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DECORATED *PINCTADA MARGARITIFERA*: NEW DATA TO THE  
PRESENCE OF EASTERN PEOPLE IN THE CIVIL TOWN  
OF AQUINCUM?

*In memoriam Erzsébet Máriy*

*Introduction*

A fragment of a large decorated bi-valve shell was found in the so-called “Diana-sanctuary” (building nr. XXVI) during the excavation carried out by late E. Máriy in 1993. The valve is decorated with running animals. Due to the tragic death of the excavator, the object has never been evaluated or published. Based on earlier research which identified the building complex as sanctuary and other finds from this area

this shell has been commonly associated with cult activity.

Here, parallels for this object will be explored as well as its function and its place within the topographic context the Civil town of Aquincum.<sup>1</sup>

*History of research*

Several studies have been carried out in the north-eastern section of the Civil Town of Aquincum, east of

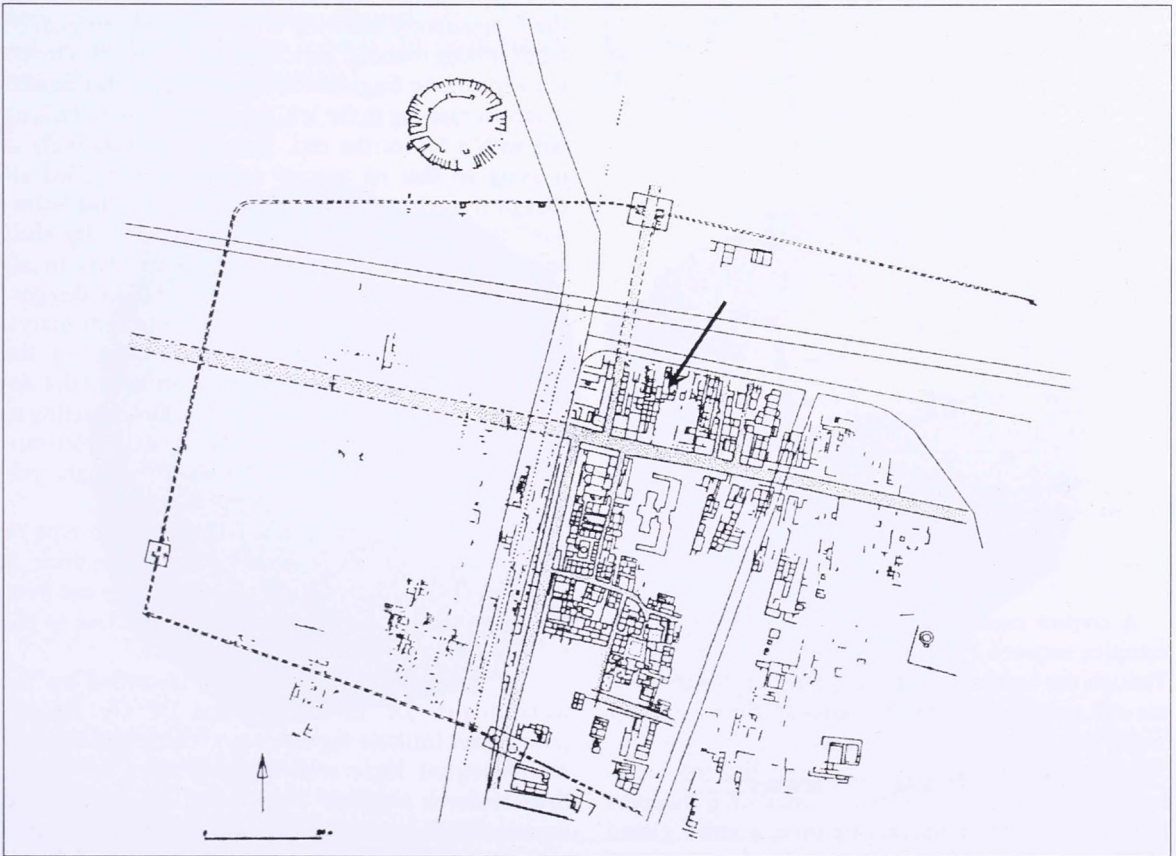


Fig. 1. Building nr. XXVI. (“Diana-sanctuary”) in the Civil Town of Aquincum  
(Collection of Drawings, Aquincum Museum)

the "C" and north of the "D" road (Fig. 1-2) since the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The first systematic excavations in building XXVI. were carried out by J. Szilágyi in 1966-1967. According to his notes, he found a "small, indigenous sanctuary", a "pavement" and a "basin with steps". The complex was attributed to Goddess Diana.<sup>2</sup> The identification was based on an altar stone found nearby, dedicated to *Dianae et Silvanus Silvestris* by a certain *M. Aurelius Pompeius*.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 2. Find spots for the decorated *Pinctada* and the disk in building nr. XXVI. (Collection of Drawings, Aquincum Museum)

A control excavation was again carried out at the complex between 1991 and 1993 by the late E. Máritý. Though the results and find material of this reserach are still being evaluated, it is already clear that there were are five constructing phases at this site.<sup>4</sup> E. Máritý made a preliminary suggestion that the complex was still attributed to Diana, based on a fragment of a small, seated terracotta figurine, a small glazed statue, two pieces of a coin-box and a decorated marine shell<sup>5</sup> found in a refuse pit in trench XIX of this

same complex and a small disk from the same type of shell, discovered in a well in trench XX. The excavator considered that the refuse pit had been disturbed in modern times, thus it is without dating information. In her unpublished manuscript, E. Máritý suggested that this disk might have decorated the clothes of the priest, while she took the decorated bi-valve to the cult, as an offering dish. This last piece has appeared ever since as a cult object (FORSCHUNGEN 2003, 267; OUT OF ROME...1997, 118, fig.63).

