

JUGURTHA, KING OF NUMIDIA : UPBRINGING, CHARACTER, AND MILITARY

Khaoula BOUCHAMA

Université Abdelhamid Mehri Constantine2

khaoula.bouchama@univ-constantine2.dz

Abstract : This article examines the life and personality of Jugurtha, King of Numidia, by exploring the factors that shaped his character and contributed to his emergence as one of the most prominent rulers of ancient North Africa during the second century BCE. The study focuses on his birth and upbringing within the Numidian royal court, highlighting the educational, cultural, and social influences that contributed to the formation of his leadership qualities. Particular attention is given to his personal attributes, including intelligence, courage, physical strength, humility, and determination, which distinguished him among his contemporaries. The article also analyzes Jugurtha's military abilities and leadership skills, emphasizing his early military training, his participation in the Numantine War alongside the Roman commander Scipio Aemilianus, and his mastery of both conventional and guerrilla warfare. These experiences enabled him to gain valuable military knowledge and establish a reputation as an outstanding commander. Through a critical examination of ancient literary sources and modern historical studies, the paper reassesses Jugurtha's image beyond the traditional Roman portrayal, presenting him as a capable statesman and military leader who sought to preserve the unity and independence of the Numidian Kingdom. The study concludes that Jugurtha's upbringing, personal virtues, and military talents played a decisive role in shaping his political career and resistance against Roman expansion, making him one of the most influential figures in the history of Numidia and ancient North Africa.

Keywords: Jugurtha; Numidia; Ancient North Africa; Military Leadership; Numidian Kingdom; Numantine War.

JUGURTHA, ROI DE NUMIDIE : ENFANCE, PERSONNALITÉ ET CARRIÈRE MILITAIRE

Résumé : Cet article examine la vie et la personnalité de Jugurtha, roi de Numidie, en analysant les facteurs qui ont façonné son caractère et contribué à son émergence comme l'un des souverains les plus remarquables de l'Afrique du Nord antique au II^e siècle av. J.-C. L'étude s'intéresse à sa naissance et à son éducation au sein de la cour royale numide, en mettant en lumière les influences éducatives, culturelles et sociales qui ont participé à la formation de ses qualités de dirigeant. Une attention particulière est accordée à ses traits personnels, notamment son intelligence, son courage, sa force physique, son humilité et sa détermination, qui le distinguaient de ses contemporains. L'article analyse également les capacités militaires et les compétences de commandement de Jugurtha, en soulignant sa formation militaire précoce, sa participation à la guerre de Numance aux côtés du commandant romain Scipion Émilien, ainsi que sa maîtrise des formes de guerre conventionnelle et de guérilla. Ces expériences lui ont permis d'acquérir une précieuse expertise militaire et de se forger une réputation de chef exceptionnel. À travers une lecture critique des sources littéraires antiques et des études historiques modernes, cette contribution réévalue l'image de Jugurtha au-delà de la représentation traditionnelle des auteurs romains,

en le présentant comme un homme d'État et un chef militaire compétent, soucieux de préserver l'unité et l'indépendance du royaume numide. L'étude conclut que l'éducation de Jugurtha, ses qualités personnelles et ses talents militaires ont joué un rôle déterminant dans la construction de sa carrière politique et dans sa résistance à l'expansion romaine, faisant de lui l'une des figures les plus influentes de l'histoire de la Numidie et de l'Afrique du Nord antique.

Mots-clés : Jugurtha ; Numidie ; Afrique du Nord antique ; commandement militaire ; royaume numide ; guerre de Numance.

Introduction

Jugurtha is considered one of the most prominent political and military figures in the history of Numidia and ancient North Africa during the second century BCE. His name became associated with a decisive period in the history of the Numidian Kingdom, characterized by the growing influence of Rome in the Mediterranean basin and by the attempts of local kingdoms to preserve their independence and political position. Jugurtha succeeded in establishing himself as a major actor in the events that took place in the region, not only because of his military abilities but also because of the personal and leadership qualities he possessed, which qualified him to assume power and lead the resistance against Roman expansion. The study of Jugurtha's character acquires particular importance in view of his position in Numidian history. His upbringing within the royal palace, his cultural and military formation, and his distinguished qualities of courage, intelligence, and determination contributed to shaping his leadership personality and refining his political and military talents. Moreover, his participation in the Numantine War alongside the Romans provided him with extensive field experience, which later enabled him to employ his military knowledge in managing the conflict with Rome and defending the interests of his kingdom. This study aims to shed light on the factors that contributed to the formation of Jugurtha's character, to analyze his most prominent qualities and traits, and to highlight his military role and leadership in the wars he fought in order to preserve the unity and independence of the Numidian Kingdom. Accordingly, the central research problem of this study revolves around the following main question: **to what extent did Jugurtha's upbringing, personal qualities, and military experience contribute to the formation of his leadership character and enable him to play a pivotal role in the history of the Numidian Kingdom?** From this main question arise a number of subsidiary questions: what were the circumstances surrounding Jugurtha's birth and upbringing within the Numidian royal family? What were the most prominent qualities and traits that distinguished his character and earned him a prestigious position among the Numidians? How did his military training and field experience contribute to the development of his leadership skills?

