

ICONOGRAPHY OF TUNA TRAPS: THE DISCOVERY OF THE OLDEST RECORDED PRINTED IMAGE OF A TUNA TRAP

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SUMMARY

The iconography of tuna traps is an essential element for providing better knowledge of this ancient fishing technique. Images from the earliest period are not very common and printed images from the XVI century are extremely rare. Since the publication of a comprehensive review in 2012 (SCRS/2012/036) an earlier engraving has been found. This latest finding is particularly relevant not only because it is the first known printed image of a tuna trap but also because of the artistic importance of its author, Adamo Scultori. This masterpiece engraving was printed in an uncertain date between 1563 and 1565. This paper provides details about this specific engraving as well as its historical and artistic context.

RÉSUMÉ

L'iconographie des madragues thonières est un élément essentiel pour fournir une meilleure connaissance de cette ancienne technique de pêche. Les images de la toute première période sont peu fréquentes et les impressions du XVI^e siècle sont extrêmement rares. Depuis la publication d'une étude exhaustive en 2012 (SCRS/2012/036), une gravure plus ancienne a été découverte. Cette toute dernière découverte est particulièrement importante car il s'agit non seulement de la première impression connue d'une madrague thonière mais aussi en raison de l'importance artistique de son auteur, Adamo Scultori. Ce chef-d'œuvre d'impression a été réalisé à une date incertaine, entre 1563 et 1565. Le présent document fournit des informations détaillées sur cette gravure spécifique ainsi que sur son contexte historique et artistique.

RESUMEN

La iconografía de las almadrabas de atún es un elemento esencial para obtener mejores conocimientos de esta antigua técnica de pesca. Las imágenes del periodo inicial no son muy comunes y las imágenes impresas del siglo XVI son muy escasas. Desde la publicación de una revisión exhaustiva en 2012 (SCRS/2012/036) se ha encontrado un grabado anterior. Este último hallazgo reviste especial importancia, no sólo porque es la primera imagen impresa conocida de una almadraba de túnidos sino también por la importancia artística de su autor: Adamo Scultori. Este grabado, que es una auténtica obra de arte, se imprimió en una fecha desconocida entre 1563 y 1565. En este documento se proporciona información detallada sobre este grabado específico, así como sobre su contexto histórico y artístico.

KEYWORDS

Trap fishery, bluefin tuna, ancient seafood industry, Mediterranean Sea, fishing gear, historical images, engravings

1. Introduction

The review of the iconography on tuna traps presented in 2011 (Di Natale, 2012a) at the ICCAT-GBYP Symposium on Trap Fishery for Bluefin Tuna (Tanger, Morocco, May 23 to 25, 2011 (Anon., 2012) reported most of the known ancient images of this age-old industrial fishery activity.

At that time, the oldest panted images of the trap fishery were considered to be the marvelous etchings of Georg (Joris) Hoefnagel, who engraved the views of many Spanish cities in the volumes of the world famous “*Civitates Orbis Terrarum*” (1572-1617), by George Braun and Franz Hogenberg. The first etching shows a beach seine fishery in Cadiz (published in the first volume in 1572) and the second clearly shows the bluefin tuna fishery in

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Conil (published in the second volume in 1575). It is not clear if the beach seine in the first etching of Cadiz was used for bluefin tuna because, apparently, it is a common seine used for other smaller species and, furthermore, the position along the coast is different from the tuna trap factory position. Another larger etching, illustrating the bluefin tuna fishery in Cadiz in a more detailed way, was published in the same volumes. However, it is not clear if this was included in some copies of the first volume (1572) or if it was added only to the second edition in 1598.

For many decades, these images were considered the first printed images of a tuna trap and they both illustrated beach seines, one of the types of tuna traps used in the Mediterranean Sea since at least the Phoenician times, VII centuries b.C.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update of the very first part of the tuna trap iconography, after the discovery of a very rare engraving, which was printed possibly about a decade before those published by Braun and Hogenberg.

