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Another look at a decorated shell disc from Sharm, Fujairah, United Arab Emirates: not *Spondylus* but *Lambis*

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Decorated shell discs are well-known artefacts found occasionally during excavations in the Middle East. They were once considered to have been made of Giant Clams (*Tridacna* spp.) from the Red Sea (Brandl, 1984). However, not only are these discs much thinner than the mean thickness of a *Tridacna* shell, the curvature of the shell is also completely different, while the inside shows in most examples a rim, which is not known to occur in *Tridacna*.

A follow-up study of such discs has revealed that all of them were made from the large body whorl of Seba's Spider Conch, *Lambis truncata sebae* (Kiener, 1843) (Mienis, 1988, 1992, 2006; Reese, 1995, 1996). The internal rim corresponds with the place where the body whorl adheres to the previous whorl. Finds of unfinished shell discs made of *Lambis* have been reported from Jerusalem (Mienis, 1992, 2006). This Spider Conch is known to occur in the coastal waters of the Arabian Peninsula.

Two types of decoration are known to occur on these shell discs: stylised lotus flowers (Brandl, 1984; Mienis, 1988) and a dot-in-circle pattern (Reese, 1996). The latter type of decoration is also well-known from soft-stone vessels and has been described in detail by Ziolkowski and Al-Sharqi (2006).

A few years ago Barker and Hartnell (2000) published a decorated shell disc presumed to have been made from a Spiny Oyster (*Spondylus* sp.). This disc was found during the

excavation of Sharm, Fujairah, United Arab Emirates (mid-second century BC to the first centuries AD).

A careful study of the published figures showing the exterior of that shell disc revealed the characteristics of *Lambis* and not of *Spondylus*. The lower part of the disc shows the suture separating the body whorl from the penultimate whorl and the slight depression just below the suture. In the photograph and the drawing, this depression is clearly visible above the suture because the shell disc is printed upside down. In other words, in the case of the shell disc from Sharm, we are also dealing with one made from Seba's Spider Conch.

The decoration of the Sharm disc, which shows a dot in a double circle, seems to be a variant of the more common dot in a single circle pattern as figured by Reese (1996).

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