
Trends in Bronze Age mollusc exploitation at Larda I and Larda II (Northeast Italy)

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Résumé

Archaeomalacology, the study of mollusc shells from archaeological sites, is a discipline that started in recent times, precisely from the second half of the last century. It's an essential approach to understand the human social and cultural behaviour and the dietary contribution of molluscs to human subsistence economies. Additionally, the taxonomic identification of malacological finds allows us to proceed with paleoenvironmental reconstructions, which are particularly useful for the understanding of human and environment interaction.

The examined sites of Larda I and Larda II are located near the town of Gavello (Rovigo), in the southern part of the Veneto Region, situated in north-eastern Italy.

The first site is interpreted as a village endowed with bank and is dated between XIV-XIII B.C..

The excavations highlighted two main settlement stages: the oldest is dated between the Middle and the Recent Bronze Age, while the second one is dated to the Recent Bronze Age. The site of Larda II is not far from the site of Larda I and the excavations revealed two settlement stages dated to the Recent Bronze Age I.

From Larda I 380 (MNI 243) malacological finds have been recovered, while only 15 finds come from the site of Larda II.

In the two sites we identified a double role for marine and freshwater molluscs. Largely, marine shells have been collected dead from the beach, as suggested by the presence of traces produced by abrasion on beaches or undertows, bioerosion and gastropod predation. Moreover, the presence of natural and anthropic holes on some *Glycymeris*'s umbos, suggests a human desire of collecting empty shells for ornamental purposes. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude a collecting for other purposes: for example, the presence of *Glycymeris* valves inside a stake-hole, could suggest a deliberate deposition of shells as a wedge.

The sample of freshwater molluscs is composed almost exclusively by fragments of *Unio*, an elongated bivalve that lives submerged in mud, probably collected along the rivers close to the sites. The high degree of fragmentation of the shells, associated with the presence of striations produced by pointed tools on the inner part of the valve, suggests a collecting for dietary purposes and, at least in part, a consumption of raw molluscs.

A further analysis was conducted on *Glycymeris* perforated at the umbo. We compared the archaeological holes with those associated with modern specimens collected on the beach. This comparison allowed us to identify the natural origin for almost the totality of the archaeological sample.

Nevertheless, for one of the shells, SEM analysis revealed striations around the hole, produced by scraping activity, in order to obtain a perforation.

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Finally, a yellowish patina was recorded on the natural surface of a naturally perforated *Glycymeris* valve. The coloration recalls the natural colour of amber, whose manufacturing for the production of beads is documented in the near village of Campestrin during the Late Bronze Age; nevertheless, only future archaeometrical analysis will provide further information on the origin of the substance.

Mots-Clés: Archaeomalacology, Malacology, Bronze Age, Perforated shells, Traceological analysis, Shell ornaments, Mollusc exploitation