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# The Mollusc Remains from the Burial Caves at Sha'ar Efrayim

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The archaeomalacological finds from the excavation of five Late Chalcolithic burial caves at Sha'ar Efrayim (see van den Brink, this volume) consisted of six samples collected from Caves 1 and 3. Cave 1 yielded five samples containing 13 shells, and Cave 3, a single sample containing one shell only. Two bivalves could be identified on the spot, while the snails (11 specimens) necessitated comparison with recent material in the National Mollusc Collection of Tel Aviv University.

*Results*

Only two species were recognized among the material: a marine snail (11 shells) and a marine bivalve (two valves):

Gastropoda

*Conus flavidus* Lamarck 1810

Cave 1 (L116, B1062): one shell with a perforated apex.

Cave 1 (L124, B1128): one shell with a perforated apex.

Cave 1 (L128, B1125): five shells with a perforated apex.

Cave 1 (L128, B1129): four shells with a perforated apex.

Bivalvia

*Glycymeris insubrica* (Brocchi 1814)

Cave 1 (L124, B1116): one valve with a perforated umbo.

Cave 3 (L112, B1032): one valve with a perforated umbo.

*Discussion and Conclusions*

The excavation of the burial caves yielded only 13 shells, which belong to two quite different molluscs: a Cone shell: *Conus flavidus* (×11) and a Bittersweet: *Glycymeris insubrica* (×2).

The presence of *Glycymeris insubrica* could be expected, as it is a common species in the Mediterranean Sea. The eleven specimens identified as *Conus flavidus* are surprising, not only due to the fact that this is a species native to the Red Sea and the even more distant Indo-Pacific, but also because all the shells belong to a single species. This is in spite of the fact that 23 species of Cone shells live in the shallow waters of the Gulf of Aqaba (Fainzilber, Mienis and Heller 1992).

All the shells apparently served as burial gifts, as they had been converted into either pendants (*Glycymeris*) or beads (*Conus*). The two *Glycymeris* valves were perforated in the customary way, i.e., by piercing the umbo. A round hole is also located at the exact spot where the apex used to be in all the *Conus* specimens. However, before piercing the top of the shell, the upper whorls were ground down until the top of the shell was more or less flat. Initially, all these manipulations to the Cone shells made it difficult to recognize them. However, the combination of general outline, the absence of a coronated shoulder, the protruding ridges on the columella and a callosity within the aperture at about the middle of the last whorl, all pointed in the direction of *Conus flavidus*, the identification of which was confirmed by comparison with recent material from the Red Sea.

The presence of this Eritrean material indicates some kind of trade with populations living farther to the south.

## REFERENCES

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