

BRITISH CHRISTIANS IN ROME BEFORE PAUL EVER ARRIVED

Clifton A. Emahiser's Teaching Ministries
1012 N. Vine Street, Fostoria, Ohio 44830
Phone (419)435-2836, Fax (419)435-7571
E-mail caemahiser@sbcglobal.net

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The Picture Above Is Where Paul Preached In Rome

The average Christian will be simply astounded with the content of this brochure. There are two major points which will amaze them: (1) the fact that there were already converted Christians in Rome before Paul ever arrived there, and (2) that the edifice where Paul preached in Rome still stands. There are a few informed Christians, however, who are aware of these two facts. You may be somewhat skeptical of these two concepts, but corroborating historical evidence will be supplied here.

First I shall give the reader the historical background surrounding the above picture, and much of the evidence which I will show comes from the book *The Drama of the Lost Disciples*, by George F. Jowett, hereinafter designated *TDOTLD*. On page 125 we find the following:

“The church still stands and can be seen in what was once the palatial grounds of the Palatium Britannicum, a memorial to the Christianizing endeavors of St. Paul and the expatriate (exiled) royal British family at Rome with Rufus Pudens. The church is

recorded in Roman history under four different names: 1. Palatium Britannicum; 2. Titulus; 3. Hospitium Apostolorum; 4. Lastly, as St. Pudentiana in honour and memory of the martyred daughter of Claudia Pudens, by which name it is known to this day.”

What most people have never been told is that Joseph of Arimathea made it to Britain five short years after the Passion and set up a Church at Glastonbury. Claudia Pudens, who was born a British Princess, and others of her family were converted to Christianity under Joseph. I was quite surprised to find confirmation on this from *The World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, page 246 under the topic “England” and the sub-topic “The Roman Conquest”, saying in part: “... During the Roman period, Christianity came to Britain for the first time. According to legend, Joseph of Arimathea traveled to England shortly after Christ’s death with the Holy Grail, the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper.” I know it says “legend” here, but with the historical evidence I will present, one shall see that it may be given much greater credence.

We learn more about Claudia Pudens and her family from *TDOTLD* on page 124: “From the swiftness of the events that followed it is seen that St. Paul lost no time in putting into action his bold plan to erect at Rome, on an indestructible foundation, the first Christian Church among Gentiles [sic nations] above ground. This was the first need and was made possible by a bold act of the British royal family, Claudia and Pudens, in donating their home, the Palace of the British, to be openly declared to be the established Christian Church at Rome. ... This was the birth of the first Church of Christ above ground at Rome. ...”

From *TDOTLD*, p. 125: “Linus, the son of Caractacus, who had remained at Rome, had long before been baptized and confirmed by St. Joseph of Arimathea in Britain. He was a priestly instructor. It was Linus whom St. Paul chose and personally consecrated to be the First Bishop of the Christian Church at Rome. A Prince of the royal blood of Britain, he is the same Linus whom St. Paul addressed in his Epistles.” To bring more information to our story, I will now quote from the book *Father Abraham’s Children*, by Perry Edwards Powell, Ph. D., pages 105-107:

“At the dawn of the Christian era the dark shadow on the horizon was Rome. What would be her attitude? Really the Cymry provoked the attack according to both Caesar and the Druidic Triads. In the days of Caesar the Roman proconsul, Lucius Valerius Praeconinus, was routed by the ‘second silver host’ of the Cymry at Tolosa, Aquitania, and the consul, Lucius Manilius, lost all his commissariat (food supply) and in addition was ingloriously compelled to retreat.

“When this stunning news reached Julius Caesar he turned on the Veneti of Vendaeans, whose navy had been used by the Cymry or Britons and who enjoyed a flourishing trade with Great Britain. This led to the first invasion of the Island on 5 August 55 B.C. This campaign got only seven miles into the island, lost one battle, and had the camp attacked by the victorious islanders ...

“The second campaign came the next year and lasted from 10 May to 26 September 54 B.C., and got as far as seventy miles from shore when Caesar was compelled to make peace at Gwerddlan or St. Albans on account of the bad news from the continent as well as the triumphant resistance of the Cymry ... Caesar left to reconquer Gaul and to subdue the Roman Empire for his family. He never returned. His enemies at Rome taunted him in the words of Lucan:

“‘ With pride he sought the Britons, and when found,
Dreaded their force, and fled the hostile ground.’

