



## [Florus, Epitome of the Roman History of Titus Livius I.33.7-8](#)

The submission of Spain.

**Name of the author:** Florus

**Date:** 117 CE to 161 CE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** History

**Title of work:** Epitome of the Roman History of Titus Livius

**Reference:** I.33.7-8

**Commentary:**

The title and the dating of Florus's work have been greatly discussed, as has the identity of the author himself. We will summarize these debates by recalling that Florus's *tabella*, or picture, of the history of the Roman people is not an epitome of Livy's work. Rather, it was an original composition in which Florus decided to present the history of the Roman people from the foundation of Rome by Romulus to the reign of Augustus (the latest event is Varus's defeat in 9 CE), by dividing it into four ages of life (*infantia*, *adulescentia*, *iuventus*, *senectus*), each age being internally organized through narratives of internal or external wars; of times of stability or of crisis. Among these ages only the first three are presented in Florus's work, the fourth one – only mentioned in the preface of the work –, is presented as an age of decline of the Roman people until Trajan's martial policy enabled them to recover strength. This mention of Trajan is one of the soundest element which can be used to assert that Florus may have composed his work under Hadrian or under Antoninus Pius's reigns. Finally, for what concerns the identity of the author, many with the name Florus are known, meaning that many scholars have proposed to identify him with a poet of Spanish origin. What remains certain is that the author of the *tabella* identifies himself many times with the Roman people by using the first person, making it obvious that Florus claimed "no identity other than Roman," and wrote from a Roman perspective (Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 126, 129; for further details about the work, see the introduction in [Florus, Epitome Taken from Titus Livius, Preface](#)).

After the narratives of the destruction of Carthage and Corinth, Florus deals with the various campaigns led by Rome in *Hispania* from the Punic Wars until the Roman victory at the siege of Numantia in 133 BCE (see I.33-I.34[II.18].17). The originality of Florus's presentation of Spain is that he gives a partially lenient portrayal of the inhabitants of *Hispania* by trying to downplay the supposed natural hostility that Spaniards would have had to Rome ("Spain never had any desire to rise as a whole against us, nor wanted to gather their strengths, nor to go after hegemony, nor to defend collectively their freedom"; II.33.3), and by explaining the origins of their hostility to Rome by the belligerent attitudes of the Carthaginians present in *Hispania* (I.33.3-5). The opinion of Florus about the inhabitants of *Hispania* appears different from that of Livy, who considers that they had been naturally hostile to Rome (see Livy, *History of Rome* XXVIII.19.6-7; Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. 74, n. 5). Florus's presentation of the Spaniards and the attention that he pays to the evaluation of their dangerousness has to be understood in the global perspective of Florus's opinion about the legitimacy of wars led by Rome since the third Punic War. As Hervé Inglebert has rightly recalled, Florus is quite unique among Roman authors in highlighting that some wars waged by Rome – as the Third Punic War, the destruction of Corinth or the taking of Numantia (mentioned in I.31-34) – were unfair, because Rome attacked peoples or cities which did not represent an immediate threat. Such questioning of Rome's aggressive expansionist policy – totally absent from Livy's writings for instance – shows the originality of Florus's point of view, which may have been that of a person who accepted Roman domination and assumed the senatorial Roman legacy, but may have considered this legacy from the point of view of a Roman originating from a province of the Empire (Inglebert, *Les Romains chrétiens*, p. 46-47). Florus may thus be considered a good representative of a "Latin conception of the Roman history" according to which the discernment of the existence of a period of corruption and of violent imperialism between the glorious Republic and the triumphant Empire, provided the best solution to make politically acceptable the fact that, in the past, the ancestors of provincials who were now Romans had waged war against Roman armies. Such an interpretation of Florus's development about some unjust wars waged by Rome is convincing, but it is important to recall that Florus's identity remains largely unknown, especially his identification as a provincial from Spain.

Thus, in I.33, even if Florus recalls that Spaniards were originally not hostile to Rome, the presence of



Carthaginians is presented by the author as the main cause of the breaking up of conflicts in this region. After having mentioned the courageous actions of Publius and Cnaeus Scipio, who killed the brothers of Hannibal but were themselves killed in 211 BCE, and were the first Romans in charge of military operations in *Hispania*, Florus deals with the son of the first and the nephew of the second, the future Scipio Africanus, who when he was only 24 years old took over the leadership of the military operations in *Hispania* and won decisive victories until the end of the Carthaginian presence in Spain in 206 BCE (§ 7). Through the following sentence Florus recalls that since 218 BCE – the beginning of the second Punic War –, a Roman province had actually come into existence in the Iberian peninsula, in the framework of Rome's fight against Hannibal for supremacy in the Western Mediterranean: "And so, it was, as it were, a new and independent province that Scipio, soon afterwards known as the African, attacked to avenge his father and uncle" (see Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique*, p. 20).

