

Aim: Presenting the uniqueness of Numantia’s society  
Evidence: Trading centre (lots of items, wool and food), pottery, siege, physical map of its buildings

Introduction

Numantia is a Celtiberian Iron Age site in the Iberian peninsula, well known for conflict with Roman soldiers. During the 13 month siege by Romans under Scipio Aemilianus (134-133 BC), the Numantians decided to burn their own city rather than let the Romans besiege their home, ending in surrender.  
I find this site particularly interesting because of the complexity of the housing and art. Clearly the Numantians were an intellectual people, unique from other cultures that used round-house buildings as in Britain for example. Being a trade centre that offered various goods, the site would no doubt have interacted with multiple groups.

History of Numantia

Historical sources of the siege also discuss the tragedy of the Numantian people, with Cassius Dio covering it in great detail. “In 133 BC, after eight months of siege, the starving population was reduced to cannibalism and, filthy and foul smelling, compelled to surrender.. Families poisoned themselves, weapons were burned, and the beleaguered town set ablaze. Some of the pitiable survivors were chosen for Scipio's triumph, the others were sold as slaves and the town razed to the ground, the territory divided among its neighbours.” (1) Henri Hubert’s *The Greatness and Decline of the Celts* attributes the fall of Numantia to the end of the country exhausting the Celtiberians (2) .

The painting of Numantia known as *The Last Day of Numantia* by Alejo Vera y Estaca, depicts Numantians in a time of crisis, some choosing to kill themselves while others go to the Romans for aid and surrendered (3). Those who chose to commit suicide show the resolve of the Numantians, who would rather die than accept Roman rule, similar of renaissance works which often have a focus on heroic portrayal. A Spanish phrase “*Defensa numantina*” means final resistance to invading forces, and Numantine resistance is a phrase implying absolute stubborn resistance, even against incredible odds which is a compliment to the site’s people.



Pottery

The economy of Numantia was based around ceramic industry, clay, stock raising and wool production, being a trade centre as evidenced by finds of over 300 coins from the Celtiberian and Iberian valleys of the Ebro valley. Numantian pottery had multiple decorations of animals, warriors, and ritual life, similar to other cultures but having unglazed terracotta, unique in itself. (4)  
Numantia being a trade centre would be an important site during the time, offering multiple items that display a unique culture and necessities that would draw in others which must have created multiple trading partners throughout the area. For it to be a trading centre, the social structure of Numantia must have been complex, its people providing resources to other cultures that travel to Numantia. Grains of wheat and rye have been found in Numantia; these were the raw materials of the *caelia* or beer. Trace-element analysis of the bone remains in the necropolis show that the local diet of Numantia was rich in vegetable components, nuts and dried fruit (especially acorns) but poor in animal protein. (5)



# Numantia

Within Numantia there is four categories of burials that each represent social status within their community. The first category being burials with weapons, the second with bronze adornments that shows high social rank and the third with marbles and sewing needles perhaps indicating that the burial was a woman or textile worker. The fourth and final category had no possessions at all, which could be seen as means of disrespecting that individual, leaving no mark on Numantian society.

Burial rites themselves were cremation and funeral for natural deaths, items were then placed in the necropolis along with the ashes of the deceased.



Those who died in battle were picked apart by vultures which was seen as custom because in the Numantian mythology, the warrior’s spirit would live with the gods as their flesh was eaten. This traditional view is evident through pottery depicting the act of a warrior fallen in combat, being scavenged by a vulture, and a crow pecking the body which in my eyes is reminiscent of the Morrígan a fate goddess in Celtic Irish mythology. (6) The Morrígan was capable of shape shifting into a crow, and seeing that animal on the battlefield meant your death during battle or your opponents’. When the crow landed on a body it was the confirmation of that man’s death, and warriors would leave the battlefield until dawn so The Morrígan can claim trophies.

Though Numantia is far away from Ireland, the connection between both of them through religion is very similar, which shouldn’t be ignored, perhaps interacting with each other through trade among other possible ideas.

Amongst the gods certainly worshipped in Numantia was ‘Cernunnos’ as evident from a shred. (7) ‘Cernunnos’ was a god of trees and vegetation being connected to hunting, which was an important aspect of a Numantian’s livelihood alongside other communities that also shared in this belief. Due to the importance of hunting and vegetation in everyday life, tributes to ‘Cernunnos’ must have been done regularly. Potentially sacrifices could have been carried out alongside other offerings frequently. (8) The style of the shred is to portray a slim figured man with animal parts, stylised in the outline for the purpose of making important beings stand out as a god would.

The identity of this god is unknown, possessing antlers similar to Cernunnos which may represent renewal and growth among other ideas. Inscriptions testified to worship of the Celtic deity Lugoves who has multiple names depending on the region such as Lugus and Nemausus. In Osma and Soria, Lugoves like ‘Cernunnos’ were patrons of craftsmanship and thus important figures in late Iron Age



livelihoods, indicating a commonality in these Celtic societies. (9) The god or possible shaman depicted in the shred appears to be raising his hands, similar to the Cernunnos we know of on the Gundestrup cauldron where the horned god is surrounded by animals. The significance of the god’s hands being held up is unknown, to put it simply, leaving it up to speculation from ideas that include establishing control over nature due to ‘Cernunnos’ ties to animals, or just as a good luck charm for the shred’s owner.



Housing

With this picture you can develop an understanding of Numantian life, houses were semi detached with roofs made of wattle and daub weighted down with stones evident at the corners of the roof. (10) The walls behind the houses within the picture are made of boulders with a filling of clay. Towers were also included alongside four gates to keep up defence of this site. Its geographic benefits would also be important to maintain, as dealing with a steep hill alongside guarded towers and walls, would be a tiring threat to opposition. Within Numantia there are houses we can use to distinguish professions such as horse breeding, pottery and wool production, through analysing the houses and local burials.

On the Numantia site itself, a reconstructed Celtiberian house can be visited which is very similar to the picture here with the see through house. Pictures such as this are greatly useful for understanding sites such as Numantia, making it easier to learn of these sites without having to look at archaeological evidence. This allows people not interested in archaeology to understand Numantia. The houses are divided into three rooms rectangular in shape, about 12 m long and 3 m wide, each of the three used in different ways. The first open room you are able to see has hand mills for grinding cereals and mast. Light was important for these tasks so this room is the best lit of the house, and it was most likely the warmest part as portrayed by the man close to a fire who appears to be relaxing. A spear is also inside the room, leading to my own speculation that warriors took care of their own items, teaching his children how to fight as well as protecting them from threats while serving superiors and patrons. The second room in the house that can be seen is used to house animal skins and textiles, with a woman appearing to acting on a task alongside a fire, giving an idea that items were created at home and later were sold off in local markets. The third room was used for livestock where the animals could rest, and gave resources to the family that possessed them, indicating that Numantian society had a great agricultural focus.

Conclusion

To conclude, Numantia is an important site due to buildings that teach how these people lived and the religious beliefs told through poetry, that could have been commissioned by other cultures and being a trade centre that offered multiple unique properties.

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