

THE MOLLUSCS FROM RABBI YEHUDA ME-RAGUZA STREET, YAFO (JAFFA)

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This report discusses the 232 malacological remains from the excavations on Me-Raguza Street, Yafo (see Arbel and Rauchberger, this volume).¹ The assemblage, retrieved manually and identified to species level, includes mostly Mediterranean shells (221), land snails (10) and a fragment of *Chambardia rubens* from the Nile River, as well as three mother-of-pearl buttons. The origin and quantities of the marine and land species are presented in Table 1; the stratigraphic designations were determined by the excavators.

The malacological evidence from Me-Raguza Street indicates that Mediterranean seashells were used from the Hellenistic to the Ottoman periods. This is reflected by the presence of *Naria spurca*, *Neverita josephina*, *Charonia tritonis variegata*, *Bolinus brandaris*, *Hexaplex trunculus*, *Stramonita haemastoma*, *Glycymeris nummaria*, *Spondylus gaederopus* and *Acanthocardia tuberculata*, which is to be expected at a site located on the Mediterranean coast. Most of the shells were worn and collected from the shore.

The additional presence of *Chambardia rubens*, a large freshwater mussel distributed in East (the Nile River), Central and West Africa, reveals contacts with Egypt. The shell is solid and ovate and its interior is pink mother-of-pearl that changes to white when exposed to sunlight (Pain and Woodward 1962:75; Mandahl-Barth 1988:73). The single fragment of a valve of *Chambardia rubens* was found in L426, in a mixed layer of stones/sand. It was not worked and its specific use at the site could not be determined. The beauty of the mother-of-pearl inner valve may have prompted their collection for aesthetic purposes. The four species of land snails are part of the natural surroundings of the site.

THE OBJECTS

Buttons

Three mother-of-pearl buttons from the Ottoman period were found: Fig. 1:1 (diam. 16 mm) has a notch in the back for the insertion of a metal clasp; Fig. 1:2 (diam. 11 mm) has a metal clasp on its back; and Fig. 1:3 (diam. 14 mm) has two holes in its center.

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Table 1. Species and Origin of Molluscs according to Period

Species and Origin	Hellenistic	Byzantine	Early Islamic	Crusader	Ottoman	Mixed Layers
Land Snails						
<i>Xerocrassa simulata</i>						2
<i>Xeropicta vestalis</i>						6
<i>Helix engaddensis</i>		1				
<i>Theba pisana</i>						1
<i>Subtotal</i>		1				9
Mediterranean						
<i>Naria spurca</i> ¹						1
<i>Neverita josephina</i>						
<i>Charonia variegata</i>						1
<i>Bolinus brandaris</i>		3		3	1	7
<i>Hexaplex trunculus</i>	1	2	2	2	9	5
<i>Stramonita haemastoma</i>	1	1		1	1	5
<i>Nassarius circumcinctus</i>		1				
<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i> ¹	11	46	6	13	37	55
<i>Spondylus gaederopus</i>		1				
<i>Acanthocardia tuberculata</i>		2				1
<i>Cerasthoderma glaucum</i>					1	
<i>Subtotal</i>	13	56	8	19	49	76
Nile						
<i>Chambardia rubens</i>						1
<i>Subtotal</i>						1
Total	13	57	8	19	50	86

¹ Formerly known as *Erosaria spurca*.

Amulets and Ornaments

One complete shell of *Naria spurca* dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Fig. 1:4) was found. Cowries are known to have had symbolic meaning and were used as amulets to promote fertility and against the evil eye. Since sterility has often been believed to be caused by the evil eye, envy or jealousy, cowries may be assumed to be apotropaic against harmful agents. This belief exists in many cultures around the world, but it is strongest in the Mediterranean region, in the Middle East and northwest India (Safer and Gill 1982). The shell from Me-Ragusa Street may have been used as an amulet or it may have been collected from the shore for the beauty of its shape.

One broken shell of *Glycymeris nummaria* was found in an ashy layer (L387) and dated to the Crusader period; it has an artificial hole in the umbo. Two shells of *Acanthocardia tuberculata*, also with artificial holes in the umbo, were found in a Crusader occupation layer (Fig. 1:5)—they probably served as ornaments.



Fig. 1. Shells.

No.	Object	Locus	Mollusc
1	Button	601	Mother-of-pearl
2	Button	819	Mother-of-pearl
3	Button	818	Mother-of-pearl
4	Amulet?	105	Cowrie (<i>Naria spurca</i>)
5	Ornament?	344, 362	<i>Acanthocardia tuberculata</i>

Use in Construction

A valve of *Glycymeris nummaria* with traces of plaster on the shell was found in L352, in a robber trench from the Hellenistic period. Seashells are commonly used in construction, mainly in sites near the Mediterranean shore (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2005).

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