l u t r e o l a

Investigations of Mustelids and other Carnivorous Mammals in Russia

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Brief Communications

A milk tooth of Pliocene otter

Averianov, A.O. & Tesakov, A.S.

Pliocene otters are scarcely known, usually by isolated teeth and jaw fragments. Thus it is not surprising that until recently there were no finds of the deciduous teeth of fossil otters. The first such discovery is reported here. It is an isolated upper carnassial milk tooth (D^3) from the Upper Pliocene vertebrate locality Psekups in the Northern Caucasus. The fossilliferous beds of Psekups correspond to the lower part of the Matuyama Chron and its mammalian fauna is correlated with the beginning of Upper Villafranchian and Upper Villanyian faunas of Europe (Vangengeim et al., 1990).

The tooth (Fig. 1) is nearly identical in morphology to those of recent common otter, *Lutra lutra* L., 1758. It differs from D^3 of *L. lutra* only by higher and larger parastyle A (terminology after Baryshnikov, Averianov, 1990). Measurements of the described tooth fit those of deciduous upper carnassials of *L. lutra* (Table 1) too. From D^3 of recent south-asian smooth-coated otter *Lutrogale perscipillata* Geoffroy, 1826 (Leche, 1915, fig. 113) the specimen from Psekups differs by more weak inflation on the place of parastyle B. From D^3 of Brazilian giant otter *Pteronura brasiliensis* Gmelin, 1788 it can be distinguished by a smaller talon, not divided parastyle A, and by much lesser dimensions (Table 1). Although the deciduous upper carnassials of recent *Lutra* and *Lutrogale* are hard to separate exactly, the recent geographic ranges of both genera and the geographic position of the Psekups locality make the assignment of described tooth to an representative of the genus *Lutra* more preferable.

In Aonyxini we know only the lower deciduous dentition (*Aonyx capensis* Schinz, 1821: Baryshnikov, Averianov, 1990). It does not differ explicitly from those of Lutrini, so there is a possibility that Psekups otter belongs to this tribe. But before gaining the information about morphology of D^3 in Aonyxini it have to be attributed to *Lutra sp*. The milk teeth of *Enhydra lutris* L., 1758 are adopted for crushing as the permanent ones and consequently have quite peculiar morphology (Baryshnikov, Averianov, 1990) that

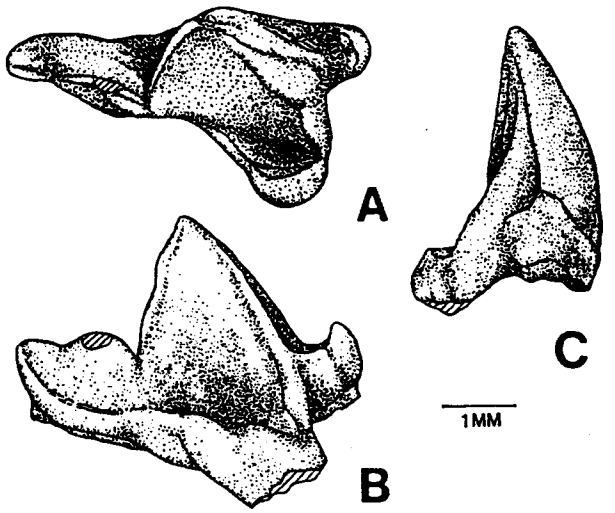

Fig. 1. Milk upper carnassial tooth (D^3) of *Lutra sp.* from Upper Pliocene of Psekups, North Caucasus: A - occlusal view, B - lingual view, C - anterior view.

excludes the attribution of the Psekups D^3 to Enhydrini.

The resorbed roots indicate that the tooth was shed during the natural process of teeth replacement and did not originate from a dead young animal.

Undescribed remains of *Lutra sp.* have been also reported from the near by Low Villafranchian (MN 16/17) of Liventzovka site near Rostov-on-Don (Baigusheva, 1971).

Attribution of the Psekups tooth to the widespread Pliocene genus *Lutra* demonstrates lack of endemism in Pliocene Caucasus Island contrary to a highly endemic Neogene-Pleistocene mammalian faunas of Mediterranean islands with peculiar genera of Lutrinae (*Nesolutra*, *Cyrnaonyx*, *Megalenhydris*, *Isolalutra*).

Table 1. Measurements of D^3 in Pliocene and Recent Otters

Measurements	*Lutra sp.*	*Lutra lutra*				*Lutrogale perspicillata*	*Pteronura brasiliensis*
	Psekups GIN	*n*	min	max	*M*		
Length	7.8	3	6.6	8.6	7.5	6.2, 9.0	10.5
Length of talon	2.4	4	2.1	3.0	2.6	2.6, 2.9	3.7
Length of metastyle	3.0	3	2.4	3.6	2.9	2.6, 4.0	5.4
Width	4.5	4	3.4	5.2	4.4	4.4, 5.8	7.0
Width of talon	2.4	4	1.6	2.2	2.0	2.0, 3.3	4.0
Heigth	5.2	4	3.6	5.5	4.4	4.9, 5.2	8.0

Data on the *Lutra lutra*, *Lutrogale perspicillata* and *Pteronura brasiliensis* from Baryshnikov, Averianov, 1990.

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Alexander O. Averianov
Zoological Institute
Russian Academy of Sciences
Universitetskaya nab., 1
199034 St.-Petersburg, Russia

Alexey S. Tesakov
Geological Institute
Russian Academy of Sciences
Pyzhevsky per., 7
109017 Moscow, Russia