

Who were the first modern humans to settle in Europe?

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Skull fragment found at Buran Kaya III in Crimea, belonging to an individual dating back to approximately 37,000 years ago. © Eva-Maria Geigl/IJM/CNRS

Before modern humans settled definitively in Europe, other human populations left Africa for Europe beginning approximately 60,000 years ago, albeit without settling for the long term. This was due to a major climatic crisis 40,000 years ago, combined with a super-eruption originating from the Phlegraean Fields volcanic area near current-day Naples, subsequently precipitating a decline in ancient European populations.

To determine who the first modern humans to settle definitively in Europe were, a team led by CNRS scientists analyzed the genome of two skull fragments from the Buran Kaya III site in Crimea dating to 36,000 and 37,000 years ago.

By comparing them to DNA sequences from human [genome](#) databases, they revealed the genetic proximity between these individuals and both current and ancient Europeans, especially those associated with the Gravettian culture, known for producing female figurines referred to as "Venuses," whose apogee in Europe came between 31,000 and 23,000 years ago. The stone tools found at Buran Kaya III also resemble some Gravettian assemblages.

The individuals studied here therefore contributed both genetically and technologically to the population that gave rise to this civilization around 5,000 years later. This research, which was [published](#) in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* on October 23, documents the first arrival of the ancestors of Europeans.

More information: Bennett, E.A., et al. Genome sequences of 36,000- to 37,000-year-old modern humans at Buran-Kaya III in Crimea. *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41559-023-02211-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-023-02211-9).
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