ROME'S ENEMIES 2
GALIC AND BRITISH CELTS

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Chronology

3000 BC Nomadic Indo-European warriors begin to colonise large areas of Europe, settling among New Stone Age farmers and Old Stone Age hunters in the north.

1800 BC Proto-Celts begin moving into western Europe.

1600 BC Proto-Celts dominate the British Isles and the Atlantic coast of Iberia.

1200 BC A new Celtic culture evolves, named after the fields of individual cremation urns corresponding to areas of Celtic settlement in middle Europe.

1000 BC The ‘Urnenfeld’ culture spreads into most of France at the expense of the earlier ‘Tumulus’ culture of the Proto-Celts.

800 BC ‘Urnenfeld’ Celts begin expansion into the Iberian peninsula. Scythians penetrate Europe. The Illyrian Hallstatt culture begins.

670 BC The Iberians of Eastern Spain are overrun by ‘Urnenfeld’ Celts. Iron working is in progress in the Celtic regions of the Danube. Iron weapons appear in the Celtic waggon graves of Bohemia and southern Germany.

600 BC The Iron Age Hallstatt culture emerges among the Celts of Central Europe. The Celts of Spain penetrate the central Iberian plateau. The Iberians regain independence in the north and east, thus dislocating the trans-Pyrenean link between the Celts of Spain and Gaul. Celtic trade increases with the Greeks and Etruscans.

500 BC Hallstatt Celts begin to move into mainland Britain.

400 BC The Iron Age La Tène culture begins its first phase. La Tène Celts become known to ancient writers, who call them Gauls. The Gauls cross the Alps, flooding into the valley of the Po. Northern Etruscan communities are expunged. Latium is invaded and Rome sacked.

368 BC Gallic mercenaries are employed in the army of Syracuse.

341 BC Roman defeat of the Gauls in Latium.

285 BC Roman conquest of the Ager Gallicus.

Bronze dagger hilt and scabbard of unknown provenance, but dating from the late Hallstatt period—the 6th century BC.
expansion begins to wane. La Tène Celts (Gauls) begin to move into Britain. Many Gauls in Carthaginian service.

218 BC

Celts involved as allies of Carthage during the Second Punic War. Their power in Italy declines.

125 BC

Roman conquest of southern Gaul.

118 BC

The Cimbri, a Celtic tribe from the middle Danube, attack Noricum.

113 BC

War between Rome and Celto-Spaniards (‘Celtiberians’).

105 BC

Cimbri and Teutones defeat Roman forces at Orange.

102–1 BC

Roman forces destroy the Cimbri and Teutones.

100 BC

Belgic Gauls begin migration to southern Britain.

58 BC

The beginning of the final subjugation of Gaul.

55–4 BC

Roman forces probe southern Britain.

52 BC

Vercingetorix leads a major Gallic rebellion, which is defeated by Caesar at Alesia.

AD 9

Northern German tribes annihilate three Roman legions in the Teutoburg Forest.

AD 43

Roman invasion of southern Britain.

AD 61

British revolt led by Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni.

AD 69

The Romanisation of southern Britain is completed.

AD 84

Roman forces defeat the Caledonians in northern Britain.

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**Introduction**

The military ascendancy of the Celtic warrior north of the Alps was brought to an end when the loosely-knit Celtic ‘empire’, established in a great anarchic band across central Europe from the Atlantic coasts of the British Isles to the Black Sea, collapsed piecemeal in the face of the relentless campaigns of Julius Caesar.

Successive waves of warlike Indo-European tribes had by about 1000 BC given most of Europe an overlay of warrior-farmers. Hellenic tribes had
colonised Greece. Thracians had moved into areas north of Greece; Italic and Celtic tribes were in Italy; Celts were in the British Isles, Spain and central Europe; Teutons were occupying most of Scandinavia and the north-western coastlands of Europe, with the Slavs and Balts on their north-eastern flank.

At about this time the ‘Urnefield’ Celts began an expansion to the west from the region of the upper Danube. In around 800 BC the ‘Urnefielders’ had also spread east on to the Hungarian *puszta* and to the south-west, where they stood at the gates of Spain. During the early 8th century BC they had crossed the eastern passes of the Pyrenees and had occupied a wide inland area with the Mediterranean coast on their left flank.

At the beginning of the 6th century BC ‘Urnefield’ Celts were involved in the Illyrian Iron Age culture named by modern archaeologists after the first find-spot of the extensive cemetery which had belonged to a wealthy salt mining community: Halstatt, a village near Salzburg, Austria is on a lakeside where the original excavations took place in the 19th century.

19th-century sketch of an excavated chariot burial of a Gallic chieftain at Somme-Bionne, Marne. The skeleton lies between two ‘countersunk’ chariot wheels surrounded by the remains of a sword, belt hooks, belt plates, knife, and spear fittings. A cloak clasp lies at his right shoulder, and a wine jar at his feet. In a trench joined to the main burial by a narrow channel are the remains of the harness for two horses. (British Museum)

Most of our knowledge of early Celtic culture is based on the rich finds from the early burials in Bavaria, Bohemia and Upper Austria. These princely tombs contained a waggton, or its dismembered parts, on which the corpse was laid together with an iron sword and spears, an ample supply of pottery, sometimes cauldrons, and joints of beef and pork. Some graves also contained yokes, harness and bronze bits for the two waggton horses, and a third set probably for a riding horse. The whole tomb was usually encased in an oblong wooden chamber beneath an earthen mound or barrow.

Towards the end of the ‘Halstatt period’ the funeral vehicle became a two-wheeled chariot. The important centres in which these inhumations are found show a strong tendency to be sited further to the west the later they are, which most probably indicates the general drift west of a ‘Royal’ group of
Celtic warriors. By the 3rd century BC, warriors buried in this manner had arrived in Britain.

The Gauls made their entry with the advent of the ‘La Tène’ culture in Celtic territory. The Celts knew themselves as Celtae; the Greeks knew them as Keltoi, the Romans called them Galli or Galatae, but recognised that all these terms were interchangeable. To earlier Greek writers the Celts and Germans were grouped together as ‘un-mounted Scythians’. It is with the Roman version, the Galli (Gauls), that most ‘La Tène’ Celts are associated.

The first Celtic La Tène Iron Age phase roughly corresponds with a widespread avalanche of Gauls into Italy, Eastern Europe, France, Denmark and the British Isles. Gallic settlement of northern Italy centred on the Upper Po Valley and those of its
tributaries. They poured through Alpine passes, obliterating the infrastructure of northern Etruscan society; long-standing trade contracts between the Gauls and Etruscans would have made it obvious to the Gauls that Etruscan society had begun to show some signs of disintegration at this time.

The declared origins of these invaders are confirmed by archaeology as being Switzerland and southern Germany. The tribes who had traversed the central Alpine massif are recorded as being led by the Insubres, who settled around Mediolanum, now Milan. They were followed by the Laii, Libici, Cenomani and Anari who settled in Lombardy. Later waves included the Boii and Lingones who passed through the new Gallic territories finding their own area in Emelia. Last to arrive were the Senones, who settled the poorer land along the Adriatic coast of Umbria.

Swiftly-moving, marauding bands of unencumbered warriors raided deeper into the peninsula. The main armies and caravans of family waggons followed, stopping at the main areas of settlement. Roman influence in southern Etruria was temporarily disrupted by the Gallic incursions, but during the ensuing chaos Rome destroyed Etruscan power and influence among her Italic allies. The Etruscans, though not lacking valour, never developed a successful enough technique for dealing with Gallic warriors and their northern citizens began settling further to the south. Etruscan culture and history were eventually to be absorbed by the nascent and vigorous Roman Republic.

In 390 BC a meeting between a Roman embassy of three patrician delegates and the Senones took place at the Etruscan town of Clusium; the Romans were invited by the anxious burghers of the town to mediate with the barbarians. During an ensuing dispute one of the Gallic leaders received a fatal wound, and the Roman party made an immediate and hurried departure. There followed a demand from the Gauls for all three patricians to be returned for retribution. The Roman authorities refused, and awaited barbarian reaction, confident in their ability to deal with it. The Gauls promptly wrenched their standards from the ground and marched south.

The Roman army of about 15,000 men sent to bar the way to Rome was destroyed, 11 miles north of the city, at the confluence of the Rivers Allia and Tiber. Three days after the battle the Gauls entered Rome, much of which they burnt. Senators were slaughtered in the Senate House. Many citizens were saved by cackling geese giving the alarm during a Gallic night attack on the Capitol where they had sought sanctuary. The barbarians demanded a huge bounty of gold to leave the city. During the weighing procedure, Brennus, the Gallic leader, is said to have thrown his sword on to the scales with the words ‘Vae victis’—‘Woe to the defeated’.

Without doubt, the capture, occupation and sack of the city remained an indelible mark on Roman folk memory. We can only guess how great a part it played in Rome’s merciless treatment of the Celts in subsequent wars. Repeatedly beaten in battle, the Celts were subjected to wholesale massacres which almost merit that overworked word, ‘genocide’. This implacable hostility did not ease until Gauls and Britons were finally incorporated into the
Roman Empire. (It should be noted, nevertheless, that large numbers of Celts were accepted into the Roman army from the earliest opportunity.)

The Celts possessed many impressive qualities; and in the 4th century the writer Ephorus named the Celts, Persians, Scythians and Lybians as the four great barbarian peoples of the known world. Celtic technical skills, particularly their artistry in metalwork, were of the very highest calibre; and are matched, in surviving artefacts, by an abstract artistic vision which can be breathtaking in its beauty. They loved display—display of material wealth and beauty, as in the colourful clothing and collars and armlets of precious metals which bedecked their chiefs and warriors; and display of human qualities, as in their bragging of ancestry, strength and prowess. They bellowed insult and challenge across the battle-lines. At their great feasts they were quick to laughter, and to ferocity. Their spirits could be moved quickly from deep troughs of melancholy to furious outbursts of uncontrolled energy.

Astonishing examples of loyalty unto death went hand in hand with tales of appalling treacheries. Blood-feuds were commonplace; and the cult of head-hunting played a major part in their feelings about war and the supernatural. They were a people capable of fine gold-work of the utmost subtlety; of enamelled brooches, utensils and weapons of nearly unequalled quality—and yet a people whose dark beliefs allowed them to commit unspeakable acts of savagery against helpless captives. They were a contradictory, tumultuous, dynamic, and infinitely spectacular people, whose blood is permanently mixed into that of the inhabitants of the British Isles and north-west Europe.

The Warrior

Many authorities are of the opinion that Celtic expansion did not involve a special racial type, and that the descriptive use of the word ‘Celtic’ is only valid as a linguistic term. Others believe that ample skeletal remains contradict this view, since all Celtic remains show the same Nordic characteristics as their descendants.

The unforgettable appearance to southern European eyes of Celtic warriors—their height, white skin, muscularity, fair hair and blue eyes—points to a particularly heavy concentration of these physical characteristics among the warrior class, descendants of the intrusive Indo-European warriors—farmers of an earlier age. The paramount function of this warrior caste was precisely that of appearing on battlefields, opposing all kinds of southern Europeans or any other challengers to Celtic arms. To most outsiders, the Celts would all be assumed to be of this particular type. It is logical to assume that this blonde warrior caste represented the ‘Celts proper’; and Classical sculpture, mainly from the Pergamene school, confirms the literary descriptions of their tall, athletic, muscular bodies and wavy or curly hair.

