

The Hook as a Fishing Tool in Ancient Egypt

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Abstract:

Hooks is one of several tools used by the ancient Egyptian to fish. It was known from the pre-dynastic period, and it still used today. Hooks were made from bone, ivory, copper, bronze, and iron . The ancient Egyptian used a single hook, and sometimes as a cluster hooks attached to a line (*Haddaf*) or a line/rode and hook (*Sennara*). This paper traces the development and using the hook as a fishing tool from the Predynastic period to the New kingdom.

Key words: hook – fish – fishing- line – angler – tomb - raft

1-Introduction

Fishing was flourished the length and breadth of the Nile river, particularly in the Delta and Fayyum.¹ Various hooks of bone, ivory, and shell used for catching fish have been discovered on these sites too.² Zoo archaeological evidence clearly indicates that Nile fish was a readily exploited food stable from the earliest Predynastic settlement sites in the Nile valley,³ Bones of more than twenty different species of fish could be identified at Merimde.⁴ although it is not certain that fish was a part of the day-to-day, diet of the average ancient Egyptian citizen.⁵ Fishing as a profession involved the use of large nets, spear,⁶ wickerwork basket-traps and angling with hook and line.⁷ More attention was actually given to fishing scenes in ancient Egyptian tombs. The scenes of fishing by net or spear usually seized a wide space of tomb's walls, but with tiny spaces leaves to the scene of fishing by hook. Hook and line was generally done from the shore, but in some of the tomb paintings there are representations of boats engaged in fishing.⁸ The hook-and-line technique consists of immersing a hook, secured by a line, to various depths where feeding fish can be found. By baiting the hook, a fish is enticed into biting the hook for food or revenge, thus finding itself caught by a barbed hook that cannot be shaken from the mouth.⁹ In early times hooks were barbless but from the 12th dynasty onwards they were barbed and had a ring or plate for fixing a line to. Lines were fitted with one or hooks; also rods were used with one or more lines and several hooks.¹⁰

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The fish frequently depicted are Nile perch, Nile Tilapia, various species of catfishes and elephant-fishes barbels, mullets and eels. Modern studies revealed about 65 fish species in the Nile waters; some 30 of them can be recognized in ancient images.¹¹ Representation of fish actually caught by hook are limited primarily to catfish, in particular the Nile catfish.¹² In rare instances Tilapia (*Boliti*),¹³ Barbus and bynni are also shown caught by hook.¹⁴

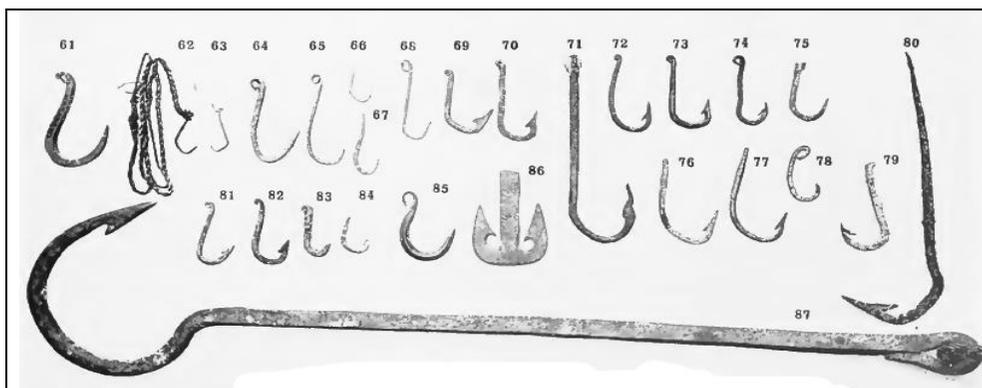
2-The Hook

After 10000 BCE, as North African savannas deteriorated to deserts due to climatic changes, game became rare, and hunters turned increasingly to fishing, employing curved fishhooks and gorges (*primitive hook made from bone and ivory*) with other fishing tools.¹⁵ The numerous bone and ivory points, all more or less like the slender rod or pin of ivory shown in El Amrah and Ahydos may, perhaps, indicate the gorges used by fishermen in predynastic times.¹⁶ Fishing by hook and line is an ancient practice in Egypt. Hooks of various types have been found in predynastic settlements from both Upper and Lower Egypt.¹⁷ Fishhooks of bone, ivory, and shell are particularly common in Predynastic sites in Middle Egypt. Thought absent from Fayum sequences.¹⁸ They appear to have remained dependent on hunting and fishing to a considerable degree. Although no fish-hooks has been found.¹⁹

