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Molluscs from the Early Bronze Age Site at Ashqelon Afridar, Area N

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This report discusses 49 malacological remains excavated at Ashqelon Afridar, Area N.[1] The excavation revealed two strata dating from EB I that included architectural remains and associated surfaces (see Golani, this volume). The shells were retrieved manually and by sieving through a 1×1 cm mesh from clear archaeological contexts. There were no major differences between the shell assemblages of both strata, except for *Chambardia rubens*, which appear only in Stratum III.

The shells are presented in Table 1 according to their archaeological context, followed by a description of their species, provenance and state of preservation. A specimen is considered broken when more than half the shell is present, and a fragment when less than half the shell is present.

The Finds

The Early EB I malacological evidence from Ashqelon Afridar Area N indicates the primary use of local resources, i.e., Mediterranean seashells, as reflected by the presence of *Stramonita haemastoma*, *Glycymeris nummaria*, *Ostrea* sp., *Cerastoderma glaucum* and *Donax trunculus*, while the presence of *Chambardia rubens* from the Nile River also indicates contact with the Nile region. The two fragmented valves of *Chambardia rubens* were found on a floor in an open area (L28, L41); they were not worked, and their specific use at Ashqelon Afridar could not be determined. Besides their being an edible species, due to their mother-of-pearl inner valve, these shells may have also been collected for aesthetic purposes. Remains of *Chambardia rubens* have been found in Israel at sites dating from the Natufian period onward (Mienis 1987). Evidence of long-term connections with the Nile region (both shells and fish bones) was documented at sites in Israel, Cyprus, the Aegean region and North Africa (Reese, Mienis and Woodward 1986). During the Chalcolithic period in Israel, intensive use was made of *Chambardia rubens*, along with the Red Sea *Pinctada margaritifera*, for making trapezoidal pendants that are found both in funerary and

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Table 1. Shells according to Provenance and Species

Provenance	Species	Locus	Stratum	Complete	Broken	Fragment
Mediterranean	*Stramonita haemastoma*	41	III			1
		33	I?			1
	Glycymeris nummaria	7	III			3
		13	II			2
		20	II ?			1
		27	II	1	1	3
		28	III	1		
		33	I?		1	1
		35	II	2		1
		37	III–II	1	1	1
		38	III		1	
		39	II?	1	1	2
		41	III		2	
		45	III?	3	1	
		46	III		1	
		52	II		1	3
		54	III–II		1	
	Ostrea sp.	27	II	1		
		35	II		1	
	Cerastoderma glaucum	27	II		1	
	Donax trunculus	21	III			1
		27	II		1	
		33	I?	1		
		35	II	1		
		45	III?	1		
Nile	*Chambardia rubens*	41	III			1
		28	III			1

household contexts (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2007:196). This tradition continued into EB I and, in a few cases, into EB II, when they may represent heirlooms.

The exchange of *Chambardia rubens* during EB I coincides with Egyptian influence beginning in Early EB I and becoming fully developed in Late EB I; it declined during EB II, disappearing altogether during EB III (Milevski 2005:204). Shells of *Chambardia rubens* from Late EB I were also found in a small jar off the coast of ʻAtlit (Sharvit et al. 2002), as well as at Azor (Bar-Yosef Mayer 1999), Ashqelon Afridar Area G (Braun and Gophna 2004:219), Ḥorbat Petora (Milevski 2005:201), ʻEn Besor Site H (Macdonald 1932: Pl. XXIII:33, 35) and Taur Ikhbieneh (Horwitz et al. 2002:116–117, Table 6). According to its

distribution patterns (Milevski 2005: Map 16), *Chambardia* may have arrived from Egypt via maritime trade.

Eight of the 37 *Glycymeris nummaria* species shells display an artificial, worked hole above the umbo; four of them were not found in clear contexts (L39, L45). The complete valve from L35 (Stratum II) was found in an open area; two broken valves were found on a surface in an open area (L41; Stratum III); and the fourth, broken valve was found in a floor makeup inside a structure (L54; Strata III–II). Perforated shells of *Glycymeris nummaria* or *Cerastoderma glaucum* were used as ornaments, yet in larger assemblages they could have functioned as tallies/counters (Tubb and Dorrell 1994:63). Parallels for their use as tallies/counters or ornaments were found in Early Bronze Age contexts at Tel Bet She'an (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2006:690), Tel Qashish (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2003:420–421), Megiddo, Lod, Tel Yarmut, Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2007:198), Ashqelon Barne'a (Ktalav 2022) and Qiryat Ata (Reese 2003:253; Ktalav 2014).

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