

THE EXPLOITATION OF MARINE TURTLES IN THE ROMAN SALTED FISH FACTORIES AT THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR REGION: NEWS FROM CEUTA, SPAIN

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We present an interesting archaeozoology discovery made in the Spanish town of Ceuta. During an archaeological excavation in the city center, the remains of the bone structures of a marine turtle, *Caretta caretta* were recorded. The discovery took place on the bottom of a rectangular pool designed for salting fish. This pool and the other related structures were part of a huge Roman salted fish factory, which started its activities in the middle of the 1st century BC and remained active until the end of the fifth century AD. Actually, the bones correspond to the final stages of this Roman industrial complex. The presence of these turtle bones in the factory can be related with some classical writings which mention the exploitation of marine turtle and cetacean meat as raw materials in the production of salted fish.

"Septem Fratres, or Roman Ceuta, was on the African shore, across the Straits of Gibraltar, as part of a powerful industrial complex with some other settlements on the Iberian Peninsula. The factory was set up during the 1st Century, a surface of about 75,000 m² representing one of the biggest in size, and demonstrated the strategic location of Ceuta and its importance in the capture of Tunnis. The smooth slope of the north bay beach was chosen instead of the rough south bay suggesting the one was chosen to facilitate unloading the fish catches and place them inside the factory. These pools have changed little from the original Roman model. Usually rectangular in shape and coated with a material made out of ceramic fragments called "Opus Signinum", the bottom is concave in order to facilitate cleaning. The remains of a loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) were found, representing the first evidence in this period. Archaeological studies point to the 5th Century as the date this turtle was placed inside the pool."

Bibliography

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