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Abstract: In the Caucasus, cheetahs were first revealed in Middle Pleistocene strata of the Apsheron Peninsula. Its preferred biotopes in its distribution area is described. There are no documentary data on the occurrence of the cheetah in Caucasus in historical times. Some pictures of cheetahs have been found. The cheetah is mentioned in books giving some evidence of its presence in Russia during the 11th-12th centuries, trained for hunting and in another adjoining countries during the 14th and the 15th century. The disappearance of the cheetah from Transcaucasia and southern Asia is explained by the depletion of steppe ungulates and the intensive pursuit of young cheetahs for training.

Dans le Caucase, les guépards ont d'abord été retrouvés dans la strate du Pléistocène Moyen de la Péninsule Apchéron. Son biotope préféré dans son aire de répartition est décrit. Il n'y a pas de données documentées sur la présence du guépard dans le Caucase au temps historique. Des dessins de guépards ont été retrouvés. Le guépard est mentionné dans plusieurs livres apportant la preuve de sa présence en Russie pendant le 11e et le 12e siècle où il était entraîné pour la chasse et dans d'autres pays proches pendant le 14e et le 15e siècle. La disparition du guépard de la Transcaucasie et au sud de l'Asie est expliquée par la diminution des ongulés des steppes et la poursuite intensive des jeunes guépards pour l'entraînement.

The greatest number of this species is observed in the lowland forests of eastern Transcaucasia. Its favorite biotopes are reed-cattail thickets beside lakes and marshes and tugai thickets along rivers and rivulets. Here the cat hunts water voles and marsh birds. It is not encountered in mountain forests, but will migrate through open places in the Transcaucasian semidesert.

Some unknown barriers impede its penetration into western Transcaucasia. At the first glance it would seem that, like the jackal, the jungle cat would prosper in the Colchis, which has a topography similar to that of Girkan, a warm climate and many swamps. The absence of the cat from the Colchis cannot simply be explained by the "newness" of the distribution area on the Caucasus. After all, the Surami Pass is sufficiently low to permit passage, and predatory communities are known to settle rapidly. The absence of jungle cat remains from the Binagady locality, the "underdevelopment" of its range on the Isthmus and, finally, the stenotopic character of the animal and its relative adaptation to warmth suggest that it is a postglacial settler of southern origin. The area of land on the Azerbaidzhan Plains inhabited by the jungle cat increased with the development of a local irrigation system and decreased with its abandonment. Most recently, the destruction of tugai forests and of bamboo groves and accelerated trade have caused a further decrease in range and population. It is difficult to discover the population dynamics of the jungle cat from figures on pelt yields because the pelts of this species and those of European wildcat are reported together.

The granting of bounties on cats sharply increased the pelt yield. This reflects a state of species well-being, although nutria breeding is thereby endangered.

Cheetah — *Acinonyx jubatus* Schr. Cheetah remains are known from the Upper Pliocene of southern Europe and Africa (Simpson, 1945).

- 81 The species is very rare in Quaternary deposits and until recent times was known only from the Upper Pleistocene of China (Pei, 1939). In the Caucasus (Figure 117) they were first revealed in Middle Pleistocene strata of the Apsheron Peninsula (Map 38). At that time the cheetah (Figure 118) could have hunted saigas, asses, horses and hares. Possibly its distribution in the Pleistocene extended to eastern Ciscaucasia. The contemporary range of the cheetah includes Africa and southern Asia as far as China. Its preferred biotopes, according to Roosevelt, Pocock (1939, 1941) and other naturalists and hunters, are low-lying plains and hilly savannahs, deserts and semideserts where the animal shelters among rocks and shrubs. In Turkmenistan and Iran it lives in the open sandy, clayey and stony desert, but prefers river valleys grown with tugai thickets where it hunts gazelles and hares.

