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POPULAR MECHANICS

3,500-Year-Old Swiss Relic Might Be Europe's Oldest Bronze Sculpture

It was found by treasure hunters and promptly turned over to the experts.



By [Sam Blum](#)



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE OF THE CANTON OF BERNE,
PHILIPPE JONER.

Last October, Swiss archaeologists were presented with a momentous and possibly history-making discovery: a bronze hand with a gold cuff glued to its wrist, alongside what appeared to be a withered dagger and a human rib.

Placed in the stead of the Bern Archaeological Service by two treasure hunters who made the discovery near the municipality of Prêles, the antiquities confounded experts. After conducting tests, the hand's provenance and significance came into sharper focus. Radiocarbon dating indicates the hand is 3,500-years-old, with its origins dating between 1500 to 1400 BCE.

A genuine artifact of Europe's Bronze Age, the hand is consequently the "oldest bronze piece representing a part of the human body" ever discovered, per [a press release](#). The dagger blade was determined to be a similar age.

Adding an air of mystique to the find, scientists have dubbed the relic "The hand of Prêles."



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Following a massive cue from the armchair archaeologists, the Bern Archaeological Service went back to the site for its own excavation in the summer of 2018. At the site, experts unearthed the remains of an adult man, encased in a badly damaged grave. Various remnants were found in the tomb, including a bronze spiral and pieces of gold plate, which researchers assumed were likely part of the hand's cuff. "The presence of one of the fingers of the bronze hand confirmed that the sculpture came from this site," the release states.

The tomb was placed on top of a different "human construction," which archaeologists think signals the man's nobility. Moreover, the hand's "gold ornament suggests that it is an emblem of power, a distinctive sign of the social elite, even of a deity."

Oddly, the discovery has been somewhat tainted by rumors of criminal activity at the excavation site. [Local reports](#) suggest that objects have gone missing from the site, raising the possibility that looters are afoot.

"A criminal investigation is currently underway in this matter," an Archaeological Service spokesperson [told Gizmodo](#).

Source: [Bern Archaeological Society](#) via [Gizmodo](#)