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Karolina Trusz

FISH AND FISHING IN THE DAILY LIFE OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE SOUTHERN COAST OF ANATOLIA

Abstract: This article aims to allow a closer look at the fishing industry in the daily life of towns on the southern coast of Anatolia. The available written sources, iconography and excavations results make it possible to shed light on where and how the fishing was practised, what was its role in commercial relations and spiritual beliefs.

Keywords: fish industry, Anatolia, Lycia, Pamphylia, Cilicia, fish

Introduction

Cities and settlements on the Mediterranean coasts were associated with water-related activities. Fishing, catching molluscs or diving for sponges were one of the many daily tasks of the people living off the southern coast of Anatolia. In the ancient markets, freshwater and sea fish species were available in fresh, dried, salted and smoked forms. However, fish sauce was one of the most popular product. A blend of viscera and whole fish, soaked in salt water and herbs, fermented, was considered an exclusive product used as a condiment for meals but also used for medical purposes.¹ The following section will discuss the relationship between people living on the southern coasts of Anatolia and marine creatures [Fig. 1].²

Ancient written sources — daily life perspective

The information in ancient sources about the fish in waters around the south coast of Anatolia is limited, though Mare Pamphylium frequently appears. Ancient writers mentioned Mare Pamphylium as a place where it was possible to catch, a formidable opponent, a sturgeon in the depths. It was called a "silent fish" known also as a *hellops*.³ According to Columella, the sturgeon lived only in the waters surrounding the Pamphylia region and occurred extremely rare.⁴ That might explain

¹ E.g. Jundziłł 1991, pp. 104–111; Curtis 1991, pp. 27–37; Grainger 2020, pp. 90–92; Marzano 2018, pp. 438–439; Diosc. *De materia medica* 2.34.

² The map shows all discussed ancient rivers and archaeological sites where fish industry facilities were discovered. Other ancient rivers have also been marked on the map.

³ Ael. NA 8.28.

⁴ Columella, Rust. 8.16.9.

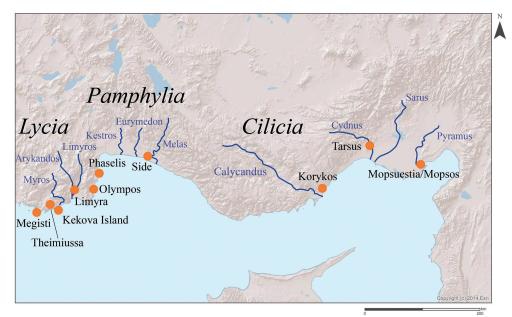


Fig. 1. Map of Lycia, Pamphylia and Cilicia regions (prepared by K. Trusz, base map from © 2014 Esri)

the celebration that ensued when the sturgeon was caught. Fisherman decorated their boats with wreaths, and they were greeted with the sounds of flutes and bells in the port.⁵ In one of the Pamphylian harbours, a similar reaction was seen. Plutarch observed a fisherman returning after catching a *hellops* fish and described the excitement and the great joy of people greeting the fisherman.⁶

Much more information we have about the freshwater fish found in rivers and streams flowing into the northern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Milyas, a town located on the northern border of Lycia, was famous for its lakes, from which freshwater fish were obtained.⁷ This suggests that freshwater fish were frequently consumed in the region, though no specific fish name is given. The river Kestros (today Aksu) in Pamphylia was once famous for its mullets and pikes, which were abundant at the mouth of the river.⁸ Aelianus mentioned that few fish swam in the river Kyndos, a stream of Tarsus in Cilicia, but also numerous fish were seen in other Cilician rivers: Pyramos (today Ceyhan) and Sarus (today Seyhan).⁹

The writer Dioscorides of Anazarbos in Cilicia wrote an extensive work in which he mentions fish sauces (*garum*) as medicine. According to *De materia medica*, *garum* could be used to treat cheek and intestinal ulcers or help with sciatica. ¹⁰ Unfortunately, we do not know the efficiency of using *garum* as cure.

Fish were also mentioned in ancient written sources as a part of beliefs. Pliny reports that the inhabitants of the area around the river Limyra, in Lycia region, offered food to the fish and waited to see if it would be consumed by them. If the fish accepted the food this indicated a positive response, if it was rejected then the response was negative.¹¹

It was believed that fish swimming in the spring of Apollo in the city of Myra had magical abilities. Food was offered to the fish summoned by the sounds of the flute. If the fish ate food, it would bring good luck, but if it was rejected, it would bring misfortune.¹²

⁵ Ael. NA 8.28.

⁶ Plut. De Soll. 32.

⁷ BORCHHARDT 1999, pp. 62, 41.

⁸ VAN NEER 2000, p. 841.

⁹ Ael. NA 12.29.

¹⁰ Diosc. *De materia medica* 2.34.

¹¹ Plin. Nat. 31.18.

¹² Plin. Nat. 32.8.