### The find

As the whole material of the 1991-93 campaign is under evaluation it seemed reasonable to look around for parallels to the decorated shell, especially as it is a marine shell, far from being native to land-locked Pannonia.

The shell fragment comes from a large bi-valve. It approximately measures: 10.7 cm x 6.6 cm and it is 2 mm thick<sup>6</sup> (Fig.3-4). Animals picked out with 1mm drilled dots decorate on its inner pearly surface. The only intact animal depiction is in the central part of the shell, apparently showing a four-legged, long-tailed felid(?) with rounded ears, looking to its left. On the left edge of the fragment in the photo, another animal is shown running to the left. It has four legs and a long tail with a tuft at the end. Two thirds of its body is missing so that its species cannot be identified although it might be some kind of lion. Another "creature" is depicted in the lower left corner of the shell and appears to be a fish-like creature with fins. In addition there were other 3.5 mm circle and dot designs: one on the upper edge of the bi-valve (fragmentary), two others (one intact and one fragmentary) on the right edge in the photo and another circle and dot design inscribed above the felid-like creature running to the left. These may have functioned as border-motives. The outer surface of the shell is rough, yellowish with traces of marine parasites.

The above mentioned disk is of the same type of shell and is of 4.6 cm in diameter and 2 mm thick. It has been observed, that it was most probably cut from the decorated piece, after it was broken, close to the hinge. Its edges were filed for further use.<sup>7</sup>

The species of shell has been identified by the malacologists Dr. E. Krolopp and Dr. Gy. Radócz (Hungarian Institute for Geology).<sup>8</sup> Although obvious morphological signs were missing from the object their research suggests that based on its size, the thickness of the valve and its form this shell was *Pinctada Margaritifera*, belonging to the family of *Pteriidae* shells (Fig. 5). This type of shell can be as large as



Fig. 3. Decorated *Pinctada Margaritifera* from the Civil Town of Aquincum (Photo of P. Komjáthy, Aquincum Museum)

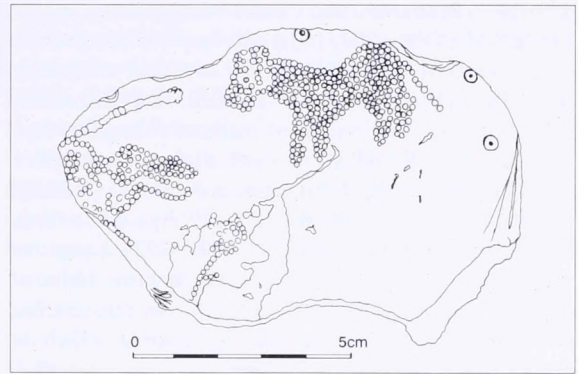


Fig. 4. Decorated *Pinctada Margaritifera* from the Civil Town of Aquincum (drawing of the author, Aquincum Museum)

20–25 to 30 cm, with a well-grown layer of pearly-substance or nacre inside. It is widespread throughout the Indo-Pacific region (from Madagascar to the Pacific islands) and also occurs in the Red Sea and the Persian gulf. The mother-of-pearl that grows in it has been collected in all periods, although since this bivalve species prefers deep water (5–30 m) its collection would have been quite risky.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Finds of Pinctada Margaritifera*

*Pinctada Margaritifera*, that is to say the black-lipped pearl oyster has been a preferred shell in all archaeological periods: as a whole shell without decoration, as jewelery, as containers or as a raw material for inlay.<sup>10</sup> They can already be found at Neolithic sites, primarily in areas close to its source (Sinai-pe-

