

Guerrilleros in Hispania?

The myth of Iberian guerrillas against Rome

COMMONLY ACCEPTED WISDOM SAYS THAT THE 'TRIBES' THAT STOOD AGAINST THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA WERE ONLY CAPABLE OF QUITE PRIMITIVE WARFARE IN STRATEGIC, LOGISTICAL, ORGANISATIONAL AND TACTICAL TERMS. IF THEY COULD RESIST THE MIGHT OF THE REGULAR ROMAN LEGIONS FOR SO LONG, IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE WARLIKE NATURE OF THE PENINSULAR PEOPLES, BECAUSE OF ROME'S OTHER, MORE PRESSING COMMITMENTS ELSEWHERE AND BECAUSE THEIR STYLE OF GUERRILLA WARFARE WAS NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH. IN FACT, SOME OF THESE POINTS CAN BE SHOWN TO BE MISLEADING OR PLAIN WRONG.

By Fernando Quesada-Sanz

For example, the use of the term 'tribes' to denote a quite primitive stage of social development should not be used to describe Iberian and Celtiberian societies. We know of kings who ruled over a wide territory (e.g. Edecon of the Edetani), and even over twenty-eight *oppida* or fortified cities (Culchas in Andalusia). Our sources regularly use terms such as *rex*, *princeps*, *basileus* or *dinastés* to describe them. Some cities had a Senate and magistrates (for example, Arse/Saguntum). It was an urban culture of a complex nature, economically developed, a culture that employed a writing system and that for centuries had sculpted complex monuments in stone. The Iberian civilisation along the Mediterranean coast of the Peninsula and Southern Andalusia, or the Celtiberian culture along the Ebro river basin and in the inner Meseta cannot be compared with the Lusitanian or Cantabrian *populi* in the western and northern parts of Iberia.

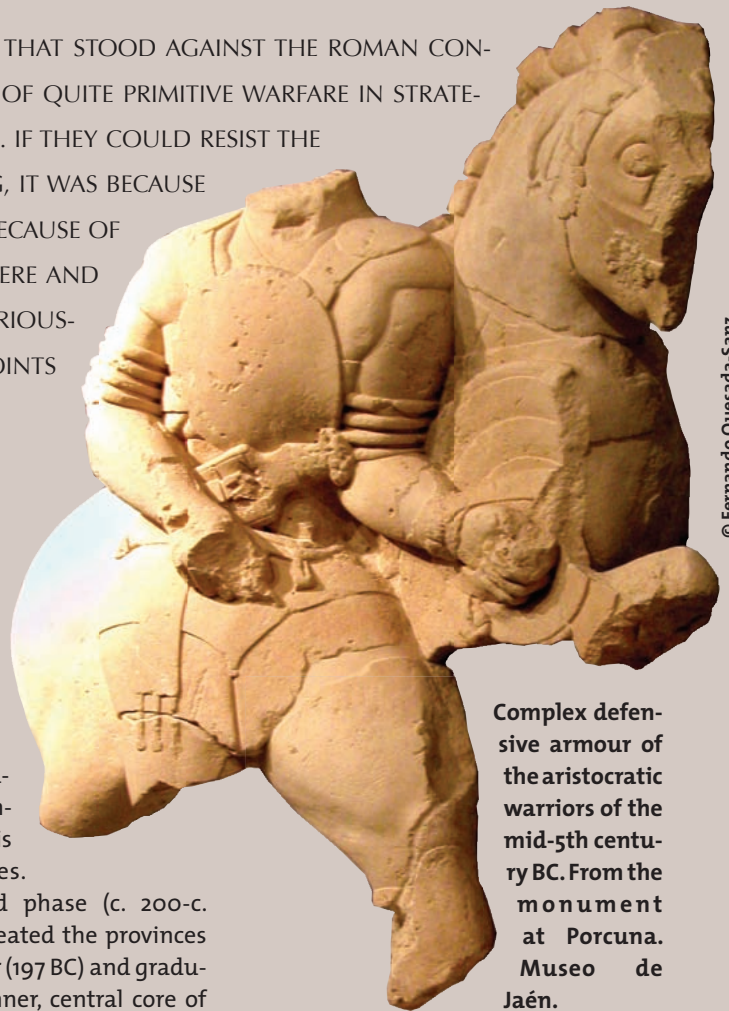
Roman conquest

The Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula can be conveniently divided into four main phases. During the first one (218 to 202 BC, the Hannibalic War), the Scipios decisively defeated the Carthaginians and their Iberian allies along the Mediterranean coast and the

Guadalquivir valley. At the end of this period they also crushed the resistance of the strongest independent Iberian confederacy in the north-east, led by Indibilis of the Ilergetes.

