related to staining, but expressions such as Pliny's "inscribunt" have led to questioning the possibility of the Briton corporeal painting being achieved through tattooing. The latter was practised in the Roman world, usually for penal purposes, and had a generally negative connotation⁶⁶. The discussion regarding the possible use of plant or mineral-based materials for tattooing purposes shall be presented below. If it were so, it would be another addition to the factor of foreign existence adjudicated to the Britons, together with an even more negative association with Roman penal practices.

There is evidence for tattooed bodies in Europe since, at least, the Chalcolithic⁶⁷, but there have been difficulties in correlating archaeological findings in Great Britain with tattooing. Gillian Carr published a study in which the tattoo hypothesis is analysed in bigger detail, introducing comprehensive archaeological data. Objects identified as cosmetic grinders were found in Great Britain⁶⁸, dating to the first century B.C.E.; they usually appear in regions with less Roman influence, which is how Carr comes to present the hypothesis of them being used "for a more native

66. See, for instance, Gustafson, "Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire", regarding imperial Rome's perspectives on tattooing. This chapter particularly emphasises the Roman disdain or avoidance towards facial tattooing, and the importance of the face in the Mediterranean world: "The ancient Mediterranean city was a face-to-face society, and the discipline of physiognomies – that is, the attempt to detect one's character, disposition, or destiny from external, especially facial, features – was more than an idle pastime". Penal tattooing amidst the Greco-Roman world is contrasted by Gustafson with sociocultural spheres within the empire where it would be willingly practised, as is the case of the practising members of ancient Christianity.

67. See, for example, Chapman, *Iconoclasm*, 89-90, and the reference to Ötzi, also known as the "Tyrolean Iceman", found in 1991 in the Alps. Research has shown the body to have at least "fifteen groups of tattoos, all located within less visible parts of the body", and none of them appearing "ornamental". Chapman suggests the presence of tattoos in Europe from the fourth millennium B.C.E., while also pointing to the absence of mentions in ancient sources, and Thomas, "Interpretation of Pictish symbols", suggests the existence of facial tattoos on "Gallic coinage from the later third and second centuries BC". A more detailed study of Numismatics, with an in-depth comparison between samples found in Great Britain and Central Europe, may be a future direction to understanding facial painting among the populations of Great Britain.

68. Later, the same type was found in northern France (Carr, "Woad, Tattooing and Identity", 273). This identification was proposed by Jackson, "Cosmetic sets", who suggests their purpose would have been to be used for mineral grinding, in order to create cosmetics.

practice”, as part of “the paraphernalia used in the application of woad-derived indigo”.

Carr presents several theories as to why these grinders would not have been created for the application of cosmetics, in a strictly Roman sense. One of the major factors is their non-existence outside of Great Britain and Northern France; the other is their coexistence in Great Britain with the Roman “stone palette”, which would, indeed, be used for grinding products for cosmetic use. Experimental archaeology has shown that it is possible to produce blue dye from woad in efficient manners, even from smaller amounts, and that several methods could be employed to either create intricate tattoos or stain the whole body⁶⁹. The coincidental findings of woad and needles in Dragonby are mentioned as further sustaining evidence towards the possibility of tattooing, especially as the needle is believed by some research to have been stained in a “blue-green” hue⁷⁰. As per Carr, there are two sources that may indicate tattooing:

1. Solinus (*Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium* 22.12): “regionem partim tenent barbari, quibus per artifices plagarum figuras iam inde a pueris variae animalium effigies incorporantur, inscriptisque visceribus hominis incremento pigmenti notae crescunt; nec quicquam mae patientiae loco nationes ferae ducunt, quam ut per memores cicatrices plurimum fuci artus bibant”.
2. Claudian (*Poem on Stilicho’s Consulship* 2.247): “Inde Caledonio velata Britannia monstro, ferro picta genas, cuius vestigia verrit caeruleus Oceanique aestum mentitur amictos”.
3. Claudian (*De Bello Gothico* 420-30): “venit et extremis legio praetenta Britannis, quae Scotto dat frena truci ferroque notatas perlegit exanimis Picto moriente figuras”.

