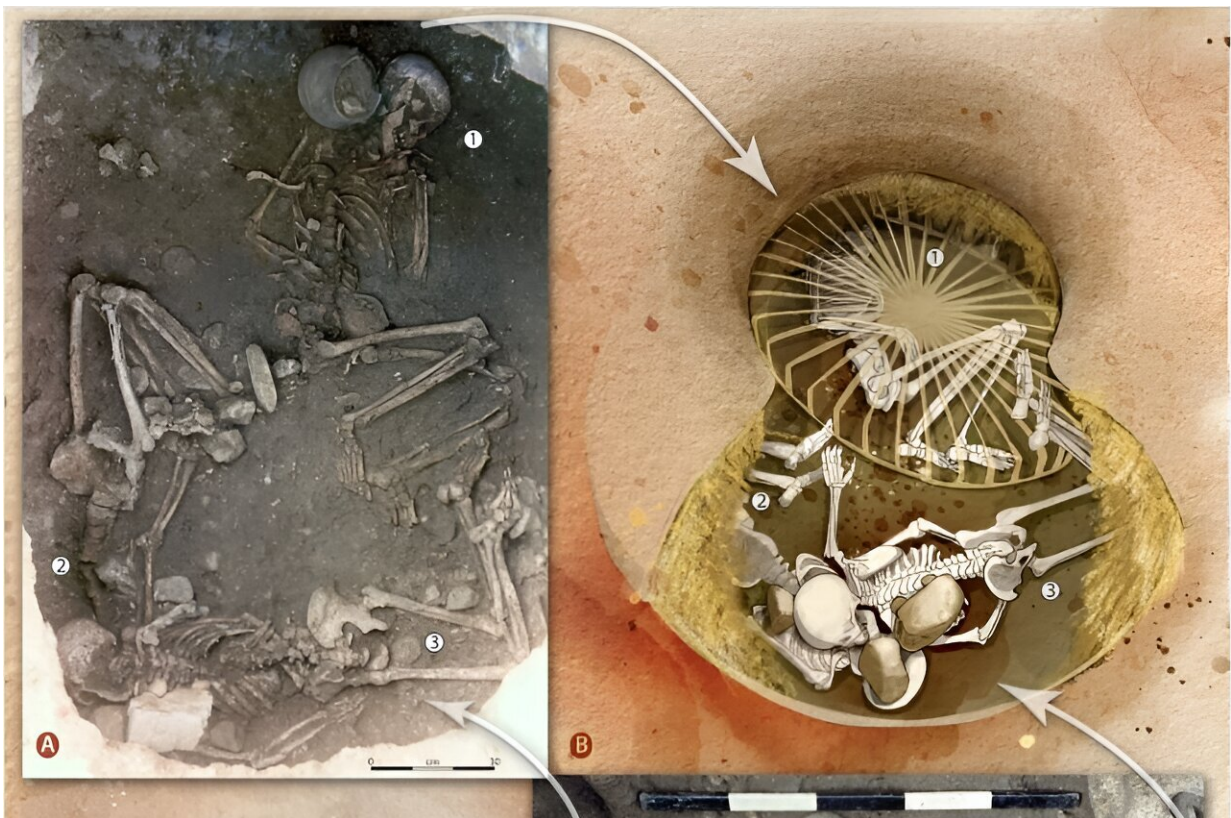


# Team finds evidence of commonly conducted ritualized human sacrifice across Europe in the Stone Age

April 11 2024, by Bob Yirka



Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux pit 69. (A) View taken from the upper part of the 255 storage pit showing the three skeletons, with one individual in a central position (Woman 256 1) and the other two placed under the overhang of the wall (Woman 2 and Woman 3). The 257 photos were taken with a wide-angle lens; otherwise, all three individuals cannot be 258 captured in a single shot. (Credit: A. Beeching) (B) Reconstruction of the remains, 259 blocked under the

