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Birmingham Archaeologists Strike Gold With Major Bronze Age Discovery in Croatia

Archaeologists at the University of Birmingham, supported by the British and Slovene Academies, have discovered what may be one of the most important archaeological sites of the last 50 years, in a riverbed in Croatia.

The site at the Valley of the River Cetina, which is geographically and strategically placed at a major European crossroads, holds the key to unlocking over 8,000 years of Balkan history.

Dr Vincent Gaffney, Director of the University's Institute for Archaeology and Antiquity and Cetina Project Leader says, "*The Cetina Valley is certainly the most remarkable site that I have, and will ever, have the privilege of being involved in – a once in a lifetime discovery for any archaeologist. As the majority of the Cetina Valley site is waterlogged, the level of preservation is quite exceptional. I believe this to be one of the most important archaeological wetlands in Europe.*"

An initial survey of the site has uncovered remarkable finds spanning a period of history from 6,000 BC onwards. Timbers 3 metres in length are clearly visible through the clear water from the riverbank, showing evidence of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age wooden settlements that are comparable to the Swiss lake settlements. A large number of metal and stone objects have also been retrieved which appear to have been thrown into the river deliberately, possibly as offerings to river gods. Items include over 90 swords, a Roman legionary dagger complete with sheath, over 30 Greco-Illyrian helmets, plus numerous items of jewellery, axes and spearheads.

Another extraordinary element of the project is the potential for environmental archaeology, which will bring history to life. Dr David Smith, Environmental Archaeologist from the University of Birmingham explains, "*The valley sediments provide an environmental record covering around 10,000 years and hold the key to our understanding of the environment of Dalmatia and much of the Central Balkans. Through examination of pollen cores and peat samples from within the basin we can gain a real insight into the everyday life of the people; the food they ate, the crops and animals they kept, and the crafts/activities they pursued.*"

Dr Vincent Gaffney adds, *“The site was obviously of major importance both strategically and geographically. The gorge with its mountains provided a natural barrier, but we also know that it was a border between the Venetian and Turkish empires, and between the Roman empire and the Slavic kingdoms. Also, as many parts of Croatia have little water, effectively a limestone desert in some areas, this rich, green valley would also have been important as a major water source, which may explain the great evidence of ritual activity in the area.*

“It is quite unique to have a virgin site with this level of preservation offering environmental, metalwork, stone and timber artefacts all on one site. This is a tremendously exciting project and it is intended that the team from the University of Birmingham will return to the site in May this year to carry out an extensive survey of the site.”

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Notes to Editors:

The partners in the River Cetina Archaeology Project are:
Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity - University of Birmingham, UK
Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Department of Archaeology - University of Ljubljana, Croatia
Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments, Split, Croatia

Croatian archaeologists have long been aware of the remains in the Cetina Valley, carrying out valuable work on the landscape. However, the team from the University of Birmingham have been able to bring their experience to this investigation and demonstrate the wider context and significance of the finds.

The artefacts that have been retrieved from the river Cetina are currently being displayed in the Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments in Split, Croatia.

The Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity at the University of Birmingham incorporates the Ironbridge Institute, the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies and Birmingham Archaeology Field Unit. It is one of Britain’s largest academic groups dedicated to the study of the history and archaeology of mankind. Although the Institute has an emphasis on Mediterranean studies, Institute staff have worked as far afield as Texas and Zimbabwe and have expertise ranging from the Palaeolithic through to more recent studies including forensic archaeology.

Notes for Broadcast Journalists:

Moving footage/interviews are available free of charge as a package to broadcast media via Research TV, due for streaming via Reuters on Tuesday 13 January at 12:45–12:55 GMT. Go to <http://www.Research-TV.com/> for more details/to request footage.

Footage includes images of divers pulling swords and spearheads from the riverbed in Croatia, peat samples being examined under the microscope, interviews with Dr Vincent Gaffney and Dr David Smith from the University of Birmingham's Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, and still images of various finds.

Notes to Picture Editors:

Still images of the finds and of the Cetina River Valley and its finds are available on request. Please contact Rachel Robson to request JPEG images.

Further information/interview requests:

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