This abundant hair was left uncut by most warriors. In some cases it was plaited so as to hang on either side of the forehead. The Sicilian-Greek Diodorus describes how some Celts smeared their hair with a thick lime wash and drew it back from...
the forehead to produce a weird effect, like the flying white mane of a horse. Drooping moustaches were popular. Bearded warriors are shown on the Arch of Orange.

The Celtic Iron Age fashion of wearing trousers was particularly noted by Greek and Roman writers. Diodorus Siculus, probably quoting the Syrian historian Posidonius, writes of the colourful clothing worn by the Gauls, as well as their use of trousers; the ‘multi-coloured’ fabric associated with the Celts probably indicates checkered and striped patterns, but they also wore fabrics of solid colours, natural wool colours and linen. Tunics with long or short sleeves were worn with a waist belt or girdle; over this was worn a cloak. Braiding and fringes were attached separately. Leather shoes completed the turnout.

Neck rings, known as torcs, were worn by chieftains and many warriors, made of gold, electrum, silver and bronze. Most surviving examples are of exquisite workmanship. They were worn by the Celts from about the 5th century BC; the finest examples of metallic Celtic jewellery belong to this early La Tène phase. Classical sculpture and native art distinctly show Celtic warriors wearing these torcs. They are also shown on Roman military funerary stones, together with other decorative awards on chest harness worn by centurions. Large numbers of these torcs must have fallen into the hands of victorious Roman forces in their wars with the Gauls; perhaps more significant is the Romans’ copying of this and other fashions from their deadly but impressive enemies.

Bronze brooches, often embellished with studs mounted with coral or exquisitely enamelled, are found in warrior graves singly or in pairs, in the region of the chest where they had held a cloak in place.

Roman fear of the awesome and dangerous Celtic charge was eventually overcome when it was realised that steadiness, thorough battle training, the use of ample reserves and, above all, a complete range of missiles could usually be relied upon to defeat even the most determined avalanche of battle crazed Gallic savages.

One of the best insights into the character of the Celtic warrior was written by Strabo, a Greek geographer who lived around the beginning of the 1st century AD. He wrote: ‘The whole race, which is now called Celtic or Galatic, is madly fond of war, high spirited and quick to battle, but otherwise straightforward and not of evil character. And so when they are stirred up they assemble in their bands for battle, quite openly and without
remark that homo-erotic practices were accepted among Celtic warriors.

**Celtic communities: fort and farmstead**

Since the Celts left no written record, our only knowledge of the arrangement of their lives and their communities comes from the brief, and perhaps unreliable accounts left by Roman writers, and from the evidence of the spade. There are few clues to any detailed understanding of their society. We know that they were a ‘tribal’ people; we do not know exactly what their tribal structure was. We are told that they were a society divided by caste into a warrior ‘aristocracy’, a priestly class, and an underclass of peasants. We know that they practised slavery.

As for their pattern of building, the modern academic view is that a fairly highly organised society of scattered farms and farming hamlets looked towards local ‘hill forts’ as the focus of their lives. These ‘forts’ present a bewildering range of size, local density, and apparent purpose. Some are only an acre or two in extent, with a simple rampart-and-ditch defence, and traces of a handful of huts. Others enclose within huge multiple rampart systems scores or even hundreds of acres, and traces of up to several hundred huts. There are examples which fall at every point along this range of size. Some may have been villages; some were almost certainly simply refuges for people and their beasts in time of war; and the largest and most densely built-up can only be described as ‘towns’—perhaps even as local ‘capitals’. We simply do not know how Celtic ‘political’ society worked; so we cannot make intelligent guesses about the comparative frequency of purely military ‘forts’, fortified refuges, permanent fortified villages, or massively defended ‘royal capitals’.

One safe assumption is that the time-smoothed banks and faint traces of post-holes, which today crown almost every skyline in some parts of Britain and continental Europe, give an altogether too primitive impression. The archaeological evidence shows a wide range of construction techniques, some extremely sophisticated. Ramparts which even today survive to a height of 90 feet would then have been much more sharply sloped and sculpted. Some were built up by means of timber lacing, rubble in-fill, and vertical facing walls of dry stone
blocks. Some had defended gateways with indirect approaches and outworks which are reminiscent in their sound design of 18th century forts. We find evidence for massive timber gates surmounted by patrol-walks; for multiple stone-faced ramparts, quite possibly spaced according to the effective range of the available missile weapons; for a hierarchy wielding enough authority to stockpile 50,000 large sling-stones in handy positions on the ramparts of a fort, after gathering them from a beach some miles away. Whatever our ignorance of these people, one thing is sure: their chieftains had real authority, and wielded it over a social system wealthy and organised enough to put considerable manpower at their disposal for sustained tasks.

Julius Caesar describes encountering in central and northern Gaul a type of solid defensive wall which he terms murus Gallicus. This can best be described as a skeletal grid of timber beams placed crossways and nailed together, built up in layers, with earth and rubble rammed down into the spaces between the beams at every level. A dry stone wall faced this construction front and back—sometimes covering the ends of the lateral beams, sometimes leaving them exposed. The core of the wall thus gave good resistance to battering rams, even when the facing had been breached; and the facing and in-fill protected the timber skeleton from fire. This ‘Gallic wall’ is known to have been at least 12 ft high in some cases.

The Gallic Celts came in contact with Greek settlers in southern France, and it is tantalising to wonder how much this contact affected Celtic defensive engineering. In this area several strongholds have been identified which boasted ramparts of stone construction, rather than of stone-faced earth. The best-known is Entremont, which the Romans described as an oppidum—‘town’. Overlooking Aix-en-Provence, this triangular fortress, captured by the Romans in 123 BC, had walls of rough-cut stone blocks defended at intervals of about every 20 yards by towers with solid rubble-packed bases; the walls probably boasted battlements or parapets originally. Britain has not
produced evidence of comparable sophistication. There are signs that some British forts were given improved defences at several periods; in about the 3rd century BC there was a general deepening of ditches and thickening of ramparts, and on some southern British sites the 1st century BC saw the raising of additional belts of ramparts and ditches and the construction of sophisticated indirect entranceways.

The settlements which were scattered right across the Celts' geographical range offer just as wide a variety of sizes and designs as the ‘forts’, from isolated farmsteads perhaps supporting one extended family, to quite large villages of up to 40 acres or so—larger than most medieval and many modern villages. There have been several recent experiments in reconstructing, from archaeological evidence, working Iron Age farmsteads. A project on Butser Hill near Petersfield, Hampshire included several different types of living units based on post-hole measurements and surviving fragments of hut fabric. In fields cultivated by hand, or with primitive ploughs drawn by cattle, experimental crops of cereals thought to resemble contemporary grains have been raised. Crops such as spelt and emmer were found to average some 1,600 lbs yield per acre even in poor conditions. Breeds of horse, cow, poultry and sheep which approximate ancient strains have been raised on these experimental farms—for instance the agile and hardy St Kilda sheep, a small goat-like creature raised for its wool. Weaving, potting, charcoal-burning and metal-smelting—all necessary to a Celtic community—have been practised on these sites using the reconstructed technology of the period. In the lower strata of Celtic society most men, women and children would have spent the bulk of their lives carrying out these labour-intensive tasks.

**The Druids**

The ancient Celts were not a religious people, in the sense of worshipping an established hierarchy of gods. But they were intensely superstitious; they believed that the objects and the environment of their physical world were pervaded by magical agencies. Placation by ritual and sacrifice—including, according to the Romans, human sacrifice—and by the telling of sacred myths and tales was believed to encourage benign involvement by supernatural powers in human affairs. The Celtic year was punctuated by festivals marking the farming seasons.

There was no organised pantheon of gods such as that of the Greeks and Romans, although much of the terminology attributed to the Celts (or perhaps simply ‘filtered through’ the Graeco-Roman vocabulary of the commentators) seems common to most Indo-European peoples. Some Celtic deities were of only local importance; others were ‘national’ gods. Some were believed capable of shape-changing, from human to bird or animal form.

Their sacred places, with the exception of sanctuaries such as Roquepertuse and Entremont, were evidently simple groves or woods. Ceremonies were conducted here by the priestly class, or ‘druids’. Pliny mentions the connection between druidic rites and oak trees. Mistletoe was ritually cut from oak trees, usually accompanied by a bull sacrifice; but the purpose of the custom is obscure.

Caesar notes the importance of the druids in Gaul both as magicians and as arbitrators to whom disputes or problems were taken. They seem to have been the guardians of the Celts’ oral traditions, through ritual myths passed from generation to generation. In short, they were ‘witch doctors’ or ‘wise men’, whose influence was woven deeply and intricately into Celtic life. Britain had a particularly strong reputation as a cradle of druids, and this was apparently more than simply the result of druids fleeing to Britain after the fall of Gaul to the Romans. The Roman invaders were implacably hostile to the druidic cult, and their writers make much of the inhuman sacrificial customs they sometimes practised. One may suppose that just as important to the invaders was the need to stamp out ruthlessly this network or ‘infrastructure’ for preserving Celtic national consciousness right
across tribal divisions. The last and most influential centre of open, ‘organised’ druidism was in the west of Britain, where the stronghold of the cult on the island of Anglesey was destroyed by Suetonius Paulinus in AD 60.

**Head-hunting**

In a man’s head lay his mind, his strength, his will, his spirit, his ‘life force’. The American Indian believed that to remain in the domestic environment of the camp, surrounded by women, children, and the smells of cooking and the camp fire was to become softened and weak; while to live in the fresh air, to kill enemy warriors and to take into one’s being their manly strength and spirit, was to become oneself a powerful warrior. Some such feeling as this probably lay behind the Celtic cult of head-collecting; but its symbols are so pervasive in surviving Celtic art and artefacts that we may suspect a developed and deeply-held system of belief, even if we cannot identify it in detail. The image of the severed head is found everywhere—in carved stone and wooden objects, and in the form of actual surviving skulls. Heads were placed on gateway lintels; in niches in temples, or in the doorbeams of buildings; even collected and kept inside huts. Some very prized heads were kept embalmed in cedar oil in special chests. When freshly taken the head was hung by the hair from a warrior’s spear, chariot, or horse’s harness.

**Weapon sacrifice**

Orosius, a Roman historian, leaves this comment on the ritual destruction of booty by the Cimbri after the battle of Arausio in 105 BC: ‘When the enemy had taken possession of two camps and an immense booty, they destroyed under new and strange oaths and imprecations all that had fallen into their hands. . . .’

A later witness to this custom was Caesar, who wrote of the Gauls: ‘When they have decided to fight a battle they generally vow to Mars the booty they hope to take, and after a victory they sacrifice the captured animals and collect the rest of the spoil in one spot. Among many of the tribes, high piles of it can be seen on consecrated ground.’ These votive deposits, dedicated to a god by the victors in inter-tribal wars, are found in different locations all over Europe where the Celts held sway. From pools, lakes, marshes and peat-bogs the remains of excellent swords, spears, daggers, mail, chariot wheels, shields, trumpets, and large deposits of animal bones have all been brought to light—indeed, it is from them that historians have learned most about Celtic war-gear.

