

# Bronze Age people could travel great distances

New analysis suggests that the 'Egtved Girl,' found in Denmark in 1921, was actually born hundreds of miles away.

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It would have been a long, long walk for the Egtved Girl.

A new study, published Thursday in *Scientific Reports*, describes [the remains of a Bronze Age female](#) who lived in present-day Denmark. Isotopic analysis of teeth, clothes, and hair seem to indicate that the “Egtved Girl” was surprisingly mobile –

she travelled back and forth over long distances in her life, and was probably born far from her final resting place.

In 1921, researchers unearthed an oak coffin from a barrow in Egtved, Denmark. Inside they found the remains of a 16- to 18-year-old female, buried some 3,400 years earlier. She wore a shirt with elbow-length sleeves, a wool skirt, and a belt which featured a large bronze disk. Her style of dress, seen elsewhere in Bronze Age figurines, suggests that she may have been a priestess in a Nordic sun cult. She was buried with the cremated remains of a 5- or 6-year-old child, in addition to a number of common household items.

The burial mound was made out of acidic peat from a bog, which allowed rainwater to trickle in, but not out, of the coffin. These unique conditions decayed the girl's bones while preserving her clothes, teeth, and hair. Karin Frei, a researcher at the National Museum of Denmark, led the analysis of those fibers.

Dr. Frei began with strontium found on the Egtved Girl's skirt. Strontium is a naturally-occurring element found in trace amounts all over the world. It has four stable isotopes, or elemental variations. Since strontium isotopes are found in different ratios depending on location, Frei could make inferences about where the remains came from. She and her colleagues determined that the wool came from outside of Denmark, possibly from the Black Forest in Germany.

Other important clues came courtesy of the girl's hair, teeth, and fingernails. They revealed long intervals of travel, during which she consumed a reduced protein diet.

Given the sheer distance of her journey, the researchers speculate that she may have traveled by boat. “She moved from one place outside Denmark, to a place that could be Denmark, to a place very far from Denmark, where she spent a large portion of the last six months of her life,” Frei told [LiveScience](#). “She probably died, or got sick and died, very shortly after her arrival to Egtved.”

Written language was only just emerging in the Bronze Age, so we must rely mainly on physical artifacts and genetic information to understand how our ancestors lived. Another study, published Tuesday in *Nature Communications*, offers evidence of profound cultural change – even as populations boomed in Bronze-Age Europe, [far fewer men than women were reproducing](#). Researchers speculate that social factors, like wealth and power, were becoming increasingly important in matters of reproduction. Thus, men who found those things inaccessible didn’t reproduce. Frei’s findings teach us that Bronze Age people were an enterprising bunch. They developed writing and built cities, but they also [maintained social networks over vast distances](#). They traded goods across continents, perhaps by hand, and maybe even made lives for themselves in foreign lands – the Egtved Girl certainly did.



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