

WOAD

The “blue skin performances” of Marie Julia Bollansée reminded Anna Harding (curator, London) of the story of the Celtic Queen Boadicea.

Once upon a time in the dark Middle Ages Boadicea, queen of the Iceni, lived in Norfolk, Britain. At the time Celtic paganism was threatened by Christianity and the Romans dominated a large part of Britain. Queen Boadicea led the ultimate rebellion against the Romans, sadly enough in vain.

Before the battle she daubed her body with the blue dye from the woad so as to get wings for the struggle.

After the defeat Boadicea and her daughters took refuge in the woods and drank the poisoned cup.

WOAD BLUE From Colour, Travels Through the Paintbox, 2002, Victoria Finlay, Sceptre

To the Britons woad blue is a battle colour, a symbol of the independence of the people that lived in England before the Romans conquered it almost 2000 years ago.

... the old Britons gaven their pale torsos a semi-permanent colour with the blue green foam that floats on top on the dye bath and smells of rotting plants from a ditch. Did they do this exclusively to scare away the Romans or were their other ritual objectives involved? There is a very practical reason why the warriors may have dyed their bodies with moad: it is an excellent haemostatic.

... Young Celtic women daubed their entire bodies with moad before attending nakedly to religious ceremonies

... In the 1980s a number of bodies was found in the moors near Cheshire, not far from Manchester. An official investigation made clear that these bodies dated from 300 BC. According to the archaeologists the skin of at least one of the bodies showed metal traces that could very well have come from a tattoo.

However, they kept their options open because the bodies were decomposed and a moor has its own minerals. Anyway, this could indicate that the Celts had their bodies tattooed in blue.