◆ Chapter 2

From Iberia to Hispania: The Conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in the Spanish Graphic Narrative (1940–2020)

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The span of time encompassed by the term Ancient History depends greatly on the introduction and development of writing in the societies that populated a certain geographical region. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, Ancient History could easily mean a period of more than a thousand years, commencing when the Phoenicians brought their alphabet to the region in the 10th century BCE. Nevertheless, it is Rome that will leave no doubt about the introduction of the exercise of letters when extending its civilization over the conquered territories of the Peninsula. Antonio Domínguez Ortiz cites the nuanced theories of Henry Pirenne in his *España. Tres milenios de Historia* (57–58) when he argues that, for Spain, Antiquity began with the Phoenicians, as writing started to appear on the coasts of what was then called Iberia and ended not with the fall of the last Roman emperor of the West but with the arrival of Islam in 711: a chronology that spans almost two millennia of history. It is a vast timeline; yet in Spanish comics, it is barely covered by a small number of publications which focus almost exclusively on the period around the end of the 3rd century and the middle of the 2nd century BCE. The main topics Spanish authors of comics and graphic novels chose to depict include Hannibal Barca and the Valencian city of Sagunto, the legendary Lusitanian hero Viriathus (Viriato in both Spanish and Portuguese), and the fall of Numantia. Some comics treating these subjects appear as early as the 1940s, yet the total number of comic books that choose to narrate the events of the Carthaginian and Roman conquests of the Iberian Peninsula does not exceed nineteen.

The aim of this study is to examine how Iberian Antiquity is recreated in comics published in Spain between 1940 and 2020, from the arrival of Hamilcar Barca to the Peninsula in 237 BCE to the end of the Roman conquest. It posits that earlier comic depictions of pre-Roman peoples from the

mid 20th-century were based on a more rudimentary knowledge of Ancient Iberia, both from academic and popular sources. However, as archeological and historical research provided more and better insights into the period, comic depictions of that era developed in line with new knowledge. This essay will trace the influence that recent historiographic contributions have had on 21st-century representations of historical events in the vignettes, compared to those produced in the previous century, in order to elucidate the diachronic evolution in comics that parallels the progress of historical studies.

At present, the Spanish academic tradition in the field of comics and graphic literature still suffers a great void with regard to approaches to Antiquity. Sergi Vilch's contributions from more than 30 years ago, first with an article (1990) and later a book (1997), remain the only contributions that analyze universal ancient history in comic formats. Internationally, the results are no better, since monographs or essay collections such as the one edited by Julie Gallego (2015) tend to focus on what has been published within the Franco-Belgian market, which has undoubtedly contributed the most famous and well-known titles of the peplum genre. In the Spanish market, however, it is unquestionable that the Ancient Age takes a backseat to the Middle Ages and boasts significantly fewer titles, reflecting the much greater and more established tradition of connecting Medieval history with Spain's national identity, as Salvador Vázquez de Parga accurately asserts in his 1980 study *Los cómics del franquismo* (102).

Thus, this study attempts to redress in some ways the paucity of scholarship on the topic of comics set in the Antiquity of the Iberian Peninsula by compiling and studying Spanish comics published from 1940 to 2020 that take as their subject events of Iberian Antiquity, analyzing in particular the representation of the pre-Roman societies and their interactions with the colonizing forces of Carthage and Rome.

Iberia: Caught between Carthage and Rome

Given that for centuries everything related to Semitic culture was abhorred by Spanish historiographic tradition and that the prehistory curriculum was a late addition to Spanish educational textbooks, most students in Spain in the 20th century received an abbreviated version of ancient history, or even the biblical history of creation, in school (Ruiz Zapatero and Álvarez Sanchís 266). Thus, Spanish society through most of the previous century had limited knowledge about the history of the Iberian Peninsula before Rome beyond the fact that the common origin of all Spaniards arose from the union between Celts and Iberians: the Celtiberians (Ruiz Zapatero 150–52).

It is not surprising, then, that Saguntum appears almost exclusively as the main topic of the comics about Antiquity produced in the early years of the Franco dictatorship, although it pales in comparison to the attention that Numantia will receive in later publications. Intrinsically linked to the journey that Hannibal takes through the Peninsula and to the role of collateral victim in the conflict of the Second Punic War, nationalist discourses of the time identify the siege and conquest of Saguntum as one part of the sacred trilogy of Spanish national mythology, with the legends of Viriathus and Numantia comprising the other two. Saguntum's fall had already been established as a touchstone in liberal thought from very early in the 19th century (Castillo Pascual 280), so its use in comics in the early years of the dictatorship comes as no surprise. However, despite the appeal this pre-Roman idea holds, the fact remains that comic book publication focused on topics predating the Roman conquest is very limited in Spain's democracy of the late 20th and into the 21st century, which means that exploration of topics related to the first millennium BCE continues to offer creative and educational opportunities to authors and readers in the comic genre.

