Abstract

The Pleistocene endemic fauna of Cyprus consists mainly of dwarf hippos and elephants, adapted to the island environment. Among the rare elements of this endemic fauna is a small carnivore, the viverrid Genetta plesictoides, poorly known from scanty material that comes from two localities. Recent excavations in a rockshelter site at the area of Aghia Napa yielded — apart from a rich hippo sample — new skeletal remains of partial skull and a tibia of the cypriot genet. The dental morphology shows adaptations towards a more carnivorous diet in relation to the extant Genetta genetta.

The skull is narrow and elongated (estimated condylobasal length: 86 mm), with moderately long and low proportions, being longer and transversely narrowed. Moreover, the P3 lacks the internal cusp that characterises the metastyle is clearly smaller in length than the paracone. The tip of the paracone is directed backwards. The co-occurrence of G. plesictoides with Elephas cypriotes Bate, 1903, a dwarf elephant (Bate 1903, 1905). Other, generally quite sparse, findings include the genet Genetta plesictoides, one or two species of murid rodents (Mus sp.), one or two species of bats and a soricid insectivore (Crocidura sobolensis) (Boekschoten and Sondaar 1972).

Discussion

The fossils ascribed until now to G. plesictoides are not comparable to the material described here, as they represent different skeletal parts. However, their size — superior in comparison to that of G. genetta — is very similar, allowing us to ascribe the studied material to G. plesictoides.

Conclusion

The species G. plesictoides is a poorly known endemic viverrid. Apart from an adult mandible and scarce limb bones, as well as some scanty juvenile dental and postcranial material, no other skeletal parts of this small carnivore were known until recently. The new material from Aghia Napa is the first adult skull and upper dentition of the species. Its main character is the development of the cutting function of the dentition, probably reflecting a more carnivorous diet, compared to the extant common genet. The Co-occurrence of G. plesictoides with Elephas cypriotes in the site of Aghia Napa, positively indicates that the Cypriot genet belongs to the endemic Pleistocene fauna or at least closely associated with it.