

The genius of Viriathus, whose name means "torque wearer", lies in the fact that, unlike the other Celtic warriors of his time, who allowed themselves to be too easily starved out, Viriathus conducted a war of movement, of surprises and ambushes.

These tactics would later be followed by such Celtic warriors as Red Hugh O'Donnell and Owen Roe O'Neill in Ireland, William Wallace, Robert Bruce, Montrose and Rob Roy MacGregor in Scotland, and Cadoudal, great leader of the Chouans of Brittany.

No less fierce and brave than the Lusitanos were the *Celtiberians* ("Celts of the River", of the Ebro and the Duero) of the Northern Plateau. The first serious campaign against the Celtiberians was that of Fulvius Nobilior, who moved against the Celtiberians of what is now the region of Soria. He fell into an ambush in which he lost 12,000 men, though Celtic losses were also heavy. In any case, Nobilior moved on to attack *Numancia*, but suffered another defeat, losing 4,000 more men. Nobilior thus lost half his army within a few days. The losses during the harsh Castilian winter were so heavy that the Romans withdrew. Claudius Marcellus agreed to a truce, which was maintained for 10 years. It was broken by Lucius Lucullus, who conducted a rather disastrous campaign in the Western Plateau.

Campaigns against Numancia by Metellus and Pompeius brought only more reverses to the Romans. Another attack against Numancia by Popilius Lenas brought the Romans yet another reverse. Then 20,000 Romans under Hostilius Mancinus were disastrously defeated by 4,000 Celtiberians. The Celts more and more began to laugh at

the Romans as "the little men" because of their short stature and to joke about the Romans, saying that they were effeminate and homosexual and that their wives were unfaithful. So old is Spanish heroism and Spanish *machismo*. Not that I am disapproving: I am a *macho iberico* or *machista* and proud of it. *Viva el machismo!* Finally Publius Scipion Emilianus was sent to Spain. With an army of 60,000 men Scipion besieged Numancia, defended by 4,000 Celtiberians. The city resisted for 8 months, the defenders being reduced to cannibalism. Rather than live in slavery, many of them killed themselves. The final act of the Celtiberian wars, the campaigns of Sertorius, belongs rather to the history of the Roman Civil Wars. The Celtiberians, like the other Spanish Celts, were defeated not by the Romans but by their own disunity and lack of organization, the eternal weakness of the Celtic peoples(137).

The Cantabrians (Celts of the Coast) and the Astures (Celts of the High Mountains) of what is now Asturias, Santander and Western Vizcaya (Western Vizcaya was then Celtic rather than Basque) were no less heroic than the Celtiberians. It was proverbial among the Roman legionaires that the most terrifying sound in the world was the Cantabrians playing their bagpipes and singing their war songs. The Emperor Augustus needed 6 legions and a fleet to subdue them. Asked to pay tribute, they replied: "Our ancestors left us iron to defend our freedom, not gold to buy it." As among the Celtiberians some committed suicide, mothers killed their children and sons killed their fathers so that they would be freed from slavery to the Romans. Believing in

reincarnation they hoped to be reborn as free men. It became a Roman proverb "more difficult than making a Cantabrian turn and run". The Cantabrians who were sold as slaves in Gaul killed their masters, returned to Spain and continued the struggle. There were yet two more Cantabrian revolts, in 37-41 AD and 55-60 AD(138). It was the descendants of these fierce Cantabrians and Astures who defeated Munuza and his Moors at Covadonga, the Moors apparently reacting in the same manner as the Roman legionnaires to the bagpipes and war cries of the Cantabrians and Astures. In a television special about Santander, the program opened with the scene of a broken Roman column lying in the mud. Very appropriate for the land of the Cantabrians.

Who can doubt that these heroic Celtic peoples had their own epic tradition? From these gallant Celtiberians and Cantabrians were descended the creators of the Castilian epic.

The Spanish Celts, united, would have drowned the Roman legions in the Mediterranean, as Viriathus very nearly did in any case. They were finally conquered, though after more than 200 years of struggle, because the Romans conquered them a tribe at a time. This is the eternal weakness of the Celts: extreme individualism, which leads to disunity and lack of discipline. All Celtic peoples are like the proverbial Irishman, for whom there are only two beings in the universe: himself and God.

The Romans were a great people in only two respects, as engineers and as lawyers. The Celts, unlike the Romans, knew how to make enamelware and *damasquinado*. The torpid Romans believed

the Celtic enamelware was made of melted jewels, and were absolutely unable to fathom how the Celts made damasquinado.

