

Artiodactyls of Syria

by Marco Masseti

Abstract. Most of the wild ungulates which inhabited the Syrian territories (Syrian Arab Republic) has been exterminated in historical times. At present, the Wild Boar, *Sus scrofa*, the Roe Deer, *Capreolus capreolus*, and two or possibly three species of gazelle, *Gazella subgutturosa*, *G. dorcas*, and *G. gazella*, are the only survivors from a rich fauna of ungulates that ranged widely until recent times. The Arabian Oryx, *Oryx leucoryx*, and the Nubian Ibex, *Capra ibex nubiana*, do not appear to exist any longer. The latter species was probably exterminated during the second half of the 20th century.

Kurzfassung. Die meisten Huftierarten Syriens starben in historischer Zeit aus. Momentan leben in Syrien als Reste einer einst reichen Paarhufer-Fauna nur noch Wildschwein, *Sus scrofa*, Reh, *Capreolus capreolus*, und zwei oder möglicherweise drei Arten von Gazellen: *Gazella subgutturosa*, *G. dorcas* und *G. gazella*. Die Arabische Oryxantilope, *Oryx leucoryx*, und der Nubische Steinbock, *Capra ibex nubiana*, existieren offenbar in Syrien nicht mehr, wobei der Nubische Steinbock in der zweiten Hälfte der 20. Jh. ausstarb.

Key words. Syria, Levant, Middle East, *Sus*, *Capreolus*, *Gazella*, *Oryx*, *Capra*.

Introduction

Most of the ungulates which inhabited the land of Syria have been exterminated in historical times, the last being the Syrian Onager, *Equus hemionus hemippus* (Geoffroy, 1855), which disappeared from its final refuge in the region of Jabal Abdul Aziz in the 1930s (HARRISON 1972). In former times, the north-eastern mountainous and forested areas of the country were also well known as the habitat of deer, such as the Mesopotamian Fallow Deer, *Dama dama mesopotamica* (Brooke, 1875), and the Red Deer, *Cervus elaphus* L., 1758, which probably survived there until comparatively recent times (TRISTRAM 1888, TALBOT 1960, HARRISON 1968 & 1972, HARRISON & BATES 1991, MASSETI 2000). Also the Bezoar Goat, *Capra aegarus* Erxleben, 1777, may have previously extended its distribution into northern Syria (CARRUTHERS 1909), but there appears to be no recent confirmation of its existence there (HARRISON 1968). According to the Bedouin people, small herds of the Arabian Oryx, *Oryx leucoryx* (Pallas, 1777), may have persisted in the desert of Palmyra until very recent times. There are, in fact, some grounds for believing that this species may have extended its range as far north as Syria. For example, "SNAFFLE" (1932) quoted reports of it having been seen after the First World War in autumn in the hills near Jerud. TRISTRAM (1888) stated that these ungulates then existed in the northern parts of the Syrian desert, including the Belka and Hauran (cf. HARRISON 1968).

The geographical position of Syria, in the land-bridge between Eurasia and Africa, gives rise to a remarkable variety of bioclimatic and biogeographical conditions throughout its territory, permitting the coexistence of zoological elements from the Mediterranean and Boreal regions with Irano-Turanian and Saharo-Sindian taxa (cf. ATALLAH 1977 & 1978).