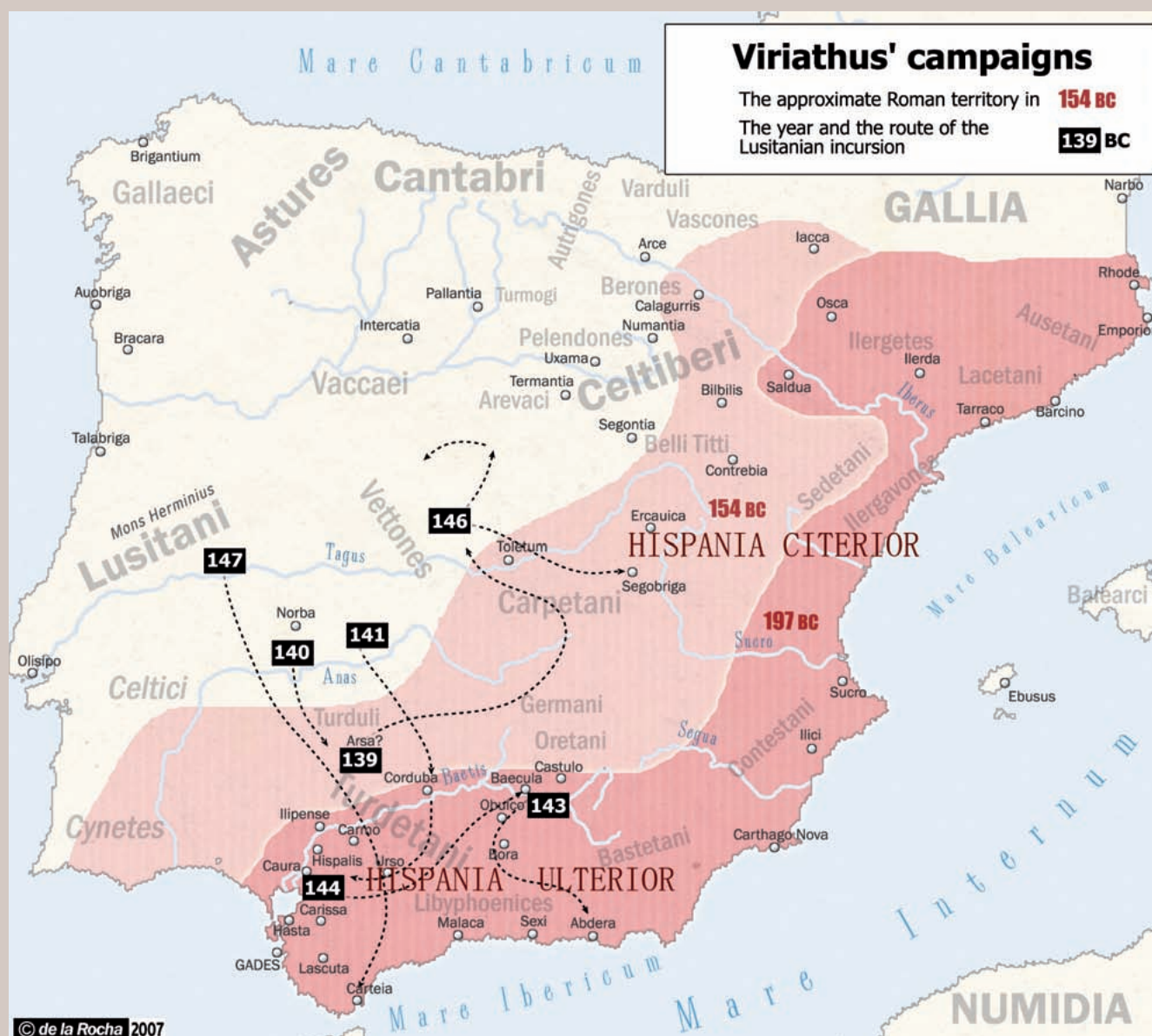
During the second phase (c. 200-c. 133), the Romans created the provinces *Citerior* and *Ulterior* (197 BC) and gradually annexed the inner, central core of Hispania as it was now called, decisively defeating the last great Iberian uprising in 197/195 BC and then conquering Celtiberia (along the Ebro valley axis) and Lusitania. During the third phase (c. 132-c. 40 BC), the Romans gradually consolidated their control, conquering the Atlantic up to Galicia (Caesar, 60 BC). The Peninsula became a battlefield during the Roman Civil wars, especially in the Sertorian episode (c. 80-72 BC) and the Caesarian wars (c.47-43 BC); large contingents of local soldiers were recruited by both sides in this period. Finally, between 29-19 BC Augustus crushed the northern Cantabrian peoples and completed the subjugation of the Peninsula.

