



STRAY FINDS AT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN ISRAEL, 4-5¹

HENK K. MIENIS, Tel Aviv University²

4. A COWRY BEAD FROM TEL GEZER

During a very recent touristic visit to Tel Gezer in the Southern Plain of Israel a Cowry bead was found at the base of a wall in a 10th BCE building. The shell had a length of 19 mm and a width of 12.3 mm. The shell was identified as belonging to the Gold-ringer cowry *Monetaria annulus* (Linnaeus, 1758) according to the general form of the shell, its purple interior and the number of teeth on the palatal lip and the columella. The shell had been transformed into a bead by removing the dorsum. This Cowry species is a common Indo-Pacific species which occurs also in the Red Sea however in the Gulf of Aqaba it has considered a very rare species (Mienis, 1971; Heiman, 2002).

Close to that Cowry bead a single valve of *Glycymeris insubrica* (Brocchi, 1814) was found which did not show a single trace of manipulation. That bivalve is of Mediterranean origin.

¹ Finds 1-4 are presented in the Archaeo + Malacology Group Newsletter No. 19 (2011: 15-16)

² mienis@netzer.org.il

5. A COWRY BEAD FROM SIDNI ALI

On 21 February 2012 a brief visit was made to the area surrounding the mosque of Sidni Ali, north of Herzliyya. This mosque dates to the 11th Century AD and contains the tomb of the Sacred Sultan Ali ibn Ali. The purpose of this visit was to look for the possible presence of specimens of the invasive land snail *Rumina saharica* (Pallary, 1901). This species had reached the area of the mosque most probable with the transfer of building material from the nearby ruins of Apollonia (Tel Arshaf). Only a single empty shell was found by my colleague Oz Rittner. However to my surprise I found a Cowry bead made of the shell of a Money cowry *Monetaria moneta* (Linnaeus, 1758). It was a rather small specimen with a length of 16 mm and a width of 12 mm. Also in this specimen the dorsum had been artificially removed in order to turn it into a bead.

The Money cowry is a common Indo-Pacific species occurring in the Red Sea, but rarely found in the Gulf of Aqaba (Mienis, 1971).

The age of this Cowry bead is unknown. Throughout the Arab history in the Levant this and other small Cowry species has been intensively exploited as fertility symbols and were often attached to the cloth of new born baby girls.

REFERENCES

- Mienis, H.K., 1971. Cypraeidae from the Sinai area of the Red Sea. *Argamon*, 2 (1-2): 13-43.
Heiman, E.L., 2002. Cowries of East Sinai. 208 pp. Keterpress Enterprises, Jerusalem.
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