



Xana Galinda

Astur People - Spain

After the collapse of the Toledo's Visigothic kingdom, with the arrival of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula in 711 C.E., northern peoples tried to organise resistance by creating various kingdoms. One of them was the Kingdom of the Asturs.

Among its kings, at the end of the 8th century, there was one Mauregatus, an infamous man, because he agreed to the Hundred Maidens Tribute. According to legend, the Astur king had committed to the Andalusi Emir of Cordova, Abd ar-Rahman I, that he would give him 100 Astur maidens every year in exchange for his support. Legend also says that the king's soldiers travelled the lands of Asturs once a year to find the most beautiful young women, who were forcibly taken to be sent to the Emir's harem.

One year, when the soldiers went to the village of Illas, a maiden of great beauty called Galinda saw them arrive and fled towards the forest. Deeply distressed, she ran towards a spring that, since time immemorial, was considered sacred. As she approached the pool, she thought she saw the reflection of a beautiful lady in its clear waters.

'Do not be afraid. I will protect you,' said a sweet voice coming from the pool. 'If you will be my xana, I will provide you with a happy life.'

Galinda had heard about the xanas of springs, streams and waterfalls, but had never seen one. The lady of the spring's proposal

filled her with a sense of restlessness, but the sound of the king's soldiers, who were chasing her, filled her with intense anguish.

'What do I need to do to gain your protection?' Galinda said at last.

'Take a sip of my waters and you will free yourself from the soldiers,' was the answer.

She obeyed just in time and was transformed into a beautiful xana just as the soldiers found her. She turned them into lambs, just by looking at them.

The next day, King Mauregatus set off with his most hardened and faithful warriors in search of the soldiers who had left to collect maidens and had not returned. By coincidence, King Mauregatus and his entourage ended up passing by the sacred spring of Illas. There Mauregatus came face to face with Xana Galinda.

Sensing that the mysterious spirit of the waters had used a magic spell with his troops, the king shouted at Galinda, not without some apprehension:

'Where are my soldiers? What have you done with them?'

Galinda, who was now used to her new condition, answered with two questions of her own:

'What soldiers? Do you mean those lambs?'

King Mauregatus turned to where Galinda was looking. He was horrified to see that his troops had been transformed into a flock of lambs.

Terrified at the power of the xana, the king quickly dismounted and, bowing on one knee, begged her not to hurt him and to free his men from her spell, swearing by his ancestors that he would fulfil whatever she would ask of him.

'Yes, I will free all your soldiers,' Galinda replied calmly, 'but you must break the pact that you established with the Emir of Cordova, and you will never again hand over an Astur maiden for the enjoyment of any man, whatever his religion or provenance may be. If you do not

fulfil your word, every time a soldier touches a woman from your kingdom, he will become a lamb, even if that means turning your whole army into a flock of sheep ... and you will turn into their shepherd.'

King Mauregatus did not dare to break his word to Galinda, such was the terror that the beautiful xana caused him. However, the king was killed shortly after, during the rebellion that the counts Arias and Oveco raised against him in revenge for having agreed to such a pact with the Andalusí Emir. □

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Comments

This medieval Asturian legend takes as its protagonist a woman turned into a spirit of nature from the traditions of northern Spain, the *xana*, a spirit living in pure and crystalline waters, running waters such as rivers, streams and waterfalls, but also springs, as we can see in this legend. Some authors link the *xana* to Artemis, goddess of hunting and wild animals, nature, virginity and maidens, capable of relieving women's diseases. It is probably not a coincidence that the old name given to sorceresses in these regions in the Middle Ages was that of *janas*.

In any case, the linking of these nature spirits or goddesses with the feminine and the defence (or healing) of the feminine does not seem to be a coincidence. Not surprisingly, the Astur tribes –Celtic in origin– were built on clans whose family units were essentially matriarchal.

Sources

Ceniza, A. (2017). Leyenda de la xana Galinda. Misterios y Leyendas de Galicia y Asturias (Blog). Retrieved 3 Sept. 2019 from <http://tierra-leyendas.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/la-xana-galinda.html>.

Tierra de Leyendas (2010). La xana Galinda. Tierra de Leyendas (Blog). Retrieved 2 Nov. 2013 from <http://tierra-leyendas.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/la-xana-galinda.html>.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 11a: Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.