There are no documentary data on the occurrence of the cheetah in the Caucasus in historical times. It was depicted (Figure 119) on an ornament of a silver container found in the Maikop burial (Farmakovskii, 1914). The wearing of a collar suggests the possibility of cheetah domestication by the time of the Scythian. On a 12th-century ceramic from the excavation of ancient Gandzha [now Kirovabad] there are pictures of cheetah somewhat reminiscent of those depicted by the ancient Egyptians.

The Georgian Chronicles "Kartlis Tskhovreba" place the cheetah in eastern Georgia (Kartlia) in the Middle Ages and, from this source, its

presence was incorporated into the local fiction. Some local authors made extraordinary statements regarding its habitation of high mountains, e. g., K. Gamsakhurdia in "The Hand of a Great Master" (1945). Usamah ibn Munkidh (1922-1923 edit.) mentioned that Asia Minor gazelles were hunted 282 with cheetahs in the 12th century in Syria and Palestine. In the Russian Chronicles and also in "The Lay of the Host of Igor" (Slovo o polku Igoreve) "parduses" are mentioned – hunting "leopards" (cheetahs) – which served the Russian princes in the hunt during the 11th-12th centuries (Zhitkov, 1936). This practice was borrowed from the Persians or the Polovtsian khans, according to Zhitkov. This is quite probable, because nomads of the Russian Plain maintained military, cultural and commercial relations with those of Ciscaucasia and Transcaucasia from the time of the Bronze Age.



FIGURE 118. Cheetah in the Pleistocene semidesert of eastern Transcaucasia

After Aristov (1866), Pidoplichko (1951, p. 178) erroneously ascribed these references to "parduses" (cheetahs) in the old Slavic records to the leopard, an animal unsuited for this hunt. The Azerbaidzhan khans and Armenian and Kartlian princes hunted with trained cheetahs up to the 14th century. In 1474 Josaf Barbaro saw the hundred hunting cheetahs of an Armenian prince.

Adam Olearius (1870 edit.) recorded that a Persian shah hunted onagers using cheetahs in the Isfahan hunting grounds. Olearius wrote (page 935) in connection with this: "There\* are numerous predators, such as tigers, leopards, wolves and bears. Tigers\*\* are so numerous there that they are sold in herds of 10-20 animals. The tigers were generally used for the hunt because they were rapid runners and became so highly domesticated that the hunter could place the tiger on the horse behind him." Later information appears on the cheetah in Mazanderan and throughout the Caspian forests (Filippi, 1865, Blanford, 1876).

\* In the Gilan area.

\*\* Cheetahs.

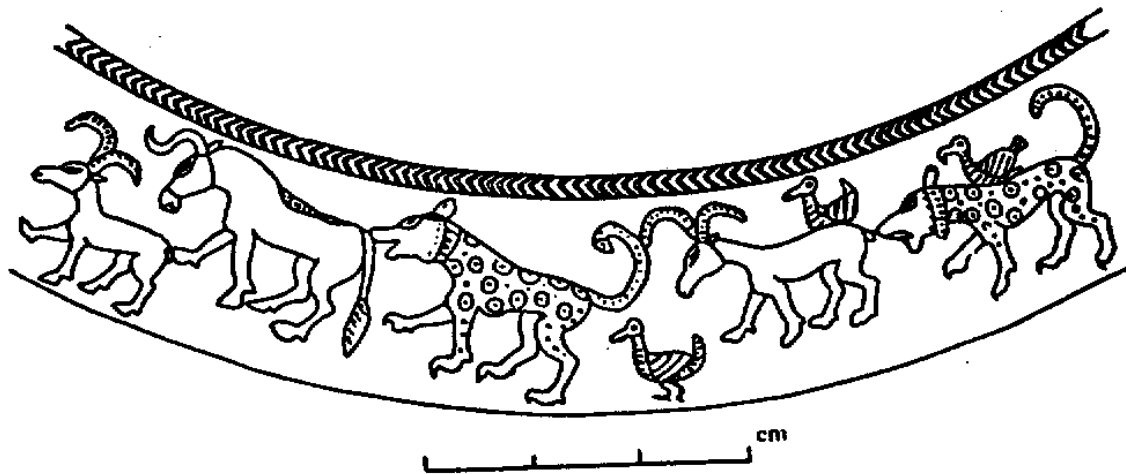


FIGURE 119. Representation of cheetahs on a silver container from Maikop burial (according to Farnakovskii, 1914)

In Asia Minor and Arabia the cheetah was rare at the end of the last century (Danford and Alston, 1880; Aharoni, 1930; Bodenheimer, 1935).

