

The Gazelles, Antelopes and Ox of Vatera

Two million years ago, several gazelles, an antelope and an ox lived at Vatera. There were at least two gazelles, a smaller and a larger one (*Gazella borbonica*, *Gazella bouvrinae*), but possibly there was a third and much larger gazelle, too (*Gazella aegaea*). Gazelles got extinct in West Europe before the end of the Pliocene, but in Southeast Europe they persisted till the very end of the Pliocene, and were known in several varieties, as can be seen in the case of Vatera. Gazelles are elegant ungulates with a slender body, long neck, long legs and S-shaped, ringed horns. Both males and females have horns. Gazelles of the genus *Gazella* still live today, but only in Africa, the Middle East and India. The antelope (*Gazellospira torticornis*) of Vatera was much larger than the gazelles. It had spiralled horns, which are like an anticlockwise corkscrew. This antelope was common from Europe to China, and has been found in several Greek localities, other than Vatera. The *Gazellospira* from Vatera is a bit smaller than most other *Gazellospira*. The genus *Gazellospira* got extinct in the Pleistocene, contrary to *Gazella*. The spiral-horned antelopes of today (*Tragelaphini*) are not directly related to *Gazellospira*. Some rare fragments indicate that there was an ox as well, possibly *Leptobos*. *Leptobos* was not as massive as the cattle and bison of today, but smaller and gracile, not unlike the Asian wild oxen (*banteng*). Another difference with cattle of today is that only the bulls bore horns. These horns are very large and form a large open circle. The *Leptobos* from Vatera is a bit larger than that from Saint Vallier (France).