First, one of the most quoted sentences of the text presented here is certainly Florus's adage: *Plus est provinciam retinere quam facere*; "It is harder to hold onto a province than to create one" (§ 8). As Patrick Le Roux has rightly noticed, this adage was shared by other authors like Cassius Dio and Fronto, who seem to share with Florus the same conception of "senatorial imperialism," implemented by Augustus, according to which the control of populations, one after the other, was a vital process which could be nothing but progressive and requiring of time (see Le Roux, "Armées et contrôles," p. 61, n. 75). The way Florus retrospectively describes in § 8 how Rome succeeded to submit the Iberians after the operations led by Scipio Africanus is interesting because it raises the question of the nature of the senatorial policy in the Iberian provinces: "It is harder to hold onto a province than to create one. And so, generals were sent throughout the regions, here and there, and, with much toil and not without bloody conflicts, they taught these so fierce peoples – who had been hitherto free and reticent to [be submitted to] the yoke – to be slaves."

The global understanding of the evolution of this senatorial policy in the Iberian provinces has divided scholars into those who defend the idea that it was a dilettante policy and those who think that every operation was the result of rational choices themselves based on a territorialised conception of the Iberian regions, and whose aim would have been to make the future military operations easier, so as to in the end ensure total control of these regions. This second perspective has to be called into question: 1) by the fact that Roman senators did not take into account territorialised strategic schemes; 2) by the fact that the case of *Hispania* was not considered as a priority by Rome – the relatively small number of troops present in the peninsula proves this; 3) the Roman Senate and People never supported any global plan of submission and control of *Hispania* (on the nature of the senatorial policy in the Iberian provinces see Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique*, p. 22-23). However, without overstressing the dilettante nature of the senatorial policy in Iberian provinces, Florus's statement about the fact that generals "were sent throughout the regions, here and there" reflects the fact that the magistrates *pro imperio* who were sent into *Hispania* had an annual office, which could be prorogued for usually no more than one year, a reality of the forms of control of Iberia, which limited the existence of any larger plan of control of the *provinciae Hispaniarum* (see Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique*, p. 23). Such an impression is confirmed by one sentence preceding our text. After having mentioned that *Hispania* became aware of its strength after having been defeated by the Scipiones, Florus writes: "In Spain, we fought for around two hundred years, since the first *Scipiones* to the first Caesar Augustus, not continuously, nor according to a plan, but at the call of circumstance..." (I.33.5). We should not forget that Florus proposes here a retrospective and rhetorical point of view of the history of the provinces of *Hispania*, a point of view which is, however, deeply influenced by the context in which he evolved. At his time, Iberian provinces were pacified, prosperous, and they had recently furnished one emperor, Trajan, and to a lesser extent, a second one, Hadrian. As Patrick Le Roux rightly mentions, through this sentence, Florus presents the evolution of the forms of control of the *provinciae Hispaniarum* as resulting from alternating adaptations to pacification or warlike contexts. This scholar thus recalls that any quick domination or brutal exercise of authority would have been counterproductive to Rome's interests – Rome's main objective remained the progressive and lasting pacification of its provinces. Rome's military strength was actually an important element in the process of the construction and pacification of the provinces, but it could not be the only one (Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique*, p. 50).

Having recalled these important notions about the Roman global approach concerning the various methods of control which could be used in the provinces, and concerning the evolution of the senatorial policy in the Iberian provinces, we can notice that Florus's vocabulary to describe the provinces submitted by Rome appears as quite unique because of the repeated use of the vocabulary of enslavement or of mastery in connection with provinces or with Roman power. Myles Lavan has accurately studied this vocabulary and reached the conclusion that "the enslavement of the provinces is the real *telos* of Roman expansion in Florus," whereas Florus could have perfectly chosen to highlight in his work the integrative capacity and unified nature of the Empire created by Roman expansion (see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 127-131, quotation p. 130; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 101-111; on the opposition between this language of enslavement and the notion of *corpus imperii* see [Florus, Epitome Taken from Titus Livius I.33.7-8](#)). On the contrary, Florus appears as one of the Roman authors who uses most frequently this



language of slavery/mastery when he deals with the relationships between Rome and its provinces. Myles Lavan has put this fact in relation to the context of the second half of the second and the beginning of the third centuries, a period during which other authors like Cassius Dio, Herodian, and Justin (through his anthology of Trogus Pompeius's work, on which see [Justin, Epitome of the Philippic Histories of Pompeius Trogus XXX.4.6-16](#)) also use the metaphor of enslavement when they deal with the formation of the empire. Myles Lavan has listed some elements which could explain this global phenomenon, such as the increase of the use of the title "master" (*dominus*), to refer to or to address oneself to the emperor (Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 143-145; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 111); or the fact that the progressive extension of the Roman citizenship to an even greater number of provincials must not have been well accepted by peoples – coming from Rome, Italy or other regions of the Empire – who had been Roman citizens for several generations, and who, in this context, may have wanted to manifest their disapproval. According to Myles Lavan, Florus would be part of the "imperial elites" who insisted on the division between Romans and subjects because they reacted to the "integrative processes at work in the second and third centuries with a heightened exclusivism" (Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 148-149; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 111).

