

MOLLUSCS FROM THE FRENCH HOSPITAL COMPOUND, YAFO (JAFFA)

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A total of 27 malacological remains were retrieved from the excavation within the French Hospital Compound, Yafo (see Dayan, Levy and Samora-Cohen, this volume).¹ The malacological assemblage was retrieved manually and included common marine shells from the Mediterranean Sea. The shells originated in two loci: L521, from the Late Roman period, and L401, from the Abbasid period.

Locus 521

This locus is an area of quarried *kurkar* (local aeolian quartz sandstone with carbonate cement) that was used as a cesspool during the Late Roman period. Three species of gastropods were found: *Hexaplex trunculus* (n = 3), *Bolinus brandaris* (n = 20) and *Charonia variegata* (n = 1).

Hexaplex trunculus is a Mediterranean species that lives on mud bottoms (Poppe and Goto 1991). Three broken and worn shells were collected on the shore. One of the shells has an artificial hole in the body whorl. This shell might have been used as an ornament.

Bolinus brandaris is a common species in the Mediterranean, found on sand/mud bottoms between 1–200 m deep (Poppe and Goto 1991). Twenty complete shells were retrieved alive from the sea, attesting that they were probably consumed in ancient times.² Today, this species is fished for consumption along the Catalan coast (360 tons per year; Poppe and Goto 1991; Martín, Sánchez and Ramón 1995). Evidence for the consumption of Muricidae was also found at Shuni,³ Legio (Ktalav 2016) and Ḥorbat 'Eleq (Mienis 2000).⁴ However, the small amounts encountered in this excavation prevents the identification of this species as being an important component of the residents' diet; it might indicate that some of the residents at the site were not Jewish, as molluscs are not considered kosher.

Charonia variegata is common in the eastern Mediterranean in shallow water, above a rocky or rough-gravel seabed (Poppe and Goto 1991). In earlier periods, this species, also

¹ I would like to thank the authors for giving me the opportunity to study the discussed material.

² In this case, these gastropods were not used for purple dye production. In order to produce 100 g of purple pigment, about 10,000 gastropods are needed, which are usually found crushed. For more information about purple dye production, see Karmon and Spanier 1987.

³ The site (License No. G-135/1998) was excavated by Karim Abumokh; the malacological assemblage was analyzed by the author.

⁴ The site (License Nos. G-49/2009, G-56/2010) was excavated by Yotam Tepper and Orit Peleg-Barkat; the malacological assemblage was analyzed by the author.

known as “trumpet shell,” was found in graves and sanctuaries and had a cultic purpose (Åström and Reese 1990). However, the single shell that was found in the excavation is worn and was collected dead on the shore; it was not manipulated in any way and was not used as a trumpet. There is a recent artificial hole in the shell that was caused during excavation and not in ancient times. Perhaps the shell had been used as an ornament.

Locus 401

Locus 401 might be an entrance to a grave (T23). The shells were found in an accumulation between two walls that were dated to the Abbasid period. Three shells of *Glycymeris nummaria* were found: one complete, one broken with a natural hole in the umbo and one fragment. They were collected dead from the shore. The context in which they were found does not imply a specific use of these shells by the inhabitants of the site.

CONCLUSIONS

Some of the shells from the Late Roman period might have been used as ornaments. Most of them belonged to the species *Bolinus brandaris*, which was possibly consumed as food, possibly pointing to the ethnicity of the site’s residents. The use of the three shells of *Glycymeris nummaria* during the Abbasid period is unclear.

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