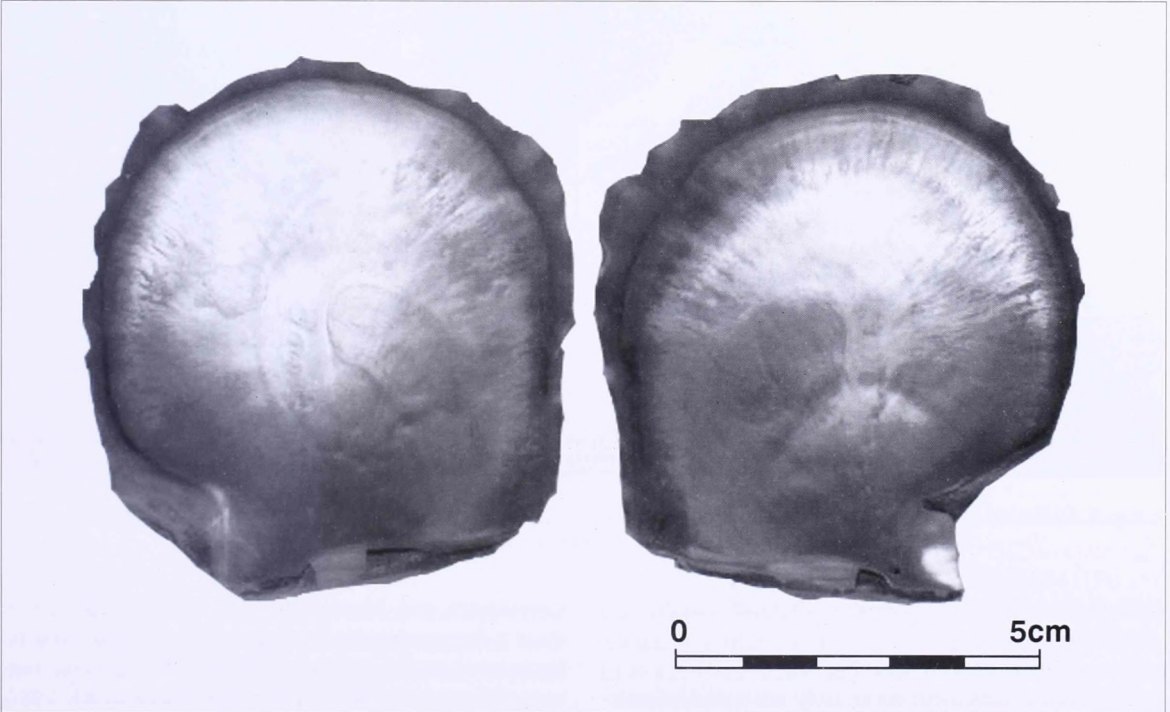


Fig. 5. *Pinctada Margaritifera* shell in its natural form

ninsula) (Pendants and other ornaments: BAR-YOSEF MAYER 1997, 101.) and they are also present on the Levantine coast in the BC 4th-3rd millenium (Kissufim) (Pendants: BAR-YOSEF MAYER 2002, 129). Some kind of ornament made of *Pinctada Margaritifera* was found in an Early Bronze Age grave from Kurban Höyük (Southeastern Anatolia) (REESE 1990, 415). There is another Bronze Age piece from Reggio Emilia in Italy (REESE 1991, 172). Large bivalves with decorated inner surfaces became fashionable in the Archaic Greek period<sup>11</sup>. An outstanding example is one from Salamis on Cyprus which is decorated with geometric patterns and supplied with a bronze lock (CESNOLA 1884, 79–82). There are also furniture inlays, incised “buttons” made of *Pinctada Margaritifera* found in Classical and Hellenistic contexts (Busayra, Jordan) (REESE 2002, 459).

provinces<sup>12</sup>. There are 6 pieces from Pompeii and a fragment from Voghenza that come closest in type (KARAGEORGHIS–MICHAELIDES 1995, 219). A shell of this type was found in the Agora in Athens (“House Δ”) that dates to some time between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. to the AD 1<sup>st</sup> century. (REESE 1991, 171).

A relatively large number of Roman period *Pinctada* have been found on Cyprus though<sup>13</sup> at the sites of Nea Paphos (MICHAELIDES 1990, 403-404), Kourion (McFADDEN 1946, 452–454. (tomb nr. 8. and 488.) and Amathous (REESE 1992, 124, 128) etc.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned above, the habitat of this shell species lies the Indo-Pacific region and in the Red Sea. Thus, it frequently occurs in Near Eastern sites from the Roman period as well. There are AD 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century from Egypt (the mining-settlements of Mons

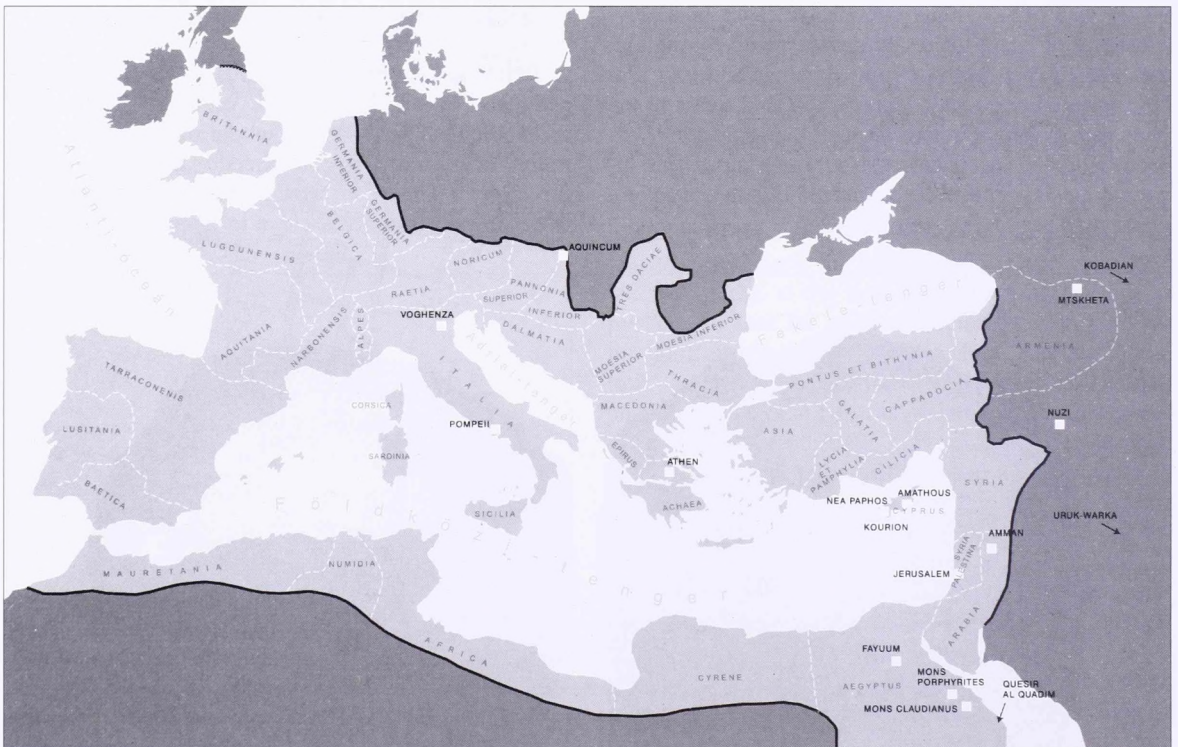


Fig. 6. Diffusion of Hellenistic and Roman Period *Pinctada Margaritifera* shells in the Roman Empire (Drawing by K. Kolozsvári, Aquincum Museum)