The fishing hook was made from different kind of materials such as; shell, bronze, and cooper. Fish Hook of mussel shell, found in Nubia,²⁰ and a small bronze barbed fish-hook with limer displayed in Brooklyn Museum,²¹ other fish hook made from copper has been found in the site of el-Kubanieh north of Aswan on the west bank of the Nile, and at Maadi.²² Although Hooks were found in two pre-dynastic graves, made from ivory, shell, and copper (fig.1). Petrie, Brunton, and Caton-Thompson, conclude that fish were caught by means of nets only, and the Egyptian never used hook-fish at this early stages of their life.²³

Numerous bone and copper fish-hook testify to the popularity of angling from pre-dynastic times onwards.²⁴ H. Seline stated that, Around 3500 BCE the first fishhooks of copper appeared and increasingly replaced the stone and bone tools (fig.2).²⁵ T.E. Peet also dates the known fish hook back to the latter part of the pre-dynastic period made from copper.²⁶ The following tables (tables 1-2) is based on Petrie's findings at Abydos of Fish hooks, from the age of Den, 1st dynasty, and was developed throughout different periods.²⁷

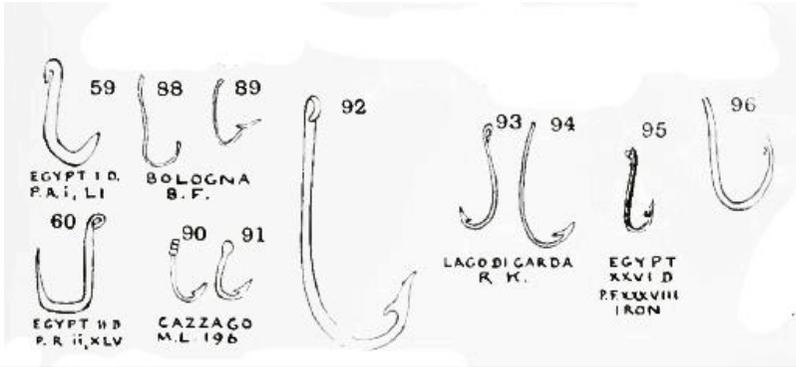
Table: (1)



No.	Period	place	Note
61	1 st or 2 nd dyn.	Ballas	
62-63	12 th dyn.	Lahun	62 has a line still attached to it
64-67	12 th dyn.	Harageh	
68	18 th dyn.	Amarna	With no barb
71-78	18 th or 19 th dyn.	Gurob	Very nearly approach the modern "limerick bend".
69,70		Quft	Not dated
79			unplaced
80		Balyzeh	Coptic, a large iron hook
81-86			Unplaced
86			Unusual double hook, there are two duplicates from Lahun, and five from Gurob.
87	Roman	Fayum	Great hook of iron. Such a size was required for the enormous fish over five feet in length. Such are still caught in the Nile.

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Table: (2)

			
No.	Period	place	Note
59	1 st dyn.		The reign of king Den
60	2 nd dyn.		The reign of king Perabsen
95	26 th dyn.		

The earliest hooks were of simple shape. The point was barbless. The head, which in all cases lay in the plane of the hook, was formed by doubling over the end of the shank against the outside of the latter, so as to form a stop or an eye, which might, or might not, have been an open one. W. Radcliffe suggested the of fish-goddess Hat-mehyt made from Bronze, which found at Abydos, with loop or hook overhead, represented the earliest hook in simple shape (fig.3).²⁸ By the 18th Dynasty barbed hooks, usually of bronze, largely predominate. Instead of being headed up in the older fashion, they show the end of the shank expanded, so as to form a small flange in a plane at right angles to that of the hook (Tables 1, no.68,71-78).²⁹