The honor, chivalry and rectitude of the Celts were as proverbial as the perfidy, lechery and perversions of the Romans. The piety of the Celtic peoples is proverbial even today, while the Romans (very modern, very secular humanist, true precursors of the "Enlightenment", the Romans), really worshipped nothing but money and power. Research is bringing the greatness and originality of the Celts in the fields of art, literature, music and mysticism more and more into sharp relief, while in the fields of art and literature the Romans were unable to achieve more than poor imitations of Greek models. Early Christian Ireland is an excellent example of the civilization which the Continental Celtic peoples were at the point of achieving at the time of the Roman Conquest. The world might well be poorer in engineering and political theory, but would have had a much richer artistic, literary and spiritual heritage if the greater part of the Celtic peoples had not been conquered by the Romans. The cause for which the Spanish Celts fought with such stubbornness and suicidal bravery was a great and noble one.

In part because of the fierce resistance of the Celtic peoples of those parts, the Romanization of the Northern Plateau and the Northwest was very late and superficial. Some have suggested the existence of an Asturian epic tradition based on selections from Asturian chronicles which appear to be taken from lost chansons de geste. In the translation to Latin, the metre

and rhyme were lost. Another proof of the existence of an Asturian epic tradition are the legends of Bernardo del Carpio, which survive in various romances, both in Castilian and in Asturian "Bable". Some have suggested that parts of the enormous novel Amadis of Gaul proceed from a lost Gallego epic. It would certainly be no surprise if Asturias and Galicia once had an epic tradition, since, like Old Castile, they are ancient Celtic lands in which the Romanization was late and superficial. Studies of the legends and romances of Asturias and Galicia might reveal other fragments of lost epic cycles.

In the area which includes Burgos and Lara de los Infantes, the homeland of the Castilian epic in the strictest and most exact sense of the word, were fabricated funeral stelae of the purest Celtic type, which have abundant parallels in the whole Celtic world, whose use is exactly the same as that of the sculptures which crowned the *kurgans* or burial mounds of Scythian chiefs. The manufacture of said stelae ceased, not because of Romanization, since the manufacture continued during almost the whole of the Roman period, but because said stelae had too many pagan resonances to be used by Christians (139). In other words, said manufacture ceased because of Christianization, not because of Romanization. The use of said stelae in the area Burgos-Lara de los Infantes until a quite late date is very important, among other reasons because it would appear to show that Celtic Paganism or Druidism remained the dominant religion in the area until Christianization. The same also applies to the area of Leon. In

the Museum of San Marcos in Leon there is a large collection of stelae of the Roman period decorated with purely Celtic themes (see photos). In the same museum I saw two pair of *Maragato* castanets of the 19th Century decorated with Celtic themes. The presence of Celtic themes in Visigothic art and architecture in Castile and Leon is also proof of the persistence of the Celtic heritage in the area of the Northern Plateau. Purely Celtic themes, such as the "rope" and the "turning wheel" appear particularly in Visigothic pieces in the Provincial Museum of Burgos and in the Visigothic churches of Quintanilla de las Vinas (near Burgos) and San Pedro de la Nave (near Zamora). This in addition to themes, such as the *trefoil* or *fleur de lis* which may be of either Celtic or Iranian origin. (see photos)

As Constantino Cabal has shown, in Galicia and Asturias, Pagan Celtic beliefs survive until today, including reincarnation and the names of certain gods, such as Lug. This indicates that the "official" Roman Paganism never made much of an impact in the Northwest. It is not easy to conceive of a follower of the official Roman paganism or of "Late Classical" Paganism in the style of Julian the Apostate would continue using Druidic burial practices or following such Celtic beliefs as reincarnation, gods or rivers and springs (the rivers *Deva*) and the god Lug. All this is of great importance, because, as Georges Dumézil has shown, every religion which merits the name has its system of values, its theology, its spirit or "ideology" (not in the political sense, of course) as well as its rites and external manifestations.

Therefore, the properly Roman values were never able to take the place of the ancient Celtic values in the Northwest of the Peninsula, including the areas which later became the cradle of the Castilian epic(140). There are some things which the Roman legions were unable to conquer. Claudio Sanchez-Albornoz (141) very strongly insists in the fact that the Cantabrians and the Astures conserved their original character very little affected by Romanization. Fray Justo Perez de Urbel says that even in the time of the Visigothic king Leovigild the Cantabrians maintained their ancient customs, traditions and even language, and that in 825 AD, in the time of Emir Abd ar-Rahman II of Cordoba, a battle was fought at a place that the Muslims called "Mountain of the Fire-Worshippers", or, more literally, "Mountain of the Magi". Said place is now impossible to identify, but must have been somewhere in what is now the Northern part of the province of Burgos or the Southern part of the province of Santander. The name appears to indicate that there the Muslims witnessed a survival of Celtic Paganism (and not the Night of St. John, which is the 22nd of June, and with which the Muslims were familiar in Andalusia; the incursion and battle took place in August) such as that which existed in the Monastery of St. Bridget in Kildare, Ireland. Fray Justo Perez de Urbel seems to be inclined toward this opinion (142). In another place the same author affirms the preponderance of the Cantabrian element among the repopulators of that part of Castile which lies between the Cantabrian mountains and the Duero.(143)

