

Description

The Tollense Valley in northern Germany is the site of Europe's oldest known large-scale battlefield, dating to approximately 1250 B.C.E. during the Middle Bronze Age. Excavations have uncovered more than 12,500 bone fragments representing thousands of combatants who fell in an organized military engagement and were left where they dropped. The demographics of the dead, primarily men aged 20 to 40, are consistent with a professional fighting force rather than a civilian massacre, marking a significant moment in the development of organized warfare in Europe.



The Tollense Valley in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern — site of Europe's oldest large-scale battlefield.

Strontium and oxygen isotope analysis of the warriors' teeth revealed that many were not local to northern Germany. They had traveled from as far south as Bohemia, Moravia, and Bavaria — a finding confirmed by the discovery of southern-style barbed bronze arrowheads among the remains. These warriors did not fight in a local skirmish; it was a large-scale, multiethnic military engagement drawing forces from across a

wide geographic area. The presence of bronze swords, wooden clubs, and professional weaponry points to the emergence of a specialized warrior class capable of sustained interregional conflict.



View of the Tollense Valley near Kessin and Weltzin.

Image by Erett

A significant genomic finding connects the Tollense Warriors to the broader sweep of European history: only 7.1% of the warriors possessed the allele for lactase persistence, the genetic mutation that allows adults to digest milk. This figure shows that a trait now widespread across Northern Europe was still rare just 3,000 years ago, spreading through the population in the centuries that followed. Preliminary sequencing also indicated genetic affinities with populations in Poland, Scandinavia, and southern Europe. The Tollense battlefield stands as biological and archaeological evidence of a turning point in European social organization — the emergence of professional, coordinated, interregional warfare as a feature of Bronze Age society.

Modern population	Distance
Danish	2.911
Czech	2.942
German	2.962
Swedish	3.025
Slovakian	3.152

Modern population	Distance
Norwegian	3.205
Icelander	3.310
English (Kent)	3.375
Orcadian	3.391
Dutch	3.396

Source

Date: 1743–1793 CE

Y-DNA: I-Z2054*, I-BY1003, R-P312, I-L1229, R-L51, I-Z2068, R-L51, R-P312, R-PF7589*, I-BY431, R-P312, I-L1229, I-L1229, I-BY1003

mtDNA: U2e1a1, H27, K1c1, J2b1a1, T1a1, H1c, U2e2a1a2, V3a, H2a1, T2b, U5a2b1, U4b1b1, I1a1a, J1c, T2b, I4a

Location: Germany

Research: Low Prevalence of Lactase Persistence in Bronze Age Europe Indicates Ongoing Strong Selection over the Last 3,000 Years

Sample(s):

WEZ15, WEZ24, WEZ35, WEZ39, WEZ40, WEZ51, WEZ53, WEZ54, WEZ57, WEZ58, WEZ59, WEZ61, WEZ64, WEZ71, WEZ74, WEZ83