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WAS HOMO GEORGICUS RUNNING AWAY? REFLECTIONS ON THE FIND-SITUATION AT DMANISI (GEORGIA)

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1.8 millions ago, at the time of Dmanisi, humans were an integral part of nature in a warm steppe environment. If, somewhere, a fauna including *Mammuthus meridionalis*, *Dicerorhinus etruscus etruscus*, *Equus stenonis*, *Cervus perrieri* and a bovid similar to *Dmanisisbos georgicus* together with *Megantereon megantereon*, *Homotherium crenatidens*, *Pachycrocuta perrieri*, *Ursus etruscus* and *Canis etruscus* occurs, we can assume that Man was also present.

Such a steppe environment existed south of the Eurasian high mountain chains and was inhabited by our ancestors during by far the longest period of our history. Much later – and probably linked with the control of fire – humans were able to occupy the temperate zones north of the mountains.

At Dmanisi humans and animals stayed close to water. The herbivores (elephants, rhinos, bovines, horses and deer) came to drink. The predators (sabre-toothed cats, hyenas, bears, wolves) came to hunt the herbivores. This explains the many bones of herbivores.

But why were many bones of carnivores also found? Mostly they do not represent old individuals and it can be excluded that they died due to natural causes.

Man was also present because of the herbivores. It may be discussed whether he himself was a hunter or whether he benefited from the carnivores' prey. Ever since humans owned stone tools, first of all flakes with sharp cutting edges, which enabled the dismembering of animal bodies, meat was an essential part of their food.

Humans were thus present for the same reason as the carnivores. But this does not explain why there are so many human bones. Mostly the bones are from young and strong individuals and nothing indicates a natural death.

It therefore seems possible that there were fights between humans and carnivores concerning the division of prey. The small wolves (*Canis etruscus*)

were not a serious danger. Bears (*Ursus etruscus*) were also not the problem; at Dmanisi they are partly represented by old animals. But there were the sabre-toothed cats (*Megantereon megantereon*, *Homotherium crenatidens*) and the hyena (*Pahycrocuta perrieri*), predators that even liked to kill humans as a welcome prey.

Such a scenario may explain the find situation at Dmanisi. The bones of sabre-toothed cats, especially the skull of a juvenile *Megantereon megantereon* with attached cervical and thoracic vertebrae, indicate that the carnivores did not always prevail. But human bones are also numerous.

How dangerous were humans at this time? The stone artefacts were not weapons but primarily tools used to cut up animal bodies. The muscular strength of *Homo georgicus* surely could not impress sabre-toothed cats and hyenas. So we may suppose that humans already had wooden weapons, perhaps already lances.

In any case, the situation at Dmanisi seems to prove that humans did not turn to flight when carnivores appeared.