

# Numantia — Similar, But Not The Same

## ● Where is it?



Numancia is a disappeared Celtic Iberian city. The site is located on Mount Murra in Galais, only 7 kilometers north of Soria, Castile and León, Spain.

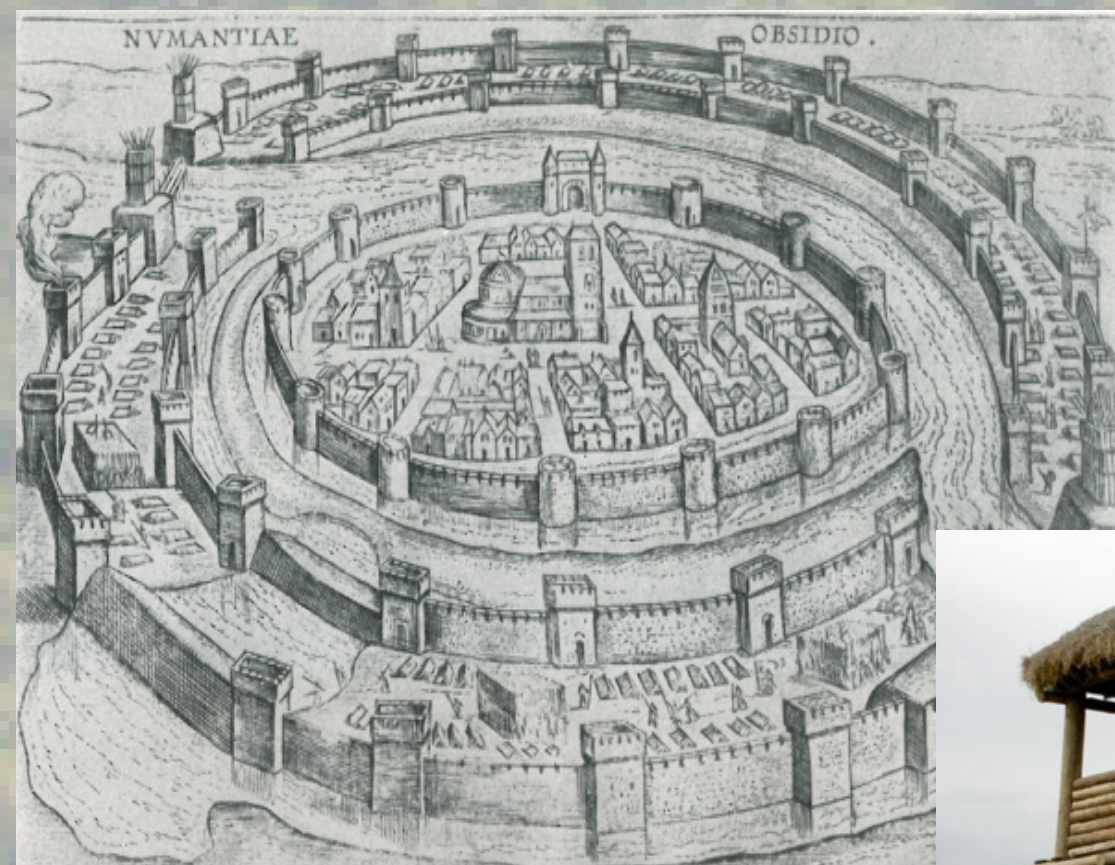
## ● Why is Numantia so famous?

At the beginning of the 11th chapter of Yuval Noah Harari's *A Brief History of Mankind*, there was a reference to a city called Numantia, and perhaps now people know more about the Spanish football team, but in the middle of 2nd century BC, this insignificant little mountain city became a symbol of Spanish courage and independence, which were bought with the spirit and life.

In the 2nd century BC, ancient Rome was an indisputable bully of the entire Mediterranean region, bringing down the Macedonian and Carthaginian empires, conquering the proud Greek city-states, and burned Carthage down into ruins. Meanwhile at Numantia, the local Celtic people were not afraid to get out of Roman control. In fact, Numantia had nothing, only the love of freedom, as well as a desolate home. However, they let the ancient Roman legions repeatedly frustrated, the Roman army can only either surrender or retreat with humiliation.

Finally, in 133 BC, the ancient Roman Senate sent the most heroic Scipio Aemilianus Africanus to lead the 30,000 sergeants to attack again, but they cannot underestimate the Numantia people's fighting spirit and combat skills, directly with fortified fortifications surrounded the city, blocking their contact with the outside world, so that hunger became the largest weapon. More than a year later, Numantia people ran out of food, they found tide is over, then set fire to the city, most people would rather kill themselves than to be the captives of ancient Rome. [1]

In 1882, Numantia was listed as a "national memorial site" and a pilgrimage site for Spanish patriots. To this day, Numantia remains a model of Spanish heroism and patriotism, a monument to the hearts of young people.



Left: Siege of Numantia  
Right: Modern reconstruction of the walls of Numantia



## ● Priest painted on the pottery

From the finds, priests play a different role in Numantia as we can see on the local pottery.