Helmets of ‘Coolus’ type, as first discovered in that district of the Marne. These simple helmets are of the true ‘reversed jockey cap’ shape. Those marked here A and B are Roman adaptations of the design, with two rivet holes on each side to attach cheek guards. The original Celtic examples have only one hole each side for a simple chin strap. The rings fitted under the neck guard may have been a third attachment point for the chin straps, or simply carrying lugs. (From various sources)
Arms and Armour

The incredible impression made by Celtic warriors on those southern Europeans who came into contact with them is registered in literature, surviving sculpture and the minor arts.

Prior to the 3rd century BC the Celts used very little armour, many warriors choosing to fight naked. Chieftains and the wealthier warriors did wear helmets and body armour to a greater degree as contact with southern armies became more frequent. This trend increasingly spread down to the lower strata. Several graves in northern Italy contain Etruscan armour and Celtic weapons; some experts believe, however, that these are probably not Celtic because of the presence of a Greek heavy infantry shield (hoplon) in one of these series of burials.

Southern Europeans never thought of the Celt particularly as an armoured warrior; even after long involvement with the sophisticated armies of Rome, the majority of Gauls wore no body defences. Ironically, some of the battle helmet types used by Roman armies are, in Russell Robinson’s view, direct developments of Gallic originals.

Montefortino and Coolus helmets
The helmets used by more northerly Gauls at the beginning of the La Tène period (during the late 5th century BC) are varied in design. Some are of a graceful conical shape, sometimes with quite a steep apex which was completed with a hollow finial; others are of a ‘reversed plain jockey cap’ shape. Later Gallic helmets show their descent from these earlier examples. Named after the necropolis at Montefortino, Ancona in northern Italy, the Montefortino type ‘jockey cap’ helmet was made of bronze or, more rarely, iron. Other ‘jockey cap’ Celtic helmets were found in the Coolus district of the Marne in north-eastern France. Most were of bronze.

The Montefortino ‘jockey cap’ evolved about the beginning of the 4th century BC, the finest examples of these beautiful headpieces being found in Italy although they originated in barbarian Europe. They were to prove extremely popular throughout both Roman and Carthaginian armies. When later versions were mass produced, their quality deteriorated. The helmet was held in place by straps which ran from the neck guard, where they were attached, to metal loops, hooks or studs on the lower part of each cheek guard. Crests were of several types, known examples having several knobs at the apex, metallic branches from a central insert, and hollow finials to accept feather or flowing horsehair plumes. The helmet shell was sometimes fitted with slots or pockets for flat metal ‘horns’ to be slid into place on either side of the skull.

The Coolus ‘jockey cap’ has a flat guard projecting horizontally from the back of the lower shell, as a neck guard. These metal caps were of a simple, utilitarian, hemispherical design with no crest fittings. They date from the 3rd to the 1st century BC, and in all probability were manufactured by Celtic armourers for the Roman army during and after the conquest. Many surviving Roman army helmets of Coolus type in a developed form have crest attachments and cheek guards.

Agen helmets
So far four late Gallic brimmed iron helmets have come to light; they are named after the find-spot of the first of the small series found at Agen, Lot-et-Garonne, Switzerland. They have deep, full shells, not unlike a bowler hat, with a wide brim at the lower edge, narrow in the front and wide at the back, the neck guard section being stepped to reinforce it. A further raised V-sectioned reinforcement encircles the wall of the shell. The cheek guards are mounted with curvilinear embossing, patterned bosses and stepping. The headpiece was secured by thongs through the rings at the underside of the neck guard and the lower rear corners of the cheek guards.

Port helmets
Named after Port Bei Nidau, in Switzerland, where the first of this series was found, these Gallic iron helmets of Port type have deep shells like the Agen helmets. The forward rim is extended into a small peak; the rear of the shell is continued down to lower ear level. This neck guard has two ridges across its width, and the lower edge is brought out to a narrow horizontal stop. The shell front has two raised ridges above the forehead forming two recurved ‘eyebrows’ almost meeting in the middle, where a large rivet forms a small boss.

Fragments of both types of the late Gallic helmets
1st-century BC bronze helmet with a central reinforcement mounted with two triple finials on the crown, and a duck or goose head at the front. Of great interest are the fabric inner cap, and the fabric-lined leather cheek guards; this type of non-metallic fitting almost never survives. The band around the edge of the skull is embossed with a simple repeat pattern of 'double hooks'. (Schweiz Landesmuseum, Zurich)

An iron helmet of the 'Agen/Port' type dating from the 1st century BC. It has a deep, vertical-sided skull and a narrow brim broadening into a neck guard at the back; this had two reversed cusps at each side, and a 'stepped' surface for added strength. From Giubasco, Ticino. (Schweiz Landesmuseum, Zurich)
were found at Alesia, where a Gallic force led by Vercingetorix was trapped during a siege in 52 BC. In the opinion of the late Russel Robinson, these Agen/Port helmets were the direct ancestors of the Imperial Gallic Roman battle helmets of later centuries.

Helmets of exotic type were also acquired by the Gaule from the earliest times, including Greek varieties, Italo-Corinthian, Italo-Attic and Etruscan Negau types.

**Helmet linings**

In his book on Roman Imperial armour, the late Russell Robinson mentions a quantity of surviving linings in helmets of the 14th to 17th centuries AD. The majority are made up of four segments, some of more, their upper ends joined by a circling which could be adjusted to enable the helmet to seat on the head at the correct height. This method is still used in modern helmets of all kinds. In all cases the linings are fastened to the helmet rim, and have a space between the top of the helmet and upper lining, in order to eliminate condensation and allow free circulation of air. A padded fabric of hard-wearing type is usual. In view of the known longevity of this method of helmet lining, there is no reason to doubt that earlier fittings of this type were used in the helmets of both Gaule and Romans. A cheek guard found at Hod Hill, Dorset has traces of fabric on its inside surface, which would seem to be the remains of a lining of simple padded type which was either stuck on or secured under the edge-binding. There is also some evidence that some form of arming cap was in use during centuries prior to the Middle Ages.

**Armour**

Body armour was always much rarer among the Celts than helmets. Some Gaule of the Urnfield culture were equipped with bronze plate armour which included cuirasses and greaves; production skills were probably derived from Mycenaean craftsmen, and the earliest examples from eastern Europe date to the 13th century BC. Some examples are heavily embossed and incised. The earliest representations of mail are on the reliefs of the temple of Athene at Pergamon in Turkey; they are included in the frieze showing captured arms and armour of the Galatians. The mail is shown made up into sleeveless shirts with reinforcement panels for the shoulders attached across the top of the back and held at the front by a bar and stud device. Dated to the early 2nd century BC, the frieze probably shows examples of the captured equipment copied on site by the sculptor.

A more developed form of this type of mail corselet was used by Roman, Etruscan and later Gallic warriors. A clearly illustrated example of this

The young Gallic nobleman of Vachères, Basses Alpes, discovered in 1892; this probably represents one of the class of *equites* or 'knights' described by Caesar. The mail corselet, with its shoulder reinforcements, is clearly defined. The cuffed tunic is split at each side of the hem. (Musée Calvet, Avignon)
Gallic armours are found on the remains of statues and figurines from southern France and northern Italy. They are in the form of a shawl or cape, which is joined at the two upper corners of each end by hook-and-plate attachments at the centre of the upper chest. Most examples show angled ends on the chest, but others are rounded off.

**The Celtic shield**

For the majority of Gaulish warriors the shield was important as their only defence, crucial to their fighting technique.

The earliest Celtic shields were relatively small ‘targets’ of hide or wood. If the round ‘parade’ shields of thin bronze found in central Europe, Greece and Italy can be taken as samples of the appearance of contemporary and earlier battle shields of this type, they were heavily studded.

At some time during the Halstatt cultural period the Celts adopted the long body shield. Most probably developed from Italic prototypes, the long Celtic shield was oblong, shaped either as a hexagon or as a complete or truncated oval. Examples of early Celtic long shields are most probably shown on a bronze bucket from northern Italy where we see warriors in brimmed ‘bowler hat’ helmets carrying two spears and long, round-cornered, oblong shields with a central spine and oblong boss.

Remains of long Celtic shields have been discovered at La Tène in France, Hjortspring in Denmark, and in Ireland. The La Tène examples were originally oval and about 1.1 metre long; they are made of oak planks which were chamfered to a thinner section towards the rim. The centre was reinforced by a wooden spine, swelling in the middle, which was hollowed out to correspond with a round or oval cut-out in the shield centre. The hollow was usually protected by a bronze or iron strap-type boss which crossed over the wide section of the spine and was riveted through the shield. The hand grip was fashioned in wood, sometimes reinforced with a metal strap riveted on either side of the hollow through the shield. The flat area of the face and back of the shield was covered with leather, or sometimes perhaps with felt. An extra metal binding or ‘piping’ was applied to the upper rim of some shields to guard against downward strokes of sword or axe, which could split the wood.

Variations of this basic shield type are to be seen
in sculpted examples. Bosses were of iron and included the simple wide strap types, ‘butterfly’ plates and conventional round varieties on circular mounting plates. It is almost certain that most shields, decorated with animal, geometric or symbolic emblems, were painted carefully in polychromatic schemes.

‘Parade’ shields
Oblong ‘parade’ shields of thin bronze sheet backed with wood have been found in the Thames at Battersea and in the Witham in Lincolnshire; they are exceptional in that applied embossed metal adorns the shield faces, and it seems clear that they were not intended for use in battle.

Swords
Celtic warriors were primarily thought of as swordsmen in the ancient world. They were employed as shock troops in Greece, Western Asia, Egypt and in the armies of Carthage.

Early Celtic iron swords were of excellent quality and followed the style of late Bronze Age types. Both bronze and iron types were manufactured together, until in time bronze ceased to be used. The stronger iron weapons were seemingly confined to the ‘royal’ group of warriors living in an area of central Europe around Bavaria, Wurtenberg, Baden, Alsace-Lorraine, Burgundy and the Auvergne.

Badly damaged statue from the great Gallic oppidum of Entremont, showing a warrior squatting in Celtic fashion. Dating from the 2nd century BC, this piece does show quite clearly the mail corselet with a cape-like shoulder reinforcement and some kind of fastening on the chest. The detail view shows, indistinctly, the remains of the sword, and the lower edge of the mail. (Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence)
Several of the iron swords of this (Halstatt) period are so large that some experts have thought them to be for ceremonial use only, but they are no bigger than some of the great war swords of the Middle Ages. As with the bronze swords of this period, the blade is of a graceful elongated leaf shape with rounded spatular, square-kink or shallow ‘V’ points. Late Halstatt swords included a type with a short, thick blade and an acute point. The hilts of both types of Halstatt iron swords are distinctive. Most earlier large swords have hilts similar to bronze prototypes but are of ‘Mexican hat’ profile; the smaller, late Halstatt swords, also adapted from earlier bronze examples, have two prongs divided at the top of the hilt to form horns or ‘antennae’. Other hilts were of a design based on the human figure and are known as ‘anthropoid’—some daggers of the period also follow this fashion.

