

The Paleofauna of Vatera

Two million years ago, the fauna of Vatera was pretty different from the fauna of today. On the open plains, the ungulate herbivores (gazelles, antelopes and wild oxen, horses) and mammoths were grazing, being stalked by sabre-toothed cats. In the woods, deer, rhinoceroses, mastodons, raccoon dogs and wild cats lived. This forest was not very dense. Giant macaques were found at the forest edge. Either in the open or in the forest, tortoises walked around, a small one and a giant one, as big as a car. Along the river, badgers and possibly otters made a living. High in the sky, eagles were circling. They are extinct since long, and their story is told only by their fossils.

At the same time, two million years ago, the same animal species were found also in the rest of Europe, and in Asia as well. The fauna of Vatera is part of that large ecosystem, ranging from Spain and France in the West to China in the Far East. The geological period of this fauna is the end of the Late Pliocene (MN 17). It is the time of the gradual transition from the warmer Pliocene period to the colder Pleistocene period. The Pleistocene species are very similar to the species of today, but those of the Pliocene are rather different.

The climate of Lesvos two million years ago was warm and relatively dry. The landscape of Vatera was mainly an open-canopy woodland, as indicated by the presence of antelopes, gazelles, giraffes, rhinos and horses. But there may have been also a more closed woodland, where the deer and wild ox roamed. Typical forest dwellers (pigs, tiny ruminants) are missing; this habitats were not available around Vatera. The climate, the landscape and the fauna of Vatera two million years ago was similar to the subtropical open woodlands and savannas of Africa and India of today.

How we know about Life of the Past?

What happened Two Million Years ago?

The Wildlife of Lesvos Today