

Discovered in Callipolis, to where, in all likelihood, it wandered from the Roman colony of Parium (J. and L. Robert 1950, 80-94), *I.Parion 5* records a second century AD dedication to Priapus. Some scholars of ancient cult, following Foucart (1895, 37), continue to treat the inscription as preserving evidence for Isis-worship or the presence of a sanctuary of the deified Nile either at Callipolis or Parium (e.g. Bonneau, 1994, 49). The Roberts, however, convincingly demonstrated that the stele was dedicated not by the initiates and officers of an Isis cult but by fishermen who had leased the rights to a tuna-tower, or lookout, at a place known locally as Neilaion. The inscription has subsequently attracted little attention, and even among social and economic historians it is “usually cited only in passing” (Purcell 1995, 146). In fact, it contains a wealth of unexploited evidence concerning the scale and organization of ancient seine operations in the Hellespont.

In this paper I argue that the hierarchically arranged list of individuals and duties corresponds not to a guild of fishermen or a corporation of revenue farmers but to a single large-scale seine and salt-fish operation. The precise duties of each named individual can be illustrated by literary and epigraphic sources, as well as by comparative evidence from traditional Mediterranean tuna-traps (*tonnare* in Italian, *madragues* in French), which, according to D’Arcy Thompson (1947, 86), survived “unaltered from ancient times.” Although Gallant’s assertion (1985, 21) that “contrary to popular opinion, the true *madrague* was not known or used in antiquity” is now often repeated (e.g. Jameson *et al.* 1994, 314), the ancient sources side with Thompson as does evidence afforded by traditional and underwater archaeology (see, e.g. Ponsich 1988, 26 and Gianfrotte *MEFRA* 1999, 19). The fishery attested at Parium corresponds not to Gallant’s simple beach-seine but to a complex operation sharing many salient features with *madragues* and with 18th and 19th century menhaden and mackerel purse-seine operations.

I additionally argue that the operation witnessed in *I.Parion 5* is similar to, and can be used to further illuminate, a type of massive seine operation prevalent in the Black Sea and cursorily described by Aelian and Philostratus. Taken together this evidence suggests that the operation at Parium would have employed at least seventy individuals. A second inscription, *I.Parion 6*, although very fragmentary, appears to attest the existence of an identically structured operation at a different location, and additional epigraphic evidence suggests the existence of similar operations in various locations stretching from the Sea of Marmora to the Saronic Gulf to the Cyclades. In all likelihood then, the terminology of our inscription does not, following Purcell, betray a “deliberate self-consciousness” of fishermen employing “sonorous literary terms” and a “mock-heroic mood,” but corresponds to the language employed by ancient fishermen to denote individuals and specializations within a large, complex, and hierarchically arranged operation. As such, *I.Parion 5* speaks to a quotidian reality that social and economic historians have, unfortunately, largely ignored. This inscription agrees with archaeological and comparative evidence in suggesting that fishermen and fisheries would have been far more important to the finances of many coastal city-states in the Hellespont (and elsewhere) than primitivist models continue to suggest.