Legio VII Gemina and its Flavian fortress at León

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After Legio X Gemina moved to Carnuntum in A.D. 63, the Spanish garrison was left with one legion, VI Victrix, stationed at León. Accompanied, according to Suetonius (Calig. 10.2), by 2 adac and 3 cohorts. The Spanish troops played an active rôle in the uprising against Nero by Galba, governor of Tarraconensis. After Legio VI Victrix proclaimed him imperator, he proceeded to raise a new legion before moving on Rome. The new legion was numbered VII, following after its parent VI Victrix, and this was the origin of the future VII Gemina. Two tombstones found in Villalís allow us to establish the exact date on which Legio VII received its insignia: June 10, A.D. 68. It was known at first as the Galbiana (Tac. Hist. 2.81 and 3.7.10.11), and Hispana (Tac. Hist. 1.6). While Legio VII accompanied Galba to Rome, its parent, VI Victrix, remained in León, controlling the gold production in the northwest, on which the ambitions of successive candidates to the purple doubtless depended. Only in the winter of 69/70 did VI Victrix along with other units leave Spain for the Rhine, as a result of the Batavian revolt under Julius Civilis, though some kind of garrison must have been left to watch the gold-mining districts.

Meanwhile, Legio VII Galbiana would be sent from Rome to the Danubian limes, and then, after Galba’s death, it returned to Italy. Under Vitellius it went back to the Danube briefly, where it supported Vespasian and came to participate in the second battle of Bedriacum near Cremona. It was as a result of its heavy casualties in that battle that it received a contingent from an undetermined legion, which led to its name Gemina (Tac. Hist. 3.22), for in 72–74 it was in Germania Superior with the epithets of Gemina and Felix. It may have returned to Spain at the end of 74, but the first references to its stay there appear only in 79. It took over the spot of the camp of Legio VI Victrix at León, and from then on its permanent operational headquarters would be León, which it abandoned on only a few occasions. This choice, in the same Asturian territory where the main troop concentration had settled in the Julio-Claudian period, and on the site of its parent’s base, points to the continuity of military goals. The main missions of the army deployed here were to watch and control the gold mines (then working at full capacity), maintenance of the associated roads, and to give technical support with the

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2 A third grave stone from León (García y Bellido, ibid. 324) may be added.

3 CIL II 2552 and 2564; P. Diego, Inscripciones romanas de la provincia de León (León 1986) 51–55, nn. 33 and 35.


6 Ritterling (supra n.1) 1630; H. M. D. Parker, The Roman legions (1928; 1993) 99–100.

7 CIL VI 3538; CIL XIII 5033, 12167, 1–8.

8 Inscriptiones of Aulae Flaviae and Cernices (Orense): CIL II 2477, and Inscripciones romanas de Galicia IV 92, respectively.

9 C. Doméneche, “Diez años de investigación (1968–1986) sur les mines d’or romaines du nord-ouest de la