

Archeologists examine one of the oldest hoards found in Europe

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Belica hoard, two views of a stylized woman (serpentinite). Credit: Nebosja Boric, Belgrade

Jewelry and female figurines from Belica, Serbia, to be exhibited for the first time at Tübingen University Museum.

[Archeologists](#) from the University of Tübingen's Institute of Prehistory are working with the Serbian Archeological Institute in Belgrade to analyze the most comprehensive Early Neolithic hoard ever found. Work on the nearly 8000 year old collection of jewelry and figurines is funded by the Thyssen Foundation.

The unique hoard is comprised of some 80 objects made of stone, clay and bone. "This collection from Belica, in all its completeness, provides a unique glimpse into the symbols of the earliest farmers and herdsmen in Europe," says Tübingen archeologist Dr. Raiko Krauss, who heads the German side of the project.



Belica hoard, two views of a representation of the sickle moon (serpentinite).
Credit: Nebosja Boric, Belgrade

The objects include stylized female figures, parts of the human body, as well as miniature [axes](#) and abstract figures. Much attention has been given to the rotund female figures of water-smoothed stone given human features by human hands. Were they idols, [lucky charms](#) or fertility symbols? Their purpose is unknown.

The stone objects are mainly of serpentinite from an ophiolite belt running some 40km west of the Belica site. The rock was washed out of the mountains and worn smooth by rivers and streams. Neolithic artists then selected the pebbles they wanted from the valleys.

Archeologists mapped the outline of an Early Neolithic settlement in June of this year using the distribution of finds on the surface as a guide. In the middle, they found the largely undisturbed hoard. Using modern geophysical prospection methods, they were able to bring buried parts of the settlement to light during summer excavations.

"Important finds like this should be prominently displayed in the Serbian National Museum," says Krauss of the hoard. "But the National Museum in Belgrade has been closed since the civil war." So Krauss is working with his Serbian colleagues on an exhibition at the University of Tübingen Museum in Hohentübingen Castle. The modern world will first get to see the Belica hoard there in the winter semester of 2013/14. The hoard, and the results of the current investigation, are to be published in German and Serbian.

Provided by Universitaet Tübingen

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