Solinus is the first to suggest that the practice would have begun during childhood and seems to indicate that whichever methods used would have been meant to make the final design last, as it was supposed to grow with the individual; scars are also mentioned. Both quotes by Claudian speak of markings made with iron, although they are not too specific regarding what these markings may be; in this regard, Solinus mentions representations of creatures of every kind. Both these sources are dated

69. Carr, “Woad, Tattooing and Identity”, 276-77. Carr also discusses the matter of translating Julius Caesar’s passage, suggesting that *uitrum*, glass, may have regarded either the colouring itself, or the material of the object used for tattooing purposes; scarification is also proposed.

70. Carr, “Woad, Tattooing and Identity”, and Greep, “Needles”.

to the later centuries of the Roman empire, with Solinus having written sometime in the third century C.E., and Claudian on the cusp of the fifth century C.E. They are correlated to a time when body painting is already associated with the Picts in their contemporary sources.

Whereas there seems to be some substantiation for the possibility of tattooing being practised, several arguments may be set against it, especially for earlier chronologies. As mentioned by Hoecherl⁷¹, and in contradiction to Carr, Caesar's use of "inficio" and "uitrum" most likely connect to staining rather than the use of materials such as glass to create tattoos; according to Hoecherl, even if tattoos were being made, they would likely not utilise glass, but rather "needles or metal implements such as knives", more in consonance with what is said by Solinus⁷². In regard to the archaeological remains and experiments by Carr, the resulting analyses have no unanimous belief. The green-blue stain of the needle has been interpreted by Hoecherl as the natural result of oxidation, and research surrounding copper-based dye on bog bodies is not yet conclusive⁷³. With respect to findings of shaving utensils, which Carr believes may have been used for tattooing processes, Hoecherl reminds us that Caesar describes the Britons as shaving the majority of their bodies, and thus there is no absolute correlation.

The temporal gap between the writings of Solinus and Julius Caesar is of at least three centuries, and even more significant if one speaks of Claudius. Tattooing may have been a practice introduced by the Picts, but not necessarily one in use among the Britons who defended the island from Caesar's invasions in 55 and 54 B.C.E.⁷⁴ Hoecherl considers that the presence of decorative body art would have been specifically mentioned by Caesar as "an alien and in the eyes of the Roman beholder doubtless barbarian custom"⁷⁵.

71. Hoecherl, *Controlling Colours*, 91.

72. See Hoecherl, *Controlling Colours*, 92, n. 54, regarding the stained needle and Solinus.

73. Aldhouse-Green, *Bog Bodies Uncovered*, particularly chapter 5, which analyses the forensic results of analysis made to Lindow II and III, and chapter 6, which analyses the toxins found in Lindow II. Only Lindow III showed significant concentrations of minerals.

74. As seen above in this study, there may be a distinction between early Britons and the Picts. This matter is recovered by Hoecherl (*Controlling Colours*, 91), who calls it an "unresolved debate".

75. Hoecherl, *Controlling Colours*, 91. This study reinforces the distinction between the early mentions of body painting and their closer connection to staining, in opposition to later mentions, which seem to include some form of decorative art, or even tattooing.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The Britons in blue are a theme that has been consistently presented across the eras, and still populates the media today. Regarding the several approaches for analysis, one can observe the following:

