

Origin and domestication of the wild carp,
Cyprinus carpio: from Roman gourmets to the
swimming flowers.

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Origin and domestication of the wild carp, *Cyprinus carpio*: from Roman gourmets to the swimming flowers

Eugene K. Balon

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Abstract

Paleogeographical, morphological, ecological, physiological, linguistic, archeological and historical evidence is used to explain the origin and history of the domestication of the wild carp. The wild ancestor of the common carp originated in the Black, Caspian and Aral sea drainages and dispersed east into Siberia and China and west as far as the Danube River. It is represented today by the uncertain east Asian subspecies *Cyprinus carpio haematopterus* and by the east European *Cyprinus carpio carpio*. There is evidence that the Romans were the first to culture carp collected from the Danube, and that the tradition of the “œpiscinae” was continued in monasteries throughout the Middle Ages. Distribution of the carp west of the Danube's piedmont zone was clearly caused by humans, as was the introduction throughout the continents. Some domestication in China may have been independent of similar activities in Europe, but most of the

modern-day activities with the common carp in far east Asia are restricted to the domesticated carp imported from Europe, or at best to hybrids of local and imported strains. The xanthic (red) common carp seem to have first appeared in early cultures of Europe, China and Japan but reached their fame through recent artificial selection of multicolored aberrants in the Niigata Prefecture of Japan. The production of the colored carp – the Japanese –nishikigoi– presently exceeds in monetary value the production of carp as human food. The nishikigoi as –swimming flowers– delight modern people as much as the taste of carp delighted the Romans at the beginning of carp domestication.



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Keywords

Morphometry; Taxonomy; Life history; Danube River; Culture methods – fish; Archaeology; History; Vernacular names; Artificial selection; Wild forms; Pond forms; Colour aberrations; Nishikigoi; Ostariophysii; Cyprinidae

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