Returning attention to the current study, the years prior to the landing of Hamilcar Barca in Iberia are the earliest historical references to be examined here, since they are also where the authentic historical discourse of school textbooks begins (Ruiz Zapatero and Álvarez Sanchís 151). Almost all the comics that refer to this era are biographies of the Carthaginian general Hannibal or recountings of his exploits, including the seizing of Saguntum and the start of the Second Punic War. The first comics from the 1940s are highly dramatic recreations of the destruction of the ancient city, such as *La epopeya de Sagunto. Un titán de 15 años* (Canellas and Olivares) and *Entre el hambre y las llamas (Sagunto)* (Galateo). These comics present a very poor rendering of the historical setting, clearly a reflection of the limited knowledge of the period compared to what it is known today (Quesada Sanz, "*Los mitos*" 40), although it is similar to what could be found in the peplum films of the same time period. But they also overdo dramatic effect and are surprisingly violent for being publications aimed at a young audience. *Tiempos heroicos 14*. *Sagunto* (Batllori) is one of the standouts of the 1950s. It briefly synthesizes the months and events of the Saguntine resistance, adding pretexts and antecedents to the causes of the Punic attack with scenes taken from the Roman historian Livy´s *Ab urbe condita libri*, this latter serving for the first time as a clear and direct primary source for comic artists in their treatment of the time period.

The comic book version of Saguntum is on each occasion presented as a city of Greek culture, understandable since Livy mentions that the Saguntine people trace their origins to the Greek island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea (*Ab urbe condita libri* XXVI.24.15.). However, despite these possible Greek

origins, an undeniable Iberian essence is recognized in the actions that spur the Saguntine people to the destruction of their material wealth and mass suicide, thus denying the conqueror what he hoped to attain and wrenching a kind of final victory from their defeat. Meanwhile, in these same Spanish comic re-envisionings of the era of the Punic Wars, Rome is always portrayed as unfaithful to its alliance with the city of Saguntum, not sending aid and hesitating to get involved in the conflict and breach the peace treaty with Carthage. Instead, Rome dispatches an ambassador for a diplomatic solution (*Ab urbe condita libri* XXI.9.3–4.; XXI.10–11.1–3.). Such behavior seems odd for a strong colonial power like Rome, but Livy posits that this diplomatic option is a sign of the cultural superiority and civilizing mission of Rome in the face of enemies among which the resort to violence prevails; for the later historian Florus, the tragic destinies of Saguntum, and later Numantia, are a result of a blundering Rome that did not understand the situation and so decided not to act when it should have (Tovar Paz 188).

Caught between the search for the entertainment that reading comics should provide in the trying times of the postwar period and the lack of informative intention of the story, it is not uncommon to find that these titles from the first decades of the Franco dictatorship had an impoverished artistic style. Although the cartoonists tried to make a drawing that was close to reality, the staging of the action and the graphic narrative were poorly designed and executed.

Limitations with regard to the number of pages allotted for a comic sometimes resulted in a crowded baroque style in the backgrounds of the vignettes. The absence of color in Spanish publications increased this feeling of poverty and revealed the harsh realities of the publishing industry in Spain. The influx of Mexican comics into the Spanish market became a serious challenge for Peninsular publishers, and the Spanish comic industry could not compete in either the quality of the scripts or in the publication format: the new booklet format from Mexico, today's comic book, with more pages, a better and more appealing narrative graphic style and the use of color in the vignettes, meant the demise of various Spanish initiatives whose publications fell short in the eyes of consumers.

Nevertheless, comics exploring the history of the Iberian Peninsula did not disappear altogether. In the Hannibal biographies published in comic form in the 1960s, Spain appears as a land to conquer and recruit brave warriors to join the ranks of Barca's army in preparation for its upcoming confrontation with Rome. In number 85 of the Mexican series *Epopeya*, *Sagunto* (Fernando and Martínez), new details are incorporated into the Saguntine story, providing insight into the antecedents of the conflict. One such added detail is the Carthaginian pretext for the attack on Saguntum. Livy refers to an attack on the Turdetani by Saguntine forces that attracts the attention of General Barca,

