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Molluscs from the Early Bronze Age I Site at Ashqelon, Afridar (Area E-2)

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This report discusses 49 malacological remains recovered from Ashqelon, Afridar (Area E-2).[1] The excavation revealed remains of several large enclosures and a few walls and related habitation surfaces from early EB I (see Golani and Paran, this volume). The shells were retrieved manually, after sieving the sediment from clearly stratified loci through a 1 × 1 cm mesh. The stratigraphic designation of three strata, two of which are associated with early EB I, was determined by the excavator. There were no major differences between the shell assemblages of each stratum.

Table 1 presents a complete enumeration of the shells, including species, provenance and state of preservation. A specimen is considered broken when more than half its shell is present, and a fragment, when less than half its shell is present.

The malacological evidence from Ashqelon, Afridar (Area E-2) indicates the use of Mediterranean seashells during early EB I, as reflected by the presence of *Bolinus brandaris, Stramonita haemastoma, Glycymeris nummaria, Ostrea* sp., *Acanthocardia tuberculata and Donax trunculus*. This is to be expected, as the site is located near the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the presence of *Chambardia rubens* indicates contacts with the Nile region. The ten fragmented and broken valves of *Chambardia rubens* were not worked and their specific use at the site could not be determined. Due to their nacre, these shells may have been collected for aesthetic purposes. Remains of *Chambardia rubens* have been found in Israel since the Natufian period (Mienis 1987). Evidence (both shells and fish bones) for connections with the Nile region spanning a long time period was found in archaeological sites in Israel, Cyprus, the Aegean and North Africa (Reese, Mienis and Woodward 1986). 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, which were used as funerary gifts. This tradition continued into EB I, and in a few cases, into EB II as well, though some of the objects from the latter contexts may represent heirlooms. These pendants are found in both funerary and household contexts. The exchange of *Chambardia rubens* from the Nile River during the Early Bronze Age coincides with Egyptian influence;

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Table 1. Malacological Remains from Ashqelon, Afridar (Area E-2)

Origin	Species	Locus	Stratum	Complete	Broken	Fragment	Total
Mediterranean	*Bolinus brandaris*	585	III?	1			1
	Stramonita haemastoma	520	II?		1	1	2
		534			1		1
		538		2			2
		569	II			1	1
	Murex sp.	620	III?		1		1
	Glycymeris nummaria	509		1			1
		520	II?	1			1
		594	III?		1	2	3
		610	III	4	4		8
		615	III			2	2
		618	II		1		1
		619	III	3	3		6
		620	III?	2		1	3
	Ostrea sp.	546	II?		1		1
		566	II		1		1
		619	III		1		1
	Acanthocardia tuberculata	513			1		1
	Donax trunculus	619	III	1	1		2
Nile	*Chambardia* rubens	515	II?		2	1	3
		519				1	1
		538				1	1
		569	II		1		1
		593	III–II			1	1
		594	III?		1		1
		607	III			1	1
		613	III			1	1
Total				*15*	*21*	*13*	*49*

it began in early EB I and reached its peak in late EB I, but decreased during EB II and disappeared altogether in EB III (Milevski 2005:204). *Chambardia* shells were found also offshore, at ʻAtlit, in a late EB I juglet (Sharvit et al. 2002), and at Azor (Bar-Yosef Mayer 1999), Ashqelon, Afridar Area G (Braun and Gophna 2004:219), Ḥorbat Petora (Milevski 2005:201), Bet Pelet Site H (Macdonald 1932: Pl. XXIII:33, 35) and Taur Ikhbeine (Horwitz et al. 2002:116–117, Table 6). According to its distribution patterns (Milevski 2005: Map 16), *Chambardia* may have arrived in Canaan from Egypt via the maritime route.

Ten of the 25 shells of the species *Glycymeris nummaria* display a worked artificial hole in the umbo. Two of them were not found in clean contexts (L509, L520) and eight were

found in Stratum III (L599, L619) upon a floor, apparently in an open area within a large enclosure. Perforated shells of *Glycymeris nummaria* or *Cerastoderma glaucum* were used as ornaments or, when found in larger accumulations, may indicate their function as tallies/counters, as suggested by Tubb and Dorrell (1994:63). Parallels for use as tallies/counters or ornaments were found in Early Bronze Age contexts at Tel Bet She'an (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2006:370), Tel Qashish (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2003:420–421), Megiddo, Lod, Tel Yarmut, Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2008:198), Ashqelon, Barne'a (Ktalav, forthcoming) and Qiryat Ata (Reese 2003:253; Ktalav 2014).

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