Athenaeus mentions a pool in the grove of Apollo located in Lycia by the sea. When two wooden sticks are placed into the pool, it is filled with seawater, and the keeper of the grove examined what kind, and if any, fish appeared — bringing that way appropriate prediction.¹³ The inhabitants of the village of Sura, between Myra and Phellos, also observed the behaviour of fish, their appearance or jumping above the water surface was interpreted accordingly.¹⁴

The presence of sea creatures in the daily lives of coastal people was natural and important. But while ancient writers focused primarily on fish, it is worth noting that the waters surrounding the Lycia region were also famous for their large and delicate sponges. Those found in deep and calm sea waters were particularly delicate.¹⁵

Inscriptions and iconography — examples

In antiquity, every city with a harbour collected customs duties on goods reaching its borders. The evidence of such regulations can be seen on inscriptions found along the northern coast of Mediterranean Sea. An inscription from the Nero period concerning customs law was found near the *granarium* at Andriake in Lycia. The inscription indicated that dried fish, among other goods like olive oil, and saffron, were subjected to a special fee. Unfortunately, we do not have any specific information regarding such a payment. In the same town, at the entrance to the harbour, was an inscription dated to the fifth century AD with information about linen nets for catching fish. This indicates the possibility to access not only to freshly caught or dried fish, but also to the equipment needed for fishing. Perhaps in town was a local manufacturer of fish gear.

Less precise is an inscription from the town Anazarbos in Cilicia. Part of inscription was found on a marble slab, dating from the fifth—sixth century AD, mentioning a duty among others imposed on an unspecified amount of fish sauce. If it is hard to determine if the fish sauce has been produced in Cilicia or imported from the eastern centres because of the lack of a fishing industry found in the region.

Three inscriptions from Korykos, Cilicia, show that three fishermen were involved in the fishing business.²⁰ They might have established a local association for fish hunting.

A fisherman's sarcophagus was discovered in the Elaiussa Sebaste²¹ area, with an inscription indicating the deceased's connection to the marine environment.²² A similar find is evident in the Lycia region. As part of the trade, captain Eudemos brought among other things, salted fish from the Pontus Euxine and Propontis to Olympos.²³ Apparently, there was a demand for this product in the city. The sarcophagus of the shipowner Eudemos²⁴ is still visible in ancient city [Fig. 2]. Salted fish from Black Sea region were also brought to Phaselis as an annual sacrifice to Cylabras, shepherd who sold land to build a city.²⁵

Other interesting depiction of the fish on everyday life object was a relief found in Limyra, which is located inland by the river with the same name,²⁶ about 30 km from the coast. During excavations in 1971 a lead table was found in the tomb of Xntabura, which was decorated with reliefs depicting a fish, probably a carp, and a wild boar [Fig. 3].²⁷

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    Ath. 8.8.
    Ael. NA 8.5; Plut. De Soll. 23.
    Plin. Nat. 9.69.
    TAKMER 2012, pp. 201–202, 209, 214.
    ÖZTÜRK, ÖZTÜRK 2014, p. 448.
    Located inland.
    DAGRON, FEISSEL 1987, pp. 170–185; HILD, HELLENKEMPER 1990, pp. 114, 125.
    HILD, HELLENKEMPER 1990, p. 114; KEIL, WILHELM 1931, pp. 160, 279.
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²¹ Cilicia region.

²² Borgia, Sayar 1999, p. 66.

²³ Adak, Atvur 1997, pp. 11, 24.

²⁴ A ship is visible on the sarcophagus.

²⁵ Ath. *Deip.* 7.297, Curtis 1991, p. 129.

²⁶ Lycia region.

²⁷ Borchhardt 1999,:p. 62.



Fig. 2. A sarcophagus of captain Eudemos from Olympos (photo by K. Trusz)

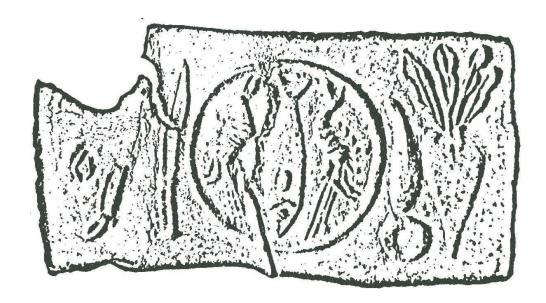


Fig. 3. Lead slab from Limyra (drawing elaborated by K. Trusz after Borchhardt, Jacobek, Dinstl 1990, p. 210, fig. 148)

Fish depictions on mosaics from the southern Anatolian coastal areas are also known. For example, during the excavations on agora in Elaiussa Sebaste, a mosaic with a sea scene depicting various fish and dolphins was found. The mosaic dates back to the first century AD. It seems that this area was part of a larger structure, like the workshop of the fisherman. From Cilicia region comes more mosaics with fish depiction. The mosaic floor was found near the ancient port of Syedra city, located on the border of Pamphylia and Cilicia. Whether the exact function of the room is unknown, it may have been a part of a bathhouse. The depiction on the mosaic is interesting, there were two winged Cupids shown in the boat. One of them was rowing, the other had a rod in his hand, and around them were different sea creatures, like: eel, swordfish, dolphins, octopus or cuttlefish [Fig. 4]. A floor mosaic with representations of 18 species of sea creatures was found in Anazarbos, Cilicia. Among the sea creatures were featured dolphin, catfish, bream, seabass, shark, freshwater perch, and calamari.