who already had plans to attack them (*Ab urbe condita libri* XXI.6.1–2). In another comic book, *Aníbal* (Buixadera), the Iberians appear as great warriors, but most notable in this version is the faithful recreation of the details from Livy's *Ab urbe condita* when recounting the siege of Saguntum, complete with details that could go unnoticed, such as the panel that shows a general plan of the city with its great defensive tower that dominated the high wall (*Ab urbe condita libri* XXI.7.7.), or the depiction of the one instance in which Hannibal was wounded—although the comic version changes exactly where he sustained the injury (*Ab urbe condita libri* XXI.7.10). Unfortunately, with this as with all of the other biographical works created during this period, the admiration of his exploits which fuels the creative process results in a deformed depiction of Hannibal, presenting his deeds as respectful and noble in the face of the reality that his actions were a waste of troops, time and resources to subdue a city razed by its own inhabitants.

The last biography of the famous Carthaginian general published to date is in the *Hombres famosos* series, *Aníbal. El terror de Roma* (Martínez Fariñas and Guerrero Pinín). In this iteration from 1968, the Iberian presence is completely marginalized and secondary, almost always appearing in helmets adorned with horns, a guise more closely related to a false Viking cliche. The cities are drawn with walls whose dimensions are colossal for any time period, something confirmed by recent archaeological findings (Castillo Martínez 63). In addition, values such as love for the homeland and the unwillingness to fight against their neighbors are attributed to the Iberian people, who in the face of defeat decide to commit suicide, as in the case of Saguntum.

In these depictions toward the end of the Franco's dictatorship, the quality of the drawings is greatly improved when compared to the rough lines of earlier Spanish comics. This new style arose in part due to the French and Italian influence that reached Spanish authors in the last two decades of the dictatorship (Lladó 76). The general aesthetic from these late Francoist comics is more refined, with greater clarity in the route of the line, this in turn resulting in better detailing for both the characters and the vignette's backgrounds. All of this means a significant improvement in the historical representation in the comics themselves.

While the post-Franco period doesn't produce complete biographical works dedicated to Hannibal per se, two comic books narrate episodes from Hannibal's passage through the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula. The first is *Gorja Mortal* (Escura and Garcia i Quera), which presents the moment in which Hannibal's Carthaginian army tries to cross the Pyrenees to reach the Italian Peninsula by land, imposing itself along the way on different Iberian tribes. It is not based on specific facts, but rather is inspired by what that journey could have been and serves to show readers certain aspects of Iberian

society, in particular its warlike characteristics. The comic shows the point of view of the Pyrenean people concerned about the advance of such a great army and the risk of subjugation of their territories (see fig. 1). These invading troops have uniformed officers of Hellenic influence similar to what can be seen in *Aníbal. El terror de Roma* (Martínez Fariñas and Guerrero Pinín), but the infantry also enjoys this distinction, a difference from previous depictions.

Fig. 1. Discussing plans in front of Hannibal's treaty. (Escura and Garcia i Quera 14)

By the end of the 20th century, the artistic quality of the new generation of Spanish authors could easily be measured against what can be seen in the French market. With a strengthened Spanish publishing industry, comics could finally be published in full color with high-quality formats, at the same time incorporating new resources available to comics authors such as recent archaeological studies and new perspectives about the Iberian past. This, on the whole, meant a significant improvement in the quality of historically-based comics in Spain.

For the first time, the visual representation of the Punic army is beginning to be more reliable, although studies are vague as a result of the loss of Phoenician sources and the paucity of iconography (Quesada Sanz, "Los ejércitos bárcidas" 16). Adrian Goldsworthy explains that there was no prototypical Carthaginian army and that each military force created was heterogeneous and multinational, although he seems to believe there were not many changes compared to the troops employed by Hannibal's father, Hamilcar (35–36). The Carthaginian army is usually considered a force that followed the military model that Alexander the Great used for his conquest of Asia, as did all the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean (30–31). This implies the use of the Macedonian-style phalanx (Quesada Sanz "De guerreros a soldados" 130), which can be seen in some of the *Gorja mortal* vignettes that depict the Libyan infantry (see fig. 2). At this point in time, only the commanders would be Carthaginians, given the Carthaginian people's reluctance to risk the lives of its citizens, choosing instead to recruit foreign mercenaries to fill out their ranks (Quesada Sanz "Aníbal, estrategos" 267). It is therefore not strange to find some of the soldiers drawn wearing a linothorax in the Hellenistic way, images of the famous phalanx in action and the iconography of the shields related to Phoenician culture. The problem is that it seems Spanish comics authors do not recognize or wish to acknowledge the diverse make-up of Hannibal's forces, despite that it has long been indicated that Hannibal's army is not the same as the one that Hamilcar led in the Peninsula, and that the former cannot be considered a Hellenistic army either, due to its weaponry and its tactical units. However, it does share some characteristics of the Grecian forces, such as its composition, ethnic structure, use of mercenaries, and combination of tactics and logistics.

