

Celts – The Untold Story

Secrets and Mysteries on the Amber Road

3 x 60 min.

Take a step into the unknown on the Amber Road, the Celtic trading route that saw Amber, known as “the gold of the North,” find its way through Eastern Europe all the way to the Mediterranean, from the breastplate of Tutankhamun to the temple of Apollo.

The Celts, who carried their right in their weapons and believed that everything belonged to the brave, established a trading route that had a huge impact on the development of society in eastern Europe and gave rise to a number of important Celtic civilization centers.

We explore the secrets of this ancient trade route, making startling new discoveries in central and eastern Europe along the way. The mysteries of the Gold-plated chariots, the Cauldron of Hair Clips, the swords that conquered Rome, to name a few.

We explore the transformation of the Celts from a prosperous, spiritual and trade-oriented society to a society of dreaded warriors, who plundered Rome around 387 BC. This three-episode miniseries includes site-specific reenactments of large Celtic oppida and will lift the veil on shrines hiding Celtic mysteries and burial sites with mounds, which continue to produce fragments from Celtic history to this day. The archaeological reenactments will allow us to see what this extraordinary, aesthetically mesmerizing material culture looked like.

Surviving historical records show that all written documents related to this period come from Greek and Roman authors, who often wrote them several hundred years later; creating a time gap and sometimes an even bigger cultural gap.

We will experience this history on the Amber Road, which generated the enormous material heritage of this culture. The most recent archaeological findings and our reenactments will paint a captivating image of these times. The first episode will focus on the accumulation of ritual wealth by Hallstatt princes. In the second episode, you will be able to admire the impeccable craftsmanship of Celtic swords, which were used to conquer the almighty Rome. The last episode showcases the highest level of Celtic culture: their coin mintage system and its hidden stories.

We will present new archaeological studies and try to answer the following questions:

- Which stories can we read between the lines of the history of trade on the Amber Road? Which were the important civilization centers in that period and how did the route foster relationships between them?
- How much of an influence did amber have as a commodity? What kind of magical power did ancient society attribute to it?
- What was the Bull Rock, the cave shrine in which four gold-plated Celtic carriages were found, each being roughly of the same value as the most expensive Rolls Royce?
- Which spiritual rituals of the Hallstatt princes are we able to reconstruct? How much did the decline of trade contribute to the downfall of this visually rich, highly spiritual and prosperous society?
- How good were Celtic swords in reality, despite being downplayed by the Roman empire?
- Why were thousands of women’s hair clips, collected from all over Europe, stored in a cauldron inside a thermal spring in the town of Duchcov in the Ore Mountains?
- What was the strategy governing the construction of Celtic oppida (fortifications), which became the backbone of the Amber Road?
- Which stories can be found in the Celtic coin mintage system?
- What are the parallels to be drawn between ancient Celts and our current civilization?





EPISODE 01 - THE KINGDOM OF IRON AND SALT (800–480 BC)

The discovery of iron transforms trading habits and gives rise to new civilization centers where iron is mined. We undertake a journey through the Alps to Hallstätter See, where we witness the emergence of a new, powerful society based on salt mining. We explore local salt mines and meet local priests, the new elite. We get to know its spiritual and material power, which is directly tied to the supply of precious materials, such as amber and ivory. Jewelry and ritual objects made of these materials are used to cement the priests' power. We retrace the steps of burial sites with mounds, which reflected the starry sky, and we reenact the drinking rituals organized by the mighty princes. We discover forgotten places riddled with mystery, such as the Bull Rock cave shrine with its incredible treasures, or the vast Heuneburg fortress, one of the largest Celtic settlements of the time. And we will try to explain what caused the demise of this society. Was it the interruption of the trade route from the western Mediterranean, which meant the supply of power-reinforcing commodities for the princes dried up? And what led to the militarization of the newly emerging La Tène culture?

EPISODE 02 - THE WARRIORS ERA (480–250 BC)

The era of chaos produced a new elite: warriors. Scythians rise to prominence in northern Europe and trade on the Amber Road stops for some time. Burial ground discoveries demonstrate the changes in Celtic society. Affluent princes' graves filled with ritual objects and jewelry are replaced by warriors with their weapons. What has happened to Celtic society? What has induced the transformation from a prosperous, spiritual and trade-oriented society to a society of dreaded warriors, who plundered Rome around 387 BC? Religion becomes a rather hazy concept; the cult of the warrior is born instead. Festive dinners habitually include fighting for the best piece of meat. The winner rises in the ranks of his tribe. The Celts of this period are also hired as mercenaries for various armies roaming Europe. The dreaded Celtic sword is longer than any sword hitherto known to man. We will take a close look at this unique weapon and compare it to other weapons of that time. We will also travel to the town of Duchcov in the Ore Mountains, where a treasure with thousands of women's hair clips from all of Europe is stored. What was the meaning of this sacred treasure, hidden from view in a cauldron inside a thermal spring? The objects in the cauldron represent an extraordinary accumulation of wealth, leading us to believe that the reasons behind hiding the treasure were no less extraordinary. It was most probably a gift to gods worshipped by women, who believed the gift's supernatural powers would protect their health and healing abilities.

EPISODE 03 - THE END OF THE LA TENE PERIOD (480–250 BC)

The society is entering another breaking point, much like at the end of the Hallstatt era. The Romans, in need of more land, are expanding from the south, while the restless Germans are expanding from the north. The Celtic society is squeezed between them. Fortified oppida are created as new centers of trade and power. Society becomes much more pragmatic and materialistic, which is reflected in the massive development of trade routes. What was once produced in individual pieces is now much less ornate and mass-produced. Production is economized. The coins brought home from the Mediterranean as mercenary pay serve as an inspiration for the Celtic mintage system. The Celts understood very quickly what the whole system was based on, and trade opportunities compelled them to create an economic counterweight in the form of their own coins. Their value was equivalent to the value of the metal they were made of. How did the Celts get their hands on such great quantities of gold and silver to support mass production of these coins? They mined hundreds of tons of gold – a supply which lasted throughout the entire Middle Ages. This whole period can be very well documented using Celtic coins, which is why we will explore it through numismatics and try to decipher the stories hidden in the drawings on Celtic money. We will also take a tour of a 3D reconstruction of the Bratislava oppidum. The fortification includes Roman architecture, signaling the growing influence of Rome on Celtic culture. Besides Bratislava, the last bastion of the La Tène period was Magdalensberg.