The swords of the Celtic Iron Age La Tène culture range in size from about 55 cm to 80 cm, hilt guard to point, but some reach a blade length of 90 cm. The quality of metal used in these weapons warrants the description of steel rather than iron. Quality varies, but few surviving blades descend to the poor quality described by Polybius, the Greek historian, who says of them that: ‘... they are effective only at the first blow; thereafter they are blunt, and bend so that if the warrior has no time to
wedge it against the ground and straighten it with his foot, the second blow is quite ineffective.’

The lake at La Tène was a Celtic sacrificial site in which hundreds of swords have been found. Other sites, in France, Britain, Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, southern Germany and eastern Europe have all produced various examples of La Tène swords.

Most swords of the early La Tène period measure about 65 cm to 75 cm overall and are cut-and-stab weapons; the blades are pointed and the scabbard chapes are heavily patterned. They date from the mid-5th to the mid-3rd century BC. Swords of the middle La Tène period, to the late 2nd century BC, became longer and round-ended, overall length being about 85 cm to 90 cm. From the 1st century BC sword length increased to a mean overall average of 90 cm, a few examples having blades of 90 cm without the handle. Scabbard chapes are neater and conform more to the sword’s outline. La Tène swords of an insular style continued to be made in Britain after the Roman conquest of Gaul up to the end of the 1st century AD. The sword was usually suspended on the right hip from a sword belt of leather or a chain of linked iron rings; the sword was attached to the belt by means of a metal loop at the back face of the scabbard.

The gradual change of the La Tène sword from a fairly short cut-and-thrust weapon to a longer weapon solely designed for cutting seems to have been reversed in Britain, where points reappear on surviving blades during the last two centuries before the Roman conquest.

**Spears**
Spears and javelins of bronze and iron took various
forms and sizes. In general, spearheads were larger during the first and second La Tène phases, from the 5th to the first quarter of the 1st century BC. The most typical Celtic designs have edges curving inwards from the belly of the blade to its tip, giving the impression of an elongated point. Two spears complete with shafts were found at La Tène, and were just under 2.5 m long; butt spikes were of socketed or tanged fitting.

Bows were evidently used in some areas by some warriors. The sling—the simplest and cheapest of all missile weapons, but one demanding long practice for accuracy—was also used. The great dumps of sling ‘ammunition’ found on some Celtic defended sites have already been mentioned. The effectiveness of the sling-stone should never be underestimated. Large ‘cobblestones’ hurled at great speed could inflict fatal crushing injuries even upon soldiers protected by metal helmets, and many hits must have produced major limb fractures. There is a school of thought which holds that the very design of the ramparts round Celtic hill forts was dictated by the widespread introduction of the sling, to produce the most effective ‘fields of fire’ and ‘killing zones’.

The Celtic chariot

‘I see a chariot of fine wood with wickerwork, moving on wheels of white bronze. A pole of white silver with a mounting of white bronze. Its frame very high, of creaking copper, rounded and firm. A strong carved yoke of gold; two firm-plaited yellow reins; the shafts hard and straight as sword-blades.’

This description from The Wooring of Emer, an Irish legend of the Ulster Cycle, should not be taken as a literal specification; and of course, it long post-dates the period of Roman-Celtic confrontation. But experience proves that such oral traditions are extraordinarily long-lived; and leading experts such as Dr Anne Ross do believe that the Irish legends are precious survivals of the earliest Celtic culture which we can glimpse.
In about 1580 BC the Hyksos peoples, after some 200 years of occupation, were expelled from Egypt. Soon afterwards, the well-trained chariot squadrons which were the Hyksos’ legacy to Egypt were spearheading invasions of the ‘fertile crescent’ as far north as Syria. Both the Indo-European Hyksos charioteers and their Egyptian pupils used a light, flexible two-wheeled car pulled by spirited horses. In the 1st century AD, Indo-European Celts were using the last examples of these chariots against the legions of Rome.

The Celtic battle chariot was a two-wheeled vehicle with an oblong platform secured above the axle at the centre of its length. On each side of the platform side panels were formed by double semi-circular bows of wood filled in with inserts of wood, leather, wickerwork, or a combination of these materials. According to recent authoritative opinion, the trace reins were attached to the axle housing by metal lugs in order to transfer the pull directly to the wheels. The centre pole was connected to the axle housing and the platform. (The Celts’ chariot tactics are mentioned below, immediately before the section on Alesia.)

**Cavalry**

Gallic nobles and their immediate following filled the ranks of the cavalry. We may suppose that most wore metal helmets, and the nobles and richer retainers the mail corselets described above. Besides swords they would have carried spears and javelins. Gallic cavalry shields seem generally to have been round or oval, but some were of truncated oval shape—i.e. ovals with the top and bottom cut off square. Cavalry tactics were normally simple: a shower of javelins was thrown, and followed up by a charge using spears and swords. Gallic cavalry—the ‘knights’ mentioned by Caesar—were the later
equivalent of the noble charioteers of an earlier period. They were apparently well mounted, on horses measuring about 14 hands (1.42 m from the ground to the withers). Celtic saddles were constructed with a pommel on each corner of the seat unit, as shown by sculptural evidence. A later Roman saddle of the same pattern, reconstructed from the sculptural evidence and surviving fragments, is neatly seamed and stitched, with bronze stiffeners inserted into the pommels, and patterns of bronze studs on the oblong side panels. Metal discs and other ornaments were attached to the harness. Both bar and jointed snaffle bits were used, the latter apparently being more popular.

It is logical to ‘work backwards from the Romans’ in any reconstruction of Celtic cavalry. As early as the Gallic Wars Rome was hiring formed units of mercenary cavalry among the pacified Gallic tribes, and Gaul (together with Thrace) continued to supply the Roman army with the bulk of its auxiliary cavalry force for centuries. Clearly Celtic features remain identifiable in cavalry accoutrements long after the incorporation of the Celtic lands into the Empire.

**Warfare**

The Gaul, whether on foot or mounted, was primarily a swordsman.

The mass of infantry warriors were the most formidable part of a Gallic army; they fought as ‘heavy’ infantry, coming into direct contact with enemy troops. After some time spent slashing the air with their long swords, pouring abuse on the enemy, rhythmically banging their weapons on their shields and tossing their standards to the harsh braying of war trumpets, the tall swordsmen rolled forward like an incoming wave and began a screaming run towards enemy lines. At about 30
Early La Tene period chieftain and warriors, late 5th century BC
British Belgic charioteer and nobleman, 1st century BC
Celtic light infantry types,
1st century BC/1st century AD
Guard cavalrymen, Roman army, early 2nd century AD
yards they began to discharge their javelins; within seconds, individual warriors were using their powerful physique to break up the opposing ranks.

If this first assault failed, a whole series of these attacks would be mounted, separated by short rest periods. The charges would last until the enemy was battered into defeat, or the Gauls became exhausted and retired, or just stood their ground in defiance.

These furious attacks were countered by Roman legions using javelin volleys, followed by an alternating-rank exchange system which put fresh or rested troops into the fighting line after a given period of action.

Polybius, born at the beginning of the 2nd century BC, would not only have gleaned the information he needed from official sources; it is entirely possible that he also took evidence from living witnesses to the events of 225 BC, when the Gauls of northern Italy marched on Rome. He names the Boii, Insubres and Taurisci of the Alpine region as the most likely participants. Adventurers from beyond the Alps were also invited to take part in the campaign; Polybius says that the Italian Gauls ‘... pointed out to them the great wealth of the Romans and the plunder that victory would bring ...’ The host was, in this way, swollen by large numbers of experienced Gaulish warriors from the Rhône Valley.

Rome was aware of her danger; the panic-stricken citizens sent the army and large numbers of reserves to the north, ‘... for the old terror of the Gauls lay in their bones.’ The large defence force was joined by contingents from other Italian peoples including the Gallic Cenomani and Illyrian Veneti. Two armies now faced the Gauls, both large and powerful. A further territorial army of older men and boys stood behind them. A Greek man and woman and a Celtic couple were sacrificed by being buried alive by Roman officials to counter a prophecy that Greeks and Gauls would one day take all Roman land.

After the initial success of a clever deception, the Gauls were trapped on Cape Telamon between two Roman army groups, and went into laager behind two- and four-wheeled chariots. Amid a chaotic clamour from the Italian Gauls, the Gaesatae warriors from the north threw off their clothes and attacked the Roman lines with missiles. After a Gallic cavalry charge had failed, the infantry furiously attacked the enemy. The naked Gaesatae, tall spearmen decked with golden bracelets and torcs and with their tawny manes stiffened with lime, repeatedly bounded up to the embattled legions behind their shields, and in ‘senseless rage stormed against the enemy’.

In their utter frustration the Gauls refused to retreat, and 40,000 were said to have died. Some 10,000 were taken prisoner, including Anerostes, one of the two kings; the other king and his companions died by their own hand.

The naked trans-Alpine Gauls were paralleled in other Celtic groups, and neither Diodorus Siculus nor Polybius understood the true significance of their stripping for battle. The name ‘Gaesatae’ is derived from gae, Celtic for spear or dart, and means spearman. They were tribeless young men who hired themselves out to any who would pay or share booty. It seems almost certain that they were also fey, legendary warriors. These warrior hirelings are echoed in Ireland where, during the early Middle Ages, the Fenian bands resembled the Gaesatae and were described in old Irish tales as ‘ecland, without a tribe’.

**The Cimbrian Wars**

A quarter of a century after their brutal sack of Carthage and destruction of Corinth, the Romans controlled Spain, Greece, southern Gaul, north Africa, Lydia, Phrygia and the Mediterranean. Apart from internal political unrest their horizons were untroubled and secure. This relative calm was disrupted by reports of a movement south by large numbers of nomadic northern barbarians. According to the Roman writer Plutarch the warriors
numbered about 300,000, not counting their families. Two tribes of unknown origin, named as the Cimbri and Teutones, were following an aimless southerly route past modern Magdeburg, Dresden and Vienna. In the area now known as Bohemia they were confronted by the Gaulish Boii, and were persuaded to move on peacefully.

South of the Danube, near modern Belgrade, they fought the Scordisci, a powerful tribe of Danubian Gauls. They were defeated, and turned west along the Drava into Noricum (Austria). By 113 BC the great horde was approaching the territory of the Taurisci, a Gallic people who had a protection treaty with Rome. With invasion imminent, they called for Roman aid. Carbo, the consul for that year, arrived with a large army, and the Cimbri and Teutones prepared to move away. The Roman consul was not interested in peaceful retreats, however, and forced the barbarians to give battle at Norcia. His generalship did not match his lust for glory and the legions were only saved from total annihilation by a heavy thunderstorm. Carbo took poison, true to Republican tradition. Although confident in their ability to face the legions, the horde turned to the north-west away from Italy. During the next three years they lived among the foothills of the Alps, near the source of the Danube.

By 110 BC the wanderers had crossed the Rhine near Schaffhausen through to the Jura and down into Gaul, where they were joined by the Tigurini and other Gauls. The Roman consul of 109 BC, M. Julius Silanus, had been sent with an army into
eastern Gaul, where he was met by a demand from the Cimbri and Teutones for land. The demand was rejected by Rome. The consular army went into action, and was seriously defeated in the valley of the Rhône. Other Gaulish tribes became restive as news of the second Roman disaster spread. The invaders now moved north, where they rested. Those Helvetian Gauls who had reinforced the Cimbrian horde settled along the northern frontier of Roman Gaul.