Fig. 2. The Carthaginian phalanx formation (Escura and Garcia i Quera 9)

Quesada Sanz points out that Hannibal's troops no longer formed in a closed phalanx order with pikes, he did not have artillery and only had a few dozen elephants that almost all died when they reached Italian soil ("De guerreros a soldados" 135–36). In *Gorja mortal*, the incorporation of these multi-ethnic allies or mercenaries from the Iberian or Celtiberian tribes into the Carthaginian forces goes almost completely unacknowledged in favor of presenting a fighting force of fully North African ethnicity. Nevertheless, when depicted as opposition to the great Punic general in this same comic, some local Iberian

tribes such as the Ilergetes or those of the Pyrenees enjoy a much-needed update when compared to the pseudo-Viking images of *Aníbal*. In line with what historical and archeological sources have revealed, the opposing Iberian and Celtiberian troops are shown with highly detailed recreations of helmets, breastplates, and falcatas, undoubtedly a result of the authors' consultation of the pertinent research and historiographic advances. In addition to the warriors' panoply, the authors attempt to provide cultural context regarding these mountain societies by presenting the conflict between twin brothers with diverging personalities and skill sets: while one brother excels at all things bellicose, the other is more intellectual, prudent, sensitive, and less skilled with weapons. Unsurprisingly, like many stories that glorify war, the former is lauded while the latter garners contempt from his people. These actions and reactions from the Pyrenean communities serve as a guiding narrative reflecting the importance that these people gave to warrior prestige in their societies. The Iberian hierarchy depicted in *Gorja mortal* is based on military prowess and rejects the opinions of those who do not reflect this alpha male construct.

A spiritual sequel, with the cartoonist Garcia i Quera as the solo author, was released about two decades later: *Cessetans. Entre Roma i Cartago* (2017). In this version, Hannibal is gone, his brother Hasdrubal Gisco remains in the Peninsula and within the comic's pages Gisco tries to recruit allies among the Cessetani who inhabited the oppida of Olèrdola. Once the main body of troops has departed for Italy, the presence of Punic soldiers and officers has now been greatly reduced, and the Ilergete tribe, subdued in *Gorja mortal* before the imminent landing of the legions of Rome, is tasked with the defense of Carthage's newly conquered Iberian territories. This defense by Hispanic troops of the possessions that Barca's troops had dedicated themselves to conquering during the years preceding the siege of Saguntum seems to indicate that the Senate of Carthage was reducing the number of African troops sent as reinforcements after the advance of Hannibal to Italy (Quesada Sanz "Aníbal, estrategos" 271). The Cessetani, caught in the crossfire between two foreign powers, are reluctant to position themselves in favor of anyone until they are attacked by the Ilergete, allies of the Carthaginians, who wish to expand their own territory. At this point, a feature that has not been mentioned so far comes to the attention of the reader: the importance of the horse in Iberian societies. While the author does not explore in depth the position this animal occupies, he does take care to give them enough weight in the narrative to justify the movement of the plot. At one point in the comic's narrative, a Punic officer claims that once his troops have seized their grain and commandeered their horses, he will be able to force the Iberian combatants to join his side. Again, toward the end of the book, the authors recognize the value placed on the horse when Rome offers to give them back their prized steeds if that is the cost of their alliance (see fig. 3). The horse

was an important status symbol of the period and while horses were not typically used for transportation by the common tribespeople (Quesada Sanz "*¿Jinetes o caballeros?*" 189), for the Cessetani and other Iberian tribes its possession was of great importance and likely served to preserve prestige before others.

Fig. 3. Trading with horses (Garcia i Quera, *Cessetans* 39)

That an event that has received so little attention from historians, the passage of Hannibal north of the Ebro and through the Pyrenees (Noguera 40), happens to have two comic books written about it is rather remarkable. There seems to be no reason beyond the personal interest of the authors and editors responsible for carrying it out, since it clearly moves away from the tradition in Spanish comics of recreating, time and again, the same feats of Spanish national history. In general, Spanish authors of graphic novels of this period do not appear to engage critically with the texts and subtexts of the various classical primary sources (if they consult them at all and don't simply rely on history texts), at least not well enough to proffer an alternate perspective in their comic books. Rather than take the opportunity to present a vision of their Iberian ancestors, these comics still center Hannibal, frame the Peninsula as merely his headquarters to attack Rome, and focus on the military action and violence. It is not until the 21st century that it is possible to see the wider picture in the Iberian theatre where different tribes try to get the upper hand to expand their own territory by supporting one or another party at war. At the same time, they manage to give the readers glimpses of how the Iberian societies lived.

