Celtic Place- and Personal-names in Spain and the Socio-political Structure and Evolution of the Celtiberians

Luis A. Garcia Moreno
University of Alcalá de Henares, Spain

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.uwm.edu/ekeltoi

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.uwm.edu/ekeltoi/vol6/iss1/14

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in e-Keltoi: Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact open-access@uwm.edu.
Celtic Place- and Personal-names in Spain and the Sociopolitical Structure and Evolution of the Celtiberians

Luis A. García Moreno, University of Alcalá de Henares, Spain

Abstract
In this paper two Celtiberian place- and personal-names are examined: Moericus, the name of a Celtiberian war chief in the Second Punic War, and Complega, a town founded by Celtiberian mavericks and conquered by praetor Fulvius Flaccus in 182 B.C. This indicates that two very important political and social institutions of the La Tène Celts are documented in Celtiberian Spain at an early date: the armed retinue that accompanied a chief with a name ended in -rix, and the armed mercenary bands that migrated long distances to conquer land and found new townships.

Keywords
Moericus, Complega, armed retinues, migrating armed bands

Although it may seem superfluous, the first question is what, from a sociopolitical viewpoint, is typically Celtic. This is far from being an unimportant question, since a number of scholars, mostly archaeologists, have argued that the Celtiberians were not Celts, in spite of the fact that they spoke a Celtic language, as is demonstrated by several texts in a Celtic language found at Botorrita near Zaragoza and elsewhere. An element that could help in finding an answer to this question is the study of Celtiberian proper names. In my opinion, a socio-political definition of "Celtic" could be partially attempted based on that of the ethnic identity reflected in the writings of Poseidonius and Caesar on the Transalpine Gauls of the first half of the first century BC. I believe that this is possible despite the fragmentary state of Poseidonius' existing "Celtic" descriptions, marked by his special love for the paradoxographic, and the fact that these reflect the Apamean's personal analysis and ideas on ethnography and social evolution, as J.J.Tierney, among others, has demonstrated. Transferred to sociopolitical organization,
"Celtic" can be defined as the existence of territorialized, mid-sized political units called *civitates* in the Latin sources. These were characteristically organized around strongholds that were central to the territory and housed the political institutions of the group. These strongholds might even have had a Mediterranean-like urban appearance in the most meridional regions which had been longest in contact with the Hellenic world. On the other hand, the fortified character of these centers indicates the predominance exercised in these political units by a warrior aristocracy who based their military power and social preeminence on the existence of armed retinues and a large, dependent peasant class.

In the social field and in systems of mental representation and ideological reproduction, these political realities gave rise to two extremely important phenomena. On the one hand, the organization of the society revolved around vertical, profoundly hierarchical and strongly independent groups that were held together internally by fictitious and/or real blood ties, which is what, since the days of Lewis Henry Morgan, has been known, more or less popularly, as a gentile organization, as well as by other ties that legally and economically created a dependency which followed the notion known in German scholarship as *Hausherrschaft*. This sociopolitical structure would have had a literal reflection in the organization of the territory with the development of smaller, fortified settlements that are frequently marked by the appearance of place-names ending in *-dunnum* and *-acum*, depending on their size and politico-military function. Regarding personal names, the sociopolitical structure would be reflected by the appearance and diffusion of compound names ended in *-reiks* for the chiefs of the hierarchical groups.

Unfortunately, the Celtiberians were not described by an observer such as Julius Caesar, who in his *De bello gallico* provides detailed accounts of Gaulish customs. It is true that Poseidonius' ethnographic description of the Iberian people is famous, but only part of it survives, poorly preserved, in Diodorus Siculus, Appian and Strabo. In addition, his writings were late in date and reflect the archetypical bias of a cultured outsider observing tribal primitives.

