

Prevalence of the protozoan organisms in the Red Sea, Hurghada, Egypt

Mansour Galal

Faculty of Science, Menofya Univ.

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in order to evaluate the distribution and availability of the various protozoan organisms in some stations at Hurghada on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea beside their response to some of the physico-chemical parameters. Two main phyla were detected at these sampling stations; Ciliophora and Sarcomastigophora. The latter phylum is comprising two subphyla (Mastigophora and Sarcodina). Three various classes were detected in that phylum; Rhizopodea, Actinopodea and Phytomastigophorea. Three different classes of the ciliated protozoa were identified as well which are known as Kinetofragminophorea, Oligohymenophorea and Polyhymenophorea. The different classes of the protozoan organisms comprised too many orders (more than 24 orders) which were illustrated by more than 103 genera/ species. It was proved that certain physico-chemical parameters affect the prevalence of some of these protozoan organisms significantly from the statistical point of view. Simultaneously, time - series analysis proved the presence of cyclic changes in the physico-chemical parameters, protozoan abundance and their numerical densities which fluctuate with the time. This could be interpreted as a result of the presence of a chemostate situation.

Keywords: Prevalence , Protozoa, Red Sea, Hurghada, Egypt

INTRODUCTION

Protozoan organisms are important biotic components in the aquatic ecosystem, particularly ciliates, which mostly act as predators of bacteria, provide nutrition for organisms at higher trophic levels (Kneitel and Chase, 2004; Dopheide *et al.*, 2009), increase mineralization and make nutrients more available to other organisms (Vickerman, 1992). They also play a crucial role in food chains as bio-monitors and/or indicators of water quality (Charubhun and Charubhun, 2000). Simultaneously, it was proved that protozoa stimulate the rates of carbon and nitrogen cycling (Fenchel, 1987 and Finlay *et al.*, 2004). Data on protozoa are available in some plankton studies along the Egyptian Red Sea Coast (Dolan and Gallegos; 2001; Modgh and Castaldo, 2002 ; Abou Zaid and Hellal, 2012).

Various studies were carried out in the Red Sea for certain protozoan genera or species but from the taxonomical point of view. Very few investigations related to protozoan ecology were done mainly on the western coast of the northern part of the red sea including Aqaba and Suez gulves (Abu-zeid and Helal, 2012; El-Serehy *et al.*, 2014 ; Zakaria, 2015).

In the Red Sea, evaporation is active and largely exceeds precipitation so that salinity is comparatively high. Surface salinity rapidly rises from less than 37 psu at the southern entrance, to 40–41 psu in the northern part of the Red Sea and El-Aqaba Gulf, and to more than 41 psu in the Suez Gulf. The average surface temperature fluctuates between 25 °C and 32 °C in the south, 21.3 °C and 27.9 °C in the North of the Red Sea.

Halim (1969) carried out a preliminary study on both phyto- and zooplankton in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba. Bergren and Boersma (1969) estimated the planktonic Foraminifera from the Red Sea, On the other hand, Weikert (1982) examined the influence of

certain ecological parameters on the vertical distribution of zooplankton along the central part of the Red Sea.

An examination of plankton samples collected from the inshore and offshore waters in the vicinity of Hurghada area in the Egyptian Red Sea coast revealed the presence of about ninety two tintinnid ciliate species (Abou Zaid and Hellal, 2012). According to Zakaria (2015), Suez Canal caused a migration of the zooplanktonic organisms generally from Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and rarely in the opposite direction as Red Sea is generally saltier and more nutrient-poor than the Atlantic ocean, so the Red Sea species have advantages over Atlantic species in the salty and nutrient-poor eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Red Sea species invaded the Mediterranean ecosystem and not vice versa; this phenomenon is known as the Lessepsian migration or erythrean invasion.

The main objective of the present study was to identify and to enumerate the various types of the protozoan organisms at sampling stations on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea at Hurghada.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The studying area includes six sampling stations around Hurghada Marine Research Institute on the Red Sea along six kilometers. Two types of samples (aquatic and sand sediment) were picked up during each sampling occasion between 8.0 - 9.0 in the morning. Water samples were collected using a water sampler of about one liter volume and then sedimentation was carried out via cold sedimentation technique at 5-7 °C according to Utermohl (1958). On the other hand, sand samples were collected by pushing down a rectangular brass corer of 10 cm length and 1 cm² cross section into the submerged sandy bottom to examine sand and its organisms. Sand of each corer was transported as quickly as we can to be washed with filtered sea water from a burette, through a double muslin tissue inside a glass funnel above a sedimentation unit (100 ml capacity) of two parts as could be seen in figure (1). Microscopical examination of protozoa was carried out using Carl- Zeiss Jena transmitted- light inverted microscope. Identification and classification were carried out via Corliss (1979) and Levin *et al.* (1980). It was found helpful to slow down the rapid movements of many of these protozoan organisms especially the ciliated ones by adding few drops of methyl cellulose solution (15 gm in 85 ml water) to the preparation inside the basal part of the sedimentation chamber.