For example, the image below shows a Celtic priest with an apron and a conical cap. We can see five key parts clearly from the Figure: the priest, a jug and a bird in his hands, an altar, and a decorated floor. As the picture shows, the priest holds the jug and putting the bird over an altar. It seems he is going to sacrifice the bird to the nature or to the gods. What caught my attention was the decorated floor. First of all, we need to know that there are many sites have the evidence of the existence of sanctuary, for example, the sanctuary found in Acy-Romance, although the available information does not directly indicate whether it also exists in Numantia, but it is likely to reflect the priest in this society is different from other, he has kind of sacred status, which can indirectly reflect a Celtiberian concept of social hierarchy.



As a part of Celtic culture, although Celtiberian art has the same images (e.g. bird, horse, priests) as other cultures, it is different by focussing on a relatively realistic style, but tends to be an abstract and symbolic form of expression. It is also clearly different from the La Tene art in central Europe.

In addition, we can see from the picture that the priest himself could be a man, then there is a new question, in the whole Celtic culture (not only Iberian), the priesthood of the profession of the subordinate staff of whether there is a female presence? If not, is it possible to reflect a certain hierarchical concept in Celtic society from this question? Although there are articles says Celtic women is likely enjoyed more rights, freedom and political power than those in other culture, [2] we hardly find a women priest till now, so the answer of first question is negative. And from my point of view, it can be an evidence to the social status.

There are various opinions about the development stage and nature of Celtic society in the field of history and archaeology. Some believe that "Celtic society is a typical society in the period of disintegration of primitive commune system and transition to class system". [3] Others think that "Celtic society is a classic example of military democracy". [4] Others think that "Celtic society is an acceptable one. A rudiment of a country can be found", [5] or "even a pre-existing country". [6] But, whatever which one is right, it is clear to know the oppidum is developed in some extent from the image of priest.



## ● If it is same as the priest in other Celtic culture?

Now let's have a look at the Gundestrup cauldron. (Iron Age, c. 100 BC – AD 1). Found in Gundestrup, northern Jutland, Denmark. There are more than one image of priests on the cauldron. From the right picture we can see the priest was also wearing something — a crown on his head, and a collar, but he held his hands high and did not take any props. It seemed that he was not holding a sacrificial ceremony, but rather praying. As for another priest on the different side, he also wear a crown on his head, but put his hands up holding two people's hands. Although we cannot tell why both of them were in this position in a certain answer, we can have a guess that they show the respect to the god or nature in this way.

In addition, from the overall artistic style, it can be obviously different from Numantia's priests. They are less decorative and more realistic. While it's not hard to find that the same thing is that the priests in both places are male, which can also lead to the question I mentioned before.

Then it comes to a concept "Druid". In ancient Greece and Rome, many scholars paid attention to "Druid", the priest of Celtic people in ancient times.

There are different opinions about Druid's identity from time to time. This is mainly due to the inconsistency of the records of classical writers, some of which are first-hand materials, such as Caesar's Gallic War Records, and some of which are second-hand materials, such as Strabo's Geography, which inevitably includes hearsay and subjective speculation.

So what kind of status and role does Druid play in Celtic society? This is a complicated question. According to Paul R. Longian, there are seventeen social roles of Druid: astronomer, prophet, representative of state or state, guardian, judge, peace defender, philosopher, physician, evil antagonist, priest, incantator, good illusionist, Oracle interpreter, owner and sacrificial of land, teacher, defender of tree worship and warrior. [7] Almost an omnipotent "all-rounder" or "all-rounder" group, affecting all aspects of Celtic social life. In a word, Druid, with various social functions, is the core and soul of Druidism and plays an irreplaceable role in the ancient Celtic world: its political role lies in formulating social rules, regulating public-private disputes and maintaining social stability; its educational role lies in receiving apprenticeships and inheriting Celtic knowledge and traditions; its religious role lies in serving as a link between mortals and gods, and in order to maintain social stability. People eliminate disasters and diseases and provide spiritual sustenance. It can be said that they integrated judicial, religious and educational functions, reflecting the social division of labor which was not very clear among the Celts in ancient times. However, in essence, Druid's social functions are religious, and many other functions are derivatives of his spiritual authority.



Different side of Gundestrup cauldron. Iron Age, c. 100 BC – AD 1. Found in Gundestrup, northern Jutland, Denmark.

And do we have Druid in Iberia? I would like to say yes and no. "All known records of Celtiberian religion, and the very substance of its religiosity in the first place, clearly support the existence of a priesthood whose characteristics were similar to those of Druidism, although it did not reach the degree of institutionalization the latter had in Ireland and Gaul, an opinion which I share with Francisco Marco Simón" says Gabriel Sopena. [8] Despite the scarcity of written or other archaeological data, research continues to uncover new evidence of Celtiberian priesthood. Maybe we cannot equate it with the above-mentioned Druid, but we can find that there are some similarities between Numantia's priests and Druid's religious functions, or in other words, the profession on pottery is the product of Druid's localization in Numantia.

## ● Conclusion

Generally speaking, the findings in Numantia have its own character, similar, but not same. Although we have a certain degree of understanding of the origin and culture of Numantia and Celtiberian, but compared with other oppida in Gual, its archaeological data is relatively scarce, which makes our understanding has some limitations. In addition, if we want to have a better understanding of Celtiberian, we must rely not only on the information of the region itself, but also on a comparison with other Celtic cultures, with horizontal comparisons and vertical comparisons combining to obtain more reliable information.

## ● Bibliography

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