

# WILD AND DOMESTIC ANIMALS IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

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## Summary

This work presents the results of the study of osteological material from excavated archaeological monuments in Armenia (from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 13<sup>th</sup> century AD). Characteristics of species structure and peculiarities of hunted and domestic animals are given; their role in economic life of inhabitants is clarified.

## Résumé

*Animaux domestiques et sauvages au Moyen Âge en Arménie.*

Ce travail présente les résultats de l'étude de matériels ostéologiques issus de monuments fouillés en Arménie (2<sup>e</sup> siècle BC - 13<sup>e</sup> siècle AD). Les caractéristiques de la structure des espèces et les particularités des animaux sauvages et domestiques sont données, et leur rôle dans la vie économique des habitants est précisé.

## Zusammenfassung

*Wilde und domestizierte Tiere im mittelalterlichen Armenien.*

Der Beitrag befaßt sich mit den Auswertungsergebnissen osteologischer Untersuchungen an Knochenmaterialien aus Grabungen in Armenien (2. Jh. v. Chr. - 13. Jh. n. Chr.). Die Charakteristika der Artenzusammensetzungen und der einzelnen Haus- und Jagdtiere werden vorgestellt. Besonderer Wert wird auf die wirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Tiere gelegt.

## Key Words

Mammalia, Osteology, Bone, Wild animals, Domestic animals.

## Mots clés

Mammifères, Ostéologie, Os, Animaux sauvages, Animaux domestiques.

## Schlüsselworte

Säugetiere, Osteologie, Knochen, Wildtiere, Haustiere.

Osteological material from the excavations of settlements, burials and sites of ancient towns (from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) are not numerous but are an interesting part of the archaeological data. Animal bone remains from monuments of medieval Armenia (11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) vary in species and number. Of 18 species of mammals, ten are wild animals present since the Early Holocene (9 800 - 7 700 years ago). The bone remains of those animals, previously widely distributed, are of great interest and are now relicts of the past.

A beaver (*Castor fiber* L.) lower jaw with damaged teeth, from the monument of Kaps, is a rare and very important find, confirming the presence of this animal in Armenia (fig. 1).

The Eastern Caucasus plains-semideserts have been the vast territory of jeyran (*Gazella subgutturosa* Guld.). Horn fragments of this animal from the monuments of Dvin and Katnakhpur give evidence of its distribution in Armenia (fig. 2).

Horn fragments (fig. 3), metapodial and other bones of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), settled in the territory of Arme-

nia since the Early Holocene, have been identified in nearly all medieval monuments. Deer is now exterminated. Moufflon (*Ovis orientalis gmelini* Blyth.) and bezoar goat (*Capra aegagrus aegagrus* Erxl.), widely distributed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are under the threat of extinction. The earliest finds of moufflon giving evidence of its general settlements date back to the IV-V<sup>th</sup> millennium bc (Manaserian, 1986). A horn of moufflon has been recorded in medieval monuments of the Ararat Valley. Fragments of horns of bezoar goats, clearly distinguishing wild forms from domestic ones, have been found in the Oghmik monument. This species of mountain goat is known from the materials of Yerevan I Palaeolithic caves.

Single specimens of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus* L.), wild cat (*Felis silvestris* Shreb.), badger (*Meles Meles* L.), fox (*Vulpes vulpes* L.) and marten (*Martes foina* Erxl.) have been identified in all investigated monuments (Manaserian, 1991). Although osteological evidences of hunting by medieval population of Armenia is far from being complete, the predominance of domestic animals over wild ones is undoubtable.

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**Fig. 1:** Lower jaw fragment of a beaver.

Bone remains of domestic animals, i.e. cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, cats and dogs, represent 95% of all faunistic collections, the majority of them being remains of sheep and cattle. Remains of goat, pig and horse fragments are less numerous. Still, it is worth to note here that horse meat has been used considerably rarely in medieval Armenia and excavated food remains do not reflect its genuine role in the economy.

Dog and cat are represented by fragments of skulls from the brain area and lower jaw. They have not been found among food remains, as if they were not used as food. The discovered apex of the brain area of a camel skull does not allow to determine to what species it belongs. However, osteological material from the southern shore of Lake Sevan and from excavations of the town of Argishtikhinili (8<sup>th</sup> century BC), as well as rock arts of camels on Geghama monuments (VI-I<sup>th</sup> millennia bc) give evidence of the presence of this animal in the territory of medieval Armenia.

Results of investigations show that wild animals average 0.8% of the total number of the 7 000 bone remains studied from nineteen monuments. If the total amount of bones of wild animals is considered as a determining criteria of hunting in economy, and first of all in feeding the population, then there is a reason to think that it was not so high as for the inhabitants of Early Holocene.

Acknowledging the limiting role of meat of wild animals in feeding medieval populations, we assume that the rise of pastoralism, i.e. cattle and sheep breeding, helped them to satisfy their need in food.



**Fig. 2:** Horn fragments of jeyran.



**Fig. 3:** Horn fragments of red deer.

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