Physico-chemical parameters as water temperature, Dissolved oxygen, pH were measured by using a fixed thermometer inside water sampler, an oxygen meter and p^H meter, while salinity, Ch-a, PO₄ & NO₃ were measured depending on APHA (2005).

The statistical tests including regression and time-series analyses were performed by using Minitab programme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The microscopical examination revealed that different types of the aquatic organisms were present in the collected samples at Hurghada coast. These organisms include rotifers, worms, crustacean, insect and polychaete larvae beside many types and numbers of different protozoan organisms. It was found that protozoa is the most abundant group. They are exhibited by two phyla; Ciliophora and Sarcostigophora. The latter phylum includes two subphyla; Sacodina and Mastigophora in all the collected aquatic and sand samples. It was found that the former phylum illustrated about 65 - 74%, while the latter one is represented by more or less 26 - 35% of the total protozoan organisms. Kingdom protista is represented, in the present investigation, by more than 103 protozoan species/genera belonging to different 24 orders of six classes; namely Rhizopodea, Actinopodea, Phytomastigophorea,

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Kinetofragminophorea, Oligohymenophorea and Polyhymenophorea. The various numerical protozoan genera at the different sampling stations were 75 genus and more than 103 species.

It is worthy to mention that the highest numerical densities were obtained in class kinetofragminophorea (2087/L) followed by Oligohymenophorea (360/L), Polyhymenophorea (1172/L), Phytomastigophorea (584/L), Rhizopodea (86/L) and then Actinopodea (37/L) as could be seen in Table (1). In addition, the comparison between the prevalence of these protozoan organisms in both Mediterranean and Red seas proved that the protozoan numerical densities in the former sea is higher than those of the latter one. This situation could be interpreted as a result of the phenomenon of the Lessepsian migration or erythrean invasion (Zakaria, 2015).

The numerical densities of both aquatic and sediment ciliated protozoan organisms belonging to the previously mentioned groups indicated that the sediment samples having higher numerical densities than the aquatic ones by more or less one and half to double times apart from phytomastigophorea. Comparing the mean values of the numerical densities belonging to ciliated protozoa of the sand sediment in Hurghada against middle northern coast of Egypt proved that data of the latter sea exceeds those of the former one. This could be interpreted mainly as a result of the highly nutritive conditions of the Mediterranean Sea as compared with those of the Red one. Comparing the numerical values of the total ciliates, Kinetofragminophora, Oligohymenophora and Polyhymenophora, belonging to these two seas, it was proved that the data were in the favour of the former sea apart from those of Polyhymenophores. Variations in the present data could be attributed mostly to the predation influence of certain organisms as crustaceans, insect larvae and rotifers (Dolan *et al.*, 1999; Pitta *et al.*, 2001). This conclusion is supported by the present data of chlorophyll-a, the total nitrates and phosphates. It is necessary to keep in mind that slight variations in the physico-chemical parameters were obtained at the various sampling stations in the present study.

Data of the physico-chemical parameters (Table 4) illustrated that the p^H levels are slightly alkaline (7.9 – 8.5), the salinity is 39 -57‰, water temperature is 15.1 -31.2 °C, and dissolved oxygen is 6.2- 8.3 mg/L. The p^H values affect most of the metabolic activities and consequently survival and growth of aquatic organisms (Ramanathan *et al.*, 2005). The present data showed a parallel behaviour with temperature and dissolved oxygen as could be seen in Figure (2). Dissolved oxygen plays an important role in most of the biological functions of zooplankton. Simultaneously, both salinity and oxygen levels affect the solubility and availability of nutrients and hence productivity of aquatic ecosystems (Abdelmongy and El-Moselhy; 2015).