In 107 BC the Volcae-Tectosages—Gauls long established in Roman territory around modern Toulouse—rose in revolt, but were met and defeated by an army commanded by the consul L. Cassius Longinus; the army then proceeded to push the Tigrinusi down the valley of the Garonne. The Romans were almost destroyed and Longinus was killed when they ran into an ambush. The survivors reached the Roman camp, where their lives were bought for half the baggage and the disgrace of ‘passing under the yoke’ in a submission ritual.

Having received a triumph for a Spanish campaign, Q. Servilius Caepio, the consul in 106 BC, was thought to be a competent soldier. He restored calm among the Volcae. Re-conquering Toulouse, he was joined by Cn. Mallius Maximus, an ambitious provincial of consular rank, with a second army; the two commanders quarrelled, but managed to place their armies on the northern side of the Rhône under Mallius’s orders when it was learned that the Cimbri and Teutones were on the move down the Rhône valley. On 6 October 105 BC, at Arausio (Orange), the Roman advance guard was wiped out. By mid-morning the consular army of Caepio was heavily engaged with the barbarian host. The Romans finally broke and the invaders swept on to assault the army of Mallius. They reached the Roman camp about an hour later. The Romans were trapped against the river, where they fought to the death. Both generals managed to escape.

In 104 BC Gaius Marius was given a second consulship by election—an emergency measure which violated a regulation of the senate. Now 25, he was a born soldier; and he completely restructured the Roman army. The legionary ceased to be a short-service citizen levy, and became a professional heavy infantryman supported by a secondary army of auxiliaries. The new army was drilled, trained and toughened to the last degree.

Meanwhile the barbarians bypassed Italy after the victory at Arausio, and strolled through the countryside of western Gaul and northern Spain before doubling back to vanish once more into the north.

In 102 BC they materialised in the south of Provence. Marius moved quickly, racing north from Rome to join his army in fortified camp on the lower Rhône. He knew now that his army faced three pugnacious tribes confident of their ability to deal with any Roman opposition; although they had been repulsed by the Belgae in northern Gaul, their spirit was unshaken. They now made a tactical error, dividing their forces in face of the enemy: the Teutones and Ambones followed the coast road from the west, and after attacking Roman positions without success, they broke off and made for the Italian passes. Marius (now in his fourth consulate) broke camp, and by carefully planned forced marches overtook them, arriving at Aquae Sextae (Aix-en-Provence) to await the barbarians in prepared positions across the valley. The Ambones arrived and attacked immediately; reaching the entrenched Roman positions, they were almost completely destroyed. The next day the Teutones offered battle, and were soundly beaten by a surprise attack in the rear; most were killed or captured.

The Cimbri, who had crossed the Brenner Pass,
now faced the army of Catulus, a senatorial general, at Tridentum (Trento). His army refused to fight, and he had to abandon Italian Gaul retreating over the Po. Marius cancelled his triumph, and joined Catulus on the Po with his army. They crossed the river in high summer 101 BC, and met the Cimbri at Campi Raurii near Vercellae.

The king of the Cimbri trotted his pony out to challenge Marius to single combat for the prize of Italy. He was told that it was not the Roman custom. Plutarch writes that the Cimbrian infantry then advanced in a huge square, 30 furlongs long on each side. These warriors each had two javelins and a sword. The cavalry, about 15,000 strong, wore helmets in the form of animal heads adorned with feather plumes; they carried white shields, and wore iron breast plates. With the sun in their eyes and unused to an Italian heatwave, the Cimbrian infantry met the legions in a cloud of dust. The foremost ranks of northern warriors were chained together through their belts to present an unbroken line. Nearly all were killed. The women slaughtered some survivors, and then killed themselves. Some 60,000 prisoners were said to have been taken, and the dead numbered well over 120,000. ‘Never had the scavenging birds of Italy fed on such gigantic corpses.’ The Tigurini turned back to Switzerland, where they settled.

The great invasion epic was at an end. Marius had become a demi-god; but Carbo, Silanus, Mallius and Caepio were in disgrace, and five Roman armies had been destroyed. The importance of taking complete control of Gaul now became obvious, as a sure defence for the Roman heartlands south of the Alps.

Posidonius of Apamea, the leading Greek scholar of his day, journeyed to Massilia (Marseilles) and Spain from Rome during the last quarter of the 1st century BC in order to find out whether the three invading tribes were or were not Celts. His first conclusion was that nothing was known or could be known of the Cimbr; they had come out of the north to appear among the Scordisci (Celts), then passed through the Taurisci (Celts) and on to the Helvetic tribes—also Celts. Two of the three tribes of the Helvetic league were so impressed by these unspoiled tribesmen that they joined them: these were the Tigurini and Teutoni. Posidonius was able to visit the battlefield of Aquae Sextae; and as the guest of the Greeks of Massilia and of Celtic nobles he enjoyed access to first-hand knowledge not shared by any scholar of his own day or since. He was able to speak to people who had seen the barbarians for themselves. Modern opinion is that the Cimbr were one of the tribes of the Germani group of northern Celts; all the known names of their leaders are pure Celtic. The Teutoni and Tigurini were, as Posidonius stated, Helvetic Celts, and the Ambrones were a tribe related to them.

The Gallic Wars
In 59 BC Gaius Julius Caesar, an ambitious and able Roman politician then aged 41, was named consul and, the following year, governor of Gallia Cisalpina (northern Italy) and Illyricum in the Roman-occupied Balkans. Just before his departure for Illyricum the governor-designate of Gallia Narbonensis (Roman-occupied southern Gaul) died, and this province was added to Caesar’s responsibilities. This multiple governorship presented him with great opportunities. It lay immediately adjacent to free Gaul, in whose political affairs Rome already interfered constantly: any attempt to unify the country was frustrated by Roman agents. Northern Italy was a great recruiting-ground for troops. Caesar had established a military reputation against the Celtiberians and Lusatians in Spain in 61–60 BC; a conquest of
free Gaul would consolidate it, and offered the chance of amassing great wealth at a time when Caesar was seriously in debt.

In free Gaul one Dumnorix, a prince of the Aedui and a successful financier, assembled a considerable following. His brother Divitiacus, the tribal leader, opposed his rise, and in 60 BC fled to Rome where he became friendly with Cicero. Divitiacus claimed that Dumnorix planned to take over first the Aedui, and later the whole of Gaul: he had allied himself with the Sequani, who had agreed to allow the German Suevi to take over lands in Alsace in return for their serving as auxiliaries under Dumnorix. Towards the end of 59 BC and in early 58 the influx of German tribesmen began a pattern of migration which would offer Caesar his chance to become involved in Gallic affairs.

The Germans poured across the territory of the Helvetii, who decided to destroy their crops and villages and fall back into Gaul. At the Rhône they asked permission to cross Roman-dominated territory occupied by the Allobroges. Caesar refused them passage, and barred their way with a scratch force of available troops. The Helvetii changed direction in the Jura, descending the passes directly into free Gaul through Sequanian territory. Caesar’s reports to the Senate painted the Helvetii in lurid colours as murderers, rapists and landgrabbers, thus justifying his reinforcement of his army with troops from the northern Italian garrisons. He moved swiftly forward into free Gaul, meeting the Helvetii at Bibracte (Autun) and inflicting a sound defeat and many losses. The survivors were driven back into their Swiss tribal lands.

The Roman Senate was apathetic, and Caesar was a skilled political manipulator. With the indirect support of his client Divitiacus, who pleaded for Roman confirmation of his rightful leadership of the Aedui, Caesar was able to
The major tribes of Gaul, in about 60 BC.

manoeuvre the Senate into accepting his rôle as 'protector of the Gauls', thus giving him an almost free hand. Many Gauls must have realised at this time that both Rome and the Germanic tribes from the east were strong enough to take control of their lands. The question of which conqueror might best serve the Gauls' interests became academic. Germanic incursions provided Caesar with all the excuse he needed to push forward into Gaul himself.

In 58 BC he defeated the Germanic Suevi, led by Ariovistus, in Alsace, and planted garrisons in Sequanian territory east of the Saône. In 57 BC the resistance of the Belgae of northern Gaul to the establishment of Roman positions on the Aisne was overcome; the chronic disunity of the Celts caused the Belgae to break up into tribal groups, which were defeated piecemeal. In the same year Caesar's lieutenant Publius Licinius Crassus subdued present-day Normandy and Brittany. On the Sambre Caesar defeated the Nervii and Atuatucre, surviving dangerous situations by his coolness in command, which allowed him to turn the fearless impetuosity of the Celts against themselves.

In 56 BC the Veneti, occupying south-west Brittany, started a revolt which was supported by the still-unconquered Morini of the Pas de Calais and the Menapii of the lower Rhine. The Veneti were notable for having a large fleet of ships at their disposal; they carried on an active trade with their Belgic cousins across the Channel in southern Britain, and levied a toll on other ships plying their stretch of the Atlantic coast. In 56 Crassus was in winter quarters in Venetic territory with the VIIth Legion. Food ran short, and Crassus sent officers out to obtain supplies from neighbouring tribes. The tribunes sent to the Veneti, Titus Silius and Quintus Vellanius, were promptly made prisoner; and this example was copied by the other tribes. A message was sent to Crassus, demanding his release of Gallic hostages in return for his officers' safety.

Caesar, then touring eastern Gaul and Illyricum, was informed, and at once ordered the construction of ships on the Loire and the recruitment of crews in Roman Gaul to the south. Examples of Mediterranean types of warship built included the heavy quinquereme, the medium trireme, and the light liburnium. The Venetic ships were apparently of fairly massive construction, made from heavy timbers joined with iron bolts, and powered not by oars but solely by large leather sails; they had a shallow draught, and high gunwales to protect the crews from missile weapons.

The sea battle took place at Quiberon near Lorient in the autumn of 56 BC. The Romans slashed the rigging of the Venetic ships with long-handled sickles; and the Celtic seamen's fate was sealed when the wind dropped, allowing their becalmed pontones to be captured one by one by the handier, oar-powered Roman ships. The Veneti were ruthlessly punished for their revolt, and the Morini and Menapii later suffered the same fate.

In 55 BC the tireless Caesar wiped out the Germanic Tencteri and Usipete, who had crossed the lower Rhine the previous winter. He bridged the Rhine near Koblenz and raided on the German bank; and in the same season he led a small expeditionary force to Britain.

The British expedition
It should be remembered that to the Celts the Channel was probably just a particularly marked geographical frontier between closely related Belgic peoples. There was constant contact across it; and Rome was already profiting by this to follow her usual method of 'softening up' potential future conquests, by interfering in tribal and dynastic quarrels. Caesar writes that before he crossed the Channel he had received envoys from some British tribes offering submission to Rome; and that they were accompanied on their return to Britain by one
Commius, supported by Caesar as the chief of a powerful southern British tribe, the Atrebates. Commius was ordered to urge other tribal leaders to trust Rome, and to warn them of Caesar’s coming.