1. The Elements Constituting Jugurtha's Character

Delving into the character of the Numidian king Jugurtha (Iugurtha) is not an easy matter in light of the scarcity of historical sources about him. What is found in the work of the Roman historian Sallust concerns mainly the wars he fought against the Romans. Therefore, Sallust overlooked many aspects of his personality, including his childhood, about which we know very little. This is because the purpose of writing the history of this figure was to expose the defects of Roman society and denounce them, as we mentioned

previously. Thus, despite the ambiguity surrounding this character, we shall attempt to explore the elements that constituted and shaped his personality.

2. Jugurtha's Upbringing

If we delve into the depths of Sallust's book "The Jugurthine War," we will come to know Jugurtha, the king who played an important role in the field of politics and the military sphere, whereas it is not possible to know the details of the upbringing and childhood of this brilliant African personality. Therefore, what we have been able to reach is that Jugurtha descended from the Massylian family; he was the son of Mastanabal, son of Masinissa, son of Gaia, son of Zilalsan. He was born while his grandfather Masinissa was still alive. Thus, he belonged to the royal family through his father, without having the rights of the members of this family, because he was the son of a concubine (Mohamed Hassen Fantar, 1970:113).

3. Jugurtha's Birth and Early Life

Jugurtha, the son of Mastanbal (Mastanbal), was born around 160 BCE (Mohamed Hassen Fantar, 1970:114-115). It is said that he inherited many of the qualities of his grandfather Masinissa (Masinissa), especially his military ability and physical strength (Mohamed El Hadi Hareche, 2001, p 243.). He spent the early years of his life under the care of his father Mastanbal, who was the youngest son of Masinissa (Haouaria Kadara-Hadjadja, 2005 :31) In this regard, the researcher Mohamed Hassen Fantar states: "There is no doubt that Mastanbal did not neglect the upbringing of his son born to a concubine. He was probably in contact with the child's mother and provided her with what she needed to fulfill her duties toward the young boy, On the other hand, the researcher raises the question of whether Mastanbal entrusted Jugurtha to a wet nurse who supervised his childhood". (Mohamed Hassen Fantar, 1970:115). This indicates the lack of information on this subject, as the information provided by the researcher Fantar remains largely a matter of conjecture.

Jugurtha was raised in the royal palace. Sallust's text indicates that his uncle Micipsa, who did not have children until a late age, was the one who brought up Jugurtha in the palace alongside his own sons. (Salluste, la guerre de jugurtha, 1850, V, 7, X, 1) Therefore, it is likely that Masinissa was the one who kept Jugurtha in the royal palace, at least until one year before his death, that is, in 149 BCE. (Green, Carin Margreta Christensen, 1991:19-20) At that time, Jugurtha was at least in his twenties. Fifteen years later, he was sent to the Numantine campaign. There is also an indication that Masinissa took great interest in children and raised all his grandsons in the palace. Thus, Jugurtha did not live a life of misery like other illegitimate children of Masinissa's lineage; rather, it is probable that he received the same care as the children of the elite (Jean-Marie Lassère, 2015 :60).

