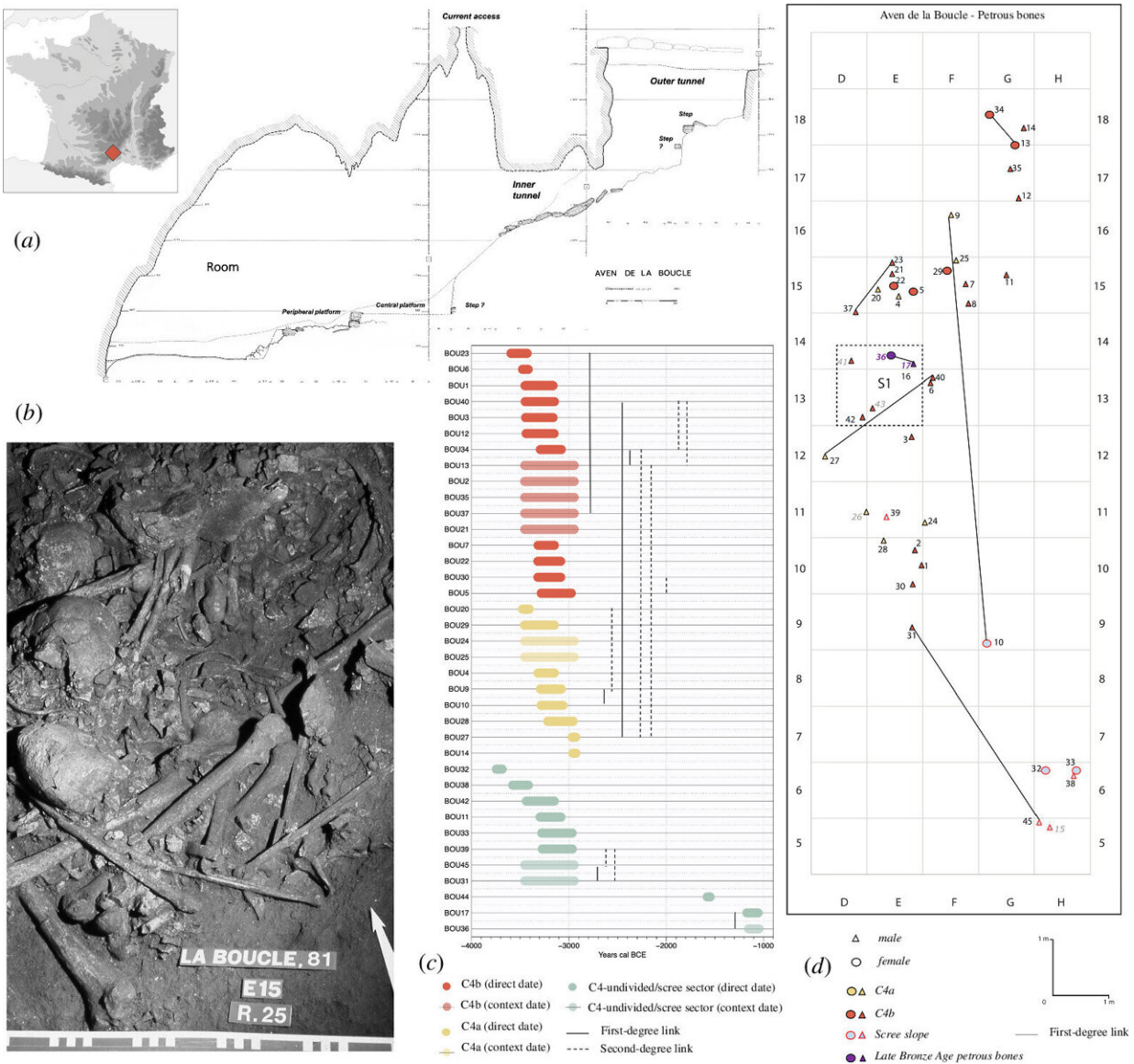


# Stone Age mass grave contains mostly adult males who were related

September 10 2024, by Bob Yirka



Geographical and chronological description of the Aven de la Boucle. Credit:

*Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* (2024). DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2024.1215

A team of archaeologists and paleo-geneticists from Université de Bordeaux, working with colleagues from Université Côte d'Azur, both in France, has found that a mass grave from the Neolithic contains the remains of mostly adult males who were related.

In their [study](#) published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, the group conducted a genetic analysis of the remains of some of the people buried at the site.

A mass [burial site](#) from the Neolithic at Aven de la Boucle was discovered in a cave in southern France in a prior dig. For the present study, the research team in the lab studied the remains of 75 exhumed people. The team analyzed the genomes of 37 of the individuals who had been uncovered throughout the burial site.

Radiocarbon dating had already shown that people were buried at the site over the years 2,800 BC to 3,600 BC, a finding that suggested that the site had been used for almost 1,000 years. In this new effort, the researchers found that 76% of the remains were male and that most of them belonged to a single paternal line. They suggest this points to the possibility that [social status](#) was passed down through the males of the society.

But it also raises the question of why fewer women were found at the site. They suggest two possibilities: that the included women were somehow "special"; or that equal numbers of males and females had been buried at the site and then, at some later time, most of the remains of the women were removed.

The researchers note that with most prehistoric societies, females typically left their group to partner with a male in another group, while the males stayed where they were. They suspect that was likely the case with these people. That suggests that the bodies of some of the [women](#) may have been taken back to their original home for burial, allowing them to be with their ancestors.

**More information:** Ana Arzelier et al, Ancient DNA sheds light on the funerary practices of late Neolithic collective burial in southern France, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* (2024). [DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2024.1215](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2024.1215)

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