“Now appears the second war of British Independence and it was longer and more stubborn. Rome at this time had consolidated her empire everywhere, in Asia, in Africa, and in all Europe. Her boundaries were entirely free of any invading foe. Her whole military force was at her command anywhere she desired. Her population was at this time 120,000,000 people of Caucasian or semi-Caucasian blood. The Caesars were sitting securely upon the throne. Everything was propitious for an easy conquest and a glorious victory. Caligula played the buffoon and we pass him by.

“But we must give serious consideration to Emperor Claudius. He acts the part of a very capable leader. Rome had the benefit, sorry to say, of treason on the part of some Reguli of the Britons. Under the emperor were the greatest generals, Plautius, Vespasian, later Emperor, his son, Titus who during one battle rescued his father from death, also later an emperor, and Cneius Geta. All were proven by being successful in other campaigns against other peoples.

“On the defensive side was Guiderius, who fell early, but a very efficient general. Immediately Caradoc, (the Latin Caractacus) ... King of the Silures, was unanimously elected Pendragon of all Britain. The Cymry stubbornly held off the Roman legions so accustomed to victory. Appeals for help reached Emperor Claudius in the imperial city and he left for the imperiled front with the second and fourteenth legions, their auxiliaries, and a cohort of elephants which were designed to break the charges of the Briton chariot with its scythe attached axle ... Nevertheless the war continued. In order to see the severity of the fighting in seven years there were about thirty-five battles. Treachery and heroism appeared.”

It was necessary here to omit a part of Perry Edwards Powell’s statements with ellipses from his *Father Abraham’s Children* for lack of historical evidence on some details; not saying that much of what he presented may not be true, but with this theme, to be believed requires evidence. On the other hand, we don’t want to delete anything he said that is creditable.

You will notice here it is a bit hard to follow names. For instance, let’s take the name of Caradoc. As long as he was not king, his name was Caradoc, but once he took the throne, he was called “King Arviragus” (being the same person as Caradoc). When he went to Rome, they Latinized his name to Caractacus (still being the same person), so whether he is called Caradoc, King Arviragus, or Caractacus, it is the same person (see *Celt, Druid and Culdee* by Isabel Hill Elder, page 38, paragraph 4). Caractacus is the next person I am going to talk about, and for that I will quote from *The Origin and Early History of Christianity In Britain*, by Andrew Gray, D.D., pages 14-16:

“**CARACTACUS:** From those valuable historical documents, the Welsh Triads — written originally in the British dialect — it appears that Caràdoc (Caractacus) was betrayed and delivered up to the Roman Commander by Arègwedd, about A.D. 51, and taken to Rome. Brân (Brennus) his father, Llyn (Linus) his son, Eurgan [sic Eurgain] a daughter, and Gladys (Claudia) a second daughter, were all taken to Rome likewise, and there detained seven years as hostages [along with their father] Caractacus.

“Tacitus furnishes an account of the battle which terminated the career of Caràdoc in the field. Caràdoc seeing that the Romans were victorious, and that his own wife and daughter had fallen into the hands of the conquerors, took refuge himself, at

her repeated solicitations, at Caer Evroc (York), with Arègwedd, Queen of the Brigantes, and grand-niece of the infamous traitor in the Julian war, Mandubratius of Avarwy. Here by her orders, —with hereditary treachery, he was seized while asleep in her palace, loaded with fetters, and delivered to Ostorius Scapula. On receiving intelligence of the event, Claudius ordered him and all the captive family to be sent to Rome. The approach and arrival of Caràdoc at Rome are finely described by the ancient historians — ‘*Roma catenatum tremuit spectare Britannum*’ —Rome trembled when she saw the Briton, though fast in chains.

