

Animal remains of the medieval settlement near Petarch village (Sofia Province, CW Bulgaria)

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Abstract. A total of 107 bones and bone fragments of wild and domestic reptiles, birds and mammals collected in the medieval settlement near Petarch village (Sofia Region, CW Bulgaria) have been identified as 11 taxa. Most numerous are the remains of cattle, aurochs and the wild boar, indicating forest landscape. The record of the wisent is a rare confirmation of the species existence at least till 7th-9th century AD in the country.

Key-words: Subfossil mammals, History of Balkan fauna, Subrecent fauna.

Introduction

In the last decade the archaeozoological studies in the Sofia Kettle revealed an unexpected diverse subrecent vertebrate terrestrial fauna (Boev, 2009, 2016, 2017 a, b, 2018, 2019, 2020). The Petarch village (Kostinbrod Municipality) is situated in the north-western part of the Sofia Kettle. In the Middle Ages this region was densely forested and it was known in the time of the Crusaders as “Silva Magna Bulgarica” (The Great Bulgarian Forest). At present natural forests are completely cleared and the surroundings of the village represent mainly farmlands and pastures. The bed of the “Balkan Stream” Gazprom Pipeline passes in the vicinities of the village and the salvage archaeological excavations along its route allowed to complete our data on the medieval fauna of Bulgaria in that part of the country.

Material and Methods

The animal material (bones, bone splinters and teeth) was collected in April – June 2021 during the archaeological excavations leaded by the archaeologist Dr. Katya Melamed (National Archaeological Institute and Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia) who dated the site Middle Ages (7th – 9th century A. D.). The material was handed for examination in June 2020. It originates from 22 samples of 5.52-5.53 m depth.

Results and discussion

The remains of domestic animals number 36 finds, while those of wild animals are 26 (Table 1). The majority of bones are heavily damaged. So, the unidentifiable bone splinters represent 42.0 percent. Ten bones of *Sus scrofa domestica*, *Bos taurus*, and *Bos primigenius* are burnt. Five bones of red deer, wild boar, land tortoise, and sheep/goat were worked (Fig. 1). The chicken is represented by a small-sized bred.

The presence of two large mammals as the aurochs and the wisent, as well as the red deer and the wild boar indicates former richness of the environment and the domination of the forested landscapes. All they are the largest hunting terrestrial mammals of Europe. The aurochs became extinct in the 17th century A.D., while the wisent disappeared in Bulgaria ca. 11th century A.D.

Domestic cattle were the most spread among the collected material. The cattle were of small-sized bred.

Most interesting are two finds of *Bison bonasus*, a horn-core and a mandibular fragment (Fig. 2). Spassov & Iliev (1986) report on a find of the wisent from a contemporaneous locality near Garvan village (Silistra Province; 9th-10th century AD) in the NE Bulgaria. The authors defined this find as the latest (i. e. the youngest) record of the wisent in Bulgaria.



Fig. 1. Worked animal bones from the medieval settlement near Petarch village (Sofia Province, CW Bulgaria): basal fragment of antler of *Cervus elaphus* (a), tusk of *Sus scrofa scrofa* (b); plastron bone of *Testudo graeca/hermanni* (c); proximal end of metatarsal bone of *Ovis/Capra* (d); distal end of tibia of *Ovis/Capra*. Photos: Z. Boev.



Fig. 2. Some finds of animal bones from the medieval settlement near Petarch village (Sofia Province, CW Bulgaria): *Bison bonasus* - horn-core (a), fragment of left mandible (b); *Bos primigenius* – distal part of femur bone (c), proximal part of right mandible (d). Photos: Z. Boev.

Table 1. Animal representation in the collected archaeozoological material from the medieval settlement (7th -9th century A. D.) near Petarch village, Sofia Region (CW Bulgaria).

No	Taxa	English Name	Number of bone finds
REPTILIA			
1.	<i>cf. Testudo graeca / hermanni</i>	Tortoise	1
AVES			
2.	<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Domestic chicken	1
MAMMALIA			
Artiodactyla			
3.	<i>Bos primigenius</i> (Bojanus, 1827)	Aurochs	10
4.	<i>Bos taurus</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Domestic cattle	20
5.	<i>Bison bonasus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wisent	2
6.	<i>Cervus elaphus</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Red deer	2
7.	<i>Sus scrofa scrofa</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Wild boar	11
8.	<i>Sus scrofa domestica</i> Erxleben, 1777	Wild boar / Domestic pig	4
9.	<i>Capra hircus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Domestic goat	1
	<i>Ovis / Capra</i>	Sheep/ Goat	8
Perissodactyla			
10.	<i>Equus ferus caballus</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Domestic horse	1
11.	<i>Equus africanus asinus</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Donkey	1
	Bone splinters		45
	Total		107

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