The main aim of this paper is to show how the study of a few ancient Spanish place and personal names makes it possible to identify some of the Celtiberians' basic sociopolitical institutions, and the speed with which they changed during the third and second centuries BC. By researching personal- and god-names (*-reiks, Bande*) or place-names (*-dunum, Contrebia,*
Complutum / Complega), we can recognize the creation of tribal chiefdoms with warlike retinues, the process of town synoikismos or a people's ethnogenesis, and the domination of a pre-Celtic people by a Celtic minority with a powerful and warlike aristocracy.

According to Titus Livius, a mercenary of Spanish origin named Moericus distinguished himself in the Second Punic War during Syracuse's defense against the siege of Consul Claudius Marcellus. The Syracusans had assigned Moericus and his mercenaries to protect the Acradiana Fort which controlled the port of Syracuse. The Roman general managed to get Moericus and his group to defect by including in the group of ambassadors he sent to parlay with the Spanish chief a Spaniard in the service of Rome called Belligenes, who managed to speak with Moericus alone and, by describing the course of the war in Spain, convinced him to betray the Syracusans. To close the deal, Moericus sent his brother to the Roman general as a hostage. As a reward for his defection Moericus was given a place of honour in Marcellus' ovatio ceremony, Roman citizenship, and five hundred iugera (ca. 125 hectares) of land in the territory of one of the conquered Sicilian cities (specifically Murgentia) for himself and his soldiers. His compatriot Belligenes was given 400 iugera (ca. 100 hectares) in the same Sicilian region.

The first thing that should be noted is the importance of the mercenary group headed by Moericus; secondly, the close ties between Moericus and his soldiers, all mercenaries of Spanish origin, and his undoubted chieftainship; and thirdly, based on his name, the strong possibility that Belligenes was a Celtiberian. It seems logical to think that Moericus belonged to an ethnic or tribal group that, if not exactly the same, was close to that of Belligenes, given his familiarity with Moericus and the fact that he was able to tell him of the affairs of their country. In this context it seems appropriate to attempt to analyse the Celtic roots of the name Moerico; it could well derive from Mog- and -reiks. The existence of a Celtiberian personal name ending in -reiks is still controversial. For our purposes it should be remembered that gutturals were clearly differentiated in the oblique cases of the Latin declination of the Gaulish equivalents, as in the case Alletorix / Alletorigis. It also seems that the guttural was quite clearly articulated in Celtiberian. Thus, the personal name Teiuoreicis on the Luzaga bronze is read Deivorix by Tovar and Devorex by Schmoll, while Lejeune reads it as Devoriges.

Moericus' name and the accompanying anecdote are not the only pieces of evidence among the Celtiberians at the end of the third century BC for the existence of a large group of
armed men closely tied to a leader.\textsuperscript{20} Outside Hispania, the earliest evidence of the basic Celtic institution of the -reiks and of the armed retinue are found associated with the Cymbrians and the Teutones at the end of the second century BC.\textsuperscript{21} But the story of Moericus is evidence for the existence of this type of band in the Celtiberian world by the end of the third century BC. Of course, the similarity of the socio-political evolution of the Hispano-Celts in comparison with the development of the La Tène Celtic peoples seems to be convincing proof, and might very well put an end to the time-worn description of the former as archaic with respect to the latter. Undoubtedly, these war bands would have appeared first in the Celtiberian groups with a higher degree of social complexity, and they may therefore have co-existed with other, more archaic and less aristocratically organized Männerbünde\textsuperscript{22} such as the Germanic Heerhaufen or bands of warriors of the same age like the archaic Roman iuventus. These groups are mentioned in Celtiberia in the year 181 BC \textsuperscript{23}, and their rituals as a religious brotherhood continued in the Iberian northwest until the times of the Roman Empire, as Fernandez-Albalat has proven based on the votive dedications to indigenous divinities related to an ethonym (or tribal unit name\textsuperscript{24}), whose names indicate the idea of cohesion (Bandua), chieftainship (Cosus and Reva), or have to do with the otherworld (Nabia) proper to these war bands.\textsuperscript{25}

