Neolithic Fishing Objects / Felicitas Faasch

The group „Stone Age Fishing“ was divided up in two segments: the passive (catching) and the active (slaying) fishing methods.

Active fishing methods include equipment, which slay lone fish and were for that reason used not as often as passive methods. Several types of instruments were known since the Late Palaeolithic but particularly in the course of the Mesolithic the importance of fishing was gaining weight. During the late mesolithic Ertebølle culture it became the main manner of subsistence.

The function of the tools leaded to a high amount of sites near and under water so there were often good preservation conditions for organic material. Especially during the last two decades submarine archaeology was emphasized, which helped improving the resource basis. Denmark can be considered as a precursor in this research field.

Known utensils are fishing hooks and –spears/lances as well as harpoons. They are aimed at different fish and sea mammals. For example harpoons were used for hunting bigger prey. The objects were often made of bones.

A specialized tool which appeared during the Mesolithic is the Lyster. Eels are rich fish that populate the coasts in great numbers. Moreover they can survive for a long time under water, even without being fed. That’s why they are suitable as a ware for exporting or storing. The eel takes up a great portion of the whole of captured fish (at some sites more than 50%), which documents the big importance of it.

The lysters were mostly found in fragments, i.e. the outer wood-constructs and bone points. For that matter the interpretation of it being a fishing utensil emerged during the early 1980s. By now there are three known examples. In addition there are folkloristic parallels (lysters of iron were used until the 20th century) so that the function is backed. These tools were used in coastal areas as well as lakes and rivers.

The wooden constructs were made of crutches of diverse wood; hazel and drupes were favored. For wrapping strings of different materials were possibly used but only nettle fibre is known from finds. By now it is not definite how long the bars were. However, it is probable that there have been different lengths as can be seen through ethnographic comparisons. The often found bone points are not in all cases integrated into the tool, it appears to be useable with or without them. Overall there have been different executions: long and slender as well as short and broad. This can presumably be connected to the surroundings (the sea ground) in which the lyster was used.

The author tested crafting a lyster on the basis of mesolithic findings from Denmark and Northern Germany. This included the working of wood, bone and bast, if possible using “Stone Age tools”. Because of a delay in splitting the hazel crutch the leister in the end could not be finished. There have been insights though, for example that the extracting of the needed materials was possible in a short time and without difficulties. Moreover the making of a lyster has - with some experience – probably been a simple work. Another noticeable aspect is the perception, that the wood of hazel should be worked while it is still fresh, because it gets more resistant through drying. In that case shaping it gets more difficult.
Literatur