2. Background history of the first tuna trap engraving

The tuna trap engraving recently discovered was made by Adamo Scultori, also known as Adamo (or Adam) Ghisi, who was born in Mantova (Italy) c.a. 1530. His father, Giovanni Battista Scultori, and his sister, Diana Scultori, were both very well-known artists and fine engravers. The reason he and his sister are sometimes referred to as Ghisi is because of the misinterpretation of Vasari's text (1568), who considered the three artists belonging to the Scultori family as "close" to Giorgio Ghisi, a famous engraver and artist also from Mantova, where he was born in 1520. Ghisi was considered to have learned engraving from Giovanni Battista Scultori. After Vasari's book, several authors followed this erroneous interpretation and created confusion about the name. Furthermore, Ghisi's earliest works were engravings after the famous artist Giulio Romano and this, as we will see, perhaps added some misinterpretation about Adamo Scultori. Precise, detailed data about Adamo Scultori and his artistic works are reported by Bellini (1991).

Giulio Romano (Rome, 1499), also known as Iulius de Pippis de Ianutiis, Giulio Pippi or Jannuzzi, was an Italian painter and architect, pupil of the archi-famous artist Raffaello Sanzio. He worked on many frescos of the Vatican Loggias as a young assistant of Raphael and then, as he started to gain reputation decorated many important places and buildings. King Charles V summoned him to Mantova to carry out the work on many important buildings and decorations. He also travelled to and worked in France. Romano died in Mantova in 1546.

Giulio Romano, who is considered one of the great masters of Italian painting in the XVI century, was also the author of the acknowledged masterpiece of architecture and fresco painting in Mantova, the suburban Palazzo Te, with its famous illusionistic frescos. This magnificent building (**Figure 1**) was constructed from 1524 to 1534 for Federico II Gonzaga, Marquess of Mantova.

Inside the Palazzo Te many frescos remain the most remarkable feature of this magnificent building. One of the rooms, the Winds Room ("Sala dei Venti") or Zodiac Room ("Sala dello Zodiaco") has a very elaborate floor and the roof is decorated by many frescos and sculptures, dominated by the central figure of a mask creating the wind. The room was decorated in 1527 and 1528 by the sculptor Nicolò da Milano, the plasterer Andrea di Pezzi and the painters Anselmo Guazzi, Agostino da Mozzanica, Benedetto Pagni and Girolamo da Treviso. Close to one of the doors, just over the fireplace, and below the Fish constellation, there is a circular fresco surrounded by a plaster wreath depicting a fishing scene.

According to the current interpretations of this drawing, based on the opinion of Marcus Manilius, a Latin poet who wrote the famous poem "*Astronomica*" in the 10th a.C., with many references to the origin and meaning of each constellation, particularly in its Liber V concerning the extra-zodiacal signs (Gombrich, 1950; Bellini, 1991; Manilio re-ed., 1996-2001), those who are born in the last phase of the Fish constellation are destined to be fishermen targeting big fish. It is the reason why the fresco showing this fishery was situated in this position within the Winds Room.

This particular fresco in the Winds Room of Palazzo Te in Mantova is the first engraving depicting a tuna trap.

3. The tuna trap engraving by Adamo Scultori

The original preparatory design of the fresco depicting a fishery scene was made by Giulio Romano, possibly in 1526 or 1527. The drawing (**Figure 2**) is now kept in the collections of the Louvre Museum (inv. No. 3560) in Paris and it is described as “Capture of big fish”.

The fresco painting showing the same fishery scene in the Winds Room at Palazzo Te in Mantova (Italy) (**Figure 3**) was made by Girolamo da Treviso. This famous artist also known as Girolamo di Tommaso da Treviso the Younger and Girolamo Trevigi, was an Italian Renaissance painter. Born in Treviso in 1508, he flourished under the artistic influence of various painters, like Pennacchi, Romano and Raphael. He worked in Bologna, Genova, Faenza, Trento and for Palazzo Te in Mantova. He also travelled to England to work as a military engineer and painter for Henry VIII. While working for Henry VIII he was killed by a cannon shot during the siege of Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1544. This fresco painting is considered to be related to astrology, because the image represents fish and for the general context of other frescos in the same room.

The engraving of the same drawing made by Giulio Romano and the fresco painting made by Girolamo da Treviso was etched by Adamo Scultori, possibly in the period 1563-1565. A more complete description is provided by Bellini (1991), who wrote an exhaustive book on both Adamo and Diana Scultori and who kindly provided more details on this specific engraving. The original plate of this engraving, carved by a graver, is kept at the Italian National Calcography in Rome (inventory no. 651).

