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# Prehistoric fishing in the light of ethnographic data from Africa

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## Résumé

During these last decades, plethoric studies conducted on ichthyofauna and stable isotopes in osseous materials revealed human subsistence was also primarily based on fishing in prehistoric Europe. However, if fish bone deposits can only attest to fish consumption in settlement sites, fishing evidence would then reveal a practice dated not earlier than Mesolithic (circa 8th-6th millennia cal BC) through the occurrence of certain perishables materials implemented for instance as various kinds of bone hooks. This gear appears soon after that climate became warmer and melting ice in liberating tons of micro-organisms begun to attract thermophilic fish species spreading farther north. Various fish species became a regular resource along coastlines of archipelagos which therefore were also occupied by human groups. The growing importance of (fish) bone floors found at coastal and inland lake sites suggest that pelagic and lacustrine areas were wholly integrated in human mobility. This raises the question of how social dynamics were driven by fishing as a common regular activity in the way human groups used these particular areas which, as a consequence, 'moulded' into cultural geographies discernible from an anthropological approach. Bone hooks appear as a main clue to understand how prehistoric groups territorially managed their subsistence. Because these principally derived from bone parts obtained from large terrestrial mammals' hunts, fishing then meant that Mesolithic groups used very different ecosystems in a same area with implications on strategic topographical location of settlement sites, possible social distribution of activities towards subsistence and special fishing techniques. Through several ethnographical case studies, we propose to explore the variety of fishing implements used by subsistence fishers in Africa and examine the exact conditions under which the precise fishing technique was narrowed down to hooks. We postulate that raw material used to elaborate this fishing gear is not significant enough not to theorize on how to discriminate postglacial strategies from the same kind of gear. This would allow us to enlarge our vision on fishing principles and better highlight types of fishing in prehistoric archaeology.

**Mots-Clés:** Fishing, Fishhooks, Ethnography, Subsistence strategies, Bone industry

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