### Hellenistic and Roman period of *Pinctada* shells

#### a. Geographical distribution (Fig. 6.)

*Pinctada* valves most commonly occur in Hellenistic and Roman period sites. When searching for parallels to the Aquincum piece it is striking that this type of find is almost totally absent in the Western Roman

Claudianus and Mons Porphyrites)<sup>15</sup> and there are quite a few specimens from Late Roman and even Islamic contexts at Quseir-al-Qadim, an important harbour-town on the coast of the Red Sea (REESE 1982, 379–381). *P. Margaritifera* was a luxury item on the Levantine coast in Roman times: there are examples from Jerusalem (AD 2<sup>nd</sup> century)<sup>16</sup> and the area of the

Upper Zohar (Palestine).<sup>17</sup> We know of two shells from Roman tombs in Amman and also from the Roman fortress of al-Humayma (Jordan) (REESE in press). Nuzi (Iraq) should also be mentioned as an exotic find spot for *Pinctada* (STARR 1939, 488-489), as well as Uruk-Warka where a shell was found datable to the Parthian or Sasanidan Period (SIMPSON 1997, 347). The easternmost exotic find spots for *P. Margaritifera* are certainly Mtskheta in Georgia (a AD 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century tomb) (KHIMSHIASVILI [www.open.ge/art/rss/kk02.htm](http://www.open.ge/art/rss/kk02.htm). NIKOLAISHVILI et alii 1988, 209-212) and Kobadian in Bactria both sites lying close to commercial routes to the Far East.<sup>18</sup>

#### b. Decoration

The above-mentioned Hellenistic and Roman period *P. Margaritifera* shells come as fragments or as complete half shells. The majority of them are unworked<sup>19</sup>, while in other cases the inner pearly surface were decorated either with carved lines or with small, drilled dots. The types of decorations can be listed as follows (Table 1).

(SEDOV 1987, Tabl. 10,1). A plaiting motive was also popular with shells with this type of ornament coming from Athens ("House Δ") (REESE 1991, 171; KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 221) Nea Paphos<sup>21</sup> and Pompeii.<sup>22</sup>

There are only a few *Pinctada* with any kind of figurative decoration: these were also shaped by drilled dots or carved lines. A carved floral ornament can be observed on a Hellenistic piece from Fayuum with its umbo carved into a bird-head (KEIMER 1947, 132-133, fig.5). Drilled dots form a floral decoration (tendrils) ornament on the shell from Nuzi (STARR 1939, 489, Pl. 127, CC). The execution and the decoration of the *Pinctada* bi-valve shell from one of the AD 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century graves in the necropolis of Mtskheta in Georgia is quite similar to the Aquincum piece: the contours and fill of the figures and the depicted building were composed of drilled dots and small concentric circles. A two-winged building complex, bird (eagle) and ribbon motive can be seen on the inner, pearly surface of the shell. Researchers have suggested that they can recognize characteristics of

Table 1.: *Hellenistic and Roman Period Finds of P. Margaritifera*

Hellenistic and Roman Period Finds of <i>P. Margaritifera</i>					
No decoration	Band Decoration		Figural Decoration		
	Incised lines and/or dots	Guilloche Pattern	Floral Decoration	Animals	Buildings
Al-Humayma	Al-Humayma	Nea Paphos	Nuzi	Uruk-Warka	Mtskheta
Pompeii (4pcs)	Kobadian	Cyprus (unknown location)	Fayuum (animal head on strap-hinge)	<b>Aquincum</b>	
Cyprus (Amathous, Nea Paphos and unknown locations)	Kourion	Pompeii			
Amman	Nea Paphos (min. 2pcs)	Athen			
Quseir -al-Quadim					
Jerusalem					
Mons Claudianus					
Mons Porphyrites					
Uppé-Zohar					

The major part of *Pinctada* valves are decorated with geometric border-like patterns. A line of dots running along the edge of the shell can be observed on a piece from Kourion (Cyprus) (McFADDEN 1946, 488) and there a combination of carved lines and dots can be seen on a shell from Nea Paphos.<sup>20</sup> The object from Kobadian (Bactria) is decorated simply with dots

Sasanidan building practice (KHIMSHIASVILI: [www.open.ge/art/rss/kk02.htm](http://www.open.ge/art/rss/kk02.htm). and NIKOLAISHVILI et alii 1988, 209-212) (Fig. 7).

Concerning the level of technical skill as well as the iconography, the best analogy to the Aquincum piece most probably would be the valve from Uruk-Warka, dated to the Parthian or Sasanidan period.<sup>23</sup> The con-

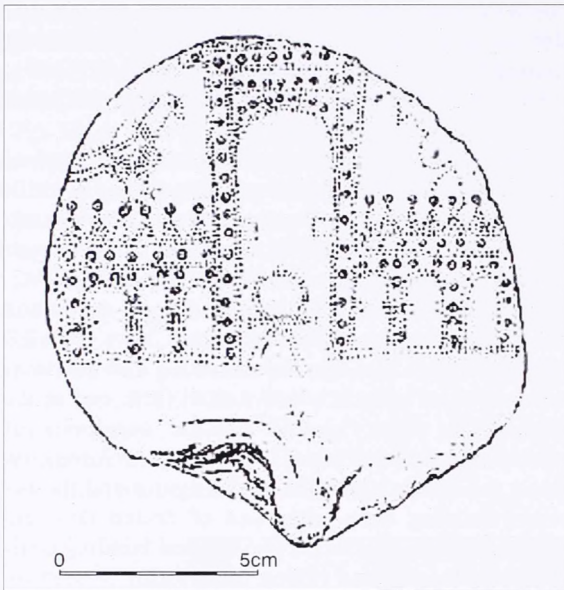


Fig. 7. Decorated *Pinctada* from Mtskheta (after KHIMSHIASVILI [www.open.ge/ant/rss/kk02.htm](http://www.open.ge/ant/rss/kk02.htm).)

tours of running and fighting animals (a lion and what may be a deer) were depicted on the inner surface with drilled dots (SIMPSON 1997, 347) (Fig. 8).

