



### THE SHELLS FROM THE EPIPALEOLITHIC SITE OF GIVAT HAYIL 35, WESTERN NEGEV, ISRAEL

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#### INTRODUCTION

The site of Givat Hayil 35 (Israel Grid 11786/04363) was discovered by Prof. Steven A. Rosen during a survey carried out in the Western Negev, Israel, on behalf of the Israel Electric Corporation and the Israel Water Planning Commission (TAHAL). It turned out to be an Epipaleolithic site with remains from the Mushabian and Ramonian cultures. The Ramonian layer is overlaying the Mushabian one, but they are both dating back some 11.000 years BP. The site and the animal bones have been described in detail by Rosen & Horwitz (2005).

#### THE SHELLS

The shells found at Givat Hayil 35 have not been dealt with so far. They were found in five areas, of which three were on the surface and two were respectively an upper and a lower subsurface one. Two areas are characterized by flints from the Ramonian culture, while three are representing the Mushabian culture (TABLE 1).

SITE	CULTURAL TYPE	SITE	CULTURAL TYPE
Area A - surface	Ramonian	Area C- upper	Mushabian
Area B - surface	Mushabian	Area C- lower	Mushabian
Area C - surface	Ramonian		

TABLE 1: THE FIVE AREAS AT GIVAT HAYIL 35 CARRYING SHELLS AND THEIR CULTURAL AFFINITIES.

The excavation produced 183 shells: 127 associated with the Ramonian culture and 56 representing the Mushabian culture. They turned out to belong to 10 different species (TABLE 2).

	Area A	Area B	Area C Surface	Area C Upper	Area C Lower	TOTAL
<i>Columbella rustica</i>	8	-	1	1	-	10
<i>Xerocrassa langloisiana</i>	2	-	-	-	-	2
<i>Xerocrassa seetzenii erkelii</i>	8	-	14	5	29	56
<i>Xerocrassa</i> species	-	-	-	-	7	7
<i>Sphincterochila zonata</i>	50	7	27	1	1	86
<i>Eremina desertorum</i>	6	1	-	-	1	8
<i>Helix engaddensis</i>	2	-	-	-	-	2
<i>Antalis inaequicostatum</i>	1	1	1	1	-	4
<i>Antalis rosatti</i>	1	-	2	-	-	3
<i>Antalis vulgare</i>	3	-	1	1	-	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>183</b>

TABLE 2: SHELLS FOUND IN THE FIVE AREAS SAMPLED AT GIVAT HAYIL 35.

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## DISCUSSION

The shells found at Givat Hayil 35 originated from two different areas: the immediate surroundings of the site and the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the shells (161) are representing six local species of land snails of which at least five are still living in the area today.

More than 70% of the land snails were found on the surface and are therefore most probably of much more recent origin. This is especially true for the thick-shelled *Sphincterochila zonata* of which 84 out of a total of 86 were found on the surface.

Even the shells of land snails which were encountered subsurface might have a much younger age since some of them are aestivating while deeply buried in the ground and not always survive such periods of long inactivity.

The *Xerocrassa* species of which seven shells were found in the lower layer of Area C, is most probably a species which is not living today in the Western Negev or elsewhere in the Levant. It resembles most closely very small specimens of *Xerocrassa langloisiana*, however the few specimens of this unknown *Xerocrassa* species does not allow a more specific identification.

The shells from the Mediterranean Sea were most probably all exploited as shell beads. All the Dove shells *Columbella rustica* show a man made hole just behind the enforced lip of the aperture and has been transformed in that way in shell beads. The Tusk shells (*Antalis* species) may be considered natural shell beads because they are open at both ends and have been exploited intensively as beads in the Levant (Bar-Yosef, 2008 & 2010).

## CONCLUSION

The shells found at the Epipaleolithic site of Givat Hayil 35 consisted of two groups: local land snails (161 out of a total of 183) and marine shells from the Mediterranean Sea (the remaining 22 shells). Only the marine shells were exploited by the inhabitants of the site as shell beads.

The land snails are most likely all natural remains of snails which were living at Givat Hayil from the Epipaleolithic period and onwards.

Interesting from a zoological point of view forms the finding of seven shells of an extremely small *Xerocrassa* species never recorded before from the Levant. More specimens are however necessary in order to establish its proper identity.

## REFERENCES

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