4. Jugurtha's Education

Jugurtha received his education in the Numidian royal palace. It was supposed to include the study of the Greek language and some training in philosophy, which was among the interests of his uncle. He also received military instruction, which was part of Numidian education. He possessed a dual Punic and Greek culture, like his cousins, and thus received a royal education. (Jean-Marie Lassère, 2015:60). The evidence for the presence of Greek culture in the Numidian royal palace is the reference found in ancient

sources confirming that Mastanabal, Jugurtha's father, was educated in Greek literature. This is what the historian Strabo mentioned when he stated that the Numidian capital, Cirta, was a center for Greeks who spread their culture during the reign of King Masinissa and later his son Micipsa. We should also not overlook the Greek inscriptions discovered in the capital of the kingdom, which date back to the royal period (Strabon, *Géographie*, 1880, XVII, 3, 13), as well as the praise of the historian Titus Livy. All these data, among others, may support the existence of Greek educational traditions in the royal palace, where Jugurtha received his education, perhaps at the hands of teachers. (Mohamad Hassine Fantar, 2017 :224).

5. Jugurtha's Youth

It appears that Jugurtha was raised in the luxurious royal palaces together with the sons of his uncle Micipsa after the death of his father Mastanabal around 140–139 BCE. (Nic Fields, 2010 :167), Despite being brought up in these luxurious palaces (Salluste, *la guerre de jugurtha*, VI,1.), the characteristics of idleness and luxury did not affect him. This is reflected in the valuable information provided by Sallust regarding the image of Jugurtha, represented by his exceptional intelligence, determination, and ability to resist the corruption of both body and soul. He continued his life in the Numidian royal palace until he was adopted by his uncle Micipsa, who ruled the Numidian kingdom (Mohamad Hassine Fantar, 2017:219-220). After the latter's death around 118 BCE, Jugurtha shared the rule of the kingdom with his cousins Hiempsal I and Adherbal. However, he soon became the sole ruler and king of the Numidian kingdom and its master, after having once been an orphaned child belonging to the royal family without enjoying the same rights as its legitimate members. Between 113 BCE and 112 BCE, his kingdom extended from the Roman province in the east to the Moulouya River in the west. His reign is considered one of the most prominent periods in Numidian history. (Stéphane Gsell, 1918 :125.)

As for his personal life, Jugurtha married a daughter of Bocchus, king of the Moors. According to Sallust, this marriage did not disturb the Numidians in any way. However, to this day, the number of Jugurtha's wives remains unknown. At that time, the number of wives varied according to a man's means and could reach as many as ten wives for some individuals, in accordance with African customs that permitted polygamy, with kings generally having the largest number of wives. (As for his children, it is said that he had sons, some of whom were still children while others were at least adolescents during the war he fought against the Romans. (Stéphane Gsell, 1918 :125.) It is also reported that two of his sons distinguished themselves alongside him in the victory over Marius, among them a son named Oxyntas, who lived in Rome for fifteen years after his father's death. (Tit-Live, 1839, fragments de *Liver LXVII*) Jugurtha's end was tragic. It is certain that he died in Italy after being taken prisoner and brought to the Tullianum prison (Tullianum). According to some historical sources, this occurred in 104 BCE. (Plutraque, *La vie de Marius*, 1840, XII)

6. His Qualities and Traits

Jugurtha was considered a handsome and intelligent man. (Yann Le Bohec, 2017, p208) He inherited remarkable physical strength from his father. He possessed an athletic build, distinguished by strong muscles (Barbara Saly, 1986 :13) and a powerful body, as well as specific features that gave him a particular beauty and an almost delightful charm. His manner of walking carried a special dignity, which added strength to his character.

Sallust states that in his youth he was distinguished by both beauty and sharp intelligence. (Sallust, *la guerre de Jugurtha*, VI,1) In addition to his attractive appearance and strength of mind, he was passionately devoted to horse riding. (Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, 1999 :225.) Indeed, Jugurtha excelled in horsemanship. He rode at an unexpected speed without a saddle, stirrups, or bridle, as was customary in the Numidian tradition. Perhaps the mountainous nature of Numidia contributed to this skill and helped shape his reputation as a fearless horseman. This was undoubtedly one of the royal Numidian qualities. (Barbara Saly, 1986 :13) We also know that his father, Mastanabal, was fond of breeding and riding horses. He owned stables dedicated to horses that participated in competitions organized by Athens. It is therefore likely that Jugurtha became a horseman like his father and learned horsemanship from him, eventually becoming highly skilled in this art. (Stéphane Gsell, 1918 :91)

It is worth noting that Jugurtha was not only interested in horse riding, but was also passionate about other sports, particularly javelin throwing and racing, in which he excelled. Sallust tells us that “ (Sallust, *la guerre de Jugurtha*, VI,1), he used to compete with his compatriots and surpass them all.” In addition, Jugurtha practiced hunting and spent much of his time engaged in it. Hunting was considered a worthy activity for kings and princes, as it strengthened the body, spirit, and courage, especially when practiced in lands inhabited by wild beasts and predators, as was the case in the regions of ancient North Africa. Greek and Latin sources relate that these lands were home to elephants, lions, and other ferocious animals. (Mohamed Hassen Fantar, 1970 :116-117) Sallust also noted that Jugurtha was “among the most distinguished hunters of lions and other wild beasts.” (Salluste, *la guerre de Jugurtha*, VI,1.).