His expeditions into southern Britain in 55 BC, and again the following year, were certainly not planned as invasions; he lacked the resources for occupation, and the most important military reason for making the crossings was probably to discourage support for the Britons’ rebellious cousins in northern Gaul. The first raid was resisted by the Cantiaci tribe of Kent; and in the relevant passage of Caesar’s book on his Gallic Wars he leaves us this impression of Celtic chariot tactics:

‘In chariot fighting, the Britons drive all over the field hurling javelins, and generally the terror inspired by the horses and the noise of the chariot wheels is sufficient to throw their opponents’ ranks into disorder. Then, after making their way between the squadrons of their own cavalry, they [i.e. the high class warriors riding in the chariots] jump down and engage the enemy on foot. In the meantime the charioteers retire a short distance . . . and place the chariots in such a position that their masters, if hard pressed . . . have an easy means of retreat. . . . By daily training and practice they attain such proficiency that even on a steep slope they are able to control the horses at full gallop, and check and turn them in a moment. They can run along the chariot pole, stand on the yoke, and get back into the chariot as quick as lightning.’

**Alesia**
The disunity of the Gallic Celts had allowed Caesar to pick off the tribes one by one, despite the fact that he enjoyed no great superiority of forces, and had even enabled him to enlist the very effective Celtic cavalry as allies in various campaigns. These years had, nevertheless, seen several determined attempts to resist Roman expansion. Dumnorix of the Aedui had been hacked down when he refused to be deported to Britain. Indutiomarus, besieging a Roman strongpoint in 54 BC, had ridden away from it when he lost patience with the delay—only to be pursued by the defenders, who brought his head back to headquarters. Ambiorix was defeated too many times by Caesar, and finally took to the forests with only four faithful riders. Other leaders were captured and executed, some by the torture which Caesar claims was ‘according to the customs of their ancestors’. But the greatest challenge to Roman expansion came in 52 BC, from a widespread resistance movement led by Vercingetorix, son of Celtillus of the royal house of the Averni.

Vercingetorix was fanatically anti-Roman, and a leader of real ability; and he was willing to use any means to his end. He urged a ‘scorched earth’ policy, so as to avoid pitched battles and sieges while cutting the Romans off from supplies. Villages were burned to the ground, wells poisoned, roads destroyed, and the countryside stripped of crops and livestock. But not all the tribes were willing to pay this price. Vercingetorix was unable to persuade the Bituriges to destroy and abandon their chief settlement of Avaricum (Bourges); the tribal leaders threw themselves at his feet and pleaded for their town. His warning of the consequences was vindicated when Caesar took Avaricum after a difficult siege.

Caesar’s troops were subjected to ambush and attack from all sides, and their supply lines and stores were constantly being destroyed. Knowing Vercingetorix to be in the vicinity, Caesar besieged Gergovia near Clermont-Ferrand, a strong position easily defended from behind ten-foot perimeter walls built on the crest of a range of hills. The garrison repulsed an attempted storming, and the Gallic army was able to launch an overwhelming attack from outside the walls on the troops occupied with the siege. By the time Caesar retired from the field that night he had lost 700 men and 36 centurions—his first outright defeat in Gaul.

A major ambush followed; but Vercingetorix was
unable to control his hot-headed followers, and what had been intended as a feint attack to separate a Roman column led by Caesar from its baggage train turned into a fatal reality. In their battle-madness the Celts charged anything in their path, and were methodically slaughtered in the customary manner by the superbly disciplined legions. Vercingetorix retired with his own forces to Alesia on the Seine (modern Alise-Ste Reine). He was followed by Caesar with about 3,000 infantry and a force of mercenary Germanic cavalry. On arrival before the walls, Caesar decided to adopt the classic method of circumvallation, and built his own surrounding wall all round the site. While the legionaries built their wall the Gauls harried them with hit-and-run sorties, and sent riders out to summon aid from other tribes. Vercingetorix stayed inside Alesia, the centre and figurehead of Gallic resistance.

Caesar made use of every resource of Roman military skill in preparing the containing defences. A complicated series of dry ditches were dug; a tributary of the Seine was diverted to fill a moat; and large areas were sewn with caltrops and 'lillies'—sharp stakes sunk in pits. Walls were built facing both inwards towards Alesia, and outwards towards any would-be relieving army of Gauls; the outer rampart was all of 15 miles long. Caesar's besiegers thus occupied a ring around the town, defended front and rear.

After a month's siege the defenders of Alesia expelled the women, children, old and sick from the oppidum to save useless mouths. They were not allowed to leave the site by the Romans, and presumably they gradually perished in the noman's-land between the armies. Soon afterwards a Gallic relief army arrived outside the Roman lines; Caesar puts their numbers at 250,000 infantry and 8,000 horsemen, drawn from 41 tribes. Like all figures quoted by ancient and medieval historians, these are probably wildly exaggerated; even so, the threatening host must have been considerable. Caesar was now sandwiched between two hostile armies, and his forces were soon subjected to furious attacks from both inside and outside.

Towards evening on the first day of this battle Caesar used his Germanic cavalry to throw the Gauls back from the outer ring of walls; the advantage was exploited by other auxiliary cavalry, the Gauls were driven back towards their camps, and missile-armed warriors supporting them were massacred.

After a day of preparation the relieving army again moved up to the assault, and simultaneously Vercingetorix sortied to attack the inner face of the Roman ring. After long and fierce fighting both
attacks were driven off, losing heavily to showers of missiles which swept the ‘killing zones’ of caltrops and ‘jillies’.

A third assault developed when desultory attacks on both inner and outer faces of Caesar’s defences led to a battle for control of an awkward sector of the outward-facing lines on a piece of rising ground up the side of a plateau. During a furious attack on this sector Caesar sent in six cohorts as reinforcements, but had to follow them with another eleven cohorts stripped from the nearest neighbouring sectors along the walls. Caesar himself finally took the Gallic attackers in the rear with another four cohorts and part of the Roman cavalry; the Gauls broke off their attempt on the wall, and those who were not cut down were taken prisoner, including the leader of the assault, one Vercassivelaunus.

Disheartened, the Gallic relief army began to melt away, and Roman cavalry followed them to inflict further casualties. Caesar writes that on the following day Vercingetorix and his tribal chiefs were delivered up to the Romans, and the garrison’s weapons handed over, while the general sat before his inner fortifications.

The Greek historian Plutarch, born almost a century later, gives a more Celtic flavour to the surrender. He says that Vercingetorix put on his most beautiful armour, had his horse carefully groomed, and rode out through the gates of Alesia to where Caesar was sitting; Vercingetorix rode round him in a circle, then leapt down from his horse, stripped off his armour, and sat silent and motionless at Caesar’s feet until he was taken away.

He was kept in chains, reserved for Caesar’s eventual triumphal procession, for six long years. In 46 BC his shrunken frame was dressed once more in his best armour; and after being paraded in Caesar’s triumph Vercingetorix, son of Celtillus of the Averni, a prince of Gaul, was ritually strangled.

Over the next two years Gaul was brought under Caesar’s control so completely that there were to be no further national risings even during the Roman civil wars of 49–31 BC. The utmost ruthlessness was shown towards any sign of resistance. The new province’s tax yield amounted to four million sesterces; a Gallic legion was raised, and some Gallic leaders were placed on Caesar’s staff. Many Gauls fled to Germany, Switzerland, eastern Europe and Britain. During the closing years of the 1st century BC the Celtic tribes in the foothills of the Alps and on the Danube were also brought into the Roman orbit.

**Britain**

Nearly 90 years after the assassination of Julius Caesar, Tiberius Claudius Drusus—the Emperor Claudius of Rome and her empire—succeeded his mad nephew Caligula unexpectedly, and at the sword-points of the mutinous Praetorian Guard. Shy, handicapped, and stammering, the new emperor was advised that an exploit to provide a pretext for the award of triumphal honours would be in order. The conquest of Britain offered an opportunity to accept such honours without undue risk.

In AD 43 a convenient appeal for Roman help

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**The major tribes of mainland Britain, in about AD 44.**
against the powerful Catuvellauni tribe was received from Verica, king of the Atrebates of southern Hampshire. Claudius assembled four legions and strong auxiliary forces in Gaul, under command of Aulus Plautius. This army was shipped across the Channel, landing at Richborough and other points on the Kent coast, and establishing their supply base with, apparently, no significant interference from the Celts. Moving inland, they made a contested crossing of the River Medway, and the Celts fell back before them to the Thames. This, too, was crossed against spirited opposition; as at the Medway, the Romans committed specialist Batavian troops first, who swam their horses across under fire and established a bridgehead. On the northern bank the Romans built a fort, and awaited the arrival of the emperor.

Claudius arrived in August, bringing with him a detachment of the Praetorian Guard, and probably reinforcements in the form of vexillations from the Rhine legions (and, according to Dio Cassius, elephants!). The army which now advanced on the Catuvellaunian capital of Camulodunum (Colchester) was built around the four original legions of the invasion force: the IInd Augusta from Strasbourg, the XIVth Gemina from Mainz, the XXth Valeria from Neuss, and the IXth Hispana from Hungary. All these units were experienced in fighting northern European warriors. The auxiliary force—which probably equalled the legionary infantry in number—including the Batavians from modern Holland, and many other cohorts of Germans, Gauls and Thracians. Camulodunum was captured without difficulty. Here Claudius received the formal submission of a number of tribes; and then returned to Rome, after a stay of only two weeks, and well before the onset of the miserable northern winter. Rome celebrated his triumph, and the army left in Britain set about crushing the inland Celtic tribes.

The XXth Legion remained at Colchester; the IInd, commanded by the future emperor Vespasian, headed a column which moved across the Western Country to subdue the Atrebates, Dobunni and Durotriges; the XIVth were sent into the West Midlands to deal with the Cornovii; and the IXth headed north towards the lands of the Coritani. By AD 47 this army had given Rome a British province up to a line running from the Bristol Channel in the south-west to the Humber in the north-east. The only individual operations of which we have any mention are those of the IInd Augusta; according to Suetonius they fought 30 battles, conquered two tribes (almost certainly the Dobunni and Durotriges), and captured 20 towns and the Isle of Wight. Excavations at Maiden Castle and Hod Hill forts in Dorset have unearthed dramatic evidence of their storming under cover of barrages of catapult bolts.

Between AD 47 and 60 the Roman forces were intermittently but heavily engaged in Wales, against the Silures of the south-east and the Ordovices of the central highlands—the latter apparently led by Caractacus, a son of the Catuvellaunian king, Cunobelinus.

In AD 59-60 Suetonius Paulinus, the Roman military governor of Britain, led two legions into north-west Wales. The climax of the campaign was an attack on the island of Mona (Anglesey), a druidic cult centre which was fiercely defended. He swam his cavalry across the Menai Strait, accompanied by the infantry in flat-bottomed boats. In bloody fighting embittered by the evidence of hideous atrocities and by the presence of shrieking Druids whipping up the Celtic warriors, the sanctuary was wiped out. While the army paused in Wales, ready to crush any remaining resistance, there came news of a disaster to the east.

