



Viriathus: And the Lusitanian Resistance to Rome

Luis Silva

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In the middle years of the second century BC, Rome was engaged in the conquest and pacification of what is now Spain and Portugal. They met with determined resistance from several tribes but nobody defied them with more determination and skill than Viriathus. Apparently of humble birth, he emerged as a leader after the treacherous massacre of the existing tribal chieftains and soon proved himself a gifted and audacious commander.

Relying on hit and run guerrilla tactics, he inflicted repeated humiliating reverses upon the theoretically superior Roman forces, uniting a number of tribes in resistance to the invader and stalling their efforts at conquest and pacification for eight years. Still unbeaten in the field, he was only overcome when the Romans resorted to bribing some of his own men to assassinate him (though they reneged on the agreed payment, claiming they did not reward traitors!).

Though renowned in his day Viriathus has been neglected by modern historians, a travesty that Luis Silva puts right in this thoroughly researched and accessible account. Portuguese by birth, the author draws on Portuguese research and perspectives that will be refreshing to English-language scholars and his own military experience also informs his analysis of events. What emerges is a stirring account of defiance, heroic resistance against the odds and, ultimately, treachery and tragedy.

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