

PATELLA RUSTICA FROM OFFSHORE SHELL ASSEMBLAGES IN THE CENTRAL ADRIATIC RECORDS HUMAN USE OF LIMPETS IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

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Abstract

Empty shells of the upper intertidal limpet *Patella rustica* were recovered in the central Adriatic at a depth of c. 200 m. These shells dated at 1050 ± 97 yrs BP cal. were likely discarded by medieval seafarers, probably using limpets as food or fish baits.

Keywords: *Adriatic Sea, Gastropods, Fisheries*

Introduction

Offshore sampling of death shell assemblages in the central Adriatic during CNR cruise ARCO of RV *Urania* recovered empty shells belonging to *Patella rustica* Linnaeus, 1758 (Fig. 1) at an average depth of c. 200 m. This common upper intertidal limpet inhabits rocky substrate in the Mediterranean Sea and Eastern Atlantic Ocean (e.g. [1]).

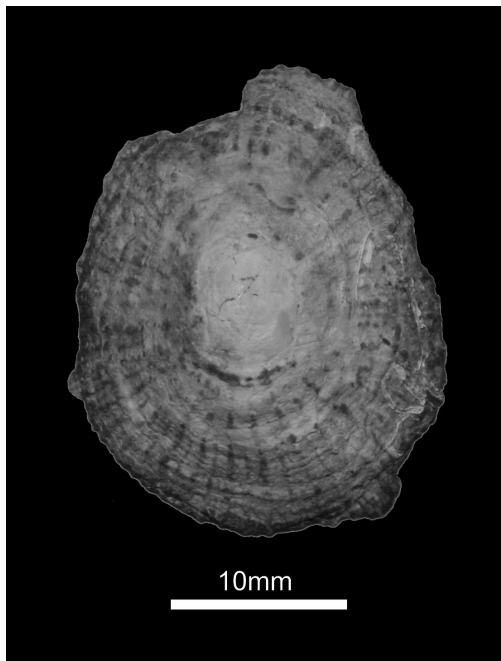


Fig. 1. *Patella rustica* Linnaeus, 1758. - St. ARCO 40

Two adult shells were identified at stations ARCO 40 and 50 (tab.1) characterized by an abundance of deep water corals (*Lophelia pertusa*, *Madrepora oculata* and *Dendrophyllia cornigera*) dated at the latest Holocene, and last glacial molluscs (predominantly the subtidal bivalves *Pseudamussium peslutrae* and *Panomya norvegica*). Since *Patella rustica* is ecologically inconsistent with both assemblages, the reason of its occurrence in such deposits was inquired.

Tab. 1. Two adult shells were identified at stations ARCO 40 and 50

Station	Gear	Lat Start N	Long Start E	Lat End N	Long End E	Depth m (Start/End)
ARCO 40	Epibenthic dredge	42°52.90'	15°03.67'	42°55.24'	15°02.33'	187/190
ARCO 50	Epibenthic dredge	43°10.86'	15°09.86'	43°10.80'	15°08.10'	210/232

Discussion and results

One shell (ARCO st. 50) was AMS-14C dated providing a calibrated age of 1050 ± 97 yrs BP. The presence of limpets of such an age in these offshore deposits may be accounted by (i) natural transport from a nearby insular rocky shore, (ii) dropping from birds (for example a seagull), or (iii) by human interference. The absence of suitable rocky substrates in this area permits to

discard the first option; bird discard so far from the nearest coastline is a remote possibility. Therefore, in all likelihood, these medieval limpets were deliberately discarded by humans, possibly Adriatic seafarers. In general limpets were and are collected either for human consumption or as baits for fishing (e.g., [2; 3]). We cannot identify at present neither who were the users of limpets nor the limpets' actual utilization. As a working hypothesis we suggest that seafarers possibly came from Dalmatian coasts characterized by abundant and accessible limpet populations because of the widespread of suitable rocky shores.

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References

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