



One of the most evocative archaeological sites in Portugal, Citânia de Briteiros, 15km north of Guimarães, is the largest of a liberal scattering of northern Celtic hill settlements, called citânias (fortified villages), dating back at least 2500 years. It's also likely that this sprawling 3.8-hectare site, inhabited from about 300 BC to AD 300, was the Celtiberians' last stronghold against the invading Romans. **Citânia de Briteiros** is one of the most expressive proto-historical fortified towns in the Iberian Peninsula, both for its magnitude, and the monumentality of its ramparts, urbanism and architecture. On the other hand, it is also one of the paradigmatic sites of the History of the Portuguese and Peninsular Archaeology. Its study began in 1874, when Francisco Martins Sarmento (1833-1899) led the first campaign of archaeological works. In the following years, he continued to discover remains, so he decided to buy the lands where the *oppidum* was settled, in an unprecedented gesture in Portugal. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the campaigns of excavation or restoration were restarted by several archaeologists. Mário Cardozo stands out among these archaeologists, and was the President of the Society to whom Martins Sarmento bequeathed his name, his archaeological sites, the library, the manuscripts, and his houses in Guimarães and Briteiros (the Ponte Estate).

As a result of the consecutive archaeological works, a large area of remains is visible today, both on the highest terrace (*acropolis*), and in the eastern slope. Despite the studies already carried out, the subsoil of the hillfort still hides many secrets and valuable scientific information. The initial phase of use of this promontory backs to the end of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic, when several panels with rock art were engraved in the granite boulders of the eastern slope. As an habitat, the settling of this site can be dated to the beginning of the first millennium BC, and it was part of a period designated as Atlantic Bronze Age. However, its golden phase was between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the beginning of the Christian Era. Therefore, it was still inhabited after the integration of the Peninsular Northwest in the Roman Empire during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. In the 10th century, a small christian hermitage was built in the acropolis, among the remains of the old settlement. The remains of the *oppidum*, its subsoil, and the collected artifacts are therefore proof of millennia of History. Different artifacts that testify this occupation can be seen at the **Cultura Castreja Museum**, in Briteiros.

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## Location

This fortified town, as many other towns in the Peninsular Northwest, is situated in a promontory, near the river Ave, in other words, in a place where its inhabitants could organize a diversified economy. The surrounding landscape of the *oppidum* was well-managed, taking advantage of a variety of resources, according to the seasons: the sands and the fishery of the river course; the woods of the riparian forest (willows and alders); the wheat, the barley, the millet and the linen produced from the soils at the foot of the promontory; the wild fruits of the woods (acorns of the oak tree and the cork tree), which were preserved in the open valleys to the West; and the livestock pastures on the slopes which extended to the Mountain of

Sameiro, were regularly rejuvenate through a process of slash-and-burn. It is important to note that the hillfort is situated in a strategic point of the valley of the river Ave, controlling the fluvial navigation, in other words, the commercial route between the coast and the inland mountains. It controlled also a southern-northern walkway which went from the valley of the river Douro to the valley of the river Minho, crossing several mountain posts. *Citânia de Briteiros* was thus a real fortified town with a strong economic activity.

### **The ramparts**

All hillforts, both big fortified towns like *Citânia de Briteiros* or *Citânia de Sanfins* and the smaller ones, were defended by ramparts. Many researchers think that the great quantity of fortresses demonstrates an endemic state of war. Others think that the ramparts had mostly a symbolic function to express power. In *Citânia de Briteiros*, at least three lines of ramparts convergent to the North are preserved. One additional line is also visible, raised at the isthmus of access to the promontory. Two ditches dug in the rock stand out also in this sector. The first rampart is situated on the western side of the fortified town where there is still one gate. From the top of this rampart, one can see the three other defensive lines built along the north-western slope. In the eastern side, the ramparts are on the other side of the main road (Estrada Nacional), which shows the enormous extension of the *oppidum*.

### **Urbanism**

In the *oppidum*, visitors can walk along the roads which ordered the structure of a small town. Several authors think that the organization of this site into streets, quarters and family compounds is already a product of the Roman influence. It is important to say that the Roman Empire only used earlier models, already in place, created in the Mediterranean, which would have arrived in the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula before the conquest of *Hispania*. It is important to state that some details of the constructions did have a Roman inspiration, but the urban origin of the fortified town is older. In fact, the chronology of the urbanism of the north-western *oppida* has not been fully researched, as there are visible differences between the structure of Sanfins (Paços de Ferreira) and Briteiros, or between this last and *Cividade de Terroso* (Póvoa do Varzim),

or *Citânia de Santa Luzia* (Viana do Castelo), which are yet to be studied. One of the most remarkable characteristics of *Citânia de Briteiros* is the structural multiplicity of the family compounds, giving a fascinating urban landscape to the hillfort.

### Highlights

The different quarters and roads from late Iron Age in the eastern slope;

The defensive door in the first rampart, from where you can see the 2nd, the 3rd and the 4th ramparts, enclosing a total area of 24 hectares;

The 19th century reconstruction of two round dwellings;

The council house, a large round room with stone benches, that use to be the seat of the local senate;

The southern bath house, with its original *pedra formosa*.

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### Citânia de Briteiros

National Road 309, on the Km 55, Briteiros S. Salvador, Guimarães, Portugal

Open every day | Summer 9h-18h, Winter 9h-17h

Closed on 1st January, Easter Day and 25th December.

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***Cultura Castreja* Museum** (at the village of Briteiros)

Rua do Solar 4805-448 Briteiros S. Salvador, Guimarães, Portugal

Every day | Summer 9h30m-12h30m/14h-18h, Winter 9h30m-12h30m/14h-17h

Closed on 1st January, Easter Day and 25th December.

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