In the different stages of their advance, the Romans fought many



Complex defensive armour of the aristocratic warriors of the mid-5th century BC. From the monument at Porcuna. Museo de Jaén.

peoples with diverse levels of social and military development in an area of 580,000 sq. km. In this article, I'll show that the generally accepted idea that the Iberians (in the first phase) and the Celtiberians (in the second phase) were incapable of both sustained fighting and concerted action at the strategic level is basically correct. However, I'll also demonstrate that the equally generalized opinion that they fought in loosely organized warbands that employed guerrilla, hit-and-run tactics is completely wrong. I'll also show that at the levels of individual combat and small unit tactics, Romans and Iberians/Celtiberians employed similar weapons and fought in comparable fashion.



Guerrilla, la pequeña guerra

The very word 'guerrilla' is, of course, Spanish, a diminutive of *guerra*, war. In a technical, military sense, it can be used in Spanish as a synonym for 'in skirmish order'. At times, there has been confusion between 'guerrilla tactics' which are employed even by regular army units with specific training and 'guerrilla warfare'. In both cases, the word usually denotes a type of combat carried out by fairly small bands of combatants who employ hit-and-run tactics, ambushes and sabotage to harass and weaken enemy forces organized in regular armies, or to hit their communication lines and civilian support. Guerrillas avoid pitched battle and use their intimate knowledge of terrain to escape in case of serious resistance or retaliation by stronger

forces, even temporarily dissolving and merging with friendly civilians if needed. As such, 'guerrilla' is as old as mankind, perhaps even older than regular 'war' itself. The actual term was coined in Spain during our 'War of Independence' against Napoleon. It is known as the 'Peninsular War' by the British.

Guerrillas in the *Guerra de Independencia* came in a wide variety of types: small bands of true bandits from the rugged mountain areas who attacked French stragglers or messengers; mobs of angry peasants, artisans, or even priests who left their plundered fields, shops and parishes to organize themselves and attack the hated invaders; soldiers from defeated regular army units who thought they had a better opportunity to kill Frenchmen

fighting on their own... guerrillas are seldom homogeneous.

However, there are two facts that are often overlooked. Firstly, 'guerrilla warfare' is not synonymous with 'revolutionary' or 'asymmetric' warfare. Although revolutionary movements usually employ guerrilla tactics that sometimes fall into the 'terrorism' category (and this is very slippery ground), 'guerrilla warfare' as a way of hitting the enemy can be employed by whole 'armies' of an irregular nature, or by specialized units in regular armies. Secondly, guerrilla bands by themselves cannot usually defeat a regular army – or depose a government – unless they have very strong external (military) and local (civilian) support. If they are not destroyed in an early stage, guerrilla bands tend to coalesce into 'regu-



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Iberian warrior, c. 350 - c. 200 BC. The colours of his tunic are as described by Livy. He carries a *falcata* slung from a baldric, a thrusting spear and a *soliferreum*, the functional equivalent of the Roman *pilum*. Grupo de recreación Ibercalafell.

lar' units. To use again the example of the Spanish war against Napoleon, over time, the smaller guerrillas were destroyed or merged into much bigger 'units' who gradually adopted a

'regular' appearance, including infantry, cavalry and even artillery. These adopted written regulations laid out by the regional *Juntas*. They finally came to collaborate closely with Wellington and the Spanish generals. In fact, the regular armies and increasingly strong guerrillas needed each other to decisively defeat a numerically superior opponent that needed to spread a high percentage of its strength all over the Peninsula. In the case of ancient Iberia however, it is at least impossible to discern such a situation in the classic texts.

