

BRITISH FISH AND FISHERIES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649169726

British fish and fisheries by W. Martin

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W. MARTIN

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AND FISHERIES**

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LONDON:
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;
Instituted 1799.

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BRITISH FISH AND FISHERIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE GENERAL PREVALENCE OF FISHES AS THE FOOD OF MAN.

THE use of fish as an article of food is of remote antiquity. The Israelites, in their journey through the wilderness, when pressed by scarcity of provisions, exclaimed, "We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic;" and it is recorded, that among the plagues brought upon the Egyptians by Moses and Aaron, at the command of God, one was the turning of the water of the river Nile into blood, and the consequent destruction of the fish, *Exod. vii. 19-21.*

The effects of this destruction were severely

felt, for fish formed an important part of the diet of the ancient inhabitants of Egypt. Among their paintings, not only fish-ponds in gardens are depicted, with the fish swimming about, but also representations of fishermen, some employed in using nets,* others, lines and hooks. Spears, as pictorial representations show, were also employed, and to these weapons we find an allusion in the book of Job, xli. 7. The mosaic pavement of Præneste exhibits also a mode of taking fish in weirs, decoys, or toils, made of hurdles of reeds, winding in various directions, so as to entrap the fish, which are taken out by means of baskets or nets; see also Isaiah xix. 8-10.

Fish, according to Herodotus, were eaten by the Egyptians like ducks and quails, both salted or pickled, and also dried in the sun, without any other preparation. From some motive or other, however, the priests were prohibited from the use of fish as food, and in the catacombs of Abousir, according to Abdallatif, (an Arabian writer of the twelfth century,) among the remains of other animals those of small fish were found.†

* See the use made by the inhabitants of the low marshes of Egypt of nets, namely, to take fish by day, to serve as mosquito curtains at night.—Herodotus; Euterpe.

† See De Sacey's Translation, p. 201.

With regard to the fish kept by the ancient Egyptians in small ornamental ponds, as their paintings show to have been a general custom, it is probable they were consecrated, or held sacred; such a practice, at least, appears to have prevailed in the east from an early period, and is, perhaps, not yet exploded. "Sir John Chardin twice mentions fishes reputed to be sacred at this day in the east. In his third volume, he tells us, 'that at a town called Comicha, he found, in the courtyard of a mosque, two reservoirs, or basins of water, twenty paces from each other, full of fishes, some of which had rings of brass, some of silver, others of gold.' 'I apprehended,' he says, 'that these fish had the rings in their nostrils, by way of ornament; but I was informed that it was in token of their being consecrated. None dared to take them; such a sacrilege was supposed to draw after it the vengeance of the saint to whom they were consecrated; and his votaries, not contented to leave them to his resentment, took upon themselves to punish the transgressors. An Armenian Christian, who had ventured to take some of these sacred fish, was killed upon the spot by one of them.' This is a relic of ancient superstition. Dr. Richard Chandler, in his Travels in Asia Minor, gives a