One of the fundamental problems in the study of the peninsular Celts has been the question of the forms and dates of their expansion from their central European homes and their penetration of the Iberian peninsula. In my opinion, Martin Almagro-Gorbea's so-called "gun-shot" or constant infiltration theory aptly frames the question.\textsuperscript{26} The image fits the well documented ver sacrum among the Celtic groups neighboring the Iberian peninsula.\textsuperscript{27} It also allows us to pose all types of suggestions related to the phenomena of linguistic sub- and super-strata in the Iberian Peninsula, including the possible existence of bilingualism as well as different languages for different social levels of the socio-economic and political hierarchy.\textsuperscript{28}

M. Koch tried some years ago to document these movements and "gun-shots" with the help of place-names ending in -briga\textsuperscript{29} and ethnonyms of the celtici type that are found in parts of the southwest and northwest of the Iberian peninsula.\textsuperscript{30} Place-names such as -dunum and ethnonyms of the galli type that can be documented along the penetration routes through the central Pyrenees and also in the northwest of the Peninsula could document the entry of La Tène Gaulish groups at a late period.\textsuperscript{31} However, the clearest onomastic evidence of the existence of these socio-political practices and systems of expansion among Peninsular Celts is doubtless that
provided by the toponym *Complega* in an anecdote about that Celtiberian city recorded in two different sets of sources, one in Livy and one in Appian, repeated in Diodorus.

Livy's report\(^{32}\) goes as follows: Q. Fulvius Flaccus marched from Aebura (modern Talavera de la Reina?) through Carpetania to Contrebia, which he easily conquered, since a strong Celtiberian rescue army, which he would also later defeat, had not arrived in time. Appian\(^{33}\) writes that Flaccus, after defeating the Lusons, put siege to Complega, a recently founded and fortified city that was growing very rapidly where many Lusons, defeated and made land-less by the Romans, had taken refuge after being forced to lead a wandering life. Finally, one of Diodorus' Byzantine *excerpta*\(^{34}\) describes how the city of the Kemeletes, founded by fugitives and bandits, was besieged by Fulvius Flaccus using the above-described strategy, and includes Appian's anecdote about Complega.

These coincidences tend to indicate that both Appian's and Diodorus' narrations used the same source, most probably Polybius. But Livy's text, analyzed by Fatás, poses a greater problem: is that source different or complementary?\(^{35}\) A possible solution to this question would be to consider that Complega was written in place of Contrebia; another possibility is that they were different cities. In favor of the second hypothesis is the fact that the defeat of the Lusons could well be the one that Livy describes after Flaccus' taking of Contrebia. In this case, it may be significant that the Contrebia anecdote in Livy is included in his reference to the taking of several *oppida* in Celtiberia by Flaccus after the victory in Contrebia. However, there are indications that Complega could easily be confused with Contrebia, something that would support the first hypothesis.

The reference to the *Kemeletoi*, who according to Diodorus were the natives of the city, is more difficult to explain as a transcription error of the inhabitants of Contrebia and Complega. The ethnonym *Kemeletoi* has the normal Greek suffix for these words and its root could be related to the well-known Celtiberian personal-name *Camal-*\(^{36}\). Maria L. Albertos Firmat believes that this is a variant of the well-documented Euro-Celtic root *Camul-*\(^{36}\), which, curiously enough, has not been found in Spain, despite the importance of the god Camulo among the Gauls.\(^{37}\) If this were true, the *Kemeletoi* could be a people dedicated to Mars-Camulo. We should keep in mind that in the Ossian cycle, Cumhaill (Camulo) is the father of Finn, leader of the Fianna, that mystic band of itinerant rovers and warriors.\(^{38}\)

