

Gold hoard may be from Aegean

Peter Hopkirk tells of the search to give 137 pieces of treasure historical worth

Further evidence suggesting either Turkey or Greece as the source of the mysterious hoard of royal gold treasure which goes on show to the public today at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, has been supplied by the museum.

The classical department of the museum has issued notes of a lecture given to American archaeologists by Mrs. Emily Vermeule, an archaeologist and wife of a director of the museum.

In this Mrs. Vermeule said: "For years scholars have expected that more gold, or signs of royal burial, would turn up along those shores of the Aegean Sea where early Bronze Age cultures are most enterprising. The treasures of Troy, the Thyreatis and Poliochni—the former now destroyed—are joined by a group of 137 pieces of gold which seems to have come from a single burial near a coastal mound."

The 137 pieces to which she refers are the newly-acquired hoard that the Boston museum has attributed so far only to "the eastern half of the Mediterranean".

Since the publication of photographs of some of the treasure in *The Times* on Saturday archaeologists have been trying to identify the country of origin of the hoard.

Stylistically, Near East experts say, the treasure could

have come from a number of eastern Mediterranean countries, including Turkey, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and Cyprus. All these countries ban the export of antiquities of the importance of the Boston hoard, which was known to have been on the Swiss market last year. It was subsequently bought in New York by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for a "six-figure sum".

Mrs. Vermeule's lecture would now appear to narrow the possible source countries to Turkey and Greece. The museum has said that it does not know the exact site from which the treasure came, though a senior official said last week: "One can make guesses".

It is, however, known that one museum which was offered the treasure was told by the dealers who brought it to them that it was from Turkey, where there are particularly strict laws forbidding the export of antiquities.

But regardless of how it came on to the Swiss market, archaeologists are dismayed that all knowledge of the exact site from which it came appears to be lost, rendering it "academically worthless", however beautiful or valuable.

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