

Research on Coastal fishing structures: a major step in Western France

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Abstract

Following the first successful investigations in Normandy (by C. Billard), Western France recently benefited from a research project dedicated to the coastal stationary fishing structures of Brittany, in the Western forefront of Europe, and area submitted to the second most important tidal ranges in the world.

This interdisciplinary based approach combined systematic desk-based analysis (historic charts, aerial photos...) and fieldwork archaeology (surveys, remote sensing, excavations...).

Systematically considering 20 variables for each installation, the dedicated database currently groups together the records of 760 fish-traps, made of various materials (stone, wood) and featuring different architectures. The analysis of the main characteristic of these weirs draw to a discussion on the first proposal for typology, and led to consider that, over the millenniums, the organisation of the installations and shapes seem to be more dependent on local topographic, tidal and geomorphologic conditions than influenced by cultural context.

Turning to the chrono-cultural question, a second step of the project led to field refined studies on some installations, selected either because for their local archaeological environment or for their topographic position as regards the sea level and its Holocene variations; we especially considered the permanently submerged fishtraps, which are supposed to be the older ones (Mesolithic or Neolithic).

Though the presentation of the main results, illustrated by several case studies, this paper aims at contributing to a more comprehensive approach of the relationship between man and marine /coastal environment and participating in the stimulation of scientific and heritage interest at a wider European level.