The text presented here provides a good example of the use of this vocabulary of enslavement/mastery by Florus when he retrospectively deals with the steps of the construction of Rome's universal empire. Thus, the author writes about *Hispania* that between the Punic War and the siege of Numantia, the Roman generals taught (*docuerunt*) the Iberians "to be slave" (*servire*). On the other side, the Iberians are presented as savage peoples (*ferocissimas gentes*) who "had been hitherto free (*liberas*) and reticent to [be submitted to] the yoke (*impatientes iugi*). The scheme presented by Florus is clear, Roman generals are the masters, and the Iberians, the slaves – implicitly compared to draught animals – submitted to Rome's *iugum*, "yoke." Myles Lavan has rightly shown that the language of slavery is often connected in Latin literature, with "the imagery of breaking animals to harness" (see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 128; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 83-88). However, for what concerns the use of this language of slavery and "animalising imagery," Florus is certainly the Roman author who uses it most extensively (for the many references to the enslaved provinces and to Roman mastery in Florus's work, see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 127-130; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 102-104). Actually, in his whole work, provincials of other regions than Spain are also compared to slaves and/or to draught animals. For instance, the Macedonians, before the outbreak of the third Macedonian War, are said to have "thrown off the yoke" (I.30.2); and Macedonia, after the Roman victory, is said to "have been punished by enslavement" (*servitute multavit*, I.30.5; see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 127). The association of "animalising imagery" with the idea of captivity of the provinces is also present when Florus deals with Caesar's campaigns against the Germans, and when he symbolizes their defeat through the episode of the construction of a bridge across the Rhine, about which Florus concludes that the Germans "saw their Rhine place as it were a prisoner under the yoke of the bridge" (I.45.15).

Coming back to the case of *Hispania*, it is interesting to see that Florus does not limit his assimilation of the Iberians to slaves and draught animals to the period of the pacification of Spain (between 206 and 133 BCE). Myles Lavan has rightly picked up another passage of Florus's narrative, which deals with the difficulties of Augustus in ensuring Roman control over the northern provinces of the Iberian peninsula. Florus writes: "Peace was still a new experience. The people's proud and haughty necks (*cervices*), not yet accustomed to the harshness of slavery (*frenis servitutis*), struggled against the yoke that had been recently forced upon them (*ab imposito nuper iugo resiliebant*)" (II.21[IV.12].2; we quote the translation of Myles Lavan, see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 128; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 103-104). Once again, when he deals with the control of inhabitants of *Hispania*, Florus combines the language of slavery and the implicit comparison between the provincials and draught animals. As Myles Lavan notices, the violence of the scene is obvious (the yoke is imposed and the provincials resist to the coercion of the snaffle, *frena*) and it clearly recalls the scene described in the text commented here, as Florus mentions that the Roman generals experienced "bloody conflicts" and that the indigenous peoples were also "reticent to [be submitted to] the yoke." The continuity of this use of enslavement vocabulary and of a violent animalising imagery to deal with the inhabitants of Spain shows that Florus may have wanted to present the provincials of the Empire essentially from this perspective. Of course, in this work which narrates the progressive settlement of Rome's universal hegemony, Florus does not describe the situation of the provincials of his time. But the impression that rises from his book is that until Augustus's reign – which is the terminus of the period dealt with in his book – he presents provincials, and here the inhabitants of various regions of *Hispania*, as being subjects of Rome who had been constantly maintained in their state of slavery, submitted to Rome's yoke, since the Roman conquests of the various regions (see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 128; Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 104). Such extensive use of the language of slavery for the inhabitants of the *provinciae Hispaniarum* is all the more surprising in that in many parts of his work, Florus praises Spain (see Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. cxiii, n. 3; Hose, *Erneuerung der Vergangenheit*, p. 134) and in that as we have said previously, Trajan and Hadrian were two emperors who had Spanish origins. This apparent contradiction perfectly illustrates the fact that Florus may have wanted to organize his whole work according to a very simple paradigm: Roman expansion led to a permanent enslavement



of the provinces and to the progressive assertion of Roman mastery over the world.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Carthago](#)
- [certamen](#)
- [doceo](#)
- [dux](#)
- [ferox](#)
- [gens](#)
- [impatiens](#)
- [imperium](#)
- [invado](#)
- [iugum](#)
- [labor](#)
- [liber](#)
- [provincia](#)
- [retineo](#)
- [Romani](#)
- [Scipio](#)
- [servio](#)
- [stipendiaria provincia](#)
- [subiicio](#)
- [victor](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [Carthage](#)
- [enslavement](#)
- [provinces](#)
- [Roman conquests](#)
- [Roman mastery](#)
- [Roman power](#)
- [slave](#)
- [Spain](#)
- [submission](#)
- [war](#)
- [yoke](#)

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