SHORT NOTES

A new record of Placozoa from the Mediterranean Sea

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Trichoplax adhaerens is the only recognized species from the phylum Placozoa described up to now. It was discovered in 1883 by Schulze in a seawater aquarium at the Graz Zoological Institute in Austria. The water in the aquarium came from the Adriatic Sea (Italy). The interest sparked by finding this organism and the possibility of clarifying the origin of Metazoa flagged shortly thereafter when a work published by Krumbach in 1907 considered it to be a modified planula larva of a hydromedusa, and thus, the discovery lost its relevance (GRELL & LÓPEZ-OCHOTERENA, 1988) (1). Subsequently, it was rediscovered and meticulously studied by GRELL, 1973 (2); 1982 (3) and GRELL & RUTHMANN, 1991 (4), among others, with material from Red Sea coral reef microfauna. Recently, VOIGT et al., 2004 (5) showed that the phylum Placozoa is significantly more diverse than previously known that placozoans can feed on protozoa and even bigger organisms (NIELSEN, 1995 (7); GRELL, 1983 (8)).

A visual count found several hundred individuals, which appeared as small off-white dots, mostly moving around very slowly. In some areas, the individuals were arranged in closer formations, while in others they were more dispersed. Microscopic preparations were made of different individuals extracted and prepared ‘in vivo’ for drawing with the help of a camera lucida combined with an optical microscope to obtain the measurements. It was possible to distinguish between bigger and smaller individuals. Both showed amoeba-like movements. When flattened out, the bigger individuals had a diameter between 1.5 and 2.5 mm and the smaller individuals between 300 and 800 mm. Photographs of different individuals of the placozoans appear in Fig. 1.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


Fig. 1. – (a-d). Photographs of four different individuals from placozoans : a, b, c : bigger individuals and d : smaller individual.

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