*Find locations of Hellenistic and Roman Pinctada Margaritifera finds and the question of workshop*

Find locations of *Pinctadae* shells are only approximately known. A large number of them appear as grave goods (Mtskheta, Kourion, Amathous Nea Paphos, Amman<sup>24</sup> and Pompeii or Vogheza). Others were found inside settlements (Kobadian, Qesir – al – Quadim (REESE 1982, 379), Uruk – Warka, Jeruzsálem, Pompeii, Nuzi, Fayuum) while a piece was clearly discovered in a house (Athens, “House Δ”).

The above-mentioned intact or fragmentary *Pinctada* shells were all found relatively close to their source, that is to say, on the Red Sea (Persian Gulf). The lively commercial activity<sup>25</sup> and role of distribution centers are always emphasised in connection to these areas (harbours of Cyprus (KARAGEORGHIS–MICHAELIDES 1995, 215) Qesir – al – Quadim (REESE 1982, 383) Nuzi (STARR 1939, 489). It is believed that the shells were worked close to their natural sources and were transported further to the east and west through the Mediterranean (e.g. the six valves in Pompeii) (MICHAELIDES 1990, 404). Workshops are localized in the areas of present day Israel, Jordan (KARAGEORGHIS–MICHAELIDES 1995, 219. and Syria.<sup>26</sup> The relatively dense diffusion

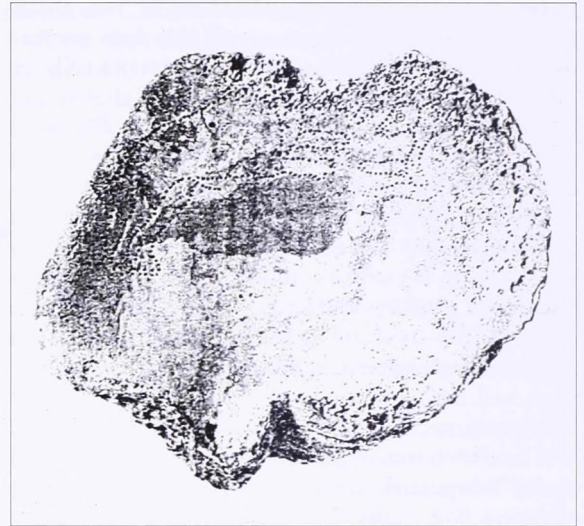


Fig. 8. Decorated *Pinctada* from Uruk-Warka (SIMPSON 1997, 347.)

of this type of shell in the eastern Mediterranean contradicts the absence of this find in the European part of the Roman Empire: only Pompeii, Voghenza and Aquincum are known as find-spots for *Pinctad*.<sup>27</sup>

*The function*

Usually two functions are attributed to these bivalve shell finds. In most cases, the suggestion is that these were cosmetic containers.<sup>28</sup> This function finds support in the above-mentioned decorated *Pinctada*, discovered in Salamis (Cyprus) closed with a bronze lock. On its inner surface the painted inscription in Cypriot letters, “Toilet-box of Habros” can be read (REESE 1991, 168; CESNOLA 1884, 79–82) (Fig. 9). Traces of some kind of pigments were identified in a similar type of shell, a *Tridacna* (KARAGEORGHIS–MICHAELIDES 1995, 211). The container hypothesis is further strengthened by the words of the Elder Pliny, who mentions “faulty” pearl-oysters being used as cosmetic containers: “[...] *cohaerentis videmus in conchis hac dote unguenta circumferentibus*”.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, *Pinctada* shell (either decorated or unworked) could have had sacral functions as well. First, the large number of finds of this type of shell discovered on the island of Cyprus should be mentioned. The Cypriot *Pinctada* are associated with a sepulchral cult, as exotic or personal objects, or as symbol of social standing. Combinations of these factors are also possible, as being a personal object does not exclude its use as symbol of social standing.<sup>30</sup> The



Fig. 9. "Toilet box of Habros": *Pinctada* with hinge and inscription in Cypriote letters (after CESNOLA 1884, 81)

connection with the Goddess Aphrodite can not be excluded, though as she herself born from the sea was the goddess of beauty and love, the question of cosmetic container arise again.<sup>31</sup> Marine shells – including *Pinctada* – were discovered recently in the Isis sanctuary in Savaria (Pannonia Superior) strongly suggesting that they must also have had a sacral function.<sup>32</sup>

Considering shell-depictions in the Roman Period in general, both spheres of use (profane or religious) can be supported by the different finds. The votiv tablet of Claudia Ageta of the two so-called Aberdeen-reliefs is a good example (dated to around AD 200). Shell-shaped dish (or natural shell) can also be observed among other objects connected to hair and face care, clothing etc. dedicated to an unknown goddess, probably Demeter. Whether these objects symbolize personal offerings, ritual purification, or grooming and cleansing the cult statue or the priestesses of Demeter is a matter of discussion (ZÄHLHAAS 1975, 527–544; WALKER 1989, 130–141) though can undoubtedly be connected to women's sphere.<sup>33</sup>

Finally it is important to mention, that the numerous depictions of Aphrodite (or Venus) sitting/lying on shells on mosaics and wall paintings<sup>34</sup> or depictions of Nereides (e.g. Amphitrite)<sup>35</sup> with shells both have sacral and profan meaning: being the goddesses of love,

beauty and their connection to preparing to the wedding ceremony<sup>36</sup> awake the function of these decorated shells as cleansing objects or containers.

