



Venus of Berekhat Ram

Discovery, Characteristics, Photo of Prehistoric Basalt Figurine: Golan Heights.

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Venus of Berekhat Ram, dated from 230,000 to 500,000 BCE. The [earliest art](#) outside India.

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Venus of Berekhat Ram (230-700,000 BCE)

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Introduction

The early Stone Age figurine of Berekhat Ram (Birkat Ram), discovered in hills north of Israel, is believed to be one of the oldest pieces of [prehistoric sculpture](#) known to archeology. Although initially highly controversial - as some paleontologists preferred to see it more as a product of natural erosion rather than a deliberate human act of creativity - its status now seems more secure following the discovery of a second similar and contemporaneous figurine - the [Venus of Tan-Tan](#), in Morocco.

Furthermore, microscopic analysis by Alexander Marshack appears to confirm that humans were responsible for the figurine.

Of equal significance is the fact that recently, examples of [rock art](#) from an even earlier Stone Age culture have been discovered in India - these are the [petroglyphs of Bhimbetka](#) - which supports the proposition that [prehistoric art](#) originated far earlier than previously thought.

See also: [Oldest Stone Age Art: Top 100 Artworks](#).



Discovery and Characteristics

The Venus of Berekhat Ram was found by archeologist N. Goren-Inbar (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) during archeological excavations on the Golan Heights between Syria and Israel during the summer of 1981. The lithic figure comprises a tuff pebble made of basalt, containing marks suggestive of the head, body, and arms of a female human. (To see how the Berekhat Ram figure fits into the evolution of art, see: [Prehistoric Art Timeline](#).)

Specifically, it exhibits three or more groove-like incisions, made by a sharp-edged stone, which give it the appearance of a human body. One incision is a deep groove that encircles the narrower end of the pebble (indicating the head), while two shallower, grooves cut into the sides (marking the arms). Recent microscopic research confirms that these incision are not the work of nature but the result of artificial intervention, indicating that the stone is definitely a work of [Stone Age art](#). Its sister figurine, the Venus of Tan-Tan is morphologically so similar that it could have been sculpted by the same artist.

Despite its name, the Venus of Berekhat Ram bears little if any resemblance to the European [venus figurines](#) of the later Gravettian culture of the Upper Paleolithic period, such as the [Venus of Willendorf](#), the [Venus of Brassempouy](#), the [Venus of Lespugue](#), the relief sculpture known as the [Venus of Laussel](#), and the [Venus of Kostenky](#).

Dating

The Venus of Berekhat Ram was created during the Acheulean culture of the

Lower Paleolithic period of the old Stone Age, and has been dated to 230,000-700,000 BCE. The reason for the vagueness of its provenance is that it was found sandwiched between two layers of volcanic residue: an upper one dated about 230,000 BCE, and a lower one dated 700,000 BCE. This makes it (along with the effigy of Tan-Tan) the oldest example of [mobiliary art](#) ever recorded, and remarkably, it means that it predated Neanderthal man, and was created by an earlier hominid like *Homo erectus*.

- See also: [Blombos Cave Engravings](#).
 - For the origins of painting and sculpture, see: [Homepage](#).
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