Adolf Schulten

The principal inventor of the theory of the Iberian 'guerrilla' is the German scholar Adolf Schulten, best known for his excavations of the Roman siege camps around Numantia (c. 1902-1914). He was also very influential in early 20th century Spain as the editor of the *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae*, a multi-

volume corpus and commentary on classical literary sources in Hispania. Spanish archaeology is partially in debt to him because of his enthusiasm and energy. However, he had a romantic view of the country, thinking in terms of supposedly 'national characteristics' such as individualism, intense patriotism or warlike pride (in this he was no different to many other scholars of his time). He wove an invisible thread linking ancient Iberia to Spain in 1910. For example, in his view, the *guerrilleros* who fought against Napoleon were direct heirs of Viriathus. These

prejudices were aggravated by a faulty historical methodology. Schulten tended to choose those ancient texts that suited his preconceptions, often mixing events from scenarios different in time and place and sometimes even 'modelling' translations of certain Greek and Latin texts to fit his preconceived scheme. In his own words, "the Iberians escape pursuit by hiding in the mountains and forests and avoiding pitched battle."

A good example of this approach is his analysis of Nobilior's defeat by a coalition of some of the most important *oppida* in Celtiberia led by Caro of Segeda on the 23rd of August, 153 BC (the (in)famous *Vulcanalia*). According to Appian (*Iberian War* 45), a consular army of around 30,000 men was badly defeated during a protracted battle. A Celtiberian army of 25,000 foot and 5,000 horse (hardly a band of guerrilleros) ambushed the Romans in a forest or dense thicket (*lochme*) and inflicted 6,000 casualties on them. The Romans partly recovered their balance during the pursuit and avoided complete disaster, only nightfall put an end to the fight. Even allowing for exaggeration in numbers, this was clearly a hard-fought battle in which the Celtiberians hit, but did not run. For Schulten, however, it was a typical example of the (Celt)iberian guerrilla in action in a defile (never mentioned in any text): "As the enemy only had at most 25,000 men [sic], lightly armed [sic, Appian never says that] and he intended to avoid battle [sic]... he had to count on the surprise of an ambush, as befitted the peculiar way of fighting of the Iberians..." (Schulten 1945, 48). Indeed, according to this analysis, the battle of lake Trasimene, an ambush on a comparable scale (Polybius 3.83-84) should be also considered a guerrilla action by the Carthaginian army... which is of course plain nonsense.

A gross distortion of sources

This bizarre use of sources also helped to create an image of warfare in the Peninsula that did not take into account differences in time and space: 4th century BC Iberians and late 1st century BC Cantabrians were all mixed together in Schulten's analyses, even though the already known and published studies

of the marquis of Cerralbo (1911-16) and of H. Sandars (1913) clearly showed that the archaeological record was diverse and should be examined in terms of evolution and regional differences. It is only over the past two decades that this has been corrected, and a detailed analysis of weapon development between the 6th and the 1st centuries BC has been built up. For example, far from being the Hispanic sword *par excellence*, the *falcata* was only typical of the Bastetani and Contestani in the Southeast and then in a 4th to 2nd century BC context. The weapon was quite rare in the rest of the Iberian-inhabited regions and almost unknown in the northern and western areas of the Peninsula.

Schulten's ideas became, however, very influential in Spain, partly because of his prestige, partly because they agreed with a superficial reading of the sources and especially because during Franco's regime in Spain (1939-1975), the country's isolated nationalism welcomed the concept of linking past and present, emphasizing these 'racial traits' to forge a strong sense of national identity and independence.

We should also take into account that geographers like Strabo or historians like Diodorus or Livy had their own agenda: they were panegyrists of Rome's right to domination, and one of the ways to justify this was to emphasize the more primitive customs of subjected peoples, including warfare. Typically, if a local leader like Indibilis was an ally, he was a *basileus*, a *princeps*, "a man of regal nobility" (Livy 28.27.5). As soon as he rebelled against Rome, he became "a bandit, leader of bandits" (Livy 28.32), and his troops a bunch of rascals.

Therefore, oddly enough, ancient sources, German romantic scholars and Spanish nationalists were all, for different reasons, keen on emphasizing the differences between Hispania and the other cultures of the ancient Mediterranean. This was done at the cost of unduly stressing the most primitive aspects of their customs, or even totally distorting them.

Schulten and later writers relied heavily on some texts that described Iberian light infantry tactics while disregarding many others that described

close order formations and battle. There are indeed some sources that highlight the nimbleness of the Iberians, but even then, they emphasize their stamina and reliability over that of the Numidians (Livy 23.26). We should read them carefully: when Strabo, the Augustan geographer, mentions that the Iberians (he is in fact referring to the Celtiberians) fought like *peltastai* and not as *psiloi* he uses a word that in his time implied dual-purpose infantry, capable of fighting both in open and close order, just as most historical sources describe them in battle.