Jugurtha combined two qualities that few people are able to unite: great diligence and little boastfulness. (Salluste, *la guerre de Jugurtha*, VI,1.) , This admirable man was indifferent to wealth, success, and fame; rather, what concerned him most was preserving his kingdom and the kingdom of his ancestors. (Jean Amrouche, 1946 :29) It is said that, out of humility, he did not dress like kings but wore very simple clothing, consisting of a wide woolen tunic without sleeves reaching above the knees, together with a thick sleeveless woolen cloak. He also wore a golden earring in his right ear and is said to have worn a necklace and bracelets, as well as amulets made of cowhide or ostrich eggshell. Moreover, he was fond of music, singing, and dancing. (Haouaria Kadara-Hadjadja, 2005:48).

Since Jugurtha combined the qualities of humility and courage, he acquired a great personality characterized by dignity and steadfastness. This made him beloved among his companions on the one hand and widely respected among the Numidian people on the other. (Mohamed El Hadi Hareche, 2001, p244), They saw in him a suitable leader capable of preserving their kingdom and defending it against the dangers surrounding it, especially when they became aware of the beginning of Roman penetration into their region after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE and the establishment of the first Roman province in North Africa upon its ruins. (Mohamed Saghir Ghanem, 2021:165.).

Therefore, we find that Jugurtha occupies a distinguished position among all the Africans who played an important role in the history of the Numidian Kingdom, becoming the most renowned among them. When compared with emblematic figures such as Masinissa and Tacfarinas, among others, he stands out for his political acumen, one of the most sought-after qualities in a war leader at a young age. His spirit was nourished by courage and boldness, as well as by the achievements of his ancestor Masinissa, who transformed

his small kingdom into an empire and united under his authority most of North Africa, including the Massylii, the Masaesyli, and part of the Gaetuli, thereby becoming the master of Numidia. (Tacite, *Annales*, 1985, *Liver II*, LII). (Noelia Cases, 2019).

For this reason, Jugurtha constantly sought to preserve the extent of this kingdom, ensure its development, and continue the work of his grandfather Masinissa and his uncle Micipsa.(G. Camps et S. Chaker, 2004 :3975) This endeavor constituted one of the foundations of royal leadership in Numidia. Thus, he deserved the title of prince and was worthy of the royal crown. (Mohamad Hassine Fantar, : 224.) In him were combined strength, ambition, and aspiration, qualities that merged to form the character of Jugurtha. (Jean Amrouche, 1964 :25.) We do not possess any images that can be confirmed as representing the Numidian king Jugurtha. However, through the study of certain coins, it is believed that a silver coin attributed to him has been discovered (see Figures 1–2), though this attribution remains uncertain. On the obverse of the coin appears a beardless figure facing right and surrounded by a wreath, while on the reverse there is an elephant walking to the right. It is only presumed that the coin depicts Jugurtha. In this regard, the historian Jean Mazard analyzes this coin and argues that Numidians of that period did not shave their beards; rather, they wore them pointed or rounded. Consequently, Jugurtha must have been bearded like his predecessors Masinissa and Syphax, as well as his successor Juba I.(Mazard Jean, 1955 :21-22) The researcher Mohamed Hassen Fantar shares this opinion, emphasizing that the coin whose attribution to Jugurtha is disputed requires further study and that archaeologists should contribute to a more rigorous verification, since information on this matter is almost non-existent. There is virtually nothing that can be definitively attributed to this Numidian king. Fantar further notes that Jugurtha hardly had enough time to rule and raises the questions: Was he able to mint his own coinage? Are there any archaeological remains dating from his reign? Therefore, further investigation appears necessary, and it remains essential to identify and better understand Numidian faces and representations from the end of the second century BCE. (Mohamad Hassine Fantar, 2017:219-220).



Figure 1: A silver coin believed to be attributed to Jugurtha (obverse side of the coin).



Figure 2: The reverse side of a Numidian silver coin believed to be attributed to Jugurtha.

