

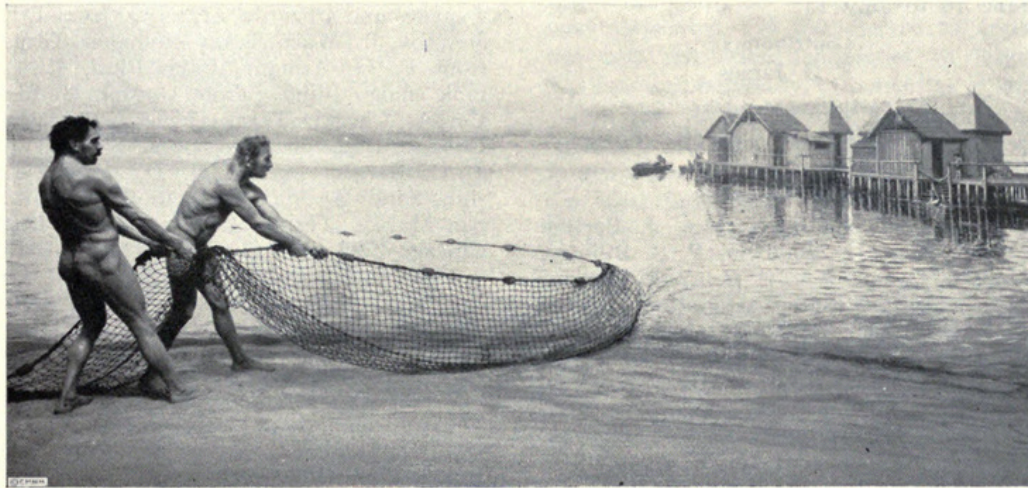
FISHES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HUMAN CULTURES

(A Symposium by Members of the Staff of the Department of Anthropology)

Wherever man can catch fish he always has, and fishes have played an important role in his cultures not only because they were used for food and in some cases for other utilitarian purposes, but also because they have further provided a motif for many of his artistic expressions.

At Field Museum the antiquity of man's dependence upon fish for a large part of his food, and his development of fishing

writing of the Sumerians (who were the ancient inhabitants of Kish and its surrounding country) had a pictograph for fish. Various gods have been associated with fish in the mythology of the ancient civilizations of the Near East. The early Christians adopted the fish as a symbol from the Greek word for fish—*Ichthys*. This developed as an acrostic from the Greek name of Jesus: *I*esous *C*Hristos, *T*Heou *H*Yios, *S*oter



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FISHERMEN IN SWITZERLAND 4,000 YEARS AGO

Prehistoric Swiss Lake Dwellers hauling in their fishnets on Lake Neuchâtel, as depicted in one of the dioramas in the Hall of the Stone Age. Their nets and net sinkers, as shown by specimens in the Museum, were much like modern ones.

techniques, is emphasized in the Hall of the Stone Age of the Old World (Hall C) by one of the life-size dioramas restoring various types of prehistoric man—that of the Swiss Lake-dwellers who are shown hauling their catch out of Lake Neuchâtel. Their nets are not vitally different in form from some of those employed by commercial fishermen today, according to Dr. Henry Field, Curator of Physical Anthropology.

Bronze fishhooks used on the river Euphrates thousands of years ago are on exhibition in the Hall of Babylonian Archaeology (Hall K).

The use of fishes in design and decoration is exemplified by various objects exhibited in Edward E. and Emma B. Ayer Hall (Hall 2, Archaeology of Etruria and Rome); the Hall of Egyptian Archaeology (Hall J), the Hall of Babylonian Archaeology (Hall K), George T. and Frances Gaylord Smith Hall (Hall 24, Archaeology of China), and Hall D (African Ethnology).

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOL

Mr. Richard A. Martin, Curator of Near Eastern Archaeology, makes this observation on fish in ancient times:

"Fishing played an important part in the economic life of Egypt, as well as Babylonia, because the life of its people was as intimately bound up with the great river Nile as were the lives of the Babylonians with the Tigris and Euphrates. The earliest

(Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior)—the italicized capitals beginning each word combine to form the word *Ichthys*."

FISH IN AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURES

On the northwest coast of North America practically the entire culture of the local Indian tribes—a fairly high type of culture—is built upon and revolves around fishes and fishing, says Dr. Alexander Spoehr, Assistant Curator of American Ethnology and Archaeology. On the other hand, at Tierra del Fuego, the island lying off the southernmost tip of South America, one of the lowest of all human cultures is built upon the fish, one of the lowest of all vertebrates. Among the Indians of southeastern North America the jaws of garfishes were used to scratch children as a punishment.

Man's methods of catching fish vary in different localities, ranging all the way from casting poison in the water to stun the fish to the expensive and complicated equipment of the modern Izaak Waltons who pursue their hobby in the coastal waters and on almost every lake, river and stream of America. Even the depth bomb principle of wrecking submarines by concussion has been used for fishing, the catch being killed or stunned by hurling exploding dynamite in the water. Indians in Honduras use a simple form of the concussion method—wading in the water, they pound river bed rocks with other heavy rocks, and the

shock is transmitted through the water to the fishes, stunning them sufficiently to make it possible to catch them by hand.

ASIA'S FISHING CORMORANTS

Dr. C. Martin Wilbur, Curator of Chinese Archaeology and Ethnology, contributes the following note on a most specialized form of fishing:

"Commercial fishing by means of trained cormorants is an East Asiatic addition to fishing practices. In China and Japan, cormorants, which are natural fish-catchers, are trained to bring all or part of the 'take' back to their masters, instead of gulping down each fish as it is captured. Sometimes a ring is placed around the bird's neck to make it impossible for it to swallow any but the smallest fish. The Japanese are credited with being the first people known to have used cormorants in this way, for a Chinese history, written during the 7th century of our era, describes the practice among the Japanese of that day. The Japanese method is not, however, as developed as that of the Chinese, who alone have actually domesticated cormorants, and created numerous refinements in the methods of fishing with them. On many of the canals and lakes of eastern and southern China, one may see boats and narrow rafts of the fisherman, with flocks of cormorants perched on special railings or poles, or plunging about in the water after fish."

AFRICAN FISHING PRACTICES

Dr. Wilfrid D. Hambly, Curator of African Ethnology, sketches the subject of fishing in Africa as follows:

"In African lakes and rivers are many species of edible fish which the natives catch by a variety of methods—nets, weirs, spearing, drag-baskets, lines and bait, shooting with arrows, poisoning, and using torch-lights as lures to bring the fish to the surface of the water. The method used may depend first upon the season. For example, poison, made from a tuberous root, is sprinkled on the water to stupefy the fish when rivers are shallow in the dry season. It would not be effective in deep running water during the rainy season. Customs associated with division of labor between the sexes, also have a bearing. Usually, only women drag baskets against the stream, although the men may help if the current is swift. Women generally use the poison method, but men usually do all of the spearing and the shooting with arrows.

"Curious beliefs sometimes center about the fisherman's craft. The Bavenda say that a certain lake is inhabited by ancestral spirits, and no fisherman has succeeded in landing a fish from the sacred waters.

"Beliefs in the sacredness of catfish survive in Liberia and Nigeria. At Ife, in the latter, I saw a pool of sacred catfish. Because of its sacred character, the catfish was often used as the motif of designs on bronze plaques made in Benin, west Africa, where religion and art were closely connected."



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