There are indeed references to Spanish light infantry units in Hannibal's army (e.g. Livy 22.18.2), but we should not forget that there are many more that show Spanish line infantry units fighting in formation, as at Cannae itself (Polybius 3.113; Livy 22.46). There they could and did resist in close order formation the full weight of a hugely stronger Roman force. The Spaniards eventually became the best units in Hannibal's army (Livy 27.14.5), just as they were in his brother Hasdrubal's (Livy 27.48.6). Even Scipio risked using line infantry Iberians in his battle line at Illipa (Polybius 11.22).

Some sources seem to attest to the contrary, but they can be misleading. Diodorus for example insists that the Lusitanians are inferior to the Celtiberians in close combat (5.34), and his description of them cannot be applied to either Iberians or Celtiberians. Also, when Strabo says (3.3.6) that the Lusitanians used a round shield two feet in diameter (over 60 cm.), we can hardly use this as a source for the idea that the *caetra* was a 'small buckler' since he is comparing it to the much bigger hoplite *aspis*.

We should finally take into account that the veteran Iberians of Cannae or Metaurus, who were either warriors transformed into soldiers, the citizens of Saguntum, or the Ilergete heavy infantrymen, did not have much in common with the Hispani of two centuries later (when they were employed as *auxilia* by Caesarians and Pompeians). These Roman generals had plenty of legionary line infantry and were mostly in need of light troops and cavalry, so they recruited these types. Even these Romans, though, had *Hispanae scuta-*

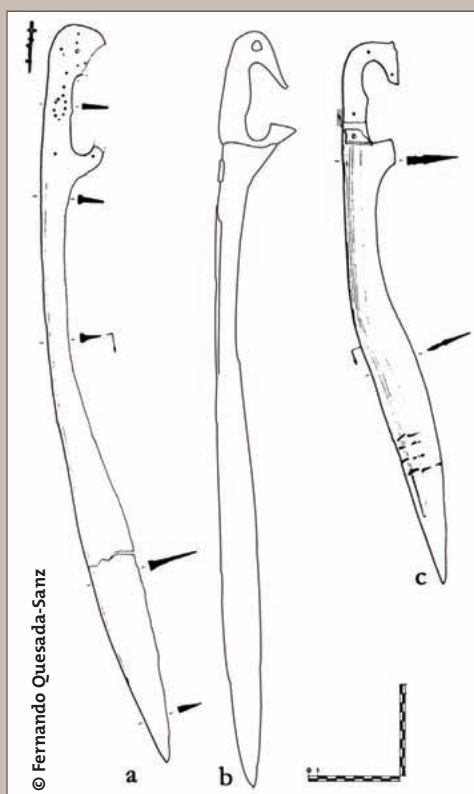
tae cohortes capable of fighting in the line (Caesar, *Civil War* 1.39)

Iberians in pitched battle

It could of course be argued that all the examples cited above belong to situations in which Iberians or Celtiberians were fighting either as allies or subjects of Carthaginians or Romans, so they could have been trained to fight in a way that was alien to their own traditions. However, there are many more examples of pitched battles fought by Iberians on their own (see table p.51). In fact, it can be argued that the Iberians suffered catastrophic defeats in their early fights against the Romans in 205-195 BC *precisely* because they tried offering open battle against the markedly better organized and disciplined legions.

Exhausted after their exertions in the Second Punic War, most Iberian peoples submitted to the Romans after the Carthaginians were defeated, but in 206 Indibilis and Mandonius, the chiefs of the Ilergetes, gathered the equivalent of a Roman consular army. This consisted of 2,500 cavalry and 20,000 infantry (Livy 28.31) of which only a third was light infantry, thus implying that the rest was 'line' (Polybius 11.33). The Roman casualties recorded by Livy in this fight (4,200, of which 1,200 were killed) are very high and show that this was a hard fought battle even if, contrary to common practice, Livy exaggerated rather than minimised Roman casualties.

