'Atiqot 100, 2020

The Molluscs from Ben Gamli'el Street, Yafo (Jaffa)

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This report presents 30 malacological finds from the excavation on 10 Ben Gamli'el Street, including 20 specimens from clear stratigraphic contexts of the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods (Strata III and II, respectively; see Arbel, this volume). The finds were manually retrieved. They were identified to species level using the taxonomic nomenclature of the World Register of Marine Species (www.marinespecies.org). The number of identifiable specimens (NISP) was used to quantify the remains. The assemblage comprises 28 Mediterranean sea shells and two Nile River freshwater bivalves (Table 1). Only the finds from the Hellenistic and Byzantine contexts are further described below.

The Finds

The Hellenistic Period

Fourteen shells were found from this period, all belonging to Mediterranean species. Most of these shells (n = 10) were retrieved from the large pit in Area B (L214, L216, L218), and the remainder were found in soil accumulations (L122, L126). Six bivalves (*Acanthocardia tuberculate* and *Glycymeris nummaria*) had an artificial hole in the umbo, indicating that they were used as ornaments.

The Byzantine Period

Six shells were found from this period, five of Mediterranean species and one of a Nile species, all originated in soil accumulations (L211, L215, L222). The Mediterranean shells include a worn specimen of *Bolinus brandaris* with a broken siphonal canal (L215); a *Conus ventricosus*[1] shell worked as a bead (L210); and three *Glycymeris nummaria* (L211), one of which exhibits traces of plaster, indicating that the shells were used in construction material. One Nilotic bivalve (L222), *Chambardia rubens*, which is unworked and broken, and another, which displays cut edges, provide an indication of trade contacts with the Nile region during the Byzantine period. This species was also identified by the author in other Byzantine-period sites, such as 'Akko (Permit No. A-5734), eṭ-Ṭuweiri (Ktalav, forthcoming), the Old City of Jerusalem (Permit Nos. A-5337, A-5569) and Ḥaluẓa (Bar-Oz et al. 2019).

[1] This species was formerly designated *Conus mediterraneus* Hwass in Bruguière, 1792.

Table 1. List of Specimens, Organized according to Loci

Locus	Basket	Period	Species	Origin	Remarks[i]
100	1028	Unclear	*Hexaplex trunculus*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, with a hole above the columella
100	1053	Unclear	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Complete except for a broken siphonal canal, worn
117	1066	Hellenistic	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Complete except for a broken siphonal canal, fresh
122	1094	Hellenistic	*Acanthocardia tuberculata*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, artificial hole in umbo
126	1140	Hellenistic	*Hexaplex trunculus*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
200	2011	Unclear	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Complete except for a broken siphonal canal, fresh
201	2024	Unclear	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Complete except for a broken siphonal canal, worn
201	2025	Unclear	*Hexaplex trunculus*	Mediterranean	Complete, fresh
201	2026	Unclear	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn, worked?
204	2027	Unclear	*Chambardia rubens*	Nile	Fragment, cut edges
204	2030	Unclear	*Hexaplex trunculus*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
208	2031	Unclear	*Stramonita haemastoma*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
208	2032	Unclear	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
210	2088	Byzantine	*Conus ventricosus*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, worked as a bead
211	2043	Byzantine	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn, with plaster
211	2043	Byzantine	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn
211	2043	Byzantine	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, natural hole in umbo
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, artificial hole in umbo

[i] The specimens are described as either broken, in which case more than half of the original specimen is preserved, or as a fragment, in which case less than half of the original specimen is preserved.

Table 1. (cont.)

Locus	Basket	Period	Species	Origin	Remarks[i]
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, artificial hole in umbo, worked on edges?
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, artificial hole in umbo, worked on edges?
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, artificial hole in umbo, worked on edges?
214	2054	Hellenistic	*Glycymeris nummaria*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn, artificial hole in umbo, worked on edges?
215	2087	Byzantine	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Complete except for a broken siphonal canal, worn
216	2124	Hellenistic	*Hexaplex trunculus*	Mediterranean	Complete, worn
218	2101	Hellenistic	*Stramonita haemastoma*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
220	2102	Hellenistic	*Bolinus brandaris*	Mediterranean	Broken, worn
222	2104	Byzantine	*Chambardia rubens*	Nile	Broken, fresh

Conclusions

The malacological assemblage from the excavation on Ben Gamli'el Street comprises mainly Mediterranean Sea species, as could be expected from the coastal location of the site. The local seashells were mainly used as simple ornaments and in construction material. The presence of two imported freshwater bivalves from the Nile most probably attests to the trade connections between Yafo and Egypt in antiquity.

References

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