

Legio VII Gemina and its Flavian fortress at León

Angel Morillo and Victorino García-Marcos

After *Legio X Gemina* moved to Carnuntum in A.D. 63, the Spanish garrison was left with one legion, *VI Victrix*, stationed in León, accompanied, according to Suetonius (*Galba* 10.2), by 2 *alae* and 3 *cohortes*. The Spanish troops played an active rôle in the uprising against Nero by Galba, governor of *Tarruconensis*. 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*.¹ Two tombstones² found in Villalís allow us to establish the exact date on which *Legio VII* received its *insignia*: June 10, A.D. 68.³ It was known at first as the *Galbiana* (*Tac., Hist.* 2.86 and 3.7, 10, 21) and *Hispana* (*Tac., Hist.* 1.6).⁴ 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.⁵ 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),⁶ for in 73-74 it was in Germania Superior with the epithets of *Gemina* and *Felix*.⁷ It may have returned to Spain at the end of 74, but the first references to its stay there appear only in 79.⁸ 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),⁹ maintenance of the associated roads,¹⁰ and to give technical support with the

- 1 Among the abundant literature on the creation and history of *Legio VII*, see especially E. Ritterling, "Legio," *RE* XII.2 (1925) 1630-41; A. García y Bellido, "Nacimiento de la Legio VII Gemina," *Legio VII Gemina* (León 1970) 303-30; J. M. Roldán, *Hispania y el ejército romano* (Salamanca 1974) 201-4; P. Le Roux, *L'armée romaine et l'organisation des provinces ibériques d'Auguste à l'invasion de 409* (Paris 1982) 151-53. E. Matilla, "La Legio VII Gemina y León," *Lancia* 1 (1983) 263-71; J. M. Abascal, "La legio VII Gemina. Balance de investigación y perspectivas," in *Actas I Congreso Int. Astorga Romana* (Astorga 1986) 317-28; A. Morillo, "Legio VII Gemina". *Los campamentos romanos de León* (León 2003) in press.
- 2 A third gravestone from León (García y Bellido, *ibid.* 324) may be added.
- 3 *CIL* II 2552 and 2554; F. Diego, *Inscripciones romanas de la provincia de León* (León 1986) 51-55, nn. 33 and 35.
- 4 A. Garzetti, "Legio VII Hisp(ana)," in *Legio VII Gemina* (León 1970) 331-36.
- 5 C. Fernández-Ochoa and A. Morillo, *La tierra de las Asturias. Nuevas perspectivas sobre la implantación romana en la antigua Asturia* (Gijón 1999) 71-72; A. Morillo, "Conquista y estrategia. El ejército romano durante el periodo augusteo y julio-claudio en la región septentrional de la península ibérica," in *id.* (ed.), *Arqueología Militar Romana en Hispania* (Anejos de *Gladius* 5; Madrid 2002) 67-93.
- 6 Ritterling (supra n.1) 1630; H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman legions* (1928; 1993) 99-100.
- 7 *CIL* VI 3538; *CIL* XIII 5033 and 12167, 1-8.
- 8 *Inscriptions of Aquae Flaviae and Cornices* (Orense): *CIL* II 2477, and *Inscripciones romanas de Galicia* IV 92, respectively.
- 9 C. Domergue, "Dix-huit ans de recherche (1968-1986) sur les mines d'or romaines du nord-ouest de la