

Hercules in the Iberian Peninsula

Hercules is the latin way to name Heracles, the most famous hero of the greek mythology. After murdering his family in an outburst of anger, caused by the goddess Hera in the shadows, the delphic sibyl told Hercules he had to carry on a serie of twelve jobs as a penance for his horrible acts. And the tenth job brought the Greek hero to the Iberian Peninsula to steal the giant Gerion's cattle.

The giant Gerion was an anthropomorphic being formed by three bodies, with their respective heads and limbs that lived on Eriteia Island (currently, Cadiz), according to the legend.

The giant owned a dog named Ortro, and a splendid cabin of cattle. Precisely the object of desire of Heracles was that cabin, where he stole the herd of red cows and oxen. Gerion went in search of revenge and fought against Heracles, but he threw an arrow, poisoned with the blood of the Hydra, which crossed his three bodies and ended his life.

Hercules and the giant Gerion



Importance in history

However, as recorded in the “*Estoria de España*” by Alfonso X the Wise, written in the thirteenth century, the giant’s head was buried in the same place where the Tower of Hercules in La Coruña. Mythological origin of a lighthouse that was built by Romans in the first century, between the reigns of Nero and Vespasian.

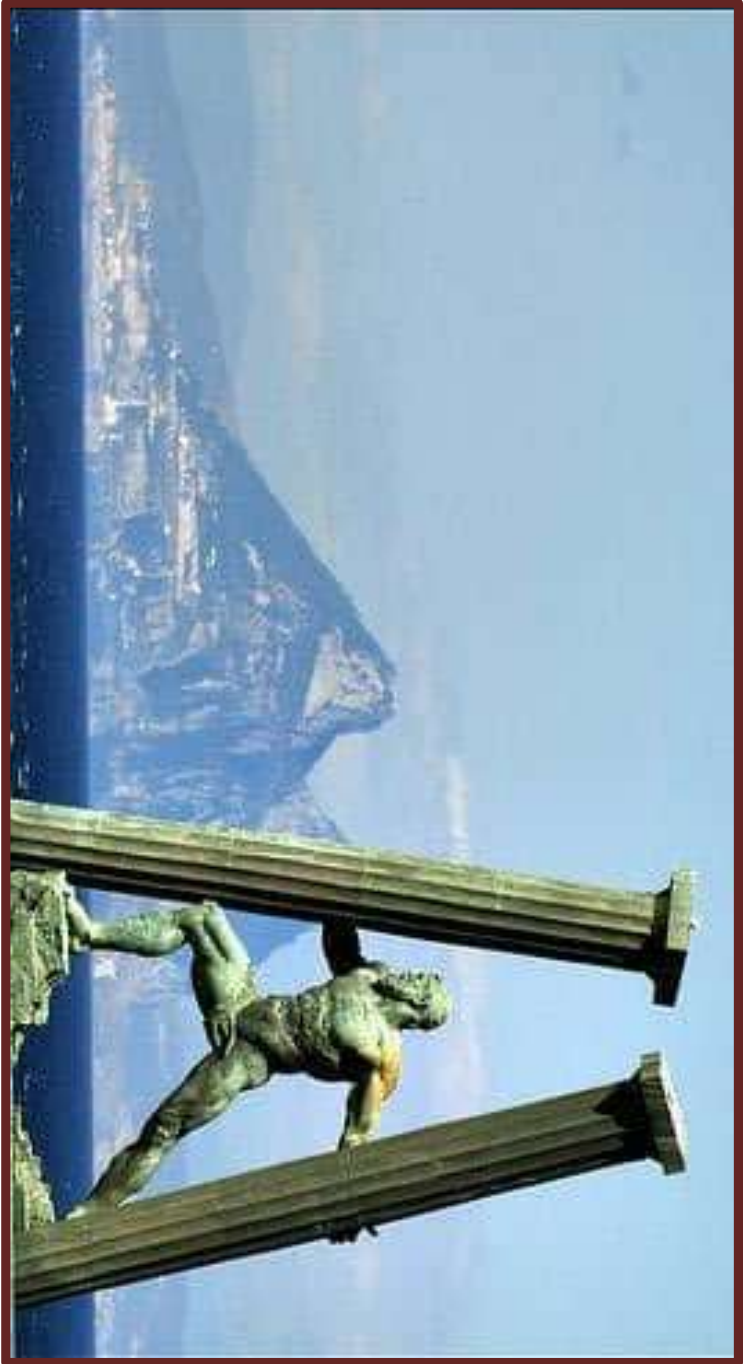
If something were true in the myth of Gerión, Pompeyo Trogo – Roman historian of the time of Augustus – noted the most likely theory. Thus, according to Trogo, Gerión was not a giant with three bodies, but they were three brothers, who attacked Hercules seeing him steal his cattle.



Hercules columns

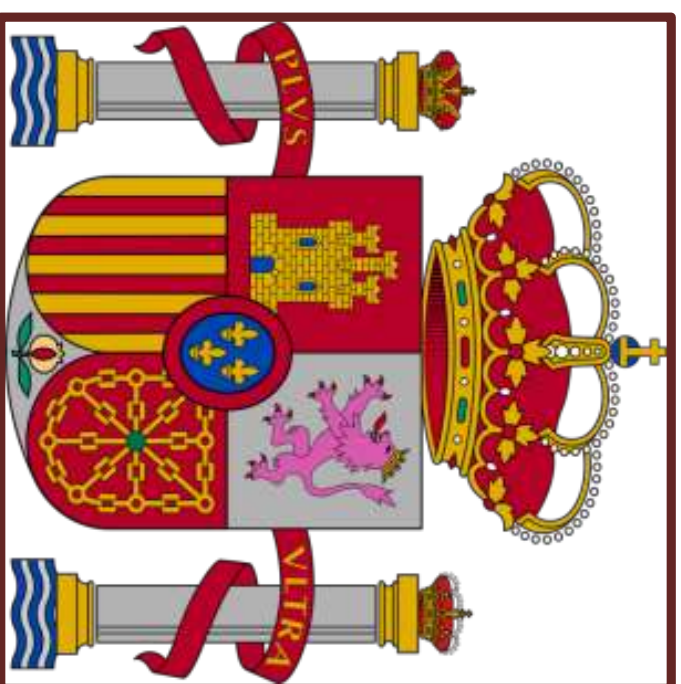
The adventure of Hercules in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as its trip before arriving at Eriteia, was prodigal in struggles of all kinds, to the extent that «for commemorate their exploits the columns were raised to separate Europe from Africa”. Two columns, located in the Strait of Gibraltar, which indicated the limit of the known world, the last frontier for the ancient navigators of the Mediterranean.

The northern column (former Kalpe or “Galpe”) is identified with the Rock of Gibraltar. However, the identity of the southern column (ancient «Ábila» or «Abila») has been disputed between Mount Hacho in Ceuta (Spain) and Mount Musa (Morocco).



Symbology

Subsequently, this mythological symbol has served to adorn different Spanish shields. Among them, that of the monarch Carlos I of Spain, who agreed to the suggestion of his doctor and advisor, Luigi Marliano, to incorporate the columns with the “Plus Ultra” currency. This heraldic element has remained with more or less presence in the course of successive monarchs, and in the currently appears on the shield of Spain.



In turn, the shield of Andalusia shows the figure of a young Hercules between two columns located in the Strait of Gibraltar, with an inscription at the foot of a legend that says: «Andalusia by itself, for Spain and Humanity», about the background of an Andalusian flag. Close the two columns a semicircular arch with the Latin words "Dominator Hercules Fundator", also on the background of the Andalusian flag.

