

## Dolphin Hunting in the Black Sea

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*“The Tears of Dolphins: Long, long ago, the Black Sea had one ruler; dolphins. Dolphins did not resemble the other kings that tyrannized over their people. They were simple-hearted and gracious. They were so fair and gracious that they even saved “Prophet Jonah” from the barbarians and reached the holy degree of God, according to the holy books. However, times have changed, ages have passed and the mankind has stepped into such a period called “civilization” that the sovereignty of the dolphins, these “holy,” warm-hearted and friendly creatures of the oceans, has come to an end. Human beings have hunted their forever friends in a deep sorrow. From then on, the tears of dolphins have never ended. Shipfull of tears coming from the eyes of dolphins and fishermen have mixed into the waters of the Black Sea ... The saying is that after these times, the seamen who have been cursed for their cruelty against dolphins have never become happy. The fertility of the seas has disappeared; the sustenance of the fishermen has been exhausted. Each and every one of the seamen, who has got stuck in between their conscience and earning a living, has life stories ending in sadness and pain...”*

Dolphins are the most widely-known adorable members of the marine mammals. Three species of dolphins live in the Black Sea. These are short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocaena*) and bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*). Although all these three species took place at the hunting statistics in the past, short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) has been the mostly hunted species with a 80-90% hunting rate (Çelikkale et al., 1988).

The bodies of dolphins are covered with a thick and elastic layer of fat. The skin surface is

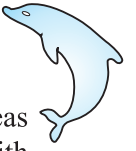
composed of a thin layer. The thickness of the layer of fat that is above dermis changes from specimen to specimen and can reach 4-5 cm. The layer of fat is important for the dolphins since they are warm-blooded. The layer of fat facilitates movement of the animal in water by reducing its specific weight. A dolphin with an average size (64-72 kg) has approximately 20 kg body fat in summer. This quantity may double in winter (Çelikkale et al., 1988).

With an increase in the water temperature in summer, its metabolism speeds up and an important part of the stored fat is used by the animal. Summer months are also the reproductive period of dolphins. At this period, the nutrition of the animals slows down considerably and they constantly lose weight. Therefore, the dolphins that are killed in summers most of the time sink to the bottom, which will not occur in other months when the dolphins have much body fat.

Before 1980s, i.e. before the prohibition of hunting, “dolphin hunting” formed the principal means of living for coastal fishermen. Dolphin hunting was so profitable that the hunting of other fish was not much popular. Fishermen preferred dolphin hunting, which provided raw products directly for the dolphin oil-based industry. Whereas 5 kuruş was paid per kilo of anchovy, 35 kuruş was paid for 1 kg. of dolphin by EBK (The Meat and Fish Corporation) in the mid-1950s. This price was further increased to 60 kuruş in 1960 (Çakıroğlu, 1969).

### Efforts to Protect Dolphins

Dolphins are the most important members of the marine mammals, the population of which has decreased due to a number of reasons such as excessive hunting, habitat degradation, maritime



trade/traffic and pollution. Due to the constant decrease in the dolphin stocks after 1938, when the dolphin hunting in the Black Sea reached the highest level, a limited hunting ban covering the reproductive period was implemented by the former Soviet Union administration in 1962. However, due to the rapid decrease in the stocks, hunting was strictly banned by the same country in 1966. In the same year, Bulgaria and Romania followed this ban (1). As a result of the activities of various international organizations, this issue was brought to agenda at the meeting of the Council of Europe held in Bern in 1979 and with the decision rendered at this meeting, the dolphins that lived in the Black Sea were put under protection and the hunting of these dolphins was strictly prohibited. The Turkish government also signed and abided by the decision in 1983 (Çelikkale et al., 1988).

### The History of Dolphin Hunting

It has been detected from the archeological findings that 'Mossynoiks,' who were one of the indigenous people of Black Sea according to the first written records, used to keep the oil that they obtained from dolphins in the pots called "amphora" made from soil. Moreover, it is known that the dolphin oil and meat that were salted and put in earthenware jar were carried to remote countries with these pots. It has been identified in the archaeological excavations that in the third century B.C. and third and fourth centuries A.D., Sinop was the amphora production and export center of the ancient times (Öztürk, 2005).

