

A 27,000-year-old burial site is studied

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Austrian scientists have found the 27,000-year-old burial site of three infants -- the first such European discovery from the Upper Palaeolithic period.

Two of the babies, estimated to have died shortly after birth and probably twins, were found together. A third, thought to have died after fewer than three months, was found 3 feet away.

Christine Neugebauer-Maresch and colleagues at the Austrian Academy of Sciences said the well-preserved burials were analyzed by laser scanning and computer imaging. The researchers believe the pair of skeletons found together, embedded in red ochre, are twins. Their bodies were covered with a mammoth shoulder bone supported by part of a tusk and one of the babies was decorated with more than 30 ivory beads.

The researchers say the evidence of ritual burial activities indicates even infants were important members of hunter-gatherer communities.

The analysis, which is expected to contribute valuable insights into the development of early modern humans, appears as a Brief Communication in the current issue of the journal *Nature*.

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