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Tests reveal Amesbury Archer 'King of Stonehenge' was a settler from the Alps

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The man who may have helped organise the building of Stonehenge was a settler from continental Europe, archaeologists say.

The Amesbury Archer: pilgrim or magician?

Welcome to the Wessex Archaeology website. To coincide with the new [BBC Timewatch programme on Stonehenge](#), made in collaboration with the [Open University](#) and the [Smithsonian Institute](#), we are presenting a summary of one of our key finds, the [Amesbury Archer](#).

Are the new theories about this extraordinary discovery better than the old ones? Or are they just different?

And what of another key find that yet to figure in the debate? Were the [Boscombe Bowmen](#) some of the builders of Stonehenge who came from Wales. Or were they pilgrims to Stonehenge who came from France?

Read our [blog post about the Archer and Bowmen](#), and have your say!



Test Results

The latest tests on the Amesbury Archer, whose grave astonished archaeologists last year with the richness of its contents, show he was originally from the Alps region, probably Switzerland, Austria or Germany. The tests also show that the gold hair tresses found in the grave are the earliest gold objects found in Britain.

The grave of the Archer, who lived around 2,300BC, contained about 100 items, more than ten times as many objects as any other burial site from this time. When details were released, the media dubbed the Archer "The King of Stonehenge".

The grave was found three miles from Stonehenge, near Amesbury in Wiltshire, last May during an excavation by Wessex Archaeology, based nearby at Salisbury, in advance of the building of a new housing scheme and school.

The Archer was obviously an important man, and because he lived at the same time that the stones at Stonehenge were first being built, archaeologists believe he may have been involved in its creation.

Tests were carried out on the Archer's teeth and bones and on the objects found in the grave, which included two gold hair tresses, three copper knives, flint arrowheads, wristguards and pottery. They show that he came from the Alps region, and that the copper knives came from Spain and France. This is evidence of the wide trade network that existed in the early Bronze Age. The gold dated to as early as 2,470BC, the earliest gold objects found in Britain.

Stonehenge was begun in the late Stone Age, around 3,000BC, as a ditch and a bank enclosing an open space. In about 2,300BC – approximately the time the Archer died – the world-famous stones were erected, the large 20-tonne Sarsen stones from the Marlborough Downs nearby and the smaller four-tonne Bluestones from Preseli in west Wales. How the Bluestones were transported 240 miles (380 kilometres) is not yet known.

The importance of the Archer and his grave were detailed in a programme 'King of Stonehenge: A Meet the Ancestors Special' on BBC2.

Dr Andrew Fitzpatrick, of Wessex Archaeology, said: "This was a time of great change in Britain – the skills of metalworking were being brought here from abroad and great monuments such as Stonehenge were being built.

"We have long suspected that it was people from the continent of Europe who initiated the trade that first brought metalworking to Britain, and the Archer is the first discovery to confirm this.

"He would have been a very important person in the Stonehenge area and it is fascinating to think that someone from abroad – probably modern day Switzerland – could well have played an important part in the construction of Britain's most famous archaeological site."

The Archer was an example of the spread of the Beaker culture from the continent, marked by a new style of pottery, the use of barbed flat arrow heads, copper knives and small gold ornaments.

Tests on the bones carried out by Wessex Archaeology's own staff showed that the Archer was a man aged between 35 and 45. He was strongly built, but he had an abscess on his jaw and had

suffered an accident a few years before his death that had ripped his left knee cap off. As a result of this he walked with a straight left which swung out to the side of him, and suffered from an infection in his bones which would have caused him constant pain.

Other tests on the enamel found on the Archer's teeth could not reveal how long he had lived in Britain, only that he must have lived in the Alps region while a child. He was most probably from what is now Switzerland, although it is possible he could have come from areas of Germany near Switzerland or Austria.



Also found at the site was a second skeleton of a younger man, aged 20 to 25. Two gold hair tresses were found lodged in mud in his jaw. Bone analysis showed he and the Archer were related and it is likely they were father and son. Analysis of his teeth show he grew up in southern England but may have spent his late teens in the Midlands or north-east Scotland.

Other tests were carried out by the British Museum, the National Museums of Wales and Scotland, the British Geological Survey, the National Trust Museum at Avebury and the Universities of Durham, Exeter, Oxford and Southampton. They showed that the Archer wore animal skins fashioned into a cloak and was buried with pottery made locally, perhaps specially for his funeral.

[< More Amesbury Archer details as 'Prince of Stonehenge' secrets are revealed](#)

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