The cheetah probably remained in a wild state in the Kura-Araks lowland and in the middle Araks valley until the 18th century. This is convincingly shown by the sudden decline in cheetah range and population in present-day Turkmenistan and its recent presence in northern Iran (southern Azerbaidzhan).

The disappearance of the cheetah from Transcaucasia and southern Asia is explained by the depletion of steppe ungulates and the intensive pursuit of young cheetahs for training.

283 By tracing the contemporary range of the cheetah in Asia and Africa, Harper (1945) established the reduced area of distribution and the population decline of this peculiar cat.

(148) TABLE 20. Changes in the species composition of the Quaternary carnivores in the piedmont of the eastern Caucasus

Species	Pleistocene	Historical time	
	Apsheron	Apsheron and Kabristan	Dagestan piedmont
<i>Canis aureus</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>Canis</i> sp. . . . .	+	-	-
<i>C. lupus</i> . . . . .	+	+	+
<i>Vulpes corsac</i> . . . . .	+	-	+
<i>V. vulpes</i> . . . . .	+	+	+
<i>Hyaena strifata</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>Crocuta spelaea</i> . . . . .	+	-	-
<i>Ursus arctos</i> . . . . .	+	+	+
<i>Vormela peregusna</i> . . . . .	+	+	+
<i>Mustela nivalis</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>M. lutreola</i> . . . . .	-	-	+
<i>M. eversmanni</i> . . . . .	-	-	+
<i>Lutra lutra</i> . . . . .	-	-	+
<i>Martes foina</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>Meles meles</i> . . . . .	+	+	+
<i>Panthera spelaea</i> . . . . .	+	-	-
<i>P. leo</i> . . . . .	-	?	?
<i>P. pardus</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>Felis lynx</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>F. silvestris</i> . . . . .	-	?	+
<i>F. lybica</i> . . . . .	+	?	?
<i>F. chaus</i> . . . . .	-	+	+
<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i> . . . . .	+	?	?
Total . . . . .	11	12 + 4?	17 + 3?

TABLE 21. Relative proportions of carnivores in Apsheron (asphalt trap) and in Shemakha area (commercial game hunting data)

Apsheron in Pleistocene		Shemakha area, 1930-1940	
species	percentage of individuals	species	percentage of individuals
Fox . . . . .	28.1	Fox . . . . .	75.5
Wolf . . . . .	27.5	Badger . . . . .	16.4
Corsac fox . . . . .	19.2	Jackal . . . . .	3.5
Badger . . . . .	13.0	Wolf . . . . .	2.3
Cave hyena . . . . .	4.5	European wildcat and jungle cat . . . . .	0.8
Tiger polecat . . . . .	2.9	Pine marten and stone marten . . . . .	0.7
Lion . . . . .	2.5	Bear . . . . .	0.2
Bear . . . . .	0.9	Lynx . . . . .	0.2
Cheetah . . . . .	0.6	Weasel . . . . .	0.1
Spotted hyena . . . . .	0.4	Otter . . . . .	0.04
Wolf (small) . . . . .	0.2	Tiger polecat . . . . .	0.04
- . . . . .	-	Striped hyena . . . . .	0.001
- . . . . .	-	Panther . . . . .	0.0001
Number of species . . . . .	11	Number of species . . . . .	15
Number of individuals . . . . .	440	Number of individuals . . . . .	12,890