

Camelids do not occur in the Late Miocene mammal locality of Çobanpinar, Turkey — omissions and contradictions

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ABSTRACT. A critical response to the small article by Sen (2010) discussing the validity of a report of camelids from the Late Miocene locality Çobanpinar, Turkey.

KEY WORDS: Camelids, Late Miocene, Plio-Pleistocene, Turkey.

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Верблюды отсутствуют в позднемиоценовом местонахождении Чобанпинар, Турция — пропуски и противоречия

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РЕЗЮМЕ. Критический ответ на статью Шена (2010) о достоверности находки остатков верблюдов в позднемиоценовом местонахождении Чобанпинар, Турция.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: верблюды, поздний миоцен, плио-плейстоцен, Турция.

Remains of a camel have been described as coming from the uppermost Miocene of Turkey at Çobanpinar by Van der Made, Morales, Sen & Aslan (2002, 2003). Recently one of these authors published a note in this journal stating that these remains do not come from this locality (Sen, 2010). The note also described the events leading to the publication of these two papers and to the subsequent doubts about the provenance. We checked correspondence on this matter and noted a contradiction. Subsequent correspondence in order to elucidate this matter, lead to further contradictions. These contradictions concern: 1) the identity of the authority who disclaims Çobanpinar as the origin of the camel remains; 2) the moment when this occurred; and 3) the main argument for this. There is also an omission in Sen's (2010) note concerning the reason why a chemical test on the origin of the remains was not performed. It is our intention here to discuss these contradictions and evaluate their scientific implications and to correct an omission from Sen's note.

From the note by Sen, we learn that in 1977, Dr. Gerçek Saraç was a member of the team led by I. Tekkaya that excavated Çobanpinar, that he accompanied Tekkaya to Yozgat and brought the camel remains back with him, and that these later got mixed up with the fossils from Çobanpinar. So in this version, Dr. Saraç is the authority providing the provenance of the camel remains. This is contradicted by events and correspondence.

In June 1995, one of us (JvdM) was in Ankara and studied fossils in the University and the MTA (Geological Survey of Turkey). Contrary to Sen's note, this

was not for the study of Çobanpinar suids, which had already been studied in 1991, when G. Saraç acted as a host to JvdM. On 19/6/1995 JvdM visited Fehmi Aslan in his room and recognized a mandible of a camel among fossils of giraffids. The question arose where the jaw came from. Several persons went into the storage, where the jaw of the other side and the symphysis of the same individual were found, and returned telling it was Çobanpinar. Besides, one of these specimens had "Çobanpinar" written on it (this can be faintly seen on published figures: Sen, 2010: fig. 1A and Van der Made *et al.*, 2003: fig. 14.1.A). From this moment onward, the fossils became more interesting, since this meant that they would be among the oldest camel remains in the Old World. This novelty spread among the paleontologists working at the MTA, but Gerçek Saraç, who worked there and who knew JvdM well, remained silent about their provenance.

The note by Sen (2010) indicates that in July 2003 he informed us about problems with the provenance of the camel specimens and that we replied that an isotope analysis could verify the provenance of the fossils. The events in 2003 were very shortly after the last of the two papers was published and eight years after it was decided to publish on the camel remains. In our first reaction to Sen, we recognized the need to publish a correction, if the doubts on the provenance were confirmed. We also answered that an analysis of trace elements (not isotopes) might provide indications for the provenance of the fossils, that there was a person who was willing to do so, and described the size and number of the samples needed from the camel remains and from fossils and

sediment from Çobanpinar and the possible locality where the camel remains might come from. Here we cite from the answer of Dr. Sen (e-mail 4/8/2003):

“It is possible to verify this by controlling the isotopes or simply the composition of bones and matrix from this specimen and those are surely from Çobanpinar. Concerning from where this mandible is originated, I have no idea, and neither Gerçek and Fehmi who were working with me in the MTA Museum in this early July. I intended to go back to MTA Museum next September or October, and then I can sample specimens for such analyses.”

The omission of the fact that Sen never sent the promised samples, gives a different meaning to the phrase in Sen’s (2010) note that “nothing has been done” on this type of analysis. We are not travelling as often to Ankara as Dr. Sen and since 2003, we have had no opportunity to take such samples.

The message, cited above and dating from August 2003, stated that Dr. Saraç did not have any idea where the camel remains come from, while the note by Sen (2010) states: “In July 2003, I visited the Natural History Museum of Ankara, and met there with G. Saraç. He advised me that the camelid material was not collected at Çobanpinar, but at a site near Yozgat.” By e-mail we have asked both Sen and Saraç about this contradiction between the published note and the e-mail but did not get a satisfactory explanation. Instead, in an e-mail of 27/10/2012 Sen stated again: “In July 2003, Gerçek told me that he does not remember any more from where the camel remains were collected”. An e-mail by Saraç (4/8/2012) stated: “Before the 2003 when we working with Sevket for put the samples in the show case (vitrine) in the new MTA Natural History museum, I asked him “if really the camel samples belong to Çobanpinar locality”” and proceeded to relate that in 2003 the same question was asked again and that then Sen, after contemplating the remains for 20–30 minutes changed his mind and decided they were not from Çobanpinar. In this version it is Sen, who pronounced the verdict that the remains are not from Çobanpinar, based on the fossilisation, while in the paper it is Saraç who provides the evidence, stating that he brought the remains from Yozgat. Depending on the version, we

have to assume that the camel remains are from an unknown locality or from Yozgat.

The photograph published by Sen (2010: fig. 1 A) shows a collection number (3007) as well as another indication that is not well legible (“705”?). These numbers were not present in 1995 (Van der Made *et al.*, 2003: fig. 14.1.A) and suggest that the specimen has been catalogued since then. Possibly this has something to do with the re-evaluation of their origin, but we are not in a position to follow this trail.

Sen (2010) stated that the camel remains are barely fossilized, unlike those from Çobanpinar and more like subfossil bones. If this is so clear now, one might ask why he did not raise the alarm in the years previous to the publication of the specimens. However, as pointed out in the descriptions in 2002 and 2003, these camel remains are of large size and retain a second lower deciduous molar. These are features shared with fossil *Paracamelus*, while living and subfossil *Camelus* tend to be smaller and have this tooth reduced. This suggests that the remains under discussion are fossil and relatively old. When, back in 1995, Turkish colleagues said the material comes from Çobanpinar, we had no reason to doubt this. Now, when Turkish colleagues say the material comes from Yozgat, there are some reasons to doubt. In the present state of knowledge, it is better to consider the provenance of these specimens as doubtful, rather than assign them a possibly erroneous provenance or age.

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