#### *How was the Aquincum shell used?*

The decorated *Pinctada* shell from the Aquincum Civil Town was found in a refuse pit so that the context gives few clues as to how it may have functioned. The find material of building complex XXVI is still being studied as is the identification of the complex as a sanctuary dedicated to the Goddess Diana.<sup>37</sup> Thus the possibility of the *Pinctada* shell being an object connected to the Diana cult can not be totally excluded. Though its decoration (running wild animals) is suggestive there is no data to suggest such objects may have been used as water ladles at sanctuaries dedicated to the cult of the Goddess.

The tradition of depicting running and chasing animals or hunting scenes as building decoration or in minor arts goes back to Ancient Mesopotamia, and remained a popular theme in the Parthian and Sassanid era as can be seen on the shell from Uruk-Warka. The popularity of these types of Sassanid decorations is well described by Ammianus Marcellinus: "[...] gentiles picturas per omnes aedium parietes ostendens regis bestias venatione multiplici trucidantis; nec enim apud eos pingitur vel fingitur aliud praeter varias caedes et bella." (AmmMarc, Res gestae XXIV, 6, 3).

Since the Aquincum shell is the only one of its kind found in the western provinces, it is perfectly possible that the shell was not brought to Aquincum as a commercial object, but as a personal belonging<sup>38</sup> rather with a mundane, non-sacral function. Since such shells come from sea waters close to the Near East, it seems plausible that someone coming from this part of the empire could have brought it with themselves from their homeland. We must not forget that pearl-oyster was a luxury item, a prestige object, which must have been in high demand.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps it was finally discarded in the refuse pit after the death of its owner.

Considering the shell-disk from the neighbouring room, it is probable, that it was cut from the decorated one, after it broke and could have been used for some other purposes, such as inlay.<sup>40</sup> The re-use of the remaining shell again emphasize its prestigious role.

Dating the Aquincum shell is problematic, partly because the excavator considered the refuse pit in room nr. XIX as a disturbed object in modern times and partly because the rest of the find material is still being evaluated. Thus we can only rely on the analogous pieces listed above and the fact that such luxury items mostly arrived to Aquincum during the flourish-

ing period of the Severans, therefore the Aquincum shell might be dated to the AD. 3<sup>rd</sup> c.

The question thus arises, as to whether this shell could have been brought to Pannonia during movements of eastern peoples into the region following the Marcomannic wars. This was a time when troops of eastern soldiers came to Pannonia Inferior in large numbers (PÓCZY 1998, 59) followed by their relatives and merchants (FORSCHUNGEN 2003, 58-59). These wealthy inhabitants were appointed to high municipal posts, obtained villa estates around Aquincum, established new cultivation methods and at the same time retained their traditions and religious beliefs. There are also mummy portraits and the mummy burials in the territory of the Aquincum Civil Town datable to the AD 4<sup>th</sup> c. containing traces of pigments of eastern origin, textiles and organic remains (PÓCZY 1998, 62-63). Another example of known individuals whose origin was certainly eastern is Bithinia Severa whose grave stele, found in the area of the so-called "Testvérhegyi villa" (PÓCZY 1971, 94; T. LÁNG 2005a, 343-360) indicates that she most probably was of Syrian origin.

Although no other fragments of *Pinctada* are known from Pannonia, shells as grave goods (in other words as personal belongings) appear in a number of burials in Pannonia. Beside the above-mentioned example from Arrabona, we know of the grave of a woman and child from Intercisa (a station of the Syrian *cohors*) in which both river and marine shells were placed (BARKÓCZI et alii. 1954, 72-73. Graveyard nr. 1813, grave nr. 20. Late Roman period). A sarcophagus from Scarbantia yield rich grave goods, including a "snail" used as "rouge container".<sup>41</sup> The object has since been lost.<sup>42</sup>

*Pinctada Margaritifera* in Aquincum: a find reflecting ethnic traditions?

If someone from the Eastern Empire was indeed the possible owner of the shell, it is worth mentioning the different kinds of data that attest to their presence in the Aquincum Civil Town.

Most of the eastern people are believed to be Syrians (PÓCZY 1996, 147) who kept their traditions and religious beliefs: the inscription on a gate from unknown location in the town dedicated to Dea Syria et Baltis<sup>43</sup> or the terracotta figurines of Attis<sup>44</sup> witness their presence. According to scholars, Syrians had their own sculpture workshop in Aquincum and gathered together in separate *collegium*.<sup>45</sup>

Further proof of their presence may also be reflected by the strip-buildings in the north-eastern region of the town which reflect eastern architectural in-

fluence (ZSIDI 2002, fn. 361. and 1997, 282). These houses were mainly inhabited by merchants and craftsmen who had their workshops here as well.<sup>46</sup> While the existence of *regiones* in the Civil Town of Aquincum has long been a matter of dispute (NAGY 1973, 122; ZSIDI 2004, 198) new research hypothesizes Jewish communities in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the town<sup>47</sup> suggesting the presence of people of eastern origin, probably living enclaves.