Evliya Çelebi, the famous traveler, wrote in his "Travelogue" that the herds of 200-300 dolphins were seen along the coasts of Istanbul and the old fishermen called the dolphins "sacred animals" and considered them as bringing luck since they chased the fish towards the coast during hunting (Şehsuvaroğlu, ?). It is reported that during the conquest of Istanbul, the commanders of Fatih Sultan Mehmet, who slid the ships from the land into the Golden Horn, had spilled cauldrons of dolphin oils on the wooden beams, and thus achieved success. According to the sources of 17th century, it is recorded that a light house was built in the 16th century by Ali Macar Captain at the place of the current Rumeli Feneri (Rumelian Light House) located at the north end point of the European shore of Bosphorus; it was reached to the top of the light house through 110 stone steps and 8 oka (10.264 g) dolphin oil was burnt on this light house from sunset to sunrise (Demirel, 2005).

Bjiksyian, who happened to pass by Sürmene 186 years ago, mentioned the dolphin oil in

Sürmene in his travel book. He wrote that whereas the population living uptown was occupied with saddle blocks and chains due to the lack of farming, the population living by the sea was composed of fishermen, who manufactured fish oil totally by hunting dolphins (Malkoç, ?).

During the period, when the petroleum-based oil industry was not developed, the oil obtained from dolphins was of vital importance to the Black Sea people. The obtained dolphin oil was used at homes, at places of worship, in the streets; for lighting candles, at the light houses and for greasing wheels.

### Once Upon a Time Dolphins were Hunted in the Black Sea

Dolphin hunting was once the most important means of living for the people of Civra (Balıklı) village of Sürmene, located in the eastern Black Sea and identified with fishery. Moreover, the dolphin hunters of this region had such a reputation that it is even told that they were invited to the former Soviet Union and Greece to transfer their experience (Kol, 2005). Saim PÜSKÜL, aged 75, a former dolphin hunter from Balıklı village of Sürmene explains those days: "Our people used to sell the fish oil to Russians. Then the Russians had a desire towards it. They bought dolphin nets. They took our captains, our captains taught them how to rotate, how to roll up, how to hunt. Russians were occupied with it a bit. Then they were struck by a storm, they were all



Dolphins catching in 1940s, İstanbul  
(Cengiz Kahraman Arşivi)





## Dolphin

*drowned with their nets. They could not manage it. After that they gave up. Greeks were occupied with trawl fishing in the Aegean Sea. Dolphins ate the trawl nets. Since small fish got into the net, big dolphins that we called 'afala' swam into and tore the net. Therefore, they asked for our help. They knew us as dolphin hunters. They took 5-6 people from here. They did hunting there."*

From the First World War to the end of the 1940s when the Second World War ended, during the years when poverty was prevalent, this "poor and painful occupation" was the only means of living for the coastal population of the Black Sea. Dolphin hunting was the means of living for fishermen from Hopa to Istanbul and mostly for the fishermen of Trabzon. At that period the most expert hunters was from Balıklı village of Sürmene and Salacık and Mersin villages of Akçaabat. Not only Trabzon, but also Çayeli and Pazar in Rize, Gülburnu in Giresun, Perşembe, Kışlaönü villages in Ordu, Karadeniz Ereğli and Sarıyer and Fener villages in the Bosphorus were remembered with dolphin hunting. It was told that; in these years, the dolphin hunters, who departed from Sürmene reached Istanbul in 9 days by following the coastline with small sailing boats (length 42 span: 10-11m).

### Direct Government Incentives for the Improvement of Dolphin Hunting

It is known that dolphin hunting has been done since 1870s in the countries that have a coast on the Black Sea. The first official records relating to the amount of hunted dolphins belong to the former Soviet Union. The amounts of dolphins hunted in the Black Sea by the Soviet Union by years are; 9,3 thousand in 1927, an annual average of 7 thousand during the period of 1928-1937, 134-140 thousand in 1938, an annual average of 2 thousand during the period of 1946-1966 and 5,6-7,4-thousand between 1966-67 (Zemsky and Yablakov, 1974). Although the oldest records on the amount of hunted dolphins are not precisely known in Turkey, the amounts of hunted dolphins are reported as; totally 157-185 thousand during the period of 1951-57, 40 thousand in 1960, 3,7 thousand in 1966, 3,9 thousand in 1967, 34,4 thousand in 1968, 35,2 thousand in 1972, 129,5 thousand in 1973 and an annual average of 6-7 thousand during the period of 1979-1983 (Zemsky and Yablakov, 1974; EBK, 1988). As seen, there are significant fluctuations in the annual amount of hunted dolphins. Beyond



doubt there are some reasons of these fluctuations.