The Resistance toward Rome

The beginnings of the Roman occupation and conquest are even less well-defined in the comic genre. Nevertheless, despite having only a kind of biography that conveys little of what we know today about the historical facts

collected in Greco-Roman literature, Manolo's *Efemérides históricas 14. Indíbil y Mandonio* (1956), serves to observe the relationship between the northeastern Iberian tribes and first the Punic forces and later the Roman. Unfortunately, all these elements are represented egregiously, ignoring the interests and objectives that the Ilergetes people could have had on the different occasions that might justify their actions (Quesada Sanz "Les forces dels antagonistes" 66). The comic has a plot entirely manipulated by the propaganda discourse of Francoist nationalist historiography, in which independence for the homeland represents the values and ideals for which both leaders fight. Their example will be echoed throughout history by turning them into martyrs for the homeland; a discourse traceable to school textbooks during the dictatorship in 20th-century Spain (Blánquez Fraile 33, 37). The value of Manolo's comic lies in being a transmitter of this type of ideology and exemplifies how the ancient world was represented in the middle of the 20th century in Spain. Nonetheless, due to its publication date, it touches on all the topics of historical recreation of the period but is a very vague account of the life of both *caudillos*. Their exemplary role should move readers and inspire them, since Spaniards are the spiritual heirs of these primordial heroes of the homeland whose names and noble cause have not been forgotten, as the last text box of the comic asserts.

When Rome became the colonial power on the Iberian Peninsula, the shift opened the doors to huge benefits for the Republic. The acquisition of new territories led to new political relationships that included Rome's commitment to lend support if her allies happened to be attacked. This meant that, as was expected with its earlier agreement with Saguntum, the Roman state had an obligation—mostly fulfilled but not entirely—to aid and protect the allied cities from attacks by other Peninsular ethnic groups: Lusitanians and Celtiberians. Those attacks on the rich valleys from which Rome drew so much benefit were likely due to the dearth of arable lands accessible to the Celtiberian and Lusitanian *aporoi* (Salinas de Frías "El impacto económico" 128). The treatment of the Roman conquest and occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in Spanish comics, however, rarely reflected this imbalance, offering a somewhat peaceful vision of the peoples who fall victim to the legions. These misinterpretations of how the pre-Roman societies were sustained seem to promote the idea that, if there were enough fertile lands, there would not be bands of warriors looting the more bountiful regions. There are exceptions to this (mis)representation, of course, but they most often occur in the titles focused on the Numantine War, which will be addressed later in this study.

The image of the Lusitanian leader Viriathus has come to comic readers distorted by the classical authors themselves, who idealized him in their comments, and later by nationalist historiography (Pérez Abellán 45–56).

Viriathus as a historical figure and mythic hero is of interest to both Portuguese and Spanish nationalisms due to the mystery of his birth and his legendary leadership in the territory that comprised ancient Lusitania. It is not surprising that among the examples of publications collected for this study, Viriathus is one of the first characters used in the historical genre during the dictatorship, however his prominence as a representation of nationalist identity began to wane in 1968, when he disappeared from the school textbooks of the Franco regime. While the legend of Viriathus had been strongly linked to the ideological propaganda of the dictatorship, certain historiographic information had been preserved along with it (Guerra and Fabiao 9–10), but as his mythic figure lost traction in the public imagination, it allowed new interpretations of the character in the 21st century.

In order to comprehend how this character is treated over time, the study must begin with comics that have Viriathus as their main character, the first of which is *Viriato y la destrucción de Numancia* (1942), the work of a young Manuel Gago. The plot of this first graphic work places the Lusitanian caudillo on his journey with the war already in progress. He quickly takes over the leadership of the Lusitanians, who are depicted in the drawings with helmets vaguely reminiscent of the Greek style and unrecognizable armor. The Lusitanians are quickly designated as "nationals" in the first vignettes, ignoring any kind of explanation about previous events and going through the most important battles and skirmishes of Viriathus's career. He is always endowed with great nobility and values in the face of the viciousness of the Roman invaders, who disregard the peace treaties, make use of prisoners of war for bloody entertainment in the amphitheaters, and send assassins when their armed forces do not produce a victory over their enemy. After the assassination of the leader Viriathus, instigated by Rome, the Lusitanians are defeated and they flee to safe harbor in Numantia, which will be discussed further below.