If this first attempt to beat the Romans in the open had not been a normal battle practice but a reckless and ill-conceived innovation by Indibilis, we should expect that the disaster would have come as a hard-learned lesson not to be repeated. In fact, exactly the opposite happened: in 205 BC the Ilergetes gathered an even bigger army (30,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry) and marched against the Romans in Sedetania (Livy 29.1.19-26). Again, the Iberians offered pitched battle in formation (*armati instructique omnes*, Livy 29.2.4). Livy then offers another precious piece of information: the Iberians formed up by nation, with the *Ausetani* in the centre, the *Ilergetes* in the right and other minor peoples on the left wing:



Comparison between (a) an Italic machaira (Gualdo Tadino), (b) a Greek kopis (Prodromi) and (c) an Iberian falcata (Almedinilla). After Quesada 1997.

"On the morrow the whole of the Spanish army marched under arms and in battle formation to within a mile of the Roman camp. The Ausetani formed the centre, the Ilergetes were on the right and the left was made up of various nameless tribes. Between the wings and the centre open spaces were left, wide enough to allow of the cavalry charging through when the right moment arrived. The Roman line was formed in the usual way, except that they so far copied the enemy as to leave spaces between the legions for their cavalry also to pass through."

Livy 29.2.5.

The battle was so difficult that *Legio XII* began to give way and the Roman commander, Lentulus, had to bring from the reserve another unit, *Legio XIII*, to save the situation. Finally, thanks to a timely cavalry charge, the Iberian

ordered ranks began to waver (*turbatos hostium ordines... fluctuantia signa*). We again get the impression of formed troops grouped around standards, an image repeated in other cases, such as the *signa* (standards) of the *Suesetani* in another episode (Livy 34.20). It was only when Indibilis, hit by a *pilum*, fell dead, that the Iberian coalition forces collapsed and carnage ensued. Obviously, this is not the tale of a major skirmish against *guerrilleros*, but of a deadly serious, pitched battle.

Other bits of information confirm that Iberian troops could be recognised at a distance thanks to shield emblems and *signa militaria*, implying some sort of clear differentiation between units. This is certainly so in the case of the *Suesetani*, who could be identified from far away by the *Lacetani* (Livy 34.20.6).

In the battle of Emporion, fought a few years later in 195 BC, Cato was able to catch another coalition of Iberians in the act of forming a proper battle line (*acie instruenda*) and soundly defeated them, although he had some trouble and had to use his reserves (Livy 34.13-16; Appian, *Iberian War* 40). This battle has been carefully scrutinized and it seems that the description is coherent and reasonably accurate. The Iberians had a fortified camp (Livy 34.15), they almost defeated part of the Roman army and their small unit tactics were familiar to the Romans: both hurled heavy javelins (*pila* and *soliferrea*) and then used the sword (Livy 34.14.18).

This is not the only instance in which similar tactics were employed by both sides. In 209 BC, a few years before, a new army of Celtiberians (they were *tirones*, so had not yet been trained in the supposedly more sophisticated ways of their Carthaginian employers), formed an *iusta legio* ("proper legion")

Battles of the Celtiberians

A few other pitched battles involving Iberians from the Levant and Andalusia are known. However, if we suspect that the less-developed Celtiberians of the inner lands are more adept at guerrilla tactics, even a cursory glance at Livy or Appian proves us wrong. We have already analyzed the Vulcanalia of 153 BC, but there are many other examples, described in some detail by sources,

which are otherwise barely mentioned (see table p.51).

In 203 BC, at the very end of Hannibal's war, the Carthaginians in Africa raised their spirits when they knew that a force of 4,000 Celtiberian mercenaries had arrived. They were considered invincible because of their valour and their weapons. Certainly, this is not the image of a contingent of light infantry auxiliaries. Indeed, they fought bravely in the line at the Great Plains, and died in their ranks covering the retreat of the rest of the army (Polybius 14.8.7).

After Cato suppressed the great revolt of the Iberians in 197-195, the Romans began moving further inland. Between 197 and 133 BC many pitched battles and many skirmishes were fought in Celtiberia. And our sources clearly make the distinction:

"Gaius Flaminius in Hispania Citerior... during the winter [of 193/192 BC] fought several actions, unworthy of record, against raiding parties of brigands rather than soldier... greater things were done by Marcus Fulvius. Near the town of Toletum, he engaged the Vaccae, the Vettones in pitched battle... and captured their king Hibernus."

Livy 35.7.

