

Evidence of early medieval Muslim graves found in France

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In situ photographs of the Nimes burials, with a synthesis of age and sex of individuals, radiocarbon dates, maternal and paternal lineages. Note that the number near the funerary pit is the recording number of the picture. The stones around the burial SP7089 correspond to a roman wall and some stones were reused to close the funerary pit. Credit: Gleize et al.

Archaeological and genetic analysis may indicate that three skeletons buried in medieval graves in France may have been Muslim, according to a study published February 24, 2016 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Yves Gleize from the French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research (Inrap) and University of Bordeaux, France,

Fanny Mendisco from University of Bordeaux, France, and colleagues.

The rapid Arab-Islamic conquest during the early Middle Ages led to major political and cultural changes in the Mediterranean. Although the early medieval Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula is well documented, scientists have less evidence of the Muslim expansion north of the Pyrenees. The authors of this study aimed to determine if the skeletons in three graves from a medieval site at Nimes, France are related to the Muslim presence in France in the 8th century. Specifically, they analyzed the funerary practices at the site, analyzed the [skeleton's](#) DNA, and determined the sex and age of the skeletons.

The authors found that the burials appear to follow Islamic rites, including the position of the body and the head orientation towards mecca. They also found genetic evidence indicating their paternal lineage may show North African ancestry. Radiocarbon dating shows that the skeletons were likely from the 7th-9th centuries. Given all of these data, the authors propose that the skeletons from the Nimes burials belonged to Berbers integrated into the Umayyad army during the Arab expansion in North Africa in the 8th century. Despite the low number of Muslim graves discovered, the authors believe that these observations provide some of the first archeological and anthropological evidence for Muslim communities in the South of France.

Dr. Gleize added, "The joint archaeological, anthropological and [genetic analysis](#) of three early medieval [graves](#) at Nimes provides evidence of burials linked with Muslim occupation during the 8th c. in south of France."

More information: Gleize Y, Mendisco F, Pemonge M-H, Hubert C, Groppi A, Houix B, et al. (2016) Early Medieval Muslim Graves in France: First Archaeological, Anthropological and Palaeogenomic Evidence. *PLoS ONE* 11(2): e0148583. [DOI:](#)

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