Viriathus appears in this first comic strip as described by the Francoist pedagogy, fighting for freedom and independence against the invader, becoming de facto the first national hero in Spanish history (Ruiz Zapatero 151). It is not surprising that he also appears characterized as a leader of the nationals who could have taken control of ancient Spain. Linking his figure to that of the *caudillo*, Pérez Isasi establishes a list of precursors to Franco, national heroes who are destined to unite the Spaniards under their command (307), but they cannot because that unity is impossible until arrival of the *Generalísimo* (Gil González 218–19).

The next comic featuring Viriathus does not appear until the following decade with *Efemérides históricas 7. Viriato* (1956) by the cartoonist Manolo. The publication again is laden with ideological content, but the portrayal of

the enemy of Rome changes substantially. Whereas in earlier works, the hero of Lusitania is depicted as a person who yearns to return to the countryside to live in peace, in this later iteration he has become a stubborn general ruled by his hatred and distrust of the invaders, who refuses to consider any treaty with them, as he considers them utterly without honor. The figure of a caudillo who holds the loyalty of his followers is completely overthrown when Viriathus, now portrayed as stubborn and hot-headed, must acquiesce to the demands of those followers in the face of a failing campaign and send an envoy to the Roman camp for peace negotiations. The Roman general's response is to incite the Lusitanian ambassadors to betray and assassinate their leader.

More than half a century later, readers find the latest story starring Viriathus in *Historia de España en viñetas 28. Viriato* (2020) by "Gol" (José Miguel Gómez Andrea), Pedro Camello and Lola Aragón. The contemporary comic boasts a greater number of pages than those of the Franco era, along with a greater depth of character made possible by the advances in historical studies about the time period and its protagonists. This *Viriato* introduces new narrative and historical elements: his wife, his father-in-law Astolpas, even the discussions and points of view the Roman Senate holds about the conflict. It also proffers glimpses of various cultural characteristics of the pre-Roman peoples who inhabit the interior of the Peninsula: the organization of warrior bands, the establishment of warrior prestige through the practice of dismemberment of defeated enemies (Sopeña Genzor 271–86), enrichment through looting (Sánchez Moreno "Viriato, jefe redistributivo (I)" (160–61), the creation of clientelist networks and alliances through the redistribution of loot that preempts internal rebellions (Sánchez Moreno "Viriato, jefe redistributivo (II)" (145–46). These, along with many other small details scattered throughout offer much information to careful readers about the past, details that are based on academic studies and incorporated into the vignettes with notable success. Viriathus continues to be the irascible leader in everything related to relations with Rome, but in this iteration, he is presented as a much simpler person, unimpressed by the comforts of urban civilization or the opulence that his father-in-law shows at his wedding (see fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Peace and trade with the Romans were never an option. (Gol, Aragón and Camello 39)

The 2020 comic returns to the theme of his leadership, showing the same pressures he receives from his own men to accept peace, and adding the creation of a hypothetical embryonic Lusitanian *regnum* resulting from the peace treaty signed with the Roman Senate after the surrender of Servilianus. It is important to note that sources do not at any time employ the title of King with Viriathus (Marín Martínez 631), but they do grant him a treatment reserved

for royal dignitaries (Sands 58–61). Florus mentions that he had become *Hispaniae Romulus* (López Melero 247–48) and other authors employ similar euphemisms, which could reveal an intention to avoid recognizing the rank held by a bitter enemy of Rome (Salinas de Frías, "La jefatura de Viriato" 111). The extensive detail in the vignettes makes this 2020 version of the *Viriato* comics easily the best of those dedicated to the topic of the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Such details confirm that the authors have made an effort to consult historical studies, to educate themselves on the facts and strive for a measure of authenticity in their recreation, but again length constraints, something common in the genre of Spanish historical comics, do not allow the deeper development of some of the various ideas and themes that are presented superficially.

The drawings in this graphic novel represent a true leap forward in the design of unknown warriors and legionaries, since they are both perfectly depicted, the panoply representing with much greater accuracy what they used in battle, if we compare it with other previous and later published examples. Despite a certain cartoonish note in the drawing style, the artists manage to populate the vignettes with a variety of decorative yet effective visual elements that faithfully represent what archaeological discoveries have revealed in recent years.

Despite the enduring fascination with the figure of Viriathus, the battle for Numantia is the most depicted episode of the Roman conquest of Iberia in Spanish graphic literature. Even when the end of the dictatorship resulted in the abandonment of many of the myths of national identity, the Numantines' heroic defense of their city and their freedom remained relatively unaffected; its symbolism and impact continue to resonate strongly through history. The conflict was exalted in favor of the Celtiberians not only by the Spanish nationalist historiography but also in the original Roman sources (Castillo Pascual 282, 297). And again, in the 21st century, the conflict proves of interest to readers of comics, first in small publishing houses in the 2000s and later in 2019 and 2020, when new releases of historical vignettes of the Numantine War appear. However, this monothematic tendency reinforces the fact that, contrary to what happens in France, the Spanish comic industry does not find ancient history appealing enough to expand its subject matter beyond Numantia.