The ancient Egyptian were sold fish-hook in their markets. The best depictions of local this markets are found in Old Kingdom tombs. On a riverside market both men and women sell consumables and craft products like small metal objects, notably fish-hooks, like the scene in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara (fig.4).³⁰ Another scene of one market from 4th Dynasty, showing one trader selling fish-hooks, the man with fish hooks seems to be vainly pressing his wares on another man beside him.³¹ The two men are looking as if they are discussing the value of a packet of fish-hooks (fig.5).³²

Few barbed hooks alongside barbless ones dates back to 12th dynasty (Table 1, no.62), One of the latter, the string of its attachment (some nine inches in length) is composed of double stout twist, while another is the Limerick hook with a single barb.³³ Brooklyn Museum is housing a bronze hook found in

Saqqara, dates back to the 18th dynasty with a line still attached to it (fig.6).³⁴ A length of fishing "line", complete with bronze hook, found at Lahun, reflects the importance of linen to the fishing industry (fig.7).³⁵ At Lahun Petrie found 62 fish hook dates back to 12th dyn., with lines attached to them.³⁶

The earliest anglers used a simple line and hook, and it was not until the middle kingdom that the line/hook and rod developed. Angling remained a lower-class occupation throughout the Old and Middle Kingdom, and it is only in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth dynasties that we find tomb owners and their wives fishing. In Theban tomb-chapels, the deceased sometimes shown hooked Tilapia (*Bolti*) in a pond, which probably alludes to the rebirth of the dead.³⁷ Invariably it is the tomb owner who holds the rod while his wife helps him by removing the caught fish from the hook.³⁸ The rod was short, and apparently of one piece ; the line usually single, though instances occur of a double line, each furnished with its own hook (fig.8).³⁹ Reel being used by a man catching a catfish with line and hook has been detected in the tomb of Ti, where one man shows with his right hand carrying what maybe merely a club, or more likely a stick for the line to be wound on, when not in use, or like the one holds by Ankhtify (10th daynasty) (fig.9,15).⁴⁰

3-Rpresentation of Hooks

3.1-A line and hook

A line attached to a single hook.

3.1.1 A scene from the tomb–chapel of the Mastaba of Ti at Saqqara (5th Dynasty). A balding angler is shown sitting in a portable seat of reed matting on a small papyrus raft. He is shown in this detail of relief bringing in a catch, a large catfish. His right hand is poised ready to dispatch the feisty fish with a wooden mallet, and three pots sits in front of him. Below, the waters of the Nile are thick with fish (fig.10).⁴¹

3.1.2 The Tomb of Nikauisesi at Saqqara, (late 5th dynasty and the beginning to 6th dyn.). A representation of a small boat made of papyri, in the stern is a man propelling the boat by bushing with a pole, while in the center a seated man holds a fishing line in one hand and a club or mallet in the other. This is probably to stun certain types of fish as they are pulled out of the water; a technique commonly depicted in the tombs of the Memphite cemeteries and rarely in provincial tombs as a direct artistic influence from Memphis (fig.11).⁴²

3.1.3 A scene from the tomb of Seshmnefer IV? (Around the end of 5th dynasty). The scene shows an angler sitting in a small raft, pulling a fish

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out of water by his right hand, using the line and hook, and his left hand holding a mallet to hit the alive fish (fig.12).⁴³

3.1.4 The Mastaba of Ptahhetep and Akhethetep (5th dynasty), had a scene of an angler sitting on a papyrus raft, dragging the line back by his right hand, with a hooked fish, and a mallet raised by his left hand (fig.13).⁴⁴

3.1.5 The tomb of Nimaatre (reign of Izezi, 5th dynasty or later). We see a thick papyrus marsh, in which two fishermen in a boat swing nets framed by two crossed sticks. In a second boat to the right of them, a third man fishes with a hook and line, and has hooked a catfish. The water below this scene holds a crocodile and, further right, two hippopotami (fig.14).⁴⁵

3.1.6 The tomb of Ankhtify (10th dynasty), the deceased is shown holding a reel in his left hand. The fish appear on the wall not only as the tomb owner pulls them from the water in the vigorous activity depicted, but they also float on the wall without relation to the water or to a ground line. (fig.15).⁴⁶