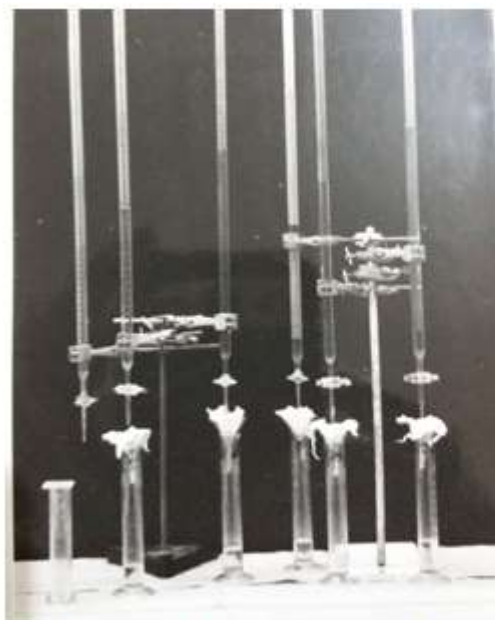
Simultaneously, the nutrient concentrations in that region of the Red sea are 3.7-4.9 ug/L for Ch-a and 0.051 - 0.065, 0.017 -0.033 mg/L for total nitrates and total phosphates respectively. Accordingly, it appears that our stations are more or less oligotrophic. Simultaneously, the numerical densities of the various taxa belonging to these protozoan organisms were examined against some of the physico-chemical factors using the Minitab package in order to detect the significance level of some of these factors on the distribution and the abundance of these unicellular organisms. It could be possible to prove that the total ciliated protozoa of the water samples are statistically significant with water temperature ($P=0.026$), dissolved oxygen ($P=0.03$) and total phosphates ($P=0.03$), while those of the sand samples are significant with the dissolved oxygen ($P=0.05$) and total phosphates only ($P=0.02$). On the other hand, it was proved that water phytomastigophorea represented a statistically significant relationships with water temperature, dissolved oxygen and chlorophyll-a values where their P values are <0.001 , <0.01 and <0.001 respectively. The application of the time –series analysis to the data of the present study could be seen in Figure (2; A B C D E F and G). Time series analysis of the various protozoan organisms indicates the presence of cyclic changes in their abundance and the numerical densities which

fluctuate with the time. Simultaneously, the examined physico-chemical parameters followed more or less a similar behavior which could be interpreted as a result of the presence of a chemostate situation.

According to the obtained data in several zooplankton studies along the Egyptian coasts (Abdel-Aziz; 2004; Abdel-Aziz and Aboul-Ezz, 2003; Anon, 2007), protozoa are considered as important biotic components in the aquatic ecosystem, particularly those acting as predators of bacteria and other micro-organisms beside some rotifers. They provide nutritive source for organisms at higher trophic levels (Kneitel and Chase 2004; Dopheide *et al.*, 2009), increase mineralization to make nutrients more available to other organisms (Vickerman, 1992). They also play a crucial role as biomonitors and/or indicators of water quality (Charubhun and Charubhun, 2000).

Marine protozoa as radiolarians and foraminiferans have a biological significance in sediments only. Other marine sarcodines are difficult to be sampled efficiently due to their body fragility and their relatively low quantitative and qualitative abundance. Many of the phytoflagellates are difficult to be detected precisely using the microscope due to their very minute size. Simultaneously, most of the marine ciliated protozoan are widely distributed and dominate in both species numbers and types. In addition, protozoan organisms play a very important role in the food web (Lee and Choi, 2000) beside their high tolerance against extreme toxic environmental conditions such as exaggerated heavy metals and other pollutants (Forge *et al.*, 1993).

Microbivorous protozoan organisms appear to stimulate the rates of carbon and nitrogen cycling (Fenchel, 1987 and Finlay *et al.*, 2004). Ciliates feed mostly on bacteria and not on dissolved organic material, bacteria and flagellates compete for dissolved nutrients, while ciliates compete with other ciliates and rotifers. Due to the controlled human activities, the environmental parameters showed a quite aerobic conditions, moderate nutrient levels and efficient protozoan growth.



Protozoan sedimentation via cold sedimentation technique at 5-7°C



The Sedimentation Chamber used to sediment Protozoa.

Fig. (1). The extraction and the sedimentation techniques of Protozoan organisms.

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Table (1). Numerical densities (n°/L) of different Protozoan organisms at the sampling stations in Hurghada, Egypt.