The first foray into comics representing the conflict involving the famous Celtiberian town occurs with Manuel Gago's *Viriato y la destrucción de Numancia* (1942), which provides an interesting bridge between these two popular themes in Spanish comics over the years. The section of Gago's work that depicts the Roman military action against the Celtiberian city occupies only two pages of the second half of the comic, but it is important because the remnants of Viriathus's army flee, seeking refuge in Numantia, supplanting

the historical role of the inhabitants of Segeda as the catalyst for the Numantine War. In only two pages, Gago develops the entire conflict, but two events occur that are of the utmost importance. First, the defiant collective suicide of Numantia is instead replaced by a heroic final charge against the enemies of the city, through which the character who takes over from Viriathus is imprisoned and released. Second, shocking for its contradiction, the comic introduces an apology for the Roman conquest that allows everyone to live in peace and the country to prosper and thrive with the new civilization, despite the numerous outrages depicted in the preceding scenes of the comic. Regarding the first event, it is likely that the young author is expressing his desire for a reconciliation between Spaniards after the Spanish Civil War and the liberation of the prisoners, since his own father was imprisoned. The second tries to reflect the message of school speeches from the middle of the previous century extolling the benefits the imposition of Latin culture brought to Spanish society.

The next depiction of Numantia appears in another exported comic from Mexico, the *Epopeya 19. Numancia la ciudad trágica* (Peñalosa and Larios 1959), in which the Celtiberians are portrayed as pure barbarians and savages: muscular men, barely dressed and wearing skins. The Mexican comic is a vague adaptation of *El cerco de Numancia* by Cervantes, and there are many narrative elements that are borrowed directly from the Spanish writer, making his influence easily identifiable, most notably Marandro and Lira and Baratio's final suicide. While some symbolism, such as the incarnations of Spain or hunger, is eliminated, the most plausible remains.

The feat and fate of Numantia will be relegated to oblivion in comic form during the rest of the dictatorship. However, with the return of democracy, there are some isolated attempts to revitalize the tragic and heroic memory of Numantia, as comics for children in 1993, and again in the 2000s with *Caraunio* (Jiménez Beneite 2007), which follows the path of Retógenes el Caraunio and the Roman punishment of the city of Lutia. Despite the adult tone of the album, its cartoonish style, colorful but with blurry lines and little focus on detail, may seem to target a young audience. The fate of Retógenes depends on the authors who choose to depict him; sometimes he is executed while other times he manages to return to his family in Numantia.

Numancia, Estrella del crepúsculo by Ángel Benito Gastañaga (2006) begins the trend toward recreations of Spanish Antiquity that will put to good use the advances of recent historical studies (Lorrio Alvarado 229–72), a trend which continues with García and Torres's *Aius. El destino de Numancia* (2019), Palomera and Szilagyi's *Numancia* (2019), and Balen and Segade's *Numancia. Hijos de las cenizas* (2020). Although the main source of information for the Numantine comic books seems to be Appian's *De rebus Hispaniensibus*, the lack of an index of consulted bibliography makes it difficult to determine the

depth and scope of the authors' research on historical fact. Nevertheless, all of these publications recount the same basic facts while they diverge in some details. The main discrepancy is how Celtiberians are portrayed; only *Estrella del crepúsculo* embraces the ideal of dissemination of Celtiberian culture, its pictographic style permitting the compartmentalization of scenes. Later comics tend to be the embodiment of a story where historical figures and fictitious characters intermingle to allow insights into the Celtiberian way of life based on the latest archeological discoveries. It is interesting to note in all of this that *Hijos de las cenizas* clearly draws some elements from Cervantes's writings for its own plot, as did *La ciudad trágica* that was mentioned above. However, what truly sets *Numancia estrella del crepúsculo* apart is the outstanding pictorial style of its author. In a departure from the usual style of other comic authors, Benito Gastañaga's drawings often evoke historical paintings. In certain vignettes that mark important moments in the narrative, through an innovative combination of color and sepia tones, the pages seem to shimmer with life before the reader's eyes (see fig. 5).

