‘Ecological revolutions’ in medieval European experience with fisheries emerged from long unintended, often unnoticed, antecedents. While local subsistence fishing long fed some people, when Christian ascetics curbed eating meat fish were the accepted substitute. Growing populations and urbanization from the 10th century enabled new artisanal commercial fishing still based on natural local ecosystems. By around 1200 limits to these supplies were becoming visible. 3 subsequent evolutions by about 1500 changed European relations with surrounding aquatic ecosystems. Human manipulation of the environment in carp aquaculture made fish into artifacts. Expansion on distant marine frontiers expected ‘infinite fish’ just over the horizon. Driven by dietary needs these two processes enlarged European supplies of fish protein. Recreational angling also arose from traditional subsistence, but turned ‘work’ into ‘play’. Values this imputed could supplant consumptive uses of some fishes and the habitats supporting them. All have long term legacies.

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