In the next year, Toletum was taken by Gaius Flaminius after another big battle; in both cases Livy uses the expression *signis conlatis*, "with engaged standards" that denotes pitched battle. When we do have more detailed information, the Celtiberians are often described as forming with line infantry, light infantry and cavalry, thus as true armies. I am aware of just one text in which the Spanish are all described as *psiloi* (i.e. as pure light infantry), and these were the *Vaccae* of Cauca, far to the west (Appian, *Iberian war* 51).

In the campaign of 185 BC, a skirmish between foragers escalated into a fully-fledged battle that looked so bad for the Roman Praetors that during the night they abandoned their camp and 5,000 casualties. The next day at dawn, the Celtiberians approached the ramparts in battle order, preparing to renew the struggle, only to find the

enemy camp empty, but with lots of abandoned weapons with which to re-equip themselves (Livy 39.30). The Praetors Calpurnius and Quinctius reinforced their army with Spanish auxilia and came back in the same season. In the ensuing battle, their two best units (legions V and VIII) became very hard pressed by a massive charge in wedge or column formation and were only saved by a timely cavalry charge into the flank of the Celtiberian *cuneus*. A hard earned victory was won, and 133 standards were taken (Livy 39.31).

Things became really difficult for the Romans in 181 BC, when the Celtiberians gathered their biggest army so far, about 35,000 men. The Praetor Q. Fulvius Flaccus had to suffer the indignity of the Celtiberians forming in battle order just in front of his camp, whilst he refused them battle. It was in fact the Roman who resorted to the sort of guile we would normally associate with the Celtiberians: he made a forced night march and attacked the rear of the Spanish camp in the dark. But the Celtiberians, instead of panicking as they were supposed to, kept on fighting even harder and only

the timely arrival of Legio VII saved the day for the Romans. And then Livy says:

"The victory was great but yet not bloodless: of Roman soldiers of the two legions, a little more than two hundred, of the allies of the Latin confederacy, eight hundred and thirty, of the auxiliaries from the province, about twenty-four hundred fell"

Livy 40.32

That it was the Romans who refused battle and who attempted 'dirty tricks' is not exceptional. In the campaign of 179 in front of Alce, Sempronius Gracchus feigned panic and retreated, and when the enemy ranks following in hot pursuit became disordered, he suddenly rallied to attack and win the day with only 109 casualties (Livy 40.48; Frontinus *Stratagemata* 2.5.3).

Of course, it was logistics, discipline, a complex chain of command and overall organization that helped the Romans most of all in their campaigns. It was relatively common for them to

Celtiberian short sword of type VI, decorated with silver, copper and some gold inlay. From Burial 513 at La Osera (Avila). 3rd century BC. Drawing after E. Cabré.

obtain victories because of their enemies' relaxed marching discipline, as in front of Contrebia in 181 BC. (Livy 40.33.4-6).

It has sometimes been argued that the *cuneus*, the charge in a wedge or column, is not a proper 'battle' formation, but with correct timing and some kind of flank protection, it could indeed break a legionary line. The furious charge in the battle at the Saltus Manlianus almost broke the Roman front, and although the day was saved, the number of Roman casualties



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Pitched battles between Iberians, Celtiberians and Rome (c. 210 BC - c. 133 BC)

Date	Place	Enemy	Outcome	Main source
207	Celtiberia	Celtiberians led by Mago.	Roman victory	Livy 28,1,7
206	Sedetania	Ilergetes and allies	Roman victory	Pol. 11,32-33; Liv. 28,31-33
205	Sedetania	Ilergetes, Ausetani, others	Decisive Roman victory	Livy, 29,2
197	Hispania Citerior	Iberians	Iberian victory, Roman praetor killed	Livy 33,25
196	Turda, Cit.	Iberians	Roman victory	Livy 33,44
195	Emporion	Iberians Major	Roman victory	Livy, 34,14-15
193	Toletum	Vaccae, Vettones, Celtiberi	Roman victory	Livy 35,7
192	Toletum	Celtiberians	Roman victory	Livy 35,22
185	Carpetania	Celtiberians?	Celtiberian victory	Livy 39,30
185	Carpetania	Celtiberians?	Roman minor victory	Livy 39,31
181	Hispania Citerior	Celtiberians	Roman victory	Livy 40, 30
181	Contrebia	Celtiberians	Roman victory	Livy 40,33
180	S.Manlianus	Celtiberians	Roman victory	Livy 40,40
179	Alce	Celtiberians	Roman victory	Livy 40,48; Front. <i>Strat.</i> 2,5,3
179	Mons Chaunus	Celtiberians	Major Roman victory	Livy 40, 50
174	Celtiberia	Celtiberians	Crushing Roman Victory	Livy 41,26
153	Celtiberia	Celtiberians (Segeda, Numantia)	Heavy Roman defeat	Appian, <i>Iber.</i> 45; Diod. 31, 39; Liv. <i>Per.</i> 47
141	Numantia	Numantia, Termantia	Minor Roman defeats	Appian <i>Iber.</i> 76-77
137	Numantia	Celtiberia	Major Roman surrender without battle	Appian, <i>Iber.</i> 80; Plut. <i>Grach.</i> 5,4
133	Numantia	Numantines	Romans refuse battle	Appian (<i>Iber.</i> 90, 97)