3.2-A line and cluster hooks

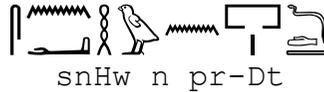
A single line and a group of hooks

3.2.1 A Nilotic fishing scene in painted limestone relief, appears in the tomb of the princess Idut at Saqqara (6th dynasty). Two fishermen are shown plying their trade from a small papyrus raft. One angler closely inspects the line he has cast, which has multiple hooks on it. He is shown with a small wooden mallet in his left hand, ready to dispatch the fish that are nibbling on the hooks below. His companion is bent over, dipping a hand held net into the water (fig.16).⁴⁷

3.2.2 Another scene in the same tomb, shows a small boat made of papyri, and a man propelling the boat by bushing with a pole in the stern, while in the other end of the boat, a seated man holds a fishing line in one hand ended with cluster of hooks, and a club in the other, before him a basket full of fish. The third man is busy fishing by a net (fig.17).⁴⁸

3.2.3 Mastaba of Mereuka, (6th dyn.) shows five men on a papyrus boat. The man in the back, fishing with a line ended with a cluster of hooks, ready to pull his catch out of water, and holding in his left other hand a club. (fig.18).⁴⁹

3.2.4 In the Tomb of Kagemni, (end of 5th and beginning of 6th dyn.) a fisherman here extends his index finger to feel the faintest bite: below the water the line ends in a cluster of five hooks, one of which holds a large fish.⁵⁰ A small text read:



This text mean "Fish-trapping for the House of Eternity", leave no doubt as to the eventual destination of the fish (fig.19).⁵¹

3-Rod, line and hook

A line and Hooks sometimes supported with a rod. The rod was short, and apparently of one piece; the line usually single, though instances occur of a double line, each furnished with its own hook, which made from bronze.⁵²

3.3.1 Another instance of hand-fining using rod-line and hook, comes from Beni Hasan and the tomb of Kenamun at Thebes. Both tombs were consider the earliest representation of fishing by rod-line and hook till we reach Greece about the sixth century B.C.⁵³ Sometimes the angler standing on the ground and throw the line and hook in the water or the line and hook supported with a rod.⁵⁴ This scene from Bani Hassn, represented a ground angling, where two brothers standing on the river or a canal bank, one of them standing with a line and hook attached to a rod, while the second brother sitting catching a fish with a line and hook. above one of the two brothers a text read;



it means "the brothers" or "the two anglings"(fig.20).⁵⁵

3.3.2 In the 19th dynasty Theban tomb of Nebwenenef, the tomb owner is angling with a rod in a pond, has a religious significance of fishing a tilapia as an Egyptian symbol of rebirth. Fishing was clearly a pleasurable sporting activity that some ancient Egyptians hoped to enjoy throughout eternity (fig.21).⁵⁶ Also the scenes showing the tomb owner and his wife angling from the shore of a lake or river (yet still with two fishing lines to catch the two fish at a time.⁵⁷

4- Hook bait:

There is no hook without a bait to lure a fish, Bait is not shown on the hooks in ancient scenes,⁵⁸ and there is no information about what was used in the hook by the ancient Egyptian fishermen. Scenes that depict fish hooked by mouth suggest the use of bait,⁵⁹ but no data enable us to identify their nature. Wilkinson's stated that, the Egyptian anglers adopted a ground bait, without any float"⁶⁰ It is certain that nothing was known about artificial bait.⁶¹ Many Old Kingdom tombs has depictions of fishing with line and hook. The end of the line where the hooks were, appears to have been weighed down, possibly

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with a lump of clay. As bait they may have used bread, little pieces of dates or the like.⁶² One passage in the Book of the Dead says: "*I have not caught fish with bait made of fish of their kind*".⁶³ This plea by the soul of the dead man not to be punished for what seemingly was a heinous sin. Although most fishes are cannibals, the bait here presents one of their natural foods.⁶⁴

These scenes may indicate this is generally just a past of time, a sport or simply a recreational activity, but these scenes are all found in a funerary context and therefore one expect them to have a religious dimension as well, even though this is not explicitly stated.⁶⁵

Conclusion:

