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6000-YEAR-OLD SITE SHEDS LIGHT ON EARLY POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

- 140 years ago, two valuable axes were found at the Neolithic hilltop site of Hofheim-Kapellenberg in Germany.
- New research suggests they came from a large burial mound, around 6,000-years-old, recently discovered on the hill.
- This suggests the community was more hierarchically organised than expected, featuring wealthy elites able to afford the valuable axes and extravagant burial.



[Hofheim-Kapellenberg hilltop (credit: Von Muck, CC BY-SA 4.0)]

Images and embargoed preview of the paper here:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1aBMkXObdVsmdKKGKULfaxN5vNizJJZg5v>

Archaeologists in Germany have discovered that Neolithic societies in the region were much more hierarchically organised than previously thought, featuring elites able to amass wealth.

This discovery comes from research on a burial mound found at the hilltop enclosure of Hofheim-Kapellenberg, reported in the journal *Antiquity*. The enclosure dates to around 6000 years ago and is one of the best-preserved above-surface sites from the Neolithic.

The site includes an entire Neolithic rampart system, which is still visible today. Earlier excavations also revealed a village of about 900 inhabitants existed on the hilltop between 3750 and 3650 BC.

While the visible ramparts have been known since the later 19th century, the burial mound was only recently discovered. The monument is 90 m across and, while it cannot yet be dated, research suggests it was built between 4500 - 3750 cal BC and thus predates the village.

However, although the burial mound was only recently discovered, excavations in the 1880s had already led to the discovery of two valuable stone axes in that area. One of which was finely manufactured out of Jade, sourced hundreds of kilometres away in the western Alps.

As such, these valuable items likely come from the recently found burial mound, suggesting the Stone Age society was more hierarchically organised than previously thought. Instead of being an egalitarian community, it appears to have had an elite class capable of amassing the wealth necessary to obtain these axes and be buried with them in the extravagant monument.

Similar mounds from this period are found in Brittany, in the famous region of Carnac. This could suggest such hierarchies were spreading across Europe during the Neolithic.

Whether the expansion of this social structure was due to conquests or migration by a hierarchical group, cultural interactions with such a society, or just coincidence is unknown.

Ongoing research at Hofheim-Kapellenberg may help shed light on the matter. Since 2008 the site is investigated by the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz, and Johannes-Gutenberg-University, together with the State Heritage Authority of Hesse and the Magistrate of City of Hofheim.



[The jade axe, made from Alpine jade from Monte Viso. Age 4200/4100 cal BC, found at Kapellenberg around 1880. (credit: Sabine Steidl/RGZM)]

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About

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For further information: RGZM continuously informs about the most recent results under: www.rgzm.de/kapellenberg.

ABOUT ANTIQUITY

Antiquity is an international peer-reviewed journal of world archaeology, published six times a year and edited by Dr Rob Witcher. The journal was founded by O.G.S. Crawford in 1927 and is currently edited in the Department of Archaeology at Durham University (head: Professor Sarah Semple). The journal is published in partnership with Cambridge University Press (CUP).

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