“The Senate was convened and the trial of Caràdoc began. With an unaltered countenance, the hero of forty battles, great in arms, greater in chains, took his position before the Emperor and defended himself in the following utterances [Tacitus *Annals* 12:37]:

“Had my government in Britain been directed solely with a view to the preservation of my hereditary domains or the aggrandizement of my own family, I might long since have entered this city an ally, not a prisoner; nor would you have disdained for a friend a king descended from illustrious ancestors and the director of many nations. My present condition, stript of its former majesty, is as adverse to myself as it is a cause of triumph to you. What then? I was lord of men, horses, arms, wealth: what wonder if at your dictation I refused to resign them? Does it follow, that because the Romans aspire to universal domination, every nation is to accept the vassalage they would impose? I am now in your power —betrayed, not conquered. Had I, like others, yielded without resistance, where would have been the name of Caràdoc? Where [is] your glory? Oblivion would have buried both in the same tomb. Bid me live, I shall survive for ever in history one example at least of Roman clemency.’

“Such an address as this, worthy of a king, a soldier, and a freeman, had never before been delivered in the Roman Senate. Tacitus thought it worthy to be reported and immortalized by his pen. The preservation of Caràdoc forms a solitary exception in the long catalogue of victims to the policy then in vogue; nor can it be accounted for, considering the inflexibility of Roman military usage, in any other way than by an immediate and supernatural intervention of providence, which was leading by the hand, to the very place of the British king at Rome, the great Apostle of the Gentiles [sic nations].”

We will now go to *TDOTLD*, pages 114-115 to find more data on Claudia and her family and an odd twist to the story: “Following the pardon of Caractacus, a close relationship developed between the two former enemies and their households evolving into a startling climax. Claudius greatly admired the character and extraordinary beauty of Gladys, the daughter of Caractacus. It grew into a deep paternal affection with the result that Emperor Claudius adopted Gladys as his own daughter, a girl who was an exceptionally devout Christian!

“Caractacus had two daughters, Eurgain, the eldest, and Gladys, the youngest child. Eurgain had been officially converted by Joseph, the Apostle of Britain, at the same time as her brother Linus. Eurgain was not only the woman to be converted to the faith, she is also recorded as being the first female Christian saint in Britain, the reward for her outstanding missionary work to which she devoted her life. Gladys, the younger, was born A.D. 36, therefore she would be an infant when Joseph and his saintly entourage arrived in Britain, following the Judean exodus of the same year. Joseph

baptized Gladys and later confirmed her into the faith with the laying on of hands. Both girls were profoundly spiritual, devoted to the Christian faith with all the zeal of a Mary Magdalene. Both had been taken to Rome as hostages, with their father and all the other aforementioned members of the royal Silurian families, and had been party to all the unusual circumstances. One wonders with what feelings did Eurgain witness the extraordinary adoption of her younger sister by the Emperor Claudius. The next unusual event was in Gladys' taking the name of her adopted parent [sic, not unusual but to be expected]. Henceforth Gladys was known as Claudia.

“The Emperor was well aware of the strong Christian convictions of Gladys, and what strikes one forcibly is the fact that the record states that the terms of her adoption did not require her to recant from her faith. ...

“Claudia was seventeen years of age when she married Rufus Pudens. The nuptials did not take place at the Imperial Palace of her adopted father, as one might expect, but at the palace of her natural father, the Palatium Britannicum, a Christian household. It was a Christian marriage performed by the Christian Pastor, Hermas, which proves that Pudens was already a Christian convert. It is interesting to note that they continued to live at the Palatium Britannicum; interesting because Pudens was an extremely wealthy man, owning vast estates in Umbria, but he chose to live at the Palace of the British, where their four illustrious children were born. On the marriage of his daughter to Pudens, Caractacus bestowed the Palace as a bridal gift upon them, with all its spacious grounds.” Again, we cannot prove or disprove everything in this last paragraph.

I promised you that I would show historical evidence that there were converted Christians in Rome before the apostle Paul ever arrived there, and I shall not disappoint you. But first, in order to show said evidence, it will be necessary to quote one more passage (though flawed) from *TDOTLD*, pages 100-101:

“The marriage of Gladys and Plautius is brought into the Roman limelight by Tacitus in his *Annals*, wherein he relates with humour the peculiar circumstances and results of a Roman trial in which Gladys, the wife of Plautius, is accused of being Christian. On her marriage Gladys took the name of Pomponia, according to Roman custom, which was the name of the Plautium clan. Later the name Graecina was added, so that she is thereafter known as Pomponia Graecina Plautius. The added name was a distinctive academic honour conferred upon her in recognition of her extraordinary scholarship in Greek.”