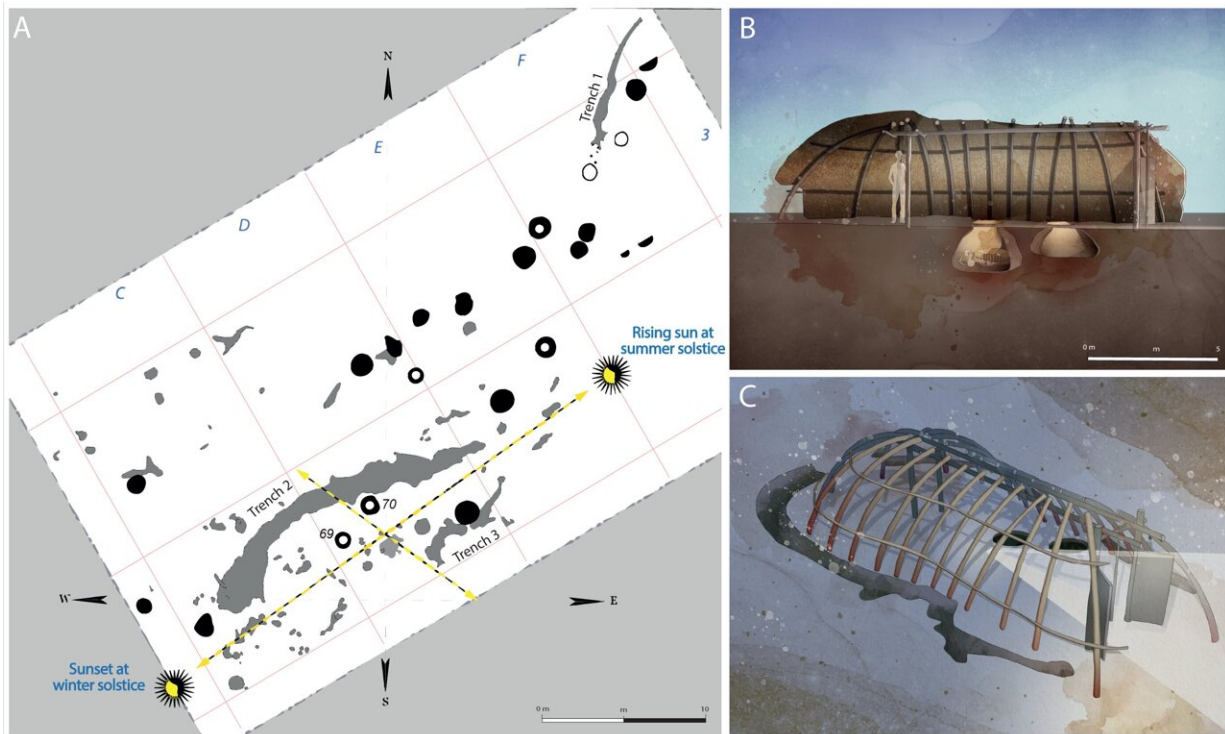
overhang of the wall of the storage pit lined with straw (typical in 260 storage pits). The woman in the central position was separated from the other two by a 261 feature made of perishable materials. (C) Lastly, the storage pit was filled with stones, 262 most likely at a later point. (D) Detailed view of the individual (Women 3) in a prone 263 position with a box-shaped stone on the left half of her remains (white square). The 264 upside-down grindstone fragment next to the box-shaped stone covers the head of the 265 individual lying underneath (white circle). Credit: *Science Advances* (2024). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.adl3374

A team of archaeologists affiliated with several institutions in France and one in Germany has found that ritualized human sacrifice was common across Europe during the Neolithic.

As they [report](#) in the journal *Science Advances*, the group studied the remains of three women found in a tomb in France who appeared to have been ritually brutalized sometime between 4000 and 3500 BCE and compared the remains with others like them found at sites in Europe.

The work began with the study of the remains of three women found in a tomb in Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux—two of the bodies showed the women were buried in unusual positions, one on her back with her legs bent upward, the other in a [prone position](#) with her neck on the torso of the other woman—characteristics associated with *incaprettamento*, a murder technique used by organized criminals as a means of intimidation in [modern times](#).

The third woman was lying on her side. One of the women also had a piece of a grindstone set on her skull and another appeared to have been buried alive. The positioning, the researchers suggest, indicates that the victims were likely killed where they lay. They also note that in addition to the odd positioning of the bodies relative to one another, they were also all oriented toward the solstice.



Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and the area surrounding pits 69 and 70. Credit: *Science Advances* (2024). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.adl3374

The researchers suggest the positioning likely meant that the [women](#) had all been killed using a form of ritualized asphyxiation—ligature strangulation—where the weight of a victim's own body results in strangulation.

To add more credence to their theory, they searched the literature for other instances of similar finds in other parts of Europe. They found 20 cases, from sites in Spain, Catalonia and Eastern Europe. Some of the earliest examples dated to between 5400 and 4800 BCE., an indication that forced forms of positional asphyxiation were conducted as part of ritualistic sacrifices all across Europe for thousands of years. They note

also that rock carvings found in a cave in Italy depicted the form of human [sacrifice](#) they observed in the cave in France.

**More information:** Bertrand Ludes et al, A ritual murder shaped the Early and Middle Neolithic across Central and Southern Europe, *Science Advances* (2024). [DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.adl3374](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adl3374)

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