It is not clear if this engraving was originally included in a booklet or if it was produced separately as such. This engraving by Scultori was described by several authors dealing with artistic or engraving masterpieces (Huber, 1797; Von Bartsch, 1813; D’Arco, 1837; Le Blanc, 1856; Ferrara *et Al.*, 1977; Massari, 1980; Strauss *et Al.*, 1986; Bellini, 1991). Even though the date is also not available, according to Bellini, the style of the monogram on the engraving, a letter “A” having two convergent pipes (**Figure 4**), situates this engraving in the third phase of the Mantuan period of Adamo Scultori, from 1563 to 1565. According to the very precise details reported by Bellini (1991), the engraving described in this work is from a second printing, because the original support had some minor damage on the lower left corner, close to the monogram. These dates are well before the engravings of the tuna fishery made by Braun and Hogenberg (1572-1575) and then the engraving made by Adamo Scultori (**Figure 5**) is the first one ever printed.

The engraving measures 210x320 mm in size and it is very well preserved. It belonged to a private Spanish collector in Barcelona, who sold this and other engraved masterpieces to a local antiquarian who then put them on the market. Copies of this extremely rare engraving are in the collections of the Vatican Museums in Rome, of Castello Sforzesco in Milano (Engravings collection “Achille Bertarelli”), of the British Museum in London, of the Biblioteque Nationale in Paris, in Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Wien, Amsterdam, Berlin, Coburg, Bassano del Grappa, Bergamo, Bologna, Brescia, Florence (both at the Biblioteca Marciana and the Uffizi Museum), Parma, Roma and Siena (Bellini, 1991).

4. Discussion

There are several reasons explaining why this important engraving was never mentioned in any previous paper concerning the tuna trap fishery and its huge iconography.

The basic one is very simple: the art experts are not fishery experts and they are not necessarily knowledgeable about the various fishing gears. This image, along with the original preparatory drawing and the fresco, have been always classified as “Capture of big fish” and never as “tuna trap fishing”, simply because none of the experts who examined this image was aware that it was clearly representing a “matanza” in a tuna trap. At the same time, fishery experts are not necessarily art experts and then their knowledge of some artistic products might be partial. Furthermore, sometimes this engraving was classified as “Capture of a marine monster”, because the images of large fish and tunas in the XVI centuries, when they were depicted by artists not having direct knowledge of the individual species, were made using a lot of fantasy, mixing-up parts of various marine species.

From a practical point of view, an image classified as such never entered the circuit of the tuna trap experts and then it was simply ignored. No reference to this image exists in any of the more than 1,200 references concerning the tuna trap fishery (Di Natale, 2012b).

As a matter of fact, the historical value of this engraving is extremely relevant, specifically because it shows very clearly that the traditional trap fishery was carried out with set traps even at that time, as reported in several books (Di Natale, 2012b). This fact demonstrates that several types of tuna traps were active at the same time in various parts of the Mediterranean Sea and the eastern Atlantic, because the etching by Braun and Hogenberg clearly depict beach seines.

The engraving made by Adamo Scultori, based on the preparatory drawing by Giulio Romano and the later fresco painting by Girolamo da Treviso, very clearly shows the typical final phase (“matanza” or “mattanza”) of tuna fishing by a set trap, with three vessels hauling the net with several fish inside and fishermen with harpoons and claws. There is no doubt about the fact that this was a tuna trap.

Later, after the discovery of the real meaning of the engraving and before the preparatory work for this paper, the author investigated if it was possible to find out from which area Giulio Romano had made the image. After investigating all Giulio Romano’s known movements and travel during his life, only one coastal place was located where it was possible to find his tracks. As a matter of fact, the bishop of Genova contracted Giulio Romano in 1523 to depict an altarpiece for the Abbey of Santo Stefano in Genova. This painting still exists in the same Abbey. Furthermore, after the sack of Rome carried out by Charles V in 1527 and the following diaspora of all artists working with Raphael, one of Romano’s colleagues and close friends, the painter and artist Perin del Vaga (also known as Pietro Bonaccorsi) moved to Genova in the same year, where he worked on the frescos of Palazzo Doria until 1538.

In the early XVI century there were three tuna traps set in the area close to Genova (Pavesi, 1889; Parona, 1919; Mariotti, 2003), one in Camogli (a small tuna trap called “tonnarella”, possibly active since at least 1383 and well documented since the beginning of 1500, when the high income from this trap financially supported the development of the harbour in Camogli) (Cattaneo Vietti and Bova, 2009), another in Santa Margherita Ligure (very close to Camogli), and a third one in Monterosso. These three traps were active up to the beginning of the XX century, while only one (Camogli) still exists. It is very possible that Giulio Romano obtained, directly or indirectly, information about the Ligurian tuna trap fishery in Genova before making the original preparatory design for the fresco and the dates are in agreement with this hypothesis.

