

Togodumnus ?= Togidubnus

This name (or names) has been much discussed, for example [here](#).

During the Roman conquest of Britain, according to [Cassius Dio 60,20](#):

‘Plautius, accordingly, had a deal of trouble in searching them out; but when at last he did find them, he first defeated Caratacus and then Togodumnus, the sons of Cynobellinus, who was dead. (The Britons were not free and independent, but were divided into groups under various kings.) After the flight of these kings he gained by capitulation a part of the Bodunni, who were ruled by a tribe of the Catuellani; and leaving a garrison there, he advanced farther and came to a river.’ [Ὁ οὖν Πλαύτιος πολλὰ μὲν πράγματα ἀναζητῶν σφας ἔσχεν, ἐπεὶ δὲ εὗρέ ποτε (ἦσαν δὲ οὐκ αὐτόνομοι ἀλλ’ ἄλλοι ἄλλοις βασιλεῦσι προστεταγμένοι), πρῶτον μὲν Καράτακον ἔπειτα Τογόδουμον, Κυνοβελλίνου παῖδας, ἐνίκησεν· αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐτεθνήκει. Φυγόντων δὲ ἐκείνων προσεποιήσατο ὁμολογία μέρος τι τῶν Βοδούννων, ὧν ἐπῆρχον Κατουελλανοὶ ὄντες, κἀνταῦθα φρουρὰν καταλιπὼν πρόσω ἦει.]

The beginning of the next section is usually translated as ‘Shortly afterwards Togodumnus perished, but the Britons, so far from yielding, united all the more firmly to avenge his death. [Διὰ τε οὖν τοῦτο, καὶ ὅτι καὶ τοῦ Τογοδούμου φθαρέντος οἱ Βρεττανοὶ οὐχ ὅσον ἐνέδοσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὴν τιμωρίαν αὐτοῦ ἐπισυνέστησαν]

These texts are unambiguous in stating that Τογοδοῦμος was one of two sons of the late king Κυνοβελλίνος, but to claim that he died (and how) may be over-interpretation. See below.

In recounting the history of Roman Britain, Tacitus wrote (in [Agricola 14](#)):

‘Aulus Plautius was the first governor of consular rank, and Ostorius Scapula the next. Both were famous soldiers, and by degrees the nearest portions of Britain were brought into the condition of a province, and a colony of veterans was also introduced. Some of the states were given to king Cogidumnus, who lived down to our day a most faithful ally. So was maintained the ancient and long-recognised practice of the Roman people, which seeks to secure among the instruments of dominion even kings themselves.’

[*Consularium primus Aulus Plautius praepositus ac subinde Ostorius Scapula, uterque bello egregius: redactaque paulatim in formam provinciae proxima pars Britanniae, addita insuper veteranorum colonia. Quaedam civitates Cogidumno regi donatae (is ad nostram usque memoriam fidissimus mansit), vetere ac iam pridem recepta populi Romani consuetudine, ut haberet instrumenta servitutis et reges.*]

The [manuscripts](#) of Tacitus had a convoluted history, but [allegedly](#) the name “appears as *Cogidumnus* in most manuscripts and *Togidumnus* in one”. (Lower-case c and t were very similar in mediaeval handwriting.)

A broken [inscription](#) containing ... TIBERI CLAVDI ###IDVBNI REG MAGN BRIT ... was found at Chichester and may be translated thus: ‘To Neptune and Minerva, for the welfare of the Divine House by the authority of Tiberius Claudius (Tog)idubnus, great king of Britain, the guild of smiths and those therein gave this temple from their own resources, Pudens, son of Pudentinus, donated the site.’

These three mentions are all that survives about this name. No coins mention it, though some [coins](#) marked CVNO DVBN might, just conceivably, refer to our man rather than to *Dubnovellaunus*. All this uncertainty has allowed lots of speculation.

Celtic scholars regard the spelling with B as primary and with M as secondary. Hence, for example Evans (1967:196-7) “The name element *dubno-* ‘deep, world’, which gave rise to *dumno-* by assimilation is cognate with Irish *domhan* ‘the world’ ... Welsh *dwfn* ‘deep’...”. Delamarre (2003 150-1) commented that “the assimilation of nasal *-mn-* < *-bn-* is known elsewhere ... Coexistence of the senses ‘deep’ and ‘world’ may be explained by a cosmology that divides the universe into three zones...”.

So Celticists translate *Togodubnus* as something like ‘deep axe’, based on a hypothetical name element **touga* (Delamarre, 2003:298) or **togi-* ‘axe, bow’, related to Irish *túag* ‘arch, curve’ and to Greek *τύκος* ‘hammer, battle-axe’, from PIE **(s)teu-* ‘to hit, thrust’. This is deeply unconvincing, for multiple reasons. For a start, it is not obvious why Gaelic *tog* ‘to lift, to rouse’, from Old Irish *do-focaib*, has been rejected as a Celtic parallel. The whole concept of a Celtic religious underworld is questionable, and while PIE **dheu-b-/*dheu-p-* ‘deep’ had descendants in many language families, on the whole in personal names it seems most likely to refer to dark hair or complexion as we discuss [here](#). There is good evidence for dark fighters, as we discuss [here](#), but that seems to apply to men not weapons.

It is heresy to suggest that Germanic languages have anything useful to say about pre-Roman British names, but *Togodumnus* is a good example of an early king’s name whose elements have more convincing parallels in later English and Dutch than in Welsh and Irish. OE *-toga* ‘leader’, seen in compounds such as *Heretoga* ‘army commander’, cognate with *Herzog*, may be related to Greek *ταγος* ‘commander, ruler’ and *ταγεω* ‘to be ruler’, and probably shows up in early personal names such as *Prasutagus* and in the place name *Tagea*. It probably came from PIE **deuk-* ‘to lead’ rather than from early words for ‘to show, to appear’, such as Gothic *at-augjan* (literally ‘at eyes’) related to modern Dutch *tonen*.

The *-dumnus* part possibly survives in modern English kingdom and wisdom, from PIE **dhē-* ‘to set, put’, whose O-grade form **dhō-* led to Latin *abdomen*, Russian *дума* ‘council’, Greek *θεμς* ‘law’, etc. Modern English doom means something like ‘nasty, inevitable fate’, but its core meaning was ‘[that which is set](#)’, as in the Domesday Book. In short, *Togodumnus* makes best sense as a constitutional title, meaning something like ‘appointed leader’.

Russell (2010) argued that the commonly stated interpretation of *Togodumnus* is wrong. He noted that (a) the *Togidumnus* of Tacitus and the *Τογοδοῦμνος* of Dio and the *####IDVBNUS* of the inscription look like all the same person, (b) there is evidence for a Roman presence in Britain and a British presence in Rome before AD 43, and (c) the evidence for military invasion via Richborough is feeble. Therefore, perhaps the Romans under Aulus Plautius were invited in, to help sort out a dispute between the two sons of *Cunobelinus*. (Compare modern “military advisers” sent from developed countries to sort out civil wars in their client states.) The Romans then backed *Togodumnus*, who stayed their ally and friend, and possibly led allied troops, not enemies, at the river-crossing battle(s) described by Cassius Dio.

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