

Reviews

Whales and Dolphins of Arabia. By Robert Baldwin. Privately published. 2003. Hardback 116 pp. ISBN 0 9526605 0 2 (e-mail: wosoman@omantel.net.om)

This self-contained book is the successor to Robert Baldwin's 'Whales and Dolphins of the United Arab Emirates', published in 1995. The size and format is an immediate improvement on that earlier work and you might want to, and easily could, carry it with you for reference in the field, although it is not specifically intended as a field guide.

'Whales and Dolphins of Arabia' is divided into three sections, of unequal length: The World of Whales and Dolphins; Arabian Whales and Dolphins and Whales, Dolphins and People.

The first section is a general account and deals with evolution, social structure, behaviour, communication, reproduction and various other aspects of cetacean biology. It concludes with a brief summary of 'migration and the Arabian enigma', without elaborating a plausible hypothesis, relating to cold-water upwelling off Dhofar in summer, as to what is thought to be going on (until you find it in a single sentence six pages later).

The second section, predictably the longest, commences by describing the marine environment around Arabia (geography, bathymetry, temperature, salinity etc), and then goes on to deal in turn with each of the twenty-one species definitely known to occur in and around Arabia, three Baleen whales and 18 Odontocete (toothed) whales and dolphins. Each is afforded one or, for ten species, two full pages, with liberal use of high-quality photographs which should help your identifications, a range map and information on the species' appearance, regional distribution, status and general biology, such as the diet.

The final section 'Whales, Dolphins and People' talks about the effects of the commercial whaling industry (with some startling catch statistics from the Arabian Sea in the 1960s), fisheries and management, habitat loss and protection, pollution and threats, then on to whale watching and conservation and research aspects, including DNA studies.

For 16 of the 21 species described the status is given as 'insufficiently known' and, not surprisingly, there is a message regarding the need not only for continued research but also for urgent conservation action.

This book is an easy read, suitable for those of 8 to 88, or more, and the author should be credited with the foresight in largely avoiding scientific terms throughout. The diversity of species that live around Arabia (admittedly largely outside the Arabian Gulf) will come as a surprise to many, as will the ease with which you can still see many of them - with just a little bit of effort and a small slice of luck. I thoroughly recommend you buy this book, and then a boat or helicopter of your own.

**Simon Aspinall,
P.O.Box 45553,
Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.
e-mail: hudhud10@emirates.net.ae**

[Whale and dolphin sightings can be sent to the Editors of Tribulus for inclusion on the UAE national cetacean database - Editors]

Stone Age Sites and their Natural Environment – The Capital Area of Northern Oman Part III

By Hans-Peter Uerpmann & Margarethe Uerpmann, with a contribution by Stefan Schöler. 2003. Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients – Reihe A (Naturwissenschaften) Nr. 31/3. Publisher: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, Wiesbaden, Germany. 266 pages. 136 black and white figures. 46 tables.

This publication presents the results of archaeological work carried out by the authors in the Capital Area of Northern Oman between 1979 and 1988 under the sponsorship of the Department of Antiquities of the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture of the Sultanate of Oman. The volume is the third in a series of joint collaborative efforts made by members of the research team of the Tübingen Atlas Project, following earlier volumes on the geomorphology and palaeoenvironment (Hannss 1991) and climate (Hannss and Kürschner 1998) of the area.

This volume is dedicated to the detailed description of Stone Age sites and their findings and attempts to interpret the archaeological evidence and to develop a human paleoecology of this region. The main area covered in this study is the so-called Capital Area which includes the old towns of Muscat and Matrah and their newly urbanised surroundings from Madinat Qaboos in the west to Bandar Gissa in the east. The other sites dealt with in this volume are located in the Quriyat area, some 60km SE of Muscat.

Chapter 1 (pages 1-2) provides a Preface to the study. Chapter 2 (pages 3-26) gives an introduction to the sites of Ra's al-Hamra, Qurum, Wadi 'Udayy, the Saruq area, Bandar Gissa and Quriyat area. There is some discussion of the spatial distribution of sites, as well as the significance of the radiocarbon dating. Chapter 3 (pages 27-43) outlines the results of test excavations in Wadi Wutayya. It provides interesting information on the links between stratigraphy and rock art, suggesting that some of the oldest parts of the rock art in Wadi Wutayya may have originated during the Late Stone Age. The oldest fireplace in Wadi Wutayya was in use about 11,000 years ago, indicating that people existed in this area long before the arrival of Neolithic herders, who started to populate Arabia from the north-west more than a thousand years later. Wadi Wutayya is an important site as it provides a well-dated sequence through the whole of the Late Stone Age from the beginning of the Holocene to the beginning of the Bronze Age. Chapter 4 (pages 44-72) discusses the chipped stone industry and other finds from Wadi Wutayya, Wadi Udayy and Qurum regions and includes excellent illustrations of the lithics recovered. Chapter 5 (pages 73-93) presents the archaeological finds from the coastal sites at Ra's al-Hamra, Qurum and Saruq. Illustrations of the stone tools from Saruq are provided. Chapter 6 (pages 94-97) is a short note concerning work at Bandar Gissa. Shell-midden deposits under a rock-shelter site have been dated here to the first half of the 4th millennium BC. Chapter 7 (pages 98-142) discusses archaeological finds from the Quriyat area, covering the sites of Khor Milkh 1 (KM1) and 2, and including the beautiful shell fish-hooks found at KM1. Chapter 8 (pages 143-162) is written by Stefan Schöler and provides a mineralogical and petrological examination of some of the objects found at Khor Milkh. Beads were made from talc, calcite, chlorite and serpentinite, ear-

