

CHALCOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGE IB MOLLUSKS FROM BEQO'A

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This report discusses 26 shells from the 2008 and 2009 excavations at Beqo'a, a site in the Judean Hills (see Golani, Storchan and Eirikh-Rose, this volume).¹ These malacological remains were retrieved manually and by soil sieving from surfaces and floors. The shells are described according to their stratigraphic assignment as determined by the excavators (Table 1).

The malacological evidence from Beqo'a during the Chalcolithic and EB IB indicates contacts with the Nile River, as reflected by the presence of the freshwater bivalve *Chambardia rubens*, as well as with the Mediterranean, which is reflected by the presence of *Glycymeris nummaria*. Another species found in EB IB Beqo'a is the land snail *Helix engaddensis*, but it is probably of recent origin.

One unworked complete shell and one unworked fragment of *Glycymeris nummaria*, as well as one fragment of mother-of-pearl from F122, which could not be identified to species level, were found from Chalcolithic-period contexts. From the EB IB, five fragments and two complete shells of *Glycymeris nummaria* were found with a naturally abraded hole in the umbo that could have been used as ready-to-use pendants (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2005:46). Shells of *Glycymeris* were sometimes used in foundation deposits during the Early Bronze Age (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2005:46), but this is not the case in Beqo'a, as the shells were not found in large quantities beneath the floors.

Nine fragments of *Chambardia rubens* were found from the Chalcolithic period; one of them, from L196, is worked. From EB IB, only four fragments of *Chambardia rubens* were found;

the one from L155 is worked to the shape of a hexagon, suggesting that the fragments were used as inlay.

Remains of *Chambardia rubens* are found in the Southern Levant as early as the Natufian period (Mienis 1987). Shells and fish from the Nile were found in archaeological sites in Israel, Cyprus, the Aegean region and North Africa (Reese, Mienis and Woodward 1986). Shells from prehistoric sites were exotic imports, and were used as offerings in graves or sanctuaries. During the Chalcolithic period in Israel, there was intensive use of *Chambardia rubens*, along with *Pinctada margaritifera* from the Red Sea, for making trapezoidal pendants (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002a; 2002b). Non-worked *Chambardia rubens* specimens are known from Abu Ma'atar, Horbat Beter, Gerar, Gilat, Ghassul, Horbat Raqq, Ben Shemen, Peqi'in and Tel Kitan during the Chalcolithic period, and 'En Besor, Tell el-Farah North, Tell el-Farah Site H, Tel 'Erani, Palmaḥim, Azor and Megiddo Area J during EB I (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002a; Mienis 2007). Beginning in EB IA, the exchange of *Chambardia* from the Nile River coincides with an Egyptian influence in Israel, which developed further during EB IB (Milevski 2005:210). According to its distribution patterns (Milevski 2005: Map 16), *Chambardia* may have arrived from Egypt via a maritime route. In addition to the sites in Israel, *Chambardia* valves were also found in graves in Egypt where they could have served as offerings, such as symbolic food for the dead or containers for cosmetic powders (Rizkana and Seeher 1990:27).

Table 1. Mollusks according to Period and Stratum

Period/Stratum	Area	Square	Locus ⁱ	Basket	Context	Species	Preservation	Origin	Comments
<i>Chalcolithic</i>									
III	C	B4	150	1080	Below floor make-up within Building 1	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIA	C	C3	187	1161	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIB	C	C3	196	1192	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	Worked
IIIB	C	C3	196	1189	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIB	C	C3	196	1183	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIA	C	C3	187	1171	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIB	C	C3	198	1200	Debris on surface	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Complete	Mediterranean	
IIIA	C	C4	193	1182	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIB	C	C4	200	1196	Debris on surface	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
IIIA	C	C4	192	1178	Debris on surface	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Fragment	Mediterranean	
III	F122		179	1145	Within burial cave	<i>Mother-of-pearl</i>	Fragment	?	
III?	F233 ⁱⁱ		5	118	Fill	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
<i>EB IB</i>									
II	C	B4	144	1070	Floor makeup-up within Building 1	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
II B	C	B4	155	1106	Stone rubble and debris upon surface west of W18	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	Hexagon, worked
II-I	C	B4	118	1030	Debris above floor within Building 1	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
II-I	C	B4	118	1030	Debris above floor within Building 1	<i>Helix engaddensis</i>	Fragment	Land and snail	
II	C	B4	126	1058	Debris above within Building 1	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Complete	Mediterranean	Naturally abraded hole
II	C	B4	126	1058	Debris above within Building 1	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	
II-I	C	B4	118	1027	Debris above floor within Building 1	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Fragment	Mediterranean	
II-I	C	B4	118	1027	Debris above floor within Building 1	<i>Helix engaddensis</i>	Fragment	Land and snail	
I	C	C3	186	1158	Surface makeup	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Fragment	Mediterranean	
II	C	C4	190	1169	Debris above within Building 1	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Fragment	Mediterranean	
II	C	C4	190	1169	Debris above within Building 1	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Fragment	Mediterranean	
II	C	C4	190	1169	Debris above within Building 1	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Fragment	Mediterranean	
II	C	C4	190	1169	Debris on floor within Building 1	<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>	Complete	Mediterranean	Naturally abraded hole
<i>Unstratified</i>	C	B4	201	1194	Balk trim	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>	Fragment	Nile	

ⁱ For a list of loci, see Golani, Storchan and Eirikh-Rose, this volume: Appendix 1.

ⁱⁱ Excavations of F233 (see Golani, Storchan and Eirikh-Rose, this volume: Fig. 1) revealed terraces with a massine fill containing Chalcolithic-period ceramics.

In conclusion, it seems that the residents of Beqo‘a had connections with Egypt during the Chalcolithic and EB IB periods, and used the imported *Chambardia rubens* as inlay.

Moreover, it is possible that the Chalcolithic population who used *Chambardia rubens* in graves adopted some of the Egyptian beliefs, continuing into EB I (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002a).

NOTE

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