In fact, an association of warriors of this type -- a typical *Männerbund* -- would
correspond closely to the characteristics provided in the texts of Appian and Diodorus regarding the inhabitants of the city, and could also have a parallel in two well-known references attributed to Poseidonius about the Aquitanian Celts and the Lusitanians. The first is the above-mentioned passage in Strabo in which he states that the Tectosages of Toulouse, when affected by internal disputes or an excess of population, would round up a group of young people who would be forced to emigrate and settle in a far-off land, together with similar youngsters from neighboring villages. The second is the above-mentioned passage from Diodorus referring to Lusitanian banditry, in which he writes that destitute young Lusitanians would periodically abandon their homes to meet in hidden parts of the mountains and form warrior bands that lived by pillaging settlements in the neighboring areas.

A different but related problem is that posed by the name Contrebia itself. Its etymology has been related to the Celtic word treb-, or house, preceded by a preposition with a meaning like that of its Latin homophone. Thus Contrebia would mean something like "shared room". The existence of several Contrebias in pre-Roman Celtiberia and their onomastic differentiation from an ethnonym (Carbica of the Carpetani, Belaisca of the Belli, and Leukade) suggests that the term might signify a phenomenon like the synoicism of Hellenic archaism, something which is supported by written sources, as in the case of Segeda. If we were to identify the city of the rovers in Diodorus' and Appian's texts with Livy's Contrebia, we would have evidence of one of the ways of carrying out the synoicistic process: the catalyst of a real, migrating Hispano-Celtic Heerhaufen like that of the Tectosages of Toulouse mentioned by Strabo.

The main contribution of the lexical analysis presented here is that it lays to rest a long-standing historiographical myth regarding the archaic and peripheral character of the Spanish Celts, particularly the Celtiberians, in relation to the La Tène Continental Celts. Moreover, this study demonstrates that the socio-political La Tène institution of the armed retinue can be documented in the Celtiberians earlier than in any other Celtic ethnic group, specifically in the second half of the third century BC. The debate regarding the importance of the terms used and of the material culture required to label an ethnic group is won by the culture that first can be shown to exhibit such manifestations. As a result, in future Celtiberian society will need to be considered as having been much more complex and hierarchical than was originally thought, and the expansion and migration of the Celts across Spain will have to be understood in light of such dynamic La Tène institutions as the armed retinue and long distance migrating bands.
Endnotes


3 This point of view is also that of F. Fischer, Die Ethnogenese der Kelten aus der Sicht der Vor- und Frühgeschichte. In W. Bernhard and A. Kandler-Pálsson (eds) *Ethnogenese europäischer Völke: Aus der Sicht der Anthropologie und Vor- und Frühgeschichte*, Stuttgart and New York: Fischer, 1986, 209-224.


7 This can be seen in names such as *Mediolanum*.


9 In early medieval Ireland the *dunum* (*dún*) place-names have parallels in the Saxon *borough* of Great Britain; they are strongholds *opera et natura muniti* for housing the Island’s petty kings. Cf. M. Richter, *Medieval Ireland. The Enduring Tradition*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988, 23).


14 The historic details of this story can be found in R. Marino, *La Sicilia dal 241 al 210 a.C.*, Roma, 1988, 81 ff.
The ending could mean "son, sprung from", and it is well attested in Hispano-Celtic personal names (M. L. Albertos Firmat, *La onomástica personal primitiva de Hispania Tarraconense y Bética*, Salamanca, 1966, 279 ff.). It must be remembered that in Republican times a Celtiberian aristocrat appears with the personal name suffix -genos, Retogenes, a member of the Arevacos tribal group (Appian, *Ib.*, 407); and Belligenes may be another example.