rings of serpentinite and clay-schist, and rasps from sandstone and apatite. Chapter 9 (pages 163-254) discusses the results of analysis of marine mollusca, fish, reptile, bird and mammalian remains from various sites. The richest assemblage discussed is that from Ra's Al-Hamra site 5 (RH5), which dates to between about 4000-3500 cal BC. Here the people regularly consumed shellfish (including *Terebralia palustris* and *Ostrea cuculata*), fish (especially tuna and jacks) and green turtles. Birds noted at RH5 include Great Cormorant, Purple Heron, Goliath Heron, a smaller unidentified heron and a large raptor, as well as several bones from sea-birds of the Gull and Tern families. Cetacean remains included bones from small and large dolphins, as well as from a Short-fin Pilot Whale. Hunted wild animals included hare, wolf, fox, caracal, wild ass, mountain gazelle and Arabian tahr. Domestic animals identified included cattle, sheep, goat and dog.

The final part of the book, chapter 10, provides an overview by the authors of the development of culture, subsistence and the environment in Northern Oman during the Late Stone Age. They conclude by mentioning the thousands of Hafit-type burial cairns scattered along mountain ridges of the Oman peninsula, and say that these provide evidence of a fairly dense population of nomadic herders, which have so far more or less escaped the interest of archaeologists. The authors go on to speculate that the large scatters of flint artifacts found in many parts of the interior, and exhibiting none of the characteristic implements of a known industry, may be the remains of these last nomadic Late Stone Age herders, who roamed the desert steppes during the final 4th and early 3rd millennium BC.

The present author cannot discuss this book without briefly passing some comments on the large samples of fish remains evaluated in this study. Fish bones represented 80% of the more than 60,000 faunal remains quantified from RH5. Numerically almost half of the identifiable bones belong to the Scombridae family (Tunas and Mackerels). The other major family represented were the jacks or Carangidae. Middle and smaller-sized fish only occurred in comparatively low numbers. This confirms the contrasting picture of fish resources modeled by the author within the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, more pelagic species being generally caught in the more open waters of the Indian Ocean (Beech 2004). The remains of these larger fish may have required fishing in deeper water which would have required some sort of boat. Such fish do, however, come close to shore on a seasonal basis when they target schooling sardines. It is possible that they may have, therefore, been also caught from the foot of the cliffs at the site. An interesting discovery within the graveyard of RH5 was a shark tooth found sticking in a human vertebra which indicates its use as a projectile point. This gives a whole new meaning to the danger of sharks out of water!

I have only a few minor criticisms, firstly that it is unfortunate that the faunal remains could not be studied evenly for all the studied sites dealt with in this book. Parts of the vertebrate assemblage were apparently not studied due to various logistical problems. This makes it very difficult to assess the quantitative relations between fish, turtle and mammal remains. At RH5 the authors conclude that green turtles between 60-90cm in carapace length were mostly exploited, and that these

were mostly immature. It is a pity that the complete turtle skulls and other bones from the graves at RH5 were not available for their study. Some of these appear to be quite large and may well be examples from large adult animals (Sandro Salvatori, pers.comm.). This might alter the interpretation of the assemblage being skewed towards immature individuals.

The analysis of the faunal material from the settlement area at RH5 has been treated as one unit, although the authors admit that "the animal bone complexes were only assigned to local features and could not be connected to the general chronology (p.165). Although separation of the fauna into sub-complexes would have led to an insufficient numerical basis for comparisons, it is a pity that more effort was not made to analyse the spatial distribution of environmental and archaeological data across the site. This might have produced more meaningful insights into domestic activities and waste disposal practices, e.g. differences between domestic and ritual activities may be hinted at by the discrepancy in the size of the green turtle remains in the cemetery and the settlement.

Sadly, the entire volume is produced in black and white and there are no colour pictures to illustrate the environments surrounding these sites and to illustrate some of the nicer archaeological finds. The inclusion of a summary in Arabic of the major conclusions from this study would also have been helpful. It might have been useful also to have had bi-lingual captions in Arabic and English for all the figures and tables. Such publications should be made available to a wider audience, and in particular to the local Arabic speaking peoples of the peninsula. Many modern day inhabitants of this region do not realise that the foundations of many of their present day coastal communities were laid in the Neolithic period, as long ago as 11,000 years ago, as we now know from Wadi Wutayya.

For those looking for a popular guide to Stone Age prehistoric sites in Oman, this is not it. There is still a need for someone to write an easy to read non-specialist guide to the early prehistoric coastal sites of the region. Putting aside these minor gripes, however, this book is a serious weighty academic contribution to our knowledge of the Neolithic period in South Eastern Arabia and will be an important source for years to come.

References

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**Dr Mark Beech,
ADIAS
P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates
email: beech@emirates.net.ae**