

MARINE PRODUCTS FROM COASTAL OMAN

A few finds from the Bronze Age tower at ST1 stand to witness the tight connections that existed between the communities settled in interior Oman and those that occupied the coast of the Arabian sea, from the those facing Masirah Island to the Emirates.

These latter communities were, in many cases, only seasonally (fall to spring) engaged in the exploitation of marine resources, and spent the remaining part of the year in inland settlements of which evidence has been discovered for example in the Ja'alan region of southeastern Oman.

Omani waters are still today renowned for their richness in fish, and this was surely true in ancient times as well. However, fish was not the only resource that ancient fishermen were collecting: shells were widely consumed both for nutrition and for the production of tools and ornaments. Green turtles were also largely hunted wherever sand beach offered a favourable nesting ground.

Excavations at several coastal sites have provided unmistakable evidence concerning shell working and fish curing.

At Ra's al-Jinz RJ-2, the fishing techniques in use during the Bronze Age indicate a neat change from those common in earlier times, linked to the transition from a subsistence activity to a large-scale production. Such a great amount of fish was then destined to exchange with the interior, likely after some curing that could have consisted in a simple drying and salting.

While remains of this maritime contribution to the inland communities' diet are difficult to retrieve, shells are known from several sites. Manufacture of rings obtained from *Conus* sp. shells is witnessed again at RJ-2, and the apex of one such *Conus* was for example found at ST1 itself. Shells could reach interior sites also without undergoing such a complex transformation: numerous are the shell beads obtained with just a simple perforation, or cutting out the back of the body whorl.

The retrieval of an almost complete *Tonna Luteostoma* at ST1 seems to indicate that in some instances, particularly large, deep waters shell, could be considered valuable just by virtue of their attractive shape.

Another function of marine shells need to be remembered, as it also is known both from sites near the coast and from others in central Oman. Cockle shells have been found on several sites, filled with cosmetic mineral-based powder. They were for example widely attested in the Royal Graves at Ur, but have also been discovered in the tombs excavated by the IMTO on Jabal Salut, and near the coast they are known from as far south as Ra's al-Hadd HD-5 to as far north as the Sharm tomb in the Emirate of Fujairah. (MdE)