

APPENDIX 4

The sponge fishing collection of Kostas Argitis, Island of Hydra

Kostas Argitis, a resident of the Island of Hydra, has for many years been collecting artefacts associated with the former sponge fishing industry of the island. For our Conference he kindly brought this material, and he made a small exhibition for us.

This is a historically valuable collection. Our conference participants agreed that it would be good if it could eventually be housed in a public institution somewhere on the Island.

Mr Argitis also gave a talk, explaining the history of the artefacts in his collection. In his presentation he made the following points. Bold lettering refers to the photographs below.

The expeditions from Hydra to the North African coast featured a “mother” boat – the *depósito* or *bratséra* – which carried the smaller boats used for sponge harvesting. It also carried the supplies for the expedition – food, water, etc. A **wooden barrel** was used to supply drinking water to the smaller boats. Its pouring hole is at the top, to avoid matter that might have accumulated at the bottom.

The small **wooden chest** would have stored the captain’s daily necessities – for instance his cigarettes – to keep them dry while at sea. There were also larger chests for the storage of clothing etc.

The exhibition includes various **types of sponges** found in the sponge-harvesting trade – the *melátia*, the *tsimoúcha*, the *lafína* etc.

The **diving helmets** were generally brought from outside. But this example was manufactured in Hydra itself.

The **gourd** served as a marker buoy, to indicate the location of sponge beds, and to indicate where the diver had dived.

The **measuring board** was a plank of wood cut with circular holes, to categorise the harvested sponges according to size, as they were being hand-trimmed in the factory.

The sponges were trimmed with **metal shears** (*psalídhia*), and the leftovers would be used for incidental purposes such as filling pillows, cushions etc.

Once trimmed, the sponges were stored in **sacks** ready for marketing. Sometimes they were also stored in crates. In order to save space, they might be squeezed in a press prior to packing.

For harvesting the sponges, the boat workers might use a **gágave**, a multi-pronged weighted metal trident. In shallow waters, the captain and his colleague would operate from one of the little boats. They used a special spyglass (the *fanári*, a metal tube with a glass pane) to view underwater, and when they found a sponge they would lower the trident to impale it and pull it to the surface.

In a variant, there was also a **trident mounted on a pole**, which had a rope loop. The loop could be twisted around the sponge in order to uproot it from the seabed. Then it could be spiked by the trident and brought to the surface.

For underwater harvesting of sponges growing on rock faces, there was a small **hand-held rake**, which could be inserted beneath the sponge in order to uproot it.

The fishing spear was known as **kamáki**. It was mounted on a pole that was 4 metres long, but which could be disassembled into smaller sections. Depending on the depth of the water, further sections could also be added.

The **apóchi** was a net carried by the divers while working underwater. It had a metal ring to hold the mouth open, for the harvested sponges to be inserted. Once it was filled, the diver would tug on the rope and his colleague would pull it to the surface, and lower another one.

The **diving suit** was accompanied by heavy **metal foot-weights**. When the driver was dressed, he would sit with his feet in the water and his colleague would strap the weights under his feet. This was to assist with his walking under water.



Figure 1: Sponge types that were traditionally harvested and processed on the island; gourd buoy; wooden chest; hand-rake; bronze trident heads; trimming shears. [Photo: E.E.]



Figure 2: Hand-rake; bronze trident heads; trimming shears. [Photo: E.E.]



Figure 3: Sponge-trimming shears (*psalidhia*); iron and bronze spear-heads, *apóchi* sponge net; detachable poles for sponge spears. [Photo: E.E.]



Figure 4: A metal diver's helmet, fabricated on the island of Hydra [Photo: E.E.]



Kostas Argitis, with wooden sponge-measuring board, diving suit, diving helmet, and *meláti* sponge. [Photo: E.E.]