Another Celtiberian nobleman with a war-band in the late third century BC was Allucius, princeps celtiberorum, who, according to Livy (26, 50,12), met Scipio in 209-208, along with his 1,500 followers. According to Livy (44,33), the Celtiberians defending Contrebria in 181 BC were 17,000 men, among them 400 horsemen, with 62 war banners. Probably there were 1,500 warriors forming a unit under each of these banners, the exact figure of Allucius' followers. A basic band of 1,500 warriors could then be the standard figure for the Celtiberian Männerbünde, whose members were tied to a noble leader by a strong oath of loyalty (Iberian devotio: Cf. J. M Blázquez, *La Sociedad y la Economía en la Hispania Romana*, Madrid, 1975, 350 ff.).


27. An example are the Tectosages of Toulouse (Strabo, 4.1.13). In Celtic Ireland the famous story of the *Fianna* shows a war expedition undertaken by a Celtic *Männerbund*.

28. The Vardulli and Berones may have the same history; both were Celtic peoples from a linguistic point of view.

29. These place-names, *pace* Rix, appear in Spain in later times: Iuliobriga, Flaviobriga and a few more. This relationship found in Hispano-Celtic languages could have a parallel in the Irish language, in which can be detected place-names such as *bri/brig* "hill", and *dún* "royal stronghold*. Cf. M. Richter, *Medieval Ireland. The Enduring Tradition*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988, 23.


32. Livy 40. 33.

33. *Iber.*, 42.

34. Diodorus 29. 28.


38. In this well-known legend Finn is also called Demné, "The Deer", and his wife Sadv, who gave birth to Oisin, "the little deer", whose son in turn was called "the lover of the deers", is a she-deer during half of the year. This story could have a parallel in the famous legend about Sertorius, who kept a "divine" she-
deer. If so, this guerrilla fighter who successfully confronted the mighty Roman legions could have been a leader of a band of Celtiberians and Lusitanians, making use of themes much loved by the young Hispano-Celtic warriors. In Sertorius' story there is also paradoxography: Cf. L.A. García Moreno, Paradoxography and Political Ideals in Plutarch's Life of Sertorius, in P.A. Stadter, ed., Plutarch and the Historical Tradition, London and New York, 1992, 132-158.

39 Strabo, 4.1.13.

40 Diodorus, 5.34.

41 On the possible Poseidonian origin of this see: J. Malitz, Die Historien des Poseidonios, München, 1983, 121. On the common interpretations of this story see: L.A. García Moreno, Tumultus Hispaniae: rebeliones y revueltas indígenas en la España de época romano-republicana, Polís, 1 (1989a): 81-107; and Ibid., La Hispania anterior a nuestra Era: verdad, ficción y prejuicio en la Historiografía antigua y moderna, in Actas del VI Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos, III, Madrid, 1989b, 31 ff. Also, S. Dyson, The Creation of the Roman Frontier, Princeton, 1985, 174 ff. During the late second century BC and early first century BC, these events only took place among the Lusitanians, and not among the Celtiberians, because the latter were better controlled by Rome.

Bibliography

Albertos Firmat, M.L.

Almagro-Gorbea, M.

Almagro-Gorbea, M. and J. M. Álvarez


Blázquez, J.M.

Burillo Mozota, F.

Ciprés, P.


Dyson, S.

Edelstein, L. and I.G. Kidd

Edelstein, L. and I.G. Kidd

Fatás, G
1981. Romanos y Celtíberos citeriores en el siglo I antes de Cristo. *Caesaraugusta* 53-54: 195-
234.

Fernández Albalat, B.

Fischer, F.


García Moreno, L.A.

González Rodríguez, M.C.

Goudineau, C.

Green, M.

Hawkes, C.

de Hoz, J. and L. Michelena

Kalbe, P.
Koch, M.  

Lejeune, M.  


Malitz, J.  

Mallory, J.P.  

Marco Simón, F.  

Marino, R.  

Momigliano, A.  

Morgan, L.H.  

Renfrew, C.  

Richter, M.  

Schlesinger, W.  

Schmoll, U.  
1959. *Die Sprachen der vorkeltischen Indogermanen Hispaniens und das Keltiberische*. 
Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.