The fish motif is also visible on the coins. The reverse of the coin from Side in Pamphylia is one of example. The coin of the emperor Maximus shows a harbour and five large ships. On one ship is visible fisherman using a fishing rod.³¹ Another example is a coin from the ancient city called Mopsuestia/Mopsos that shows a river god named Pyramos and a fish.³²



Fig. 4. Mosaic found in ancient Syedra, now in the Alanya Archaeological Museum (photo by K. Trusz)

 $^{^{28}\,} Borgia, \, Savar \,\, 1999, \, p. \,\, 66; \,\, Equini \,\, Schneider \,\, 2005, \, p. \,\, 182.$

²⁹ Karamut 1996, p. 82, figure 8.

³⁰ Altay 1996, pp. 49, 51–52.

³¹ Levante 1994, p. 846.

³² LEVANTE 1986, p. 1346.

Fish-production workshops — archaeological evidence

Only a few fish workshops have been found on the southern coast of Anatolia. So far, all of them are located within the Lycia region. Workshops were built on the sidelines of cities, not far from the port or on islands, so the smell of the fermentation process did not disturb the city inhabitants.³³ Until recently, there was only one location off the coast of southern Anatolia associated with the fishing industry. Due to the strong earthquakes that occurred in the second and third centuries AD,³⁴ part of the coast of Lycia has subsided, causing some of the waterfront structures to be underwater. That is evident on the island of Castellorizo,³⁵ located in ancient times at the south-western tip of Lycia. Within the vicinity of the ancient city of Megisti, in the Mandraki port, two rectangular basins were located. They are part of a workshop for *garum* production.³⁶ This part of the port is currently underwater.

Another place where remains of fish industry have been found in what is now called the Kekova region in Lycia. Fish ponds were found in three places. In Theimiussa, archaeologists uncovered over forty such finds, suggesting an annual production of more than 400 kilograms of dried fish.³⁷

Second place in the region is ancient Dolichiste located on a small island called Kekova.³⁸ The city harbours are in two bays on the west part of the island: the Tersane Koyu and the Kuzey Yerleşim.³⁹ In the vicinity of the bays have been found ponds used for fish sauce production. The researchers were able to estimate that the workshops could produce almost 600 m³ of fish sauce at a time, which allowed for the filling of approximately 40 000 amphorae in a single production batch.⁴⁰

It is worth noting that the Betica amphorae, used for the storage of fish products, were discovered in the ancient Tarsus in Cilicia region.⁴¹

Conclusions

The waters around the southern coast of Anatolia provided abundant marine resources for the local community. The fishing industry was an integral part of daily life which supplied food and income related to economic prospects, and a connection to the natural world was established, which held spiritual significance in their beliefs.

Remains of fish processing are visible in Lycia, at Megiste and Kekova region, which confirms the small systematic and planned sea fishing industry. The Kekova region is of particular importance, as it confirms fish processing on the southern coast of Anatolia. Previous archaeological research results have suggested that fish workshops were located only on the western shore of Anatolia, in the Caria, Mysia and Bithynia regions, among others.

Numerous ancient shipwrecks dating from the Bronze Age to the present day have been found in the waters off the southern coast of Anatolia.⁴² A shipwreck from Uluburun dating back to the fourteenth century BC sank only 400 meters off the coast of the modern city Kas.⁴³ Among

³³ Curtis 1984, pp. 439–440.

 $^{^{34}}$ Bean 1978, p. 30; Aslan 2014, p. 64.

³⁵ Castellorizo/Kastellorizo Island is a small Greek island near Kas city in Turkey.

³⁶ Pirazzoli 1987, pp. 59–61.

³⁷ ZIMMERMAN 2003, pp. 280–292.

³⁸ This is the modern name of the island. The Kekova island is located on the opposite side of the city of Theimussa.

³⁹ These are the modern names of the bays; ASLAN 2014, pp. 62–63; ASLAN 2015, pp. 152–153; ASLAN 2017, pp. 178–181.

There were 2–3 such batches per year; ASLAN 2017,
 p. 182; ASLAN *et alii* 2017,
 p. 429.

⁴¹ VAN NEER et alii 2010, p. 167.

⁴² For example: PARKER 1992; ÖNIZ 2016; BASS 1966; BASS 2002.

⁴³ Pulak 1998, p. 188.

goods like copper, tin, glass, wood, handicrafts, including tools and ceramics, seeds and fruits, spices, ivory, bones of hippopotamus, land snail shells and murex snails opercula, were discovered fragments of fish bones. 44 This find is unique, and it's worth considering this as a model for studying the cargo of other ancient shipwrecks, particularly small craft, in terms of transporting fish as a product.

The fish caught were processed and, in the form of dried fish, probably met the local needs of the communities. However, finds of amphorae from Betica suggest that fish sauce came as a commercial product to the coast of southern Anatolia. Would that mean that the amounts of fish sauce produced by local workshops were too small? Future excavations in Lycia, Pamphylia and Cilicia may yield new and interesting information on fish industry in this part of Anatolia.

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