While in general these sources are quite creditable, there appears to be some misinterpretation of the history surrounding them. A little detective work will reveal some implausible deductions. A careful perusal of two passages of Tacitus will clearly show that Pomponia Graecina Plautius couldn't have been Gladys, although the story of Pomponia fits well with the account. The particular passage of Tacitus to which *TDOTLD* is referring is *Annals*, 13:32, and my translation is by Alfred John Church & William Jackson Brodribb:

“The Senate next passed a decree, providing alike for punishment and safety. If a master were murdered by his slaves, all those who were enfranchised by his will and lived under the same roof, were to suffer the capital punishment with his other slaves. Lucius Varius*, an exconsul, who had been crushed in the past under charges of extortion, was restored to his rank as a senator. Pomponia Graecina, a distinguished

lady, wife of the Plautius who returned from Britain with an ovation, was accused of some foreign superstition and handed over to her husband's judicial decision. Following ancient precedent, he heard his wife's cause in the presence of kinsfolk, involving, as it did, her legal status and character, and he reported that she was innocent. This Pomponia lived a long life of unbroken melancholy. After the murder of Julia, Drusus's daughter, by Messalina's treachery, for forty years she wore only the attire of a mourner, with a heart ever sorrowful. For this, during Claudius's reign, she escaped unpunished, and it was afterwards counted a glory to her." [*alt. spl. Lurius Varus]

There should be little doubt that Pomponia's "foreign superstition" was Christianity. Secondly, Tacitus' citing that "Plautius who returned from Britain" only means that he was a general in the Roman army and had returned from the field of battle with Britain back to Rome, and not a British citizen.

Our next passage in Tacitus is found at *Annals* 12:36: "There is seldom safety for the unfortunate, and Caractacus, seeking the protection of Cartismandua [Cartimandua], queen of the Brigantes, was put in chains and delivered up to the conquerors, nine years after the beginning of the war in Britain. His fame had spread thence, and travelled to the neighbouring islands and provinces, and was actually celebrated in Italy. All were eager to see the great man, who for so many years had defied our power. Even at Rome the name of Caractacus was no obscure one; and the emperor, while he exalted his own glory, enhanced the renown of the vanquished. The people were summoned as to a grand spectacle; the praetorian cohorts were drawn up under arms in the plain in front of their camp; then came a procession of the royal vassals, and the ornaments and neck-chains and the spoils which the king had won in wars with other tribes, were displayed. Next were to be seen [were] his brothers, his wife and daughter; last of all, Caractacus himself. All the rest stooped in their fear to abject supplication; not so the king, who neither by humble look nor speech sought compassion."

The problem that arises here is that the wife of Plautius couldn't have been Gladys as *TDOTLD* asserts, for Gladys had already taken the name Claudia by being adopted by Emperor Claudius. It was quite common for people taking up residence in Rome to take Roman names, as did Josephus receiving the name "Flavius". Claudia, or Gladys, could not have taken the names of three different Roman clans without embarrassing the emperor, yet neither was she the same person as Pomponia.

Another piece of evidence can be found in the *A Commentary ...* by Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, and can be found at the end of 2 Timothy, vol. 6, page 515:

"**Pudens ... Claudia**—afterwards husband and wife (according to MARTIAL [*Epigrams*, 4.13; 11.54]), he a Roman knight, she a Briton, surnamed *Rufina*. TACITUS (*Agricola* 14), mentions that territories in southeast Britain were given to a British king; Cogidunus, in reward for his fidelity to Rome, A.D. 52, while Claudius was emperor. In 1772 a marble was dug up at Chichester, mentioning Cogidunus with the surname Claudius, added from his patron, the emperor's name; and *Pudens* in connection with Cogidunus, doubtless his father-in-law. His daughter would be Claudia, who seems to have been sent to Rome for education, as a pledge of the father's fidelity. Here she was under the protection of Pomponia, wife of Aulus Plautius, conqueror of Britain. Pomponia was accused of *foreign superstitions*, A.D. 57."

If this is correct, which seems logical, Pomponia was a close friend to Claudia giving her shelter. So you can clearly see here that there were indeed converted Christians in Rome before the apostle Paul ever came on the scene. I have not quoted all the known history which confirms much of what I have presented here, but most of the records have been lost or destroyed in the process of time. Yet thankfully, enough of the records have been preserved so we can piece the story together.