

Herodotus, the Father of History, calls Egypt the “Gift of the Nile.” Indeed, the Nile River gave life to Egypt. The richness and diversity of fish in the waters of the Nile constituted the main food source for the Egyptians. Since the Pharaonic period, fish were a very important and cheap food for those living in the Nile Valley. Fishing was not only the job of commercial fishermen, but the general populace also needed to fish. Among the most popular species for food in the Nile were perch, eel, catfish, carp, mullet and freshwater sea bream. The poor preferred fish rather than meat. The implements used in fishing were generally fishing rods, harpoons, nets and baskets. Surplus fish for later consumption were kept in small ponds. Among surviving paintings or reliefs, the fishing scenes made by fishermen showing nets on bamboo or reed boats are quite remarkable. To locate the relatively large nets left in the sea, pieces of wood were knotted into the edges of the nets so as to float on the surface. The reliefs also show that small-sized nets were used by a single person. Fishing with rods was a practice generally done by the lower classes, but sources show that high government officials also fished with rods for sport. Although the Egyptians usually cooked their fish, they also consumed them raw. In addition, fish were dried in the sun, smoked over a fire, or soaked in saltwater brine, especially mackerel. As in Mesopotamia, fish consumption were prohibited in some temples in Egypt as well as during some periods. Catfish were also among the offerings made at the temples.