Little attention was given to the Hook as a fishing tool, maybe for the rare data available, due to the tiny space dedicated to fishing by hook in tomb's walls. The invention of hook has known since the Predynastic period, maybe a response to deteriorating climate in North Africa after 10000 BCE, and the pursuit of early man to search for substitute food. After that fishing by hook, aiming to get food, pleasure, and sport, as his counterpart today. At the beginning it was a hook attached to a line, and then it was not until the middle kingdom that the rod developed. The ancient Egyptian knows several types of hooks, made from different kind of materials. Tables (no. 1-2) listed numbers of hooks from the 1st dyn. to 26th dyn. with one example from the roman time. In all cases no difference was observed except for in the size, and the early one, the point was barbless.

The wooden mallet was proved to be a crucial and useful tool, Because no representation of fishing with hook and line, without showing it with the hand of the angler except for the one who fishing with rod/line and hook. Fishing by hook, always appears accompanied with a broad scenes of fishing with net, but it occupies a small size in the tomb's walls. The numbers of men was varied from a single angler in a small boat, to several anglers (from three to five) in medium boat, only one of them using line and hook.

The wall scenes in the tombs, always represented anglers sitting in their boats while they were fishing by hook. By the end of the Old Kingdom, this scenes decreased dramatically. By the Middle and New kingdom, the anglers fishing while they were standing on a canal or the river banks, and sometimes sitting on a chair. The hook, as a tool to catch fish is still using by nowadays anglers.

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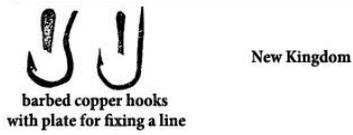
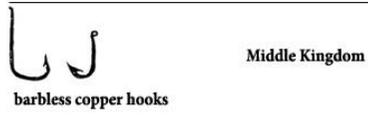
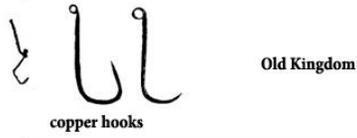
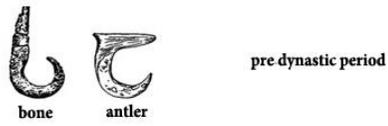
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الخطاف كأداة لصيد الأسماك فى مصر القديمة

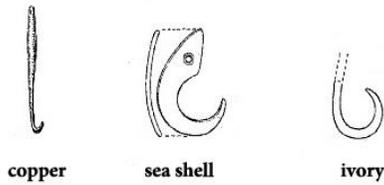
د.عبدالله دياب

المعهد العالى للسياحة والفنادق بالاسماعيلية (ايجوث)

يعد الخطاف أحد أدوات عدة استخدمها المصرى القديم فى الصيد ، وقد عرفت هذه الأداة منذ عصر ما قبل التاريخ ومازالت تستخدم إلى اليوم . وقد صنعت من العظم والعاج ، ومن النحاس والبرونز والحديد . وقد استخدم المصرى القديم أداة الصيد هذه ذات الخطاف الواحدة أو المكونة من عدة خطاطيف ومتصلة بخيط (الحداف) ، أو المكونة من خيط وبوصة وخطاف (سنارة) . وتتناول هذه الورقة البحثية تطور استخدام الخطاف كأداة لصيد الأسماك منذ عصر ما قبل الأسرات وحتى عصر الدولة الحديثة.



predynastic hooks

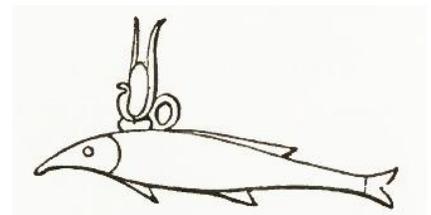


(fig.2)

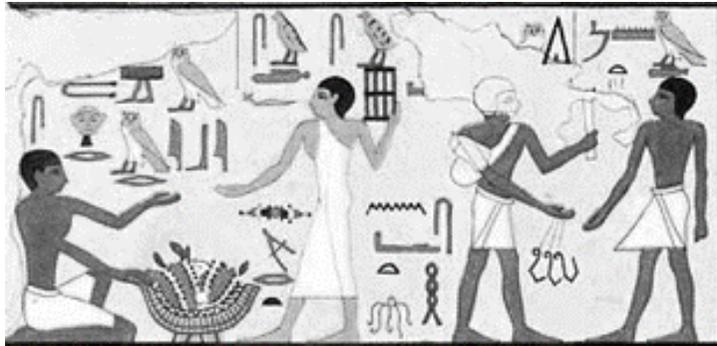
(fig.1)



