

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Evidence of Bronze Age Mediterranean visitors to Stonehenge

**The links between the Stonehenge area and the Mediterranean have been debated for years. Recent research by the British Geological Survey (BGS) suggests people came from both the snow of the Alps and the heat of the Mediterranean to visit Stonehenge.**

Scientific studies show that some of the people buried in the area during the Bronze Age were not local. The analysis of the teeth from two males provides new evidence that one dubbed 'the Boy with the Amber necklace' had come from the Mediterranean area, whilst the previously known 'Amesbury Archer' had come from the Alps.

Professor Jane Evans, Head of Archaeological Science at the British Geological Survey said "Isotope analysis of tooth enamel from both these people shows that the two individuals provide a contrast in origin, which highlights the diversity of people who came to Stonehenge from across Europe."



Burial site of the 'Boy with the Amber necklace' and the amber beads found with him. Copyright Wessex Archaeology.

Strontium isotopes in teeth provide information on the geological setting of a person's childhood and the oxygen isotopes tell us about the climate in which they were raised. The combined techniques provide a tool to compare the information about childhood origin preserved in their teeth, with reference data for the place in which they are found. A match between the tooth and reference data supports a local origin whereas a mismatch shows their burial area was not the same as their childhood location. The data can then be used to point to likely regions in which they were raised.

The isotope composition of the 'Amesbury Archer's' teeth shows that he was raised in a colder climate than that found in Britain. The combination of his strontium and oxygen isotope composition suggest that the most likely childhood origin for this person was in the Alpine foothills region of Germany.

Professor Jane Evans continues “In contrast, ‘the Boy with the Amber necklace’ spent his childhood in a warm climate typical of Iberia or the Mediterranean. Such warm oxygen values are theoretically possible in the British Isles but are only found on the extreme west coast of SW England, western Ireland and the Outer Hebrides. These areas can be excluded as likely childhood origins of his on the basis of the strontium isotope composition of his teeth.”

What these results show is that people came from across Europe, travelling long distances to Stonehenge. It was still drawing people around 1500 BC when it was already over 1500 years old.

The ‘Amesbury Archer’ was discovered around five kilometres from Stonehenge. His is the richest Copper Age (2450 – 2300 BC) grave found in Britain and it contained some of Britain’s earliest gold and copper objects- a pair of gold hair clasps and three copper daggers.

‘The Boy with the Amber necklace’, whose grave was found on Boscombe Down, about 3 kilometres south-east of Stonehenge, is from a more recent time – the end of the Early Bronze Age. His skeleton has been radiocarbon dated to around 1550 BC. Aged 14–15 years when he died, he was buried wearing a necklace of around 90 amber beads.

Other people who had visited Stonehenge from afar include individuals from a collective Bronze Age grave, the ‘Boscombe Bowmen’ and a man buried beside the ‘Amesbury Archer’ and called the ‘Archer’s Companion’.

Dr Alistair Barclay of Wessex Archaeology said “Through the application of modern science, the amber burial from Boscombe adds one small but potentially significant detail to this ongoing debate”.

**\*Ends\***

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