1. In what regards archaeological findings, there is still little substantiation to prove or disprove corporeal painting being practised in Great Britain, with only trace remains of copper in bog bodies, and speculative interpretations of utensils. Numismatics, too, does not provide enough of an answer yet, as there are no significant samples that may indicate corporeal painting amid Celtic populations, and none has been found in Great Britain thus far⁷⁶.
2. Written sources remain the chief foundation for the belief in the Briton's corporeal painting and seem to present it either as part of war ceremonial or body decoration. The possible rituals surrounding the Lindow Man may indicate a third use, in which corporeal painting is associated with contexts of death; in this aspect, too, it may be correlated to war and combat, inevitable places of death⁷⁷.
3. When body painting amid the Britons is considered, two chief materials are suggested: woad (*I. Tinctoria*) and copper-based pigments. The use of plant-based dye is correlated to earlier sources, whereas the use of copper has been indicated by the findings of the Lindow Bog, and occasionally associated with potential tattoo practices quoted by later sources. Whereas woad has medicinal advantages, minerals such as malachite and azurite have been shown to be a toxic hazard.
4. The continuity of mentions of corporeal painting throughout the Middle Ages, particularly during the Anglo-Saxon era, gives further substantiation to the practice. However, written sources may indicate either a shift in its nature (staining to tattooing), or practices of distinct origins (Britons, Picts and Anglo-Saxons). It seems to have been widespread enough in the eighth century to cause the promulgation of prohibitions from the Papacy.

76. Hoecherl, *Controlling Colours*.

77. In the ancient world, blue and green are often associated with death and the underworld. One of the most notorious cases is the Egyptian Osiris, who often appears depicted with a greenish hue. The religious practices of ancient Britons remain elusive, both due to a lack of archaeological evidence, and also the vast variety of deities one would find between different tribes: as said by Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities*, 521, "the list of gods is very long".

5. The mentions of corporeal painting in ancient sources likely reinforce the Roman narrative of the external nature of the inhabitants of Great Britain, who, even in the imperial era, are seen as peripheral to the Roman (and Mediterranean) world.⁷⁸

In a final observation of inferences derived from historical sources, one may look at the reports of Boudicca's rebellion⁷⁹. None of them mentions corporeal painting. Although they are not first-hand comments, they do contain a narrative of ancient Britons in war contexts, one century following Caesar's invasions. Whereas Late Roman and Medieval authors mention corporeal painting, sources such as Cassius Dio and Suetonius remain silent on this matter. Neither describes Boudicca or her warriors engaging in the practice. Whether this is the result of diverging habits between tribes, deliberate omission, or the lack of knowledge from those who had not witnessed the Britons at war, is uncertain. Cassius Dio dedicates almost half a chapter to describing both Boudicca's lineage and physical appearance, including her attire (Dio 62.2): among other details, she is said to be of royal lineage ("γένους τοῦ βασιλείου"), and would wear a golden necklace around her neck (στρεπτός, possibly a torque). It could be argued that corporeal painting was reserved for male warriors, but this is not described by Caesar (who generalises the practice) or Pliny (who speaks of the Briton women painting their bodies). Tacitus, too, is silent: in Tac., *Ann.* 14.34-35, when describing the confrontation between Boudicca and Gaius Suetonius Paulinus, he says only that she would be riding a chariot, which is somewhat reminiscing of the challenges faced by the invading armies in 55 and 54 B.C.E.

For now, this silence remains unexplained.

78. See, for instance, Johnson, *Later Roman Britain*, 1-8: the Mediterranean, "*mare nostrum*", is the centre of the Roman world; Britain, in the distance, is a point of contact between the Roman and the extraneous. The concept of *limes* develops progressively, and what Graham calls a "frontier consciousness" develops through the imperial era (Graham, *News and Frontier Consciousness*): the late empire, in particular, sees Rome as very aware of the geographic limits of its domains (46), of what is Roman and what is extraneous, shifting between ethnic, geographic, cultural and religious concepts. In the case of Great Britain, the influence of the Atlantic Ocean is particularly notorious, from its early formulations in ancient cosmogonies to early Christian views (56, quoting Eusebius: "(...) and then [God] circled this with Ocean to embellish its outline with dark-blue color.>").

79. Wilcox, *Rome's enemies*, 42-44.

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