(fig.4)



(fig.3)



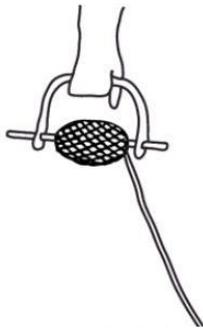
(fig.5)



(fig.7)



(fig.6)



(Fig.9)

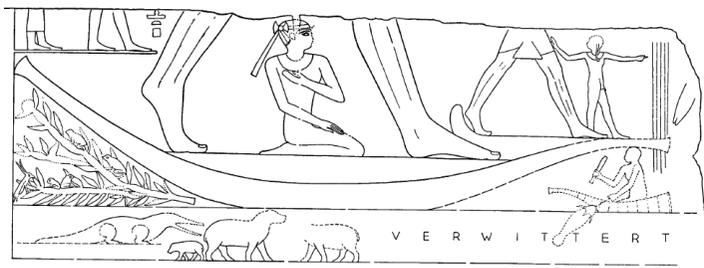


(Fig.8)

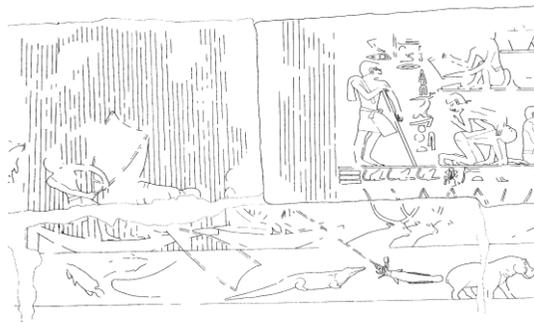


(fig.10)

(fig.11)



(fig.12)



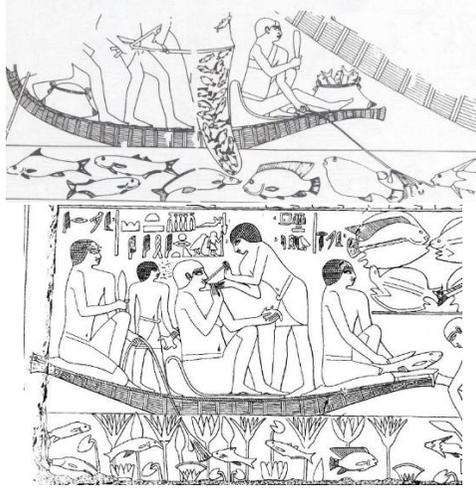
(fig.13)

(fig.14)



(fig.15)

(fig.16)

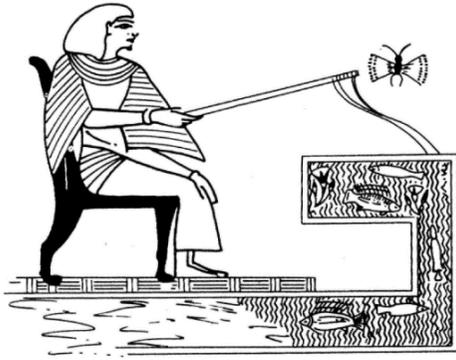


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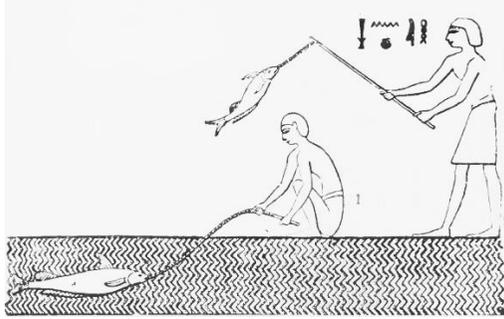
(fig.18)



(Fig.19)



(fig.21)



(fig.20)