

AMPHORA STOPPERS FROM AGUNTUM, SOUTH WESTERN NORICUM

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The Municipium Claudium Aguntum is situated in the southwest of the Roman Province Noricum, today Eastern Tyrol, Austria. There are known several find spots of Amphora lids and stoppers in city area (fig. 1). The majority of the material is represented by Amphora lids which were cut out of Amphora - body sherds. These lids do not carry any kind of decoration or inscription, thus not being of central interest in this contribution.

Complete statistical data is available for the find from the *Atrium house* of Aguntum (fig. 1, 1), which is currently examined by the author¹. The building was partly excavated already in the 1930ies and the 1950ies. The final work took place from 1994 to 2006. Here, Amphora lids cut out of body sherds amount to 50% of all Amphora lids and stoppers found. Mould-made stoppers account for approximately 25% and only two pieces are decorated (fig. 2). The remaining Amphora lids and stoppers consist of fragments of uncertain manufacture and of wheel made lids, which could also be assigned to jars². One decorated stopper shows circular grooves (fig. 2, 1), which are quite common on Amphora stoppers, the second one shows a palm

knob and circular motives. Unfortunately the elaborate decorated stopper (fig. 2, 2) was recovered in an alluvial layer, which contains material from Roman times up to the 16th century A.D.

The second find spot of decorated Amphora stoppers in Aguntum is situated in the southern part of the city (fig. 1, 2) and was excavated in the 1950ies. The building near the city walls has only been partly excavated. Among several Amphorae there were also found four decorated Amphora stoppers (fig. 3). Whereas one of these shows a radial spoke decoration (fig. 3, 1), the other three pieces show geometrical motives, which could be interpreted as letters (fig. 3, 2-4), although a proper reading seems difficult.

Another six decorated Amphora stoppers have been recovered in and around the *Thermae* of Aguntum (fig. 1, 3), which was excavated in the 1960ies and 1970ies. Here stoppers with radial spoke decoration (fig. 4, 1), applied dots (fig. 4, 2), a cross (fig. 4, 3), circular grooves (fig. 4, 4) and again geometrical motives (fig. 4, 5-6) have been found.

In total there are only 12 decorated Amphora stoppers known from Aguntum. Most of the ornamental

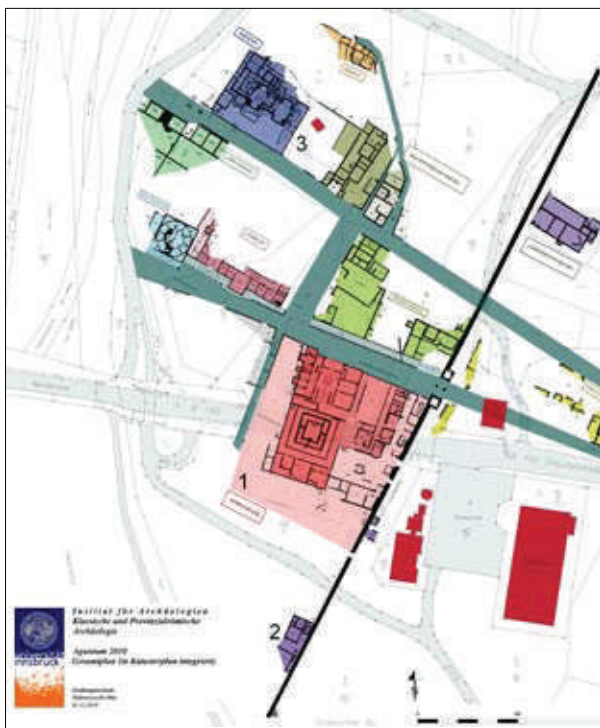


Fig. 1. Roman Aguntum, plan of the excavated structures (6/2012) [O. Defranceschi, Institut für Archäologien, Universität Innsbruck].

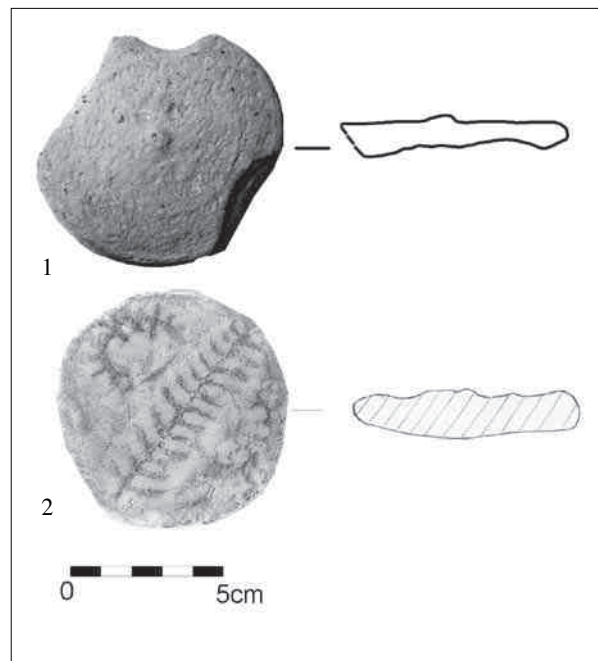


Fig. 2. Amphora stoppers found in the "Atrium-house" (1: Type: Ac; diameter: 7,7 cm; thickness: 1,1 cm. 2: Type: D; diameter: 7,6 cm; thickness: 1,6 cm) [R. Wedenig, Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike, Österr. Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW); M. Auer Institut für Archäologien, Universität Innsbruck].