Emettrice de monnaie, Monnaie: Didrachme, Argent, Incertain, Numidie, Jugurtha, 0620-0294.<https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

7. Jugurtha's Military Strength

As for the military aspect of Jugurtha, although we do not find in Sallust's texts a complete picture of the Numidian prince, (Mohamad Hassine Fantar, 2017:257) since the person writing about this prince was Roman by origin on the one hand and an opponent of his on the other, (Green, Carin Margreta Christensen, 1991:7), we nevertheless realize that his ambition and military brilliance later made him king of all Numidia. (Stéphane Gsell, 1918:139), The image appears more clearly in the writings of the French historian Stéphane Gsell, who described him as a war prince and characterized him by courage and strength, (G. Camps et S. Chaker, 2004:3975) as well as by the military skills of a powerful commander. In addition to his proficiency in warfare, he mastered hit-and-run tactics, in which Africans excelled, while at the same time confronting conventional battles whenever necessary by employing his exceptional intelligence.

Thus, as a military man, Jugurtha devoted much energy and flexibility to serving his ambition as a Numidian prince. He is considered one of the symbolic figures of resistance because of the qualities that distinguished him as a war leader. In this regard, Mohamed Ali Debbouz refers to Jugurtha, saying: "Had time allowed Jugurtha a longer life, ancient Algeria would have been an impregnable barrier and a closed gate against Roman expansion in the ancient Maghreb. He was a lofty mountain who inflicted bitterness upon his enemies and protected homelands through his heroism. He is indeed the pride and glory of Algeria and a symbol of the heroism of the Maghreb and its neighboring lands." (Mohamed Ali Debbouz, 1956 :331) This view is supported by Mahfoud Kaddache, who believes that Jugurtha represented in the history of Numidia the utmost effort of a Numidian king to continue the work of Masinissa, with the aim of ensuring the unity and independence of the Numidian Kingdom and resisting foreign invasions. His war against Rome was a war for freedom, through which Rome came to recognize the effectiveness of Numidian resistance. (Mahfoud Kaddache, 1993 :91), Jugurtha sought to revive the ambition of King Masinissa by unifying the Numidian territories and their inhabitants, and he fought for the cause of freedom. (Messaoud Djennas, 2010, p p. 167-168). The Roman consul. (Jo-Marie Claassen, 1993: 273). In addition to that, he became acquainted with the customs of the Roman enemy. At Numantia, he was indeed able to overcome the most difficult challenges, as he was brave in battle, good in counsel, and courageous. Therefore, he was a person who could be trusted in the most difficult and dangerous tasks. Accordingly, Scipio regarded Jugurtha as one of his friends who dealt with the difficulties he faced, and thus he embraced him more and more. This enabled Jugurtha to become familiar with the enemy's tactics afterward. In a short time, he attained such great distinction through the efforts he exerted in confronting dangers whose difficulty the Roman men themselves concealed, dangers that originated from the Numantians. Indeed, Jugurtha achieved what was particularly difficult in the military sphere through the activity he displayed in battle. He was wise and relied upon caution. (P. Andrew Montgomery, 2013:25-26)

Therefore, based on the foregoing, the acquisition of these qualities enabled Jugurtha to make a name for himself as a skilled war leader. (Devillers Olivier, 1999, p16) In this way, he adopted the exemplary conduct of his grandfather Masinissa. (Chlup James

Thomas, 2004, p.29) , Jugurtha succeeded in incorporating a group of mercenaries, namely the Ligurians and the Thracians, into his army in order to make use of them in his war. He may thus be considered the first Numidian king to include mercenaries in his army. (Salluste, la guerre de jugurtha, XXXVIII, 6).

Conclusion

Jugurtha was one of the most influential rulers of Numidia in the second century BCE, playing a central role in the political and military history of ancient North Africa. His royal upbringing, combined with his personal qualities of intelligence, courage, and determination, contributed significantly to the development of his leadership character. His military experience, particularly during the Numantine War, enhanced his strategic abilities and prepared him for the challenges he later faced as ruler of Numidia. Jugurtha distinguished himself as a capable military leader, successfully employing both conventional and guerrilla warfare in defense of his kingdom. His efforts were primarily directed toward preserving the unity and independence of Numidia and resisting Roman expansion. Despite the differing views of ancient sources, Jugurtha remains a symbol of leadership, resistance, and political ambition in the history of ancient Numidia.

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