Protozoan organisms	Protozoan organisms	Protozoan organisms
Phylum: Sarcomastigophora	O: Haptorida	Oxytricha sp. 2sp
Subphylum: Sarcodina	Lacrymaria sp 1sp.	Tachysoma sp. 1sp
Class: Rhizopodea 66	Spathidium sp. 1	Stylonychia sp. 1sp
Amoeba sp. 2 sp.	Dileptus sp. 1	O:Heterotrichida
Arcella sp. 1 sp.	Monodinium sp. 1 sp	Stentor sp. 2sp
Chaos sp. 1	Didinium sp 1	Spirostomum sp. 1sp
Diffugia sp. 1	Mesodinium sp. 2 sp.	Blepharisma sp. 1sp
Pelomyxa sp. 1 sp.	Subclass 2: Vestibulifera	O: Oligotrichida
Centropyxis sp. 1sp.	O: Colpodida	Halteria sp. 1sp
Saccamoeba sp. 1sp	Colpoda sp. 2 spp	Strobilidium sp. 1
Vannella sp. 1	O: Trichostomatida	Strombidium sp 1
Class: Actinopodea 37	Plagiopyla sp. 1 sp	Tintinnidium sp. 1
Actinophrys sp. 1sp.	Subclass 3: Suctorina	Codonella sp. 1
Actinosphaerium sp. 1	O: Suctorida	-----
Globigerina sp 1	Acineta sp. 2 spp	75 genera/ ~103 sp.
Textularia sp. 1	Podophrya sp 1	
Subphylum: Mstigophora	Tokophrya sp. 1	
Class: Phytomastigophorea 584	Class 2: Oligohymenophorea 360	
Euglena sp. 1sp.	O: Hymenostomatida	
Bodo sp. 1sp.	Uronema sp. 2 spp	
Phacus sp. 1	Cinetochilum sp. 1sp	
Monas sp. 1	Colpidium sp. 2sp	
Peranema sp. 1sp	O: Scuticociliatida	
Monosiga sp. 1	Cyclidium sp. 3 sp	
Chilomonas sp. 1	Pleuronema sp. 1	
Cryptomons sp. 1	O: Peritrichida	
Ceratium sp. 1	Carchesium sp. 1	
Chlamydomonas sp. 1	Cothurnia sp. 1	
Phylum: Ciliophora	.Epistylis sp. 1	
Class I: Kinetofragminophorea	Vaginicola sp. 1sp	
2087	Opercularia sp. 1	
Subclass 1: Gymnostomatia	Ophrydium sp. 2	
O: Karyorelictida	Vorticella sp. 4sp	
Loxodes sp. 1sp	O: Peniculinda	
O:Prostomatida	Paramecium sp. 3sp.	
Holophrya sp. 1	Urocentrum sp. 2 sp	
Urotricha sp 1sp.	Frontonia sp. 1sp	
Coleps sp. 1	Class 3:Polyhymenophora 1172	
Prorodon sp. 1	Subclass: Spirotrichia	
O: Pleurostomatida	O: Hypotrichida	
Acinera sp. 1	Aspidiscia sp. 3 sp.	
Amphileptus sp. 1	Urostyla sp. 1	
Litonotus sp. 4 spp	Euplotes sp. 2sp	
Loxophyllum sp. 5 spp		
Hemiophrys sp. 2spp		
Condylostoma sp 1sp		