In our country, dolphin hunting was done with "muzzleloaders" from the Ottoman period until 1947. During the years when the Second World War ended, with the effect of the financial difficulties as well, some support came from the government in an attempt to improve the dolphin oil-based local industry in the Black Sea and to be able to compete with the Soviet Union. During the single-party period, a law was issued with the proposal of Hasan Saka (Erdilek, 1983), who was the prime minister in 1947 and 1948 and who was originally from Akçaabat, and with the encouragement of President İsmet İnönü. That year, a delegation consisting of leading dolphin hunters went to Ankara to meet with the Prime Minister Hasan Saka. This delegation was composed of Karabacak Captain from Sürmene, Muzaffer Nuhoğlu from Mersin village of Akçaabat and Mustafa Captain (Malkoç) from Zavena (Salacık). Prime Minister Hasan Saka brought this delegation to the presence of the President İsmet Paşa. The delegation presented a petition including their requests to the President. After this event, the distribution of granted weapons and bullets was initiated to strengthen the dolphin hunters. Apart from this, a very low-interest credit support was provided for fishing boats and hunting equipment. During that period, with the influence of "statist economic policies," the export of dolphin oil that was especially made to Germany and Italy and formed an important intermediary raw material for many industries (pharmaceutical, leather, cosmetics, food, railway, locomotive industry etc.) was also supported for the development of weak and deficient industry. Whereas the dolphin oil production was 2000 tons/year until 1947, it rose up to 4000 tons/year in 1954. During this period, "export incentive bonus" was paid to the



manufacturers, who exported dolphin oil to Italy and Germany, by the state. However, this incentive was abolished with a law issued by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1957 (Çakiroğlu, 1969).

After the abolition of the incentives maintained for supporting dolphin hunting, “Çayeli Fishermen Cooperative” was established in 1959. Yaşar Pişkin, who was active in the establishment of this cooperative and has fought for dolphin fishery at this cooperative for many years and who is still alive, stated that they distributed weapons, bullets and credits not only to the dolphin hunters of Çayeli, but also to the dolphin hunters of the whole East Black Sea Region from Hopa to Ünye at this period (Conversation, 2004)

### **The Establishment of EBK (Meat and Fish Corporation) and the Progress Made in Dolphin Fishery**

Until the establishment of the Meat and Fish Corporation by the state in 1952, the fishermen processed the dolphins that they hunted on the spot in copper cauldrons at the stalls that they made out of their own resources and extracted their oils. The specialty of these cauldrons was that they were quite large. They were so large that one or two barrels of oil were received from one cauldron. Due to the lack of cold storage and transport facilities, the hunted dolphins went bad and gave off bad, unbearable smell when they were kept unprocessed for a long period of time (Kol, 2005). Saim captain, who is an old, former dolphin hunter from Civra, explains that those cauldrons are no longer available and they were collected by the coppersmiths for scrap and adds: “*When oil was freshly melted, in the form of foam, it was eaten by dipping bread into it. When oil was fully melted, it turned black and could not be eaten anymore. It was good for the illness of what they call eczema. Moreover, dolphin oil was used in the four-cornered wicked lamps called “likmen” made of metal sheet. You make wicks of cotton or cloth, but not of wool. Then, we lighted up our house with them.*”

