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# **EARLY PALEOLITHIC OF EURASIA: NEW DISCOVERIES**

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## THE TAMAN FAUNAL COMPLEX OF LARGE VERTEBRATES OF THE AZOV AND LOWER DON REGIONS

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The Taman faunal complex was first recognized by V.I. Gromov (1948) on the basis of materials collected by I.M. Gubkin and N.B. Vassoevich on the Taman Peninsula in 1914 and 1923, respectively. In addition to the stratotype locality of Sinyaya Balka and the Tsimbal quarry, several other Eopleistocene (Early Pleistocene according to the West European scale) paleontological sites are known in the Azov and Lower Don Region. The sites of Port-Katon, Margaritovo, and Semibalki, associated with gray-green clays and sands exposed on the southern shore of the Taganrog Gulf, represent several stages in the development of the Taman complex. The site of Semibalki produced remains of *Marmota* sp., *Trogontherium cuvieri*, *Ursus* sp., *Pachycrocuta* cf. *brevirosris*, *Homotherium* cf. *crenatidens*, *Archidiskodon meridionalis tamanensis*, *Equus* cf. *major*, *Elasmotherium caucasicum*, *Eucladoceros* aff. *orientalis*, *Bison* cf. *tamanensis*, *Pontoceros* cf. *ambiguus* (Baigusheva, 2005).

The site near the village of Samarskoe (Rostov region) is situated on the right bank of the Kagalnik River in about 30 km from the mouth. Faunal remains, (*A. m. tamanensis*, *E. cf. major*, *Stephanorhinus* sp., *Elasmotherium* sp., Cervidae gen.) were found in 1963-1965 in a sand quarry. They came from the basal layer of white obliquely laminated sands (up to 2 m thick). Most remains belonged to elephants and were represented by skull fragments, teeth, and postcranial bones. The teeth variability is within the ranges characteristic of the Taman elephant:  $M^2$  has 11-12 enamel plates, and the frequency of plates on  $M^3$  is 4.5-6 (the thickness of enamel is 2.8-3.0 mm).

Some bones of *A. m. tamanensis*, *Elasmotherium* sp., and *E. cf. orientalis* were also found in fine micaceous sands exposed in the basal part of the second terrace of the Sredniy Egorlyk River near the village of Novodonskoe (Rostov Region).

Skeletal remains of *A. m. tamanensis* were collected in sand deposits of the Krasinsky quarry on the right bank of the Aksai River (near the Kamenolomni village).  $M^3$  has 15 dental plates + talon, the plate frequency is 5-6, the mean enamel thickness is 2.6 mm.

Numerous bones of large and small mammals come from the Sarkel alluvial sediments, exposed by water abrasion near the village of Khoroshevskaya in the Lower Don Region (Dodonov et al. 2007). Large mammals are represented by *A. m. tamanensis*, *E. cf. major*, *E. cf. sussenbornensis*, *Stephanorhinus* sp., *Elasmotherium* sp., *Cervalces* sp., Cervidae gen., *Bison* sp., *Gazellospira* sp.

According to I.A. Dubrovo (1964), a number of finds from the northern (Ukrainian) shore of the Taganrog Gulf should also be identified as remains of the Taman elephant. Collections of local museums of Berdyansk and Mariupol include bones from the lower reaches of Kalmius River near Mariupol, near the metalworks “Azovstal’”, and on the Azov Sea shore at the settlements Melekini, Lyapino, Shirokino, town of Nogaisk, Obitochnaya spit, mouth of Molochnaya River, Staryi Krym settlement, and in other sites. However, the geology of the source deposits require more studies.

Remains of large mammals are somewhat less informative for age determination of source deposits than rodents. The study of remains of the index species of the Taman faunal complex, *A. m. tamanensis*, permit us, however, to conclude a certain heterogeneity of the listed localities. For example, dental features of elephants from the stratotype locality Sinyaya Balka are more archaic as compared to elephants from Sarkel (the eastern shore of Tsymla reservoir). The stratigraphic position of site Sarkel was determined rather exactly. The deposits lay below the paleomagnetic Jaramillo Subchron and were dated to the upper part of Eopleistocene. It was correlated with regional zone MQR28 (by small mammals). This fauna was characteristic for advanced stage of Taman faunistic complex (Dodonov et al., 2007).

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