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Three European Fisheries Evolutions of the Later Middle Ages

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in Kooperation mit dem Zentrum für Umweltgeschichte und dem Institut für
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Donnerstag, 30. November 2023, 17 Uhr c.t., Elise-Richter-Saal (1.Stock, rathausseitig)

‘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.

Professor Richard C. Hoffmann trained at Wisconsin and Yale in interdisciplinary medieval studies/economic history and spent his entire career (1971–2009 retirement) at York University in Toronto, evolving into a pioneer of medieval environmental history. He has authored 70 articles and chapters; 3 prize-winning books in the field, including *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2016); and now *The Catch. An Environmental History of Medieval European Fisheries*. A fellow of the Royal Society of Canada since 2017, he takes equal pride from mentoring undergrads, post-grads, postdocs, and others who obtained tenured positions in 10 North American universities.

Moderation: Gertrud Haidvogel