Before 1952, there was only one facility in Trabzon, which belonged to Veysel Çakiroğlu. This facility was established before the Second World War with the support and partnership of Germans (Çakiroğlu, 1969). The supports granted by the state in 1948 for dolphin hunting and the establishment of the factory of EBK in Trabzon in 1952 increased the interest in dolphin hunting. “*EBK Fishery Institute*” began to carry the dolphins hunted in the areas Ağva (Istanbul) and Sinop to the factory in Trabzon with the cold storage ships called “*Dalga*” and “*Dalyan*” that it owned at this period to have them processed. During the period of March-April in 1969, 20 tons of dolphin oil was produced in the factory in Trabzon. During the same period in 1970, 55,9 tons of dolphin were received for processing purposes and 21,6 tons of oil was obtained out of this raw material (EBK, 1988)

During these relentless years, when poverty was prevalent, the factory that started production in Değirmendere became means of living not only for the dolphin hunters, but also for many local people. Talip with the nickname “*Delî*” (Mad) living in the central Çukurçayır village of Trabzon was one of these lucky people. The bad luck of Talip ended with the opening of the “*Meat and Fish Institute*” in Değirmendere in 1952. Talip applied here as an employee in 1955. From then on, Talip had a proper job. Every month, he earned money that was more than enough for maintaining his family. After all this poverty, all this enduring life, this job was incredible for him.

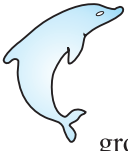
Talip endured the sharp smell of the carcass of dolphins for exactly 25 years. He obstinately flayed the skins of tones of dolphins that were brought to the factory! He couldn't get rid of the smell permeated on him in any way all throughout his life. In fact it was an unbearable job, but he kept working for the salary. He was also against killing these creatures cruelly, which were so warm and close to people, which were so in need of human love. That was why, 1980 was completely the year of freedom for Talip. On one hand, Talip retired and got rid of the sharp, heavy smell of this factory that year; on the other hand, the dolphins reached their freedom the same year. The Turkish government of that period signed the international ban on dolphin hunting in the Black Sea (Çelikkale et al., 1988).

### **Tough and Painful Occupation: Dolphin Hunting**

For the fishermen of the Eastern Black Sea, dolphin hunting was a hereditary profession, passing on from father to son. Dolphin hunting was an occupation that required knowledge, courage, skill and especially sharpshooting since the dolphins were hunted with rifles. In fact those that hunted dolphins with nets also used rifles to bring the dolphin herd together before surrounding the fish with the net. During hunting with rifles, they were aimed at big dolphins. The small young animals were not hunted. However, all small and big dolphins were hunted when surrounded with nets (Çakiroğlu, 1969).

Dolphin hunting was done from the coast to 100-150 miles of open water. The small boats that departed from the port returned to their homes at least 5 to 7 days later after a painful struggle towards storm, rain, snow. Hunting period started on September 1 and continued through the fall, winter and spring months. In general, hunting ended in the first half of June. No legal regulations were enacted for dolphin hunting by the government. Hunting period was determined according to the content of fat in the body of the animal. Since dolphins mostly bred during summer and since the fat rate stored under their skin decreased with the increase of the sea water temperature, as well, hunting was not efficient during this period (Tezel, 1958; Hikmet, 1987).





## Dolphin

The fishermen went for dolphin hunting as groups. There was a crew of approximately five people including a sharpshooter in rifle hunting in characteristic “*taka*” (small boats) of Karadeniz that were in the length of 10-12m and made of wood. Most of these fishermen helped to get the hunted fish into the boat. Hunting with nets was more burdensome and required more manpower. One team was composed of 15 boats. 2 or 3 of these boats were motorboats, boats that carried nets and ancillary rowboats. One team comprised a crew of 35-40 people including the captain.

