

On the etymology of *Tridacna*

I recently came across "M.J. Cotte (1944) Poissons et animaux aquatiques au temps de Pline: Commentaires sur le Livre IX de l'Histoire Naturelle de Pline. Ed. Paul Lechevalier, Librairie pour les Sciences Naturelles, Paris", whose title, freely translated, is "Fishes and aquatic animals in Roman times: Commentaries on Book IX of Plinius the Elder's Natural History".

This book provides the etymology of *Tridacna*: an oyster so large that "il fallait les mordre à trois reprises pour en venir à bout" [they had to be bitten three times before they were 'overcome' or 'finished off'].

The funny thing is that from being the one that is bitten, *Tridacna (gigas)* became the one that bites (c.f. its German name of "Mördermuschel", i.e., the "killer clam" of any old Hollywood movie with a plot located in southern seas). In French, *Tridacna* has ceased to either bite or be bitten: it is called a 'bénitier', or holy water font (of Catholic churches). Now, given that the clams adductor muscle is perceived as an aphrodisiac in some Asian countries, we have another transition from the ridiculous to the sublime. Big things are always like that: they inspire people's fantasies.

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