Finally, the auxiliary fortress of Ulcisia Castra where Syrian troops were stationed lay only a few kilometers to the north. Thus, veterans, their relatives or merchants could also have settled in the Aquincum Civil Town.<sup>48</sup>

When these finds and theories, mostly concerning the eastern part of the Civil Town, are examined together with the fact that the decorated *Pinctada* shell fragment also came to light here the suggestion could be put forward that there may have been an "Oriental-quarter" in the north eastern part of the Civil Town.

*Summary*

During the 1993 excavations at the building complex XXVI ("Sanctuary of Diana") in the northeast zone of the Aquincum Civil Town a decorated pearl-oyster fragment (*Pinctada Margaritifera*) came to light from a refuse pit. According to malacologists, this kind of shell may be found in the Indo-Pacific region and in the Red Sea (Persian Gulf).

On the inner, pearly surface of the shell-fragment running animals (felids?) and what may be possibly a fish were picked out with drilled dots. A disk of the same type of shell was also discovered in the neighbouring trench, which was most probably cut from the decorated piece after it broke was further used, e.g. as inlay.

Research has shown that while this type of decorated shell is relatively common in the Eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus, Near-East, and also in the Caucasus) during the Roman period from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. up to the AD 4<sup>th</sup> c. it has not been found in the western Roman provinces so far (there are only examples from Italy). Studying their context and decoration it has been observed, that most valves were found in graves (of women) or in settlements. They were decorated either with drilled dots, or carved lines. Some had geometrical, floral decoration or even building depictions on them. Based on the decorative motif, the closest parallel to the find from Aquincum came from Uruk-Warka. Scholars consider that workshops for these shells operated in present-day Syria, Jordan and Israel. Based on the finding circumstances and literary

sources such shells were considered luxury cosmetic containers, although some kind of a parallel sacral function can not be excluded (especially in the case of finds from Cyprus).

Cultic function can not be ignored in the case of the Aquincum piece either, as the depiction of running animals could indeed be connected to the cult of Diana. Building complex XXVI may actually have had functioned as a sanctuary in its earliest phase.

Beside, as the Aquincum piece is unique in Europe and there is no data to the use of shells in connection to the cult of Diana, it could have rather arrived to Aquincum from the East as personal belonging. Considering the fact that the refuse pit in which the shell was found had been disturbed in modern times and the

fact that other finds from the pit are still being evaluated, dating can only be based on the analogous pieces and the fact that such luxury items began to arrive in the province during the Severan period, therefore the Aquincum shell might be dated to the AD. 3<sup>rd</sup> c. This is the time, when Orientals began to arrive in large numbers in the province, settling down in all parts Aquincum.

In addition to the shell, other finds connected to people of eastern origin (Attis figurines, inscription on a gate with a dedication to *Dea Syria et Baltis*) can be found in the Civil Town (especially in its north eastern zone) together with strip- houses also reflecting oriental influence.

### Notes

- 1 I am grateful to P. Zsidi for her useful advices, A. Choyke and L. Bartosiewicz, for their help in the archaeological examinations and for correcting my English.
- 2 Unpublished excavation of J.Szilágyi. Quotations from his diary: inv.nr. 397-77. Preliminary reports on this excavations: SZILÁGYI 1967, 32-33, nr. 38. and 1968, 23, nr.29.
- 3 However this altar was discovered some 100 m east of this spot, in the so- called House of the Glue-Maker (Peristyl-House) Inv. nr.: 64.10.96. KUZSINSZKY 1891, 137.
- 4 For the preliminary report of the excavation see: fn.nr.: MÁRITY 1993, 34, nr. 49/6 and 1994, 34, nr. 50/2 and 1996, 36, nr.49/9. The evaluation of the stratigraphy of the site and the find material will be carried out within the framework of my PhD dissertation.
- 5 Inv. nr.: 93.12.647. d: 4.6 cm, w: 2-3mm. Unpublished.
- 6 Greatest width and breadth. Inv.nr.: R 2186.
- 7 Both the decorated shell and the disk were examined microscopically by A. Choyke.
- 8 I would like to thank them for identifying the shell.
- 9 KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 217. In Egypt it was probably also consumed: HAMILTON-DYER 2003, 90.
- 10 The use of *Pinctada* shells is still fashionable nowadays: REESE 1982, 381; KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 221-222.
- 11 Beside *Pinctada Margaritifera*, other type of shells are also to be decorated, like *Tridacna Squamosa*. There is floral ornament and animal depiction on a fragment from Kish: REESE 1988, 35-39. They are either considered as cultic object or cosmetic container. It is considered as "gaudy gew-gaw": BOARDMAN 1988, 71.
- 12 *P. Margaritifera* shells from Hellenistic, Roman and Late Roman contexts are collected by Prof. D. Reese, whom I would like to express my thanks for letting me go through his manuscript before its publication: REESE in press.
- 13 39 pieces were known up to 1993: see below.
- 14 For the other sites see: fn. nr. 20. 215, fig.1.
- 15 In form of containers, inlays and jewellery: HAMILTON-DYER 2003, 88.
- 16 From Roman contexts as well as at sites "A", "C" "L": REESE 1995b, 265, 271.
- 17 Though primaly known as an Early Byzantine fort, *P. Margaritifera* shells datable to the Roman period came to light here: REESE 1995a, 97.
- 18 See fn. nr.31.
- 19 Unworked pieces are known from (not complete): Al-Humayma (REESE in press). 4 pieces from Pompeii (MICHAELIDES 1990, 403, REESE 1991, 174) Intact and fragmentary pieces are also known from Amathous, Cyprus (REESE 1991, 168. *ibid.* 1992, 128, 130, 131) and Amman (REESE 1987, 49)
- 20 KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, fig. 4-5 and 14-15. és Michaelides 1990, 403; Taf. 62, 1-2. There is also a geometric bordering pattern on a shell from Quasr-i Abu Nasr, though it has been dated to the AD 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c: REESE in press
- 21 KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 221. Fig. 6-7. there is an other Cyprian example with this motive: op. cit. fig. 8-9.
- 22 MICHAELIDES 1990, 403; KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 219, fig. 16; REESE 1991, 173-174, fig.21a and b.
- 23 P. Zsidi called my attention to the piece and I am grateful for her help. This shell is kept in the British Museum. The circumstances of its discovery and its dating are uncertain. Pers. comm. St. John Simpson
- 24 Skeletons of three women were found in the grave, see: fn. nr. 31.
- 25 On the commercial connection between the Roman Empire and the Near and Far East (e.g. spices, silk): HEIMBERG 1981.
- 26 In connection to the Mtskheta piece: KHIMSHIAS-VILI: [www.open.ge/art/rss/kk02.htm](http://www.open.ge/art/rss/kk02.htm).
- 27 Marine shells were found recently during a control excavation in the Isis sanctuary of Savaria (Pannonia Superior). Pers. comm. O. Sosztarics