Detail of a vase from Numantia showing a single combat between two warriors. Note the short, atrophied-antennae sword and the throwing-spear or javelin at the back with *amentum*.

was very high: 472 legionaries, 1,019 Latin *socii* (allies) and around 3,000 local *auxilia* (almost 5,000 men). This was a very high proportion for a 30,000-man army (Livy 40.40). The detailed account seems too precise to be a mere estimate, except in the case of the expendable locals, of course.

After the big Roman victory at Mons Chaunus (179 BC) and the disastrous rebellion of 174 BC, a period of relative peace ensued. This ended with the great campaign of Nobilior in 154/153 and his heavy defeat at the Vulcanalia, discussed above. From 153 BC we lose the detailed account given by Livy, a gap that Appian fills only partially. Nonetheless, the campaigns of 153-152 show in some detail warfare at different levels, from minor skirmishes to diplomatic negotiations. In the following years, the Romans suffered various defeats at the hands of the Numantines, some of them quite severe, as they involved large armies. Q. Pompeius Aulus suffered various setbacks in relatively minor actions (Appian, *Iberian War* 76-77). It was the unfortunate G. Hostilius Mancinus, though, who allowed himself to be trapped with his whole army and had to surrender ignominiously. Rome could not allow this affront to stand, and the final result is well known: Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus, the besieger of Carthage, was entrusted with the task of finally

subjugating the Celtiberians. He did so in his own way. Many times the Numantines sallied and formed in battle order [*ektassontôn*] (Appian, *Iberian War* 91.97). Scipio refused any open battle against those *guerrilleros*, preferring victory by the less glamorous but good old-fashioned method of starvation by blockade.

Conclusion

An unprejudiced reading of ancient literary sources shows that between 206 and 133 BC the Iberians and Celtiberians, although they occasionally resorted to guerrilla warfare, usually gathered large armies and offered pitched battle to their Roman foes, winning sometimes and usually giving a good account of themselves even when losing. When Polybius wrote of a “war of fire” in Iberia (35.1) he added:

“For it was of a peculiarly fierce kind and remarkable for the frequency of its battles. The wars in Greece and Asia were as a rule settled by one battle, or in rare cases by two; and the battles themselves were decided by the result of the first charge and shock of the two armies. But in this war things were quite different. As a rule the battles were only stopped by the fall of night; the men neither lost heart nor would yield to bodily fatigue; but returned again and again with fresh resolution to renew the combat. The whole war, and its series of pitched battles [parataxeis], was at length interrupted for a time by the winter...”

That the Iberians and Celtiberians were finally beaten was due to the superior structure, organization, logistics and probably numbers of the Roman armies and their allies, not to inferior weapons or small unit tactics. Their tactics were in fact remarkably similar to the Roman ones, so much so that the legions would go on to adopt some of them. However, that is a discussion for another time. ■

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Further reading

To learn more, the best thing is, of course, to go to the original sources, mainly Polybius, Livy and Appian. The Caesarian corpus is needed for the latter period. Strabo and Diodorus also left us some useful descriptive paragraphs of an ethnographic nature. Poets like Silius Italicus are best left out of any historical discussion.

The most detailed modern scholarly analysis of Iberian and Celtiberian weapons and warfare is F. Quesada's *El Armamento Ibérico* (Monographies Instrumentum, 3, Montagnac) in two volumes. It has been updated in *Armas de la Antigua Iberia* (Madrid 2010, reviewed in *Ancient Warfare* V.1), which is lighter in tone and fully illustrated in colour. See also the many papers (in pdf format) at <http://www.uam.es/equus>, some of them in English. A synthesis of A. Schulten's influential views on Iberian warfare can be found in the recent reprint of his *Historia de Numancia* (1945, repr. 2004).