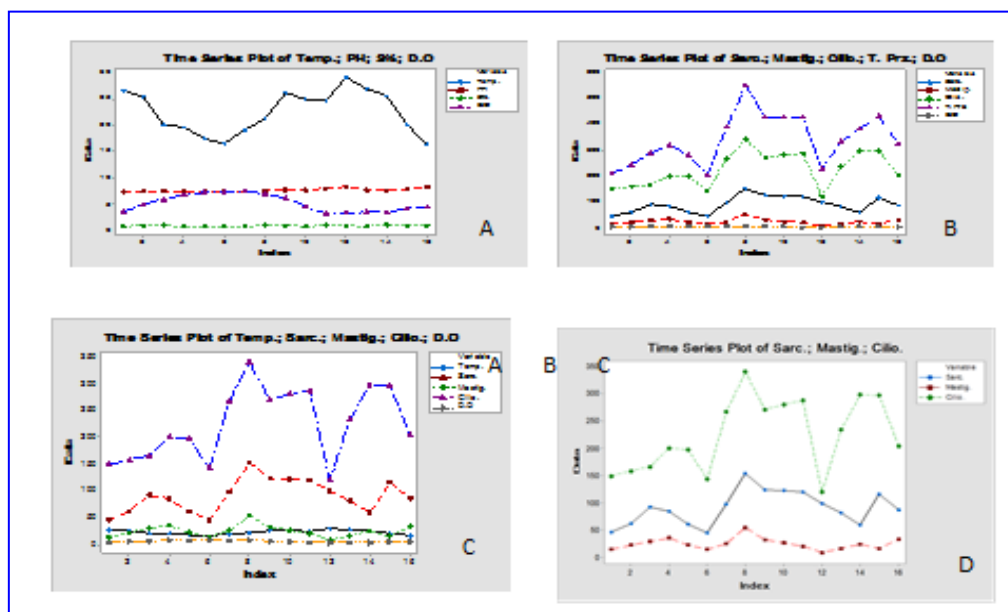


Fig. (2). Time Series Analysis of various protozoan classes and certain physico-chemical parameters at Hurghada, Egypt.

Table (2). Maximal numerical densities (n°/L) of the protozoan organism in different orders at the sampling localities in Hurghada, Red Sea, Egypt.

Protozoan order	Numerical densities	Protozoan order	Numerical densities
Phylum: Sarcomastigophora		Phylum: Ciliophora	(2087)
S.phylum: Sarcodia		*O : Karyorelictida	57
O : Euamoebida	53	Prostomatida	109
Arcellinida	32	Pleurostomatida	275
Pelobiontida	12	Haptorida	241
Actinophrida	11	Colpodida	49
Foraminiferida	13	Trichostomatida	37
S.phylum: Mastigophora	(584)	Suctorida	61
Euglenida	195	*Hymenostomatida	360
Bodonida	63	Peritrichida	341
Cryptomonadida	54	Peniculinida	44
Dinoflagellida	97	* Hypotrichida	397
Chonoflagellida	80	Heterotrichida	123
Volvocalida	95	Oligotrichida	50

Table (3). Comparable sand data in both Mediterranean and Red Seas.

Sand Data	Mediterranean Sea	Red Sea
Tot. Nitrates mg/L	0.060	0.051-0.065
Tot. Posphates mg/L	0.019	0.017-0.033
Chlorophyll-a ug/L	4.7	3.7-4.9
<i>Kinetoframinophorea</i>	1176	965
<i>Oligohymenophorea</i>	457	792
<i>Polyhymenophorea</i>		577

Table (4). Values of certain physico-chemical parameters at the Herghada location of the present study.

Prameters	Minimal & Maximal values
Water temp. °C	15.1-31.2
Salinity (‰)	39-57
pH	7.9-8.5
Dis. Ox. (mg/L)	6.2-8.3
Total NO ₃ (mg/L)	0.05-0.065
Total P O ₃ (mg/L)	0.017-0.033
Ch-a (ug/L)	3.7-4.9

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تواجد الكائنات الأولية بالغرديقة على شاطئ البحر الأحمر بمصر.

منصور جلال

قسم علم الحيوان-كلية العلوم جامعة عين شمس

المستخلص

أجريت هذه الدراسة لتتبع الأوليات المختلفة بساحل البحر الأحمر بمدينة الغردقة في ستة مواقع تحيط بمعهد الأحياء البحرية وذلك لعينات مائية وأخرى لعينات قاعية رملية ضحلة. ولقد وجدت بالإضافة للكائنات الأولية بعض أنواع من الكائنات الصغيرة الأخرى مثل ذلك العجليات ويرقات القشريات والحشرات وعديدات الأشواك وبعض الديدان الخيطية. ولقد أوضحت العينات الحقلية تواجد أكثر من 103 جنس ونوع من الأوليات المختلفة والتي تتبع 24 رتبة متباينة. ولقد لوحظ أن طائفة الأوليات الهدبية هي الأكثر شيوعاً بالنسبة إلى الأوليات الأخرى. كما أن نتائج هذا البحث أوضحت بما لا يدع مجالاً للشك أن درجة حرارة الماء والأكسجين المذاب وصبغ الكلوروفيل وبعض المواد الغذائية الأخرى لها تأثير معنوي من وجهة نظر التحليلات الإحصائية Regression Analysis على التوزيع والوفرة والكثافة العددية لتلك الكائنات. ولقد اتضح باستخدام اختبار التحليل الزمني المتسلسل Time Series Analysis أن المجموعات المختلفة لتلك الكائنات بالتضافر مع بعض العوامل الكيميائية والطبيعية تكون نظاماً بيئياً ثابتاً Chemostatic Ecosystem ذو سلاسل غذائية مختلفة ومتزنة مما يؤدي في النهاية إلى التخلص من الكثير من الملوثات المختلفة عضوية كانت أم غير عضوية.