- 28 Mtskheta: KHMISHIASVILI: [www.open.ge/art/rss\\_kk02.htm](http://www.open.ge/art/rss_kk02.htm), Amman: REESE 1987, 34. For the Cypriot pieces: KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 2212. cosmetic-container, see also: HAMILTON-DYER 2003, 88; REESE 1991, 189; GIORDANO-CASALE 1992, 4. and pers. comm. St. John Simpson
- 29 *Plinius*, NH IX, 54, 109.
- 30 op.cit. 211, 215. and MICHAELIDES 1990, 403; REESE 1991, 189. There are numerous cases when marine shells are placed in graves in the Roman period. In Pannonia Superior 39 marine shell finds, deriving mostly from the Mediterranean sea were found in a woman's grave in Arrabona, see: SZÓNYI 1974, 9. Other shells and snail-shells may have had simple uses such as e.g. salt-box: *Horatius*, Satires I/3.
- 31 KARAGEORGHIS-MICHAELIDES 1995, 212. with further reading. A *Pinctada* with the painted figure of Aphrodite was found recently in the area of the Mons Porphyrites: HAMILTON-DYER in press.
- 32 Found in 2005. Pers. comm. O. Sosztarics.
- 33 J. Pászókai-Szeőke called my attention to these reliefs: PÁSZÓKAI-SZEŐKE 2002, 179.
- 34 E.g.: Casa di Venere in Pompeii: LA ROCCA et alii 2000, 258-259. or the mosaic from Sétif: ZAHLHAAS 1975, 529.
- 35 Nereide with Triton, holding a shell. Bronze mirror: ZAHLHAAS 1975, Taf XXII.
- 36 In case of the Nereides, see: ZAHLHAAS 1975, 536.
- 37 Sacral function is only predictable in its early (end of 1st c. AD.) phase so far.
- 38 Reese connects the appearance of Red sea shells to occasional migrations: REESE 1991, 189.
- 39 Same was the case with some expensive and therefore rare glass vessels: NEWBY-PAINTER 1991, 71.
- 40 Examined by Dr. A. Choyke. See fn. 7.
- 41 The sarcophagus was found in modern Szent Mihály street, in it a young woman was buried with bronze mirror, perfume glasses, clothing accessories and a "snail-shell" (*cardium tuberculatum* L.) identified by the excavator as "blusher-container": PAUER 1873, 150-154.
- 42 Beside "real shells", vessels imitating shells (in bronze, glass) are also known from graves in Pannonia Inferior: *Intercisa*, Late Roman necropolis: BÓNA-VÁGÓ 1976, 28: grave nr. 38.: shell shaped glass vessel (first third of the 4th c. AD.) grave nr. 57: shell shaped bronze vessel (second half - end of 4th c. AD.) Both deceased were buried in wooden coffins.
- Aquincum* - western necropolis of the *canabe*: TOPÁL 1993, 69, graveyard VII. grave nr. 1: shell shaped glass vessel (middle of the 4th c. AD.) from a child's grave, made of stone slabs. The vessel is considered to be of eastern origin.
- 43 The gate was erected by a certain C. Iulius Sextinus, around AD 200. Its original position is uncertain, B. Kuzsinszky locates it to the southeastern part of the town: KUZSINSZKY 1937, 145. While Nagy T. locates it to the east-west running road leading to the harbor of the Civil Town: NAGY 1973, 176.
- 44 One found in the northeastern part of the Civil Town and another in the *mithraeum* by the northern city wall: FORSCHUNGEN 2003, 278. and fn.32.
- 45 For the *collegium*: SZILÁGYI 1968, 114 and recently: FORSCHUNGEN 2003, 278. For the workshop of sculptors: NAGY 1973, 176. On the presence of Syrians in Aquincum: NAGY 1939, 125; PÓCZY 2002, 184-185.
- 46 Hide processing and glue-making were practised in the so-called "Peristyl-House": T. LANG 2005b, 68-80.
- 47 Jewish communities were also localized in the area of the Basilica and the Forum: GÁSPÁR 2002, 29, 31-32.
- 48 NAGY 1973, 176 suspected that a sanctuary dedicated to Dea Syria was located half-way between the Civil Town and *Ulcisia Castra*.

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