Consequently, even if the image does not provide any specific information about a location, it is now possible to ascertain that it was based on the tuna trap activity carried out in one of the Ligurian traps, possibly the one in Camogli.

Another famous engraving on the tuna trap fishery in Italy was published a few years after, etched by Adrian Colaert, on a subject by Jan Van der Straet (more commonly known as Johannes Stradanus), for the second edition of “*Venationes Ferarum, Avium, Piscium, pugnae bestiarum et mutuae bestiarum*”, published in Antwerp, Belgium, by Philipp Galle. The first edition (1578) had the same plates but without the progressive numbers, while the second edition was possibly published in 1584. This image shows a bluefin tuna fishery in Naples (Italy), with tunas kept by the net, with the support of small boats and then harpooned (Di Natale, 2012). It is possible that that etching depicted a small coastal tuna trap (“tonnarella”) targeting juvenile bluefin tuna, a fishery active in the area south of Naples until about 1980.

Those two engravings, which were published within a short range of years, support the hypothesis that in the XVI century set traps were more common in Italy, while beach seines were more used in Spain.

5. Acknowledgments

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Figure 1. Aerial view of Palazzo Te in the suburbs of Mantova (Italy) (image from: <http://www.lecicloviedelpo.movimentolento.it/>).

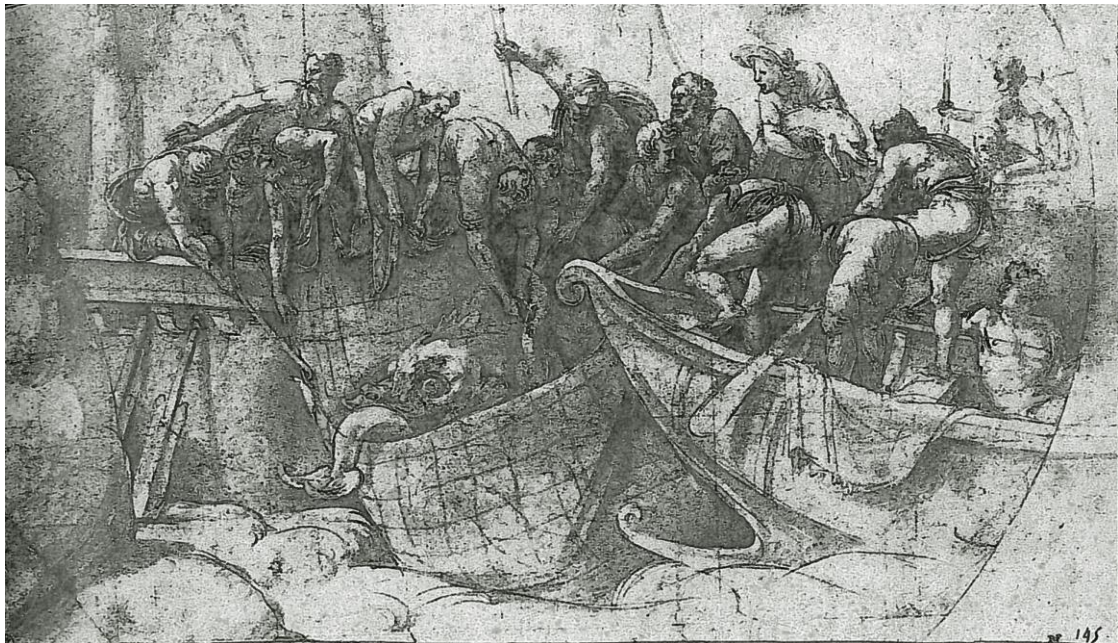


Figure 2. The original drawing made by Giulio Romano for the fresco in the Winds Room at Palazzo Te in Mantova (Italy) (from Bellini, 1991). The drawing is now in the Museum du Louvre in Paris.



Figure 3. The fresco painting made by Girolamo da Treviso in 1527-1528 in the Winds Room (“Sala dei Venti” in Palazzo Te in Mantova (Italy).



Figure 4. Enlarged image of the monogram of the artist Adamo Scultory in the lower left corner of the engraving showing the tuna trap fishery.



Figure 5. The very first engraving of a tuna trap fishery, made by Adriano Scultori possibly in 1563-1565, in Mantova (Italy).