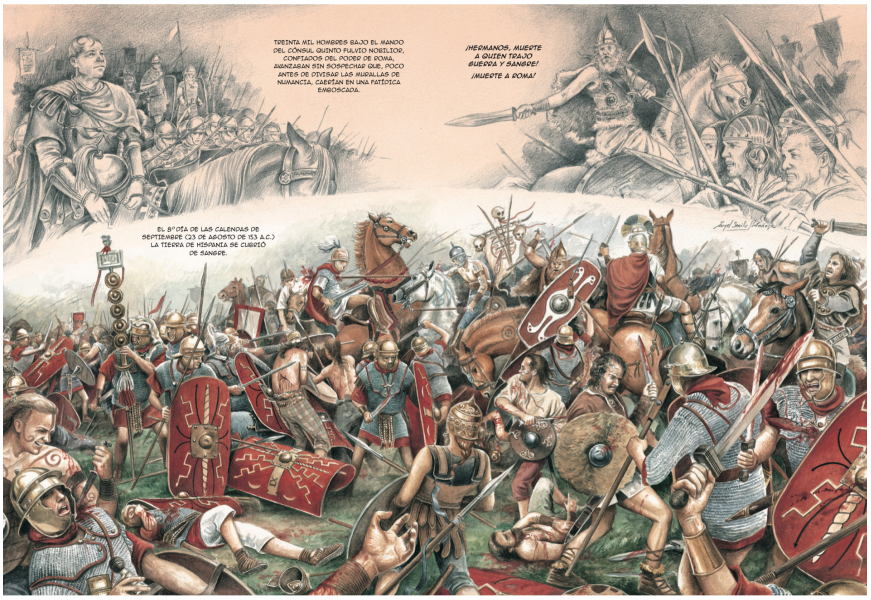

Fig. 5. Numantines battling the Roman legions (Benito 18–19)

The end of the Cantabrian wars marked the beginning of complete Roman hegemony in the Iberian Peninsula and endowed Rome with political unity for the first time. To date, Andy's *Laro el cántabro* (originally published as a

newspaper strip between 1972 and 1984) remains the only example of a comic depiction of this epilogue to the Roman conquest. The strip stands out for its depiction of the harsh violence practiced by Rome and for highlighting the consequences of the conquest as it proceeded across the rest of Hispania; as the Cantabrians pillage the neighboring tribes, Rome must intercede to ensure their safety. This revelation toward the end of the comic book undermines the heroic trope that typically marks the indigenous resistance. Instead, it indicates that the time of war and looting for Iberians has passed, their bellicose practices an anachronistic resistance to the pacific reality of the Iberian Peninsula. Vicens-Vives similarly asserts that the last real resistance in Hispania ended with the destruction of Numantia and that the Cantabrian wars were nothing more than a "prolonged police action" (30). With this last conflict, Rome concluded the conquest of what will be known as Hispania.

Conclusion

When examining the influence of historical documentation on popular culture artifacts, it is important to recognize that access to documentation sources is sometimes not as equitable and open as it should be. Knowledge of past historical events has come a long way in the last century, and this has resulted in a substantial improvement in the depictions of pre-Roman peoples in the vignettes, but the picture is far from complete. Most of the authors are still cautious about including details that cannot be verified through archaeological records, such as the use of tattoos or war paint, which is understandable to some extent.

Overall, there can be little doubt that the use of color brings the past to life in these most recent vignettes. The new generations of graphic artists have expended considerable effort in making the world of Antiquity a much more dynamic place, with graphic imagery that at times approaches epic cinematography, while also incorporating knowledge gleaned from consulting specialized bibliographies for archaeological reconstructions. This has resulted in better sequence shots than in the older comics, the latter drawing strongly on stereotypes ranging from horned helmets to the Romans of biblical films from the mid-20th century.

Ultimately, the use of color, commonly vivid and bright, also serves as an evocation of the genuine past in Antiquity. The backgrounds of the vignettes are less overloaded and allow the depiction of archaeological elements supported by historical studies. If under the Franco regime some comics to uphold and reinforce the values promoted by the dictatorship's propaganda, the return of democracy saw authors begin to offer narratives closer to the historical novel genre, showing flexibility when combining historical events with fictitious but

credible elements that help shed light on pre-Roman societies and establish interest and connection with the reader. Stoic heroism is subverted and the addition on both sides of cowardly or flawed characters, imbued with realistic doubts or fears, endows these modern comics with humanity.

As can be seen in the examples presented here, there is a growing interest among comic book authors in the making of historically based comics, often without specific scholarly guidance, and the quality of their work has reached new heights in the 21st century. The added elements portraying the details of daily life, facilitated by access to both archaeological and historical studies not often consulted previously for these types of publications, means these comics offer an extraordinary window into a time long past.

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