Saim Captain from Civra explains the intricacies of hunting dolphins: *“We also hunted with rifles. However, hunting was essentially done with nets. You hunt 30-40 dolphins in a day with bullets. We hunted 400-500 dolphins with a net. In 1950, we hunted 1,150 dolphins at a time. In Fatsa, Yalıköy... Now, you see the fish. They cannot breathe under the sea; they need to get above the water since they have lungs. When they get above the water, you direct the motorboat towards them. It goes and turns the fish back. If it does not turn, you shoot bullets and turn it back. When you shoot the bullet in front of the fish, it turns backwards. Net is kept unrotated. The motorboat brings the fish near the net, the ancillaries surround it. They take the fish to the middle. The boat carrying the net rolls the net. There, the fish is inside the rolled net. Whoever the fish goes towards fires a rifle and scares the fish to get it into the net. If the fish dives deep into the water and comes towards you, you put two pebbles on the bottom of your hands - we call it telephone - hit the pebbles to each other like this; zang zang. For example if I hit the pebbles here and if you are further ahead of me, your ears hear this zang zang. The fish goes right to the net like that. The mouth of the net closes. There is a rope underneath; they pull it with ropes and lift the bottom of the net like this with ropes. It becomes like a pan. The bottom of the net is cut. Anyway, it is such a coward, timid animal. It can get rid of the net though by jumping out of it since it jumps 2-3 meters high. We did not bring the fish to Sürmene. We melted the fish there on the spot of hunting. For example, you set out to sea in Sakarya; you catch fish, you take it. You come to the coast; you flay the fish, the oil is in its skin. You melt the fish. You can obtain 20 kilos of oil from a fish of 50 kilos.”*

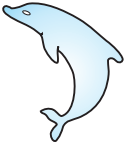
Dolphins were hunted with the nets called “*ıgrip*” (seine-net) woven with yarns obtained from the barks of hemp plants. Yarns were made from the hemp strings at

the workbenches called “*yıg*” at homes. Twofold or threefold yarns were brought together and wrapped to make them tight. After these yarns were woven by women and men in 18-20 meters of pieces at homes, they were sewn together to make large nets (Kol, 2005; Conversation, 2006).

In 1940s Salacık village of Trabzon was also very famous for dolphin hunting like Sürmene. All the households of the village were living on dolphin hunting. There were approximately 15 small boats in the village. Most of these were sailing boats. Only a few of these had engines. Namık Malkoç, who is a former trawler born in 1935 in Salacık explains those days (Conversation, 2006); *“My father hunted dolphins with old muzzleloaders. During the first year when I got my elementary school diploma and stood out to sea, new rifles and bullets were distributed by the state in 1948. We started to hunt more dolphins. After leaving the village, we were staying at sea for one week. I remember hunting 200-250 dolphins at a time in 1950. However, over the years, hunting did not increase in parallel with the improvements in the fishing tools and methods. At that time, I was young. On the other hand, we were engaged in maritime transportation called “çektirmecilik” (gear pulling). With the initiation of the road works on the Black Sea coast in 1960, road transportation began to gain importance. Ship transportation lost importance. I immigrated to Samsun in 1963 to begin trawl fishery. After all, the amount of dolphins started to decrease due to excessive hunting. Not only excessive hunting, but also the sounds of the improved rifles led to the escape of the dolphins. Moreover, due to the increase in coastal fishing, dolphins swam away from the coast. In later years, after 1980 when the dolphin hunting was totally banned, many dolphin hunters started to grow tobacco. Our relatives who were occupied with fishery continued this occupation by trawling in Samsun.”*



Dolphins catching in 1940s, İstanbul  
(Cengiz Kahraman Arşivi)



“*Malkoçlar*” family is among the oldest residents of Zavena village that is located on the coast of Akçaabat and famous for its history of fishery. Muslim and Greek dolphin hunters of Zavena were so famous that the first dolphin facilities of Trabzon coasts were established here in the beginning of 1800s. Muslim community in Zavena learnt fishing mostly from Greeks, their close neighbors. The neighborly relations and communication between Muslim and Greek households were so intimate that they set out to sea together, they casted nets together, they extracted the oils of the hunted dolphins together. During the time of emigration, their closest friends Bocaeli, Vasil and Yannis captains, who struggled against the wild waves of Black Sea together, became so sad about this separation. Their friendship also continued after the emigration; until 1924, when these close fishermen neighbors went away from these wild, rough waters during the exchange migration...

### Those Left Behind

And so, the "painful dolphin hunting" that once turned into a myth in the wild waters of the Black Sea was left in history. By leaving tones of tears and pain ...and also the painful life stories, the legendary courage of the fishermen behind ...

*“There were people at the ship wheel, at the deck head  
These were  
people with long, crooked noses,  
who had great desire for talking  
For the victory of  
the anchovies with dark blue backs and the cornbread  
they could die like singing a song  
without expecting anything from anybody...”*

(Hikmet, 1987)

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