**Boudicca**

The Iceni were a Belgic tribe occupying areas in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. At the time of the invasion their king Antedios diplomatically allied the tribe to Rome, thus avoiding conquest and slavery for his people, and preserving his personal wealth. When the XXth Legion left the area in AD 49 prior to the Welsh campaign, the tribe was disarmed as a precaution; this caused resentment. Antedios was soon succeeded by Prasutagus, who renewed the treaty with Rome. When he, too, died in AD 60, the Romans decided to annex the kingdom outright. Men acting for the military governor’s civil and financial counterpart, the procurator, plundered the tribal territory, causing widespread hardship and outrage. Even the king’s widow, Boudicca, was flogged, and her daughters raped. The exact sequence of events is unknown; but soon afterwards the whole region
time-expired Roman veterans and their families. Although built within what had been the wall of a legionary fort, its defences had been neglected. The last defenders took refuge in the partly-built temple of Claudius, probably the most substantial building available; it was burnt down, and the defenders massacred. A relief force of about 2,000 men of the 1st Cohort, IXth Legion and some 500 auxiliary troopers, hurrying over open country under command of the IXth’s legate, Petilius Cerialis, was wiped out somewhere north-east of Colchester, and only Cerialis and some of his cavalry escaped to Lincoln.

Verulamium (St Albans) and London were overwhelmed, and put to sack. The procurator and many of the richer citizens escaped to Gaul—some, almost certainly, by way of Bosham, on the estates of the Romanised king of the Regnenses, Cogidubnus. Those who could not escape—by far the majority—were massacred, many suffering atrocious torture.

Forced marches eventually brought Suetonius Paulinus back from his Welsh campaign, to somewhere just east of where the little River Anker is crossed by Watling Street, near Lichfield. His available troops seem to have consisted of the XIVth Legion, parts of the IInd and IXth, and about 4,500 auxiliaries.

Boudicca’s Britons arrived on the field in huge numbers, the warriors in an uncontrollable mass, their families camping in a huge arc of wagons behind them. After the usual display of clashing arms, trumpeting, waving swords and deep-throated bellowing, the Celts charged the waiting cohorts. They were met in the text-book manner by two volleys of javelins followed by a legionary counter-charge. The tribesmen were pushed backwards, into and beyond a narrow defile. The lay of the ground, and the packed mass of non-combatants and wagons behind their position, combined to trap the Celts in a way which allowed the legions and the auxiliary cavalry to cut them to pieces. The fighting lasted for many hours, and the slaughter was great. This action won for the XIVth Gemina the honoured title ‘Martiia Victrix’. Her rebellion in ruins, Boudicca, the great red lady of the Iceni, soon died herself—there are conflicting claims for natural causes and poison.

Vexillations from the Rhine legions were shipped.
to Britain to reinforce the weakened garrison. The army was kept in the field, in its leather tents, despite the onset of winter. A merciless punitive campaign laid waste the tribal territories. Finally, in AD 61, a new governor was sent out; Petronius Turpilianus replaced the terror campaign of Suetonius Paulinus with a more flexible and diplomatic policy, and conquered Britain began to be eased from tribal anarchy towards capitalist oligarchy.

**Agricola**

Even so, it was to be more than 20 years before Roman arms pushed the frontier of the province into the far north. It was AD 84 when Julius Agricola (a most able military governor, whose tenure had been extended to allow him to pursue a series of campaigns of northward expansion) finally stood face to face with Britain’s last Celtic army. Under the leadership of Calgacus, some 30,000 Caledonian warriors stood at bay somewhere near Inverurie in Scotland—the exact site of ‘Mons Graupius’ is unknown. The Caledonians stood with their ‘huge swords and short shields’, dodging or artfully tipping the missiles loosed by the artillerymen. The Celtic chariots performed the usual feats of virtuosity between the two armies.

Agricola sent his Gallic and German auxiliaries in to open the attack. These semi-civilised mercenaries attacked with such élan that they had soon carved their way deep into the Celtic ranks, and were in danger of being enveloped. Roman cavalry sent forward to support them charged successfully into the enemy ranks, but could not penetrate to those gathered on a hillside behind them; the horses slipped and clambered to a halt, and some of the troopers were thrown.

Encouraged, the Caledonians charged forward to exploit their advantage—and in abandoning the high ground, gave Agricola his chance. His reserve
cavalry took them in the flank, and they broke; some fought savagely to the end, but many escaped into the hills. The legionary infantry had not been committed at all. Archaeology suggests that at one time Rome intended to occupy at least part of the Scottish Highlands; whatever the reason, the forts were abandoned uncompleted, and the consolidation of the pacified province took place behind the barrier of Hadrian’s Wall, that extraordinary feat of engineering which lies across the country from sea to sea just south of the modern English-Scottish border. Rome briefly occupied the more northerly Antonine Wall between the Firths of Clyde and Forth during the 2nd century AD; and later emperors made forays into Caledonia in response to pressure on the northern frontier. But in general, the highland fastness of Scotland remained the last free refuge of the Celtic people of Britain.

The Plates

A: Early La Tène period warriors, late 5th century BC
The chieftain A1 wears a conical bronze helmet with a peak on the front rim; the wide edging band is decorated with repoussé work in La Tène style. The breastplate, of a type used extensively in Italy, is a bronze roundel secured by crossed straps, and reinforced and decorated with repoussé studs.

The warrior A2 wears a helmet of the type discovered at Negau in Yugoslavia. This one has no crest, though most recovered examples have fore-and-aft or transverse crest fittings attached. The rims contain a template with spaced holes to accept the stitches of a lining, keeping the headpiece rim at ear level, well up on the skull. In contrast, A3 is an ordinary free tribal warrior; his only defence is a shield, and his sword is of indifferent quality. He is making a prudent offering of a gold brooch to a water sprite before setting out for war.

All three wear woollen garments, some of them in checkered pattern; A1 also has an undyed cloak of creamy new twist, and A2 wears a sleeved tunic under a thicker, sleeveless jerkin of woollen mix.

The earliest writers describe Celtic patterns as ‘checkered’, ‘speckled’, ‘striped’, or ‘multi-coloured’. Many authorities now believe that broad, simple, symmetrical patterns are less likely for the earliest periods than quite involved, ‘stripey’ patterns of ‘non-repeating’ weaves, and we have tried here to devise suitable reconstructions. The fragmentary cloth survivals are uniformly of fine quality, woven in small, intricate patterns, though colours have naturally not survived.

The weapons carried by these warriors are of the types associated with the chariot graves of the period. The swords are mostly pointed, and measure between about 55 cm and 70 cm from point to shoulder. Some are of the highest quality, strong and flexible, with pattern-welded blades and hilt of horn, bone or wood. The chieftain A1 has a matched set of sword and dagger. Scabbards were mostly of wood covered with leather; part of one found in Scotland has a thin hazel lath pushed between the layers of one hide. Some were of iron or bronze; and large decorative shapes are typical of the early La Tène period. Examples of bronze scabbard sometimes have a ‘pounded’ surface, presumably imitating leather. Celtic spears are of various shapes and sizes; the small javelins have heads about 10 cm long, while some spearheads reach 50 cm long.

B: Gallic warriors of the Middle La Tène period, 3rd–2nd century BC
This was the period of the great invasions down the Italian peninsula, when the Gaesatae—a distinct group of free-wandering warriors from the Gaulish hinterland beyond the Alps—were invited south. They fought naked at the battle of Telamon; one of them is shown here as B1, but wearing a fine bronze ‘Montfortino’ helmet, with massive cheek guards secured by thongs through rings underneath the rear neck guard, and a horseshoe crest. The torc is electrum, and the plated belt and bracelet are bronze. His weapons are a large thrusting-spear, two javelins and a sword. The latter hangs from an extra loop on the belt, engaging with a metal loop on the back surface of the scabbard. The shield is painted with curvilinear patterns.

From the Marne district, warrior B2 has a simple iron ‘reversed jockey cap’ helmet without cheek guards, held in place by straps from holes drilled at the lower edges of the skull; there may have been a third attachment point below the neck guard,
where carrying rings were located. A bronze torc might have highly decorated finials. His short, thick woollen smock is held by a braided woollen belt, and similar strips hold the loose trousers at the ankle. The large shield has a decorative motif of linked torcs. The fairly long sword is of good quality, and he carries a dagger.

The horseman B3 is of the 2nd century. In his *Fall of the Roman Republic* Plutarch describes Cimbrian cavalry at Vercellae as wearing helmets like the gape-jawed heads of terrible beasts heightened with tall feather plumes; as carrying white shields, two javelins, and a large, heavy sword; and as wearing iron breastplates. In this possible reconstruction we draw upon known examples of Celtic war-gear of the period. The iron helmet is reconstructed after one from Ciumesti Maramures in Romania; it is mounted with a bronze bird, whose hinged wings would flap when the warrior was in violent motion. (Helmets mounted with animal images do appear on the Gundestrup cauldron, but no known Celtic helmets exactly fit Plutarch’s description.) The Romanian helmet was found with a coat of bronze mail and bronze greaves; the ‘iron breastplates’ mentioned by Plutarch are more likely to have been iron mail corselets, as here.

*C: Gallic cavalrymen of the Late *La Tène* period, 1st century BC*

Rider C1 wears a peaked helmet from a burial in eastern Europe; it was found with the sword, a quiver, and the horse harness. His torc is gold. The short smock-tunic is finished with a pronounced fringe; and the baggy yellow and green checkered trousers are tucked into ankle boots. The standard is based on a stylised bronze casting of a boar found at Neuvy-en-Sullius, Loiret, France.

Many Celtic horsemen fought without helmets or body armour; and it seems most likely that during their life-or-death struggle with Rome some of the poorer warriors must have acquired items of captured Roman equipment which escaped ritual destruction. We show C2 wearing a captured Roman infantry helmet of a style then nearing the end of its active use, of the so-called ‘Etrusco-Corinthian’ type. This peculiar and degenerate development of a closed Greek Corinthian style has the eye openings and nose guard of the original facial area faintly defined on what has now become
the visor. The crest is horsehair. In the background a rider carries the great Celtic war trumpet known as a carnyx.

These riders would normally throw their javelins immediately before contact; the heavier thrusting spear would be used at close quarters, and finally the sword might be drawn. The limited monumental evidence shows cavalry shields as being of round, oval or truncated oval shape with a central spine; in other respects they would be constructed in the same way as the infantry shields known from archaeological finds, but probably had a different carrying system. Classical carvings of cavalry shields show that they could be fitted with an arm strap as well as a hand grip; the latter was attached either behind the boss or the centre of the outer spine, or between the centre and the ‘leading edge’ of the shield.

**D: British chariot and crew, c.53 BC**

The charioteer is an ordinary warrior whose body is painted with designs in woad—extract of *Isatis Tinctoria*; we show the insular La Tène decorative patterns known from British artefacts, but a simpler series of shapes could well have been used. His passenger is a Belgic nobleman, fully armed with a set of javelins, sword, and ‘infantry’ shield.

The chariot box is about a metre wide, mounted on wheels about 90 cm in diameter. Though not of as light construction as earlier Egyptian and Syrian examples, which were reputed to be so light that one man could carry them, the Celtic chariot was by all accounts an extremely fast and manoeuvrable vehicle; the Celts delighted in performing stunning tricks of daring and skill at high speed. The warrior was able to fight against horsemen from the chariot platform, but would dismount to fight on foot against infantry. The charioteer would stand off, ready to swoop in and pick up his nobleman in an emergency.

The chariot is shown painted, although no direct evidence exists for the practice—e.g. traces of paint on chariot parts recovered at archaeological sites, or reference to coloured finishes on the Celtic chariots mentioned in classical literature. There is reference, however, to a variety of metals being used in chariot furniture; and the old Irish epics, which some historians believe to be valid indirect evidence, describe the hero Cuchulain’s red and white chariot. Finally, we can call in support of our guesswork the known Celtic love of colour and display.

**E: Late Gallic warriors, c.52 BC**

The horseman E1 has a crested example of the ‘Agen’ type of helmet as found on the site of the battle of Alesia; he has hung the helmet on one horn of his saddle, his shield on another. He wears a striped woollen jerkin over a checker-pattern long-sleeved smock, and his cloak is tied behind his saddle.

The iron helmet worn by the nobleman E2 is of the ‘Port’ type dating from the last phase of La Tène culture. Over a long-sleeved smock with braiding at hem and cuffs he wears a mail corselet, slit at the hips to make for an easy mounted seat.

Both these warriors could be typical of the better equipped followers of Vercingetorix during his epic rebellion. The harness fittings are based on examples from several Celtic sites of the 1st century, and the spears on types found at Alesia. The morale of these warriors will not be improved by their spotting a bloodstained rag by a stream—a Celtic omen of appalling significance.

**F: Celtic light infantry types, 1st century BC/1st century AD**

The slinger F1 represents the defenders of hill forts among the western British tribes, such as Maiden Castle, Dorset and Danebury, Hertfordshire. His stone-bag would be full of ‘pebbles’—actually, cobble-sized and water-smoothed stones of uniform weight, gathered from beaches and rivers.

The Bowman F2 represents the small body of archers which Vercingetorix gathered at Alesia from all over Gaul; this man is from the south-west. At the battle of Mons Graupius in AD 83, somewhere in the Grampian Hills of Perthshire, Caledonian warriors like F3 are said to have shown skill and courage in knocking aside Roman missiles with their long swords and small shields—even though they were eventually routed by Agricola’s Germanic auxiliaries using Rome’s classic hand-to-hand tactics.

Young men like F4, not yet strong enough to trade sword blows in the ranks of the ‘assault infantry’, could still give vent to their aggressive spirit as javeliners, using skills learned in their foster-fathers’ homes.
G: Guard cavalrymen, Roman army, early 2nd century AD. Among the carvings from the triumphal relief in the Emperor Trajan’s forum are scenes showing Trajan with members of guard units of his army. Beside the infantry stand dismounted cavalry troopers, offering their emperor the severed heads of Geto-Dacian notables. Since the days of Julius Caesar, 150 years before, large numbers of Gauls, and particularly cavalry, had been enlisted into the Roman army. At least one authority believes that some scenes in the carved relief indicate an intention in the reign of Trajan to associate auxiliary troops more closely with the mystique of the Imperial army, and that units may have been honoured with some kind of guard status. It is a fair presumption that these troopers, holding up severed heads in time-honoured Celtic fashion, may have been Gallic.

The helmets shown here, of ceremonial Attic type, may have been replaced in battle by more substantial headgear. The colours shown on these costumes are, frankly, guesswork: there is no firm
evidence for guard uniform and shield colours, but a distinctive scheme seems feasible.

Farbtafeln


E: Reiter in Uniform, die wahrscheinlich aus der Zeit der Rebellion von Vercingetorix stammt. E1 trägt einen ‘Agen’-Helm, E2 einen ‘Port’-Helm, das Sattelzeug ist zwar keltisch, wurde aber später von der römischen Kavallerie übernommen.


G: Eine mutmassliche Rekonstruktion, die auf Tafeln auf Trijans Säule basiert. Es besteht Grund zur Annahme, dass die römische Kavallerie darstellte, die wegen ihrer Verbindung zur römischen Garda geachtet wurde. Die Farben beruhen auf Vermutungen.
Continued from back cover

160 Nap's Guard Infantry (2)
44 Nap's German Allies (1)
43 Nap's German Allies (2)
90 Nap's German Allies (3)
106 Nap's German Allies (4)
122 Nap's German Allies (5)
199 Nap's Specialist Troops
211 Nap's Overseas Army
227 Nap's Sea Soldiers
88 Nap's Italian Troops
176 Austrian Army (1): Infantry
181 Austrian Army (2): Cavalry
223 Austrian Specialist Troops
152 Prussian Line Infantry
149 Prussian Light Infantry
192 Prussian Reserve & Irregulars
162 Prussian Cavalry 1792-1807
172 Prussian Cavalry 1807-15
185 Russian Army (1): Infantry
189 Russian Army (2): Cavalry
84 Wellington's Generals
114 Wellington's Infantry (1)
119 Wellington's Infantry (2)
252 Wellington's Highlanders
126 Wellington's Light Cavalry
130 Wellington's Heavy Cavalry
204 Wellington's Specialist Troops
167 Brunswick Troops 1809-15
98 Dutch-Belgian Troops
206 Hanoverian Army 1792-1816
226 The American War 1812-14
96 Artillery Equipments
77 Flags of the Nap Wars (1)
78 Flags of the Nap Wars (2)
115 Flags of the Nap Wars (3)

19TH CENTURY
232 Bolivar and San Martin
173 Alamos & Texan War 1835-6
56 Mexican-American War 1846-8
272 The Mexican Adventure 1861-67
63 American-Indian Wars 1860-90
170 American Civil War Armies:
1: Confederate
177 (2): Union
179 (3): Staff, Specialists,
Maritime
190 (4): State Troops
207 (5): Volunteer Militia
37 Army of Northern Virginia
38 Army of the Potomac
252 Flags of the American Civil War:
1: Confederate
258 (2): Union
265 (3): State & Volunteer
163 American Plains Indians
186 The Apaches
169 The Civil War 1861-65
1851-66

1-56

57 The Zulu War
59 Sudan Campaigns 1881-98
230 US Army 1890-1920
95 The Boxer Rebellion

THE WORLD WARS
80 The German Army 1914-18
81 The British Army 1914-18
245 British Territorial Units 1914-18
269 The Ottoman Army 1914-18
208 Lawrence and the Arab Revolts
182 British Battle Insignia: (1) 1914-18
187 (2) 1939-45
74 The Spanish Civil War
117 The Polish Army 1939-45
127 British Battle Dress 1937-41
120 Allied Commanders of WW2
225 The Royal Air Force
70 US Army 1941-45
216 The Red Army 1941-45
246 The Soviet Army
220 The SA 1921-45
24 The Panzer Divisions
266 The Allgemeine-SS
34 The Waffen-SS
229 Luftwaffe Field Divisions
124 German Commanders of WW2
213 German MP Units
139 German Airborne Troops
131 Germany's E. Front Allies
103 Germany's Spanish Volunteers
147 Wehrmacht Foreign Volunteers
254 Wehrmacht Auxiliary Forces
238 Allied Foreign Volunteers
142 Partisan Warfare 1941-45
169 Resistance Warfare 1940-45
270 Flags of the Third Reich:
(1) Wehrmacht
274 (2) Waffen-SS
279 (3) Party & Police Units

MODERN WARFARE
132 Malayan Campaign 1948-60
174 The Korean War 1950-53
116 The Special Air Service
156 The Royal Marines 1956-84
133 Battle for the Falklands
(1): Land Forces
134 (2): Naval Forces
135 (3): Air Forces
250 Argentine Forces in the Falklands
127 Israeli Army 1948-73
128 Arab Armies (1): 1948-73
194 Arab Armies (2): 1973-88
165 Armies in Lebanon 1982-84
104 Vietnam War Armies 1962-75
143 Vietnam War Armies (2)
209 War in Cambodia 1970-75
217 War in Laos 1960-75
183 Modern African Wars:
(1): Rhodesia 1965-80
202 (2): Angola & Mozambique
242 (3): South-West Africa
159 Grenada 1983
178 Russia's War in Afghanistan
221 Central American Wars

GENERAL
65 The Royal Navy
107 British Infantry Equipts. (1)
108 British Infantry Equipts. (2)
138 British Cavalry Equipts.
72 The Northwest Frontier
214 US Infantry Equipts.
205 US Army Combat Equipts.
234 German Combat Equipts.
157 Flak Jackets
123 Australian Army 1899-1975
164 Canadian Army at War
161 Spanish Foreign Legion
197 Royal Canadian Mounted Police
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**THE ANCIENT WORLD**

218 Ancient Chinese Armies
109 Ancient Middle East
137 The Scythians 700-300 B.C.
69 Greek & Persian Wars 500-323 B.C.
148 Army of Alexander the Great
121 Carthaginian Wars
46 Roman Army:
  (1) Caesar-Trajan
  (2) Hadrian-Constantine
129 Rome’s Enemies:
  (1) Germans & Dacians
  (2) Gallic & British Celts
175 (3) Parthians & Sassanids
180 (4) Spain 218 B.C.-19 B.C.
243 (5) The Desert Frontier

---

**THE MEDIEVAL WORLD**

247 Romano-Byzantine Armies 4th–9th C
154 Arthur & Anglo-Saxon Wars
255 Armies of the Muslim Conquest
125 Armies of Islam, 7th–11th C
150 The Age of Charlemagne
89 Byzantine Armies 886-1118
85 Saxon, Viking & Norman
231 French Medieval Armies 1000-1300
75 Armies of the Crusades
171 Saladin & the Saracens
155 Knights of Christ
200 El Cid & Reconquista 1050-1492
105 The Mongols
222 The Age of Tamerlane

---

**16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES**

256 The Irish Wars 1485-1603
191 Henry VIII’s Army
58 The Landknechts
101 The Conquistadors
263 Mughal India 1504-1761
235 Gustavus Adolphus (1): Infantry
262 Gustavus Adolphus (2): Cavalry
14 English Civil War Armies
110 New Model Army 1645-60
203 Louis XIV’s Army
267 The British Army 1660-1704
97 Marlborough’s Army
86 Samurai Armies 1550-1615
184 Polish Armies 1569-1696 (1)

---

**18TH CENTURY**

261 18th Century Highlanders
260 Peter the Great’s Army (1): Infantry
264 Peter the Great’s Army (2): Cavalry
118 Jacobite Rebellions
236 Frederick the Great (1)
240 Frederick the Great (2)
248 Frederick the Great (3)
271 Austrian Army 1740-80 (1)
276 Austrian Army 1740-80 (2)
48 Wolfe’s Army
228 American Woodland Indians
39 Brit. Army in N. America
244 French in Amer. War Ind.
273 General Washington’s Army (1): 1775-1778

---

**NAPOLEONIC PERIOD**

257 Napoleon’s Campaigns in Italy
79 Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaign
87 Napoleon’s Marshals
64 Nap’s Cuirassiers & Carabiniers
55 Nap’s Dragoons & Lancers
68 Nap’s Line Chasseurs
76 Nap’s Hussars
83 Nap’s Guard Cavalry
141 Nap’s Line Infantry
146 Nap’s Light Infantry
153 Nap’s Guard Infantry (1)

Title list continued on inside back cover

Please note that for space reasons abbreviated titles are given above; when ordering, please quote the title number, e.g. "MMA 109" for "Ancient Armies of the Middle East", etc.

Avec annotations en français sur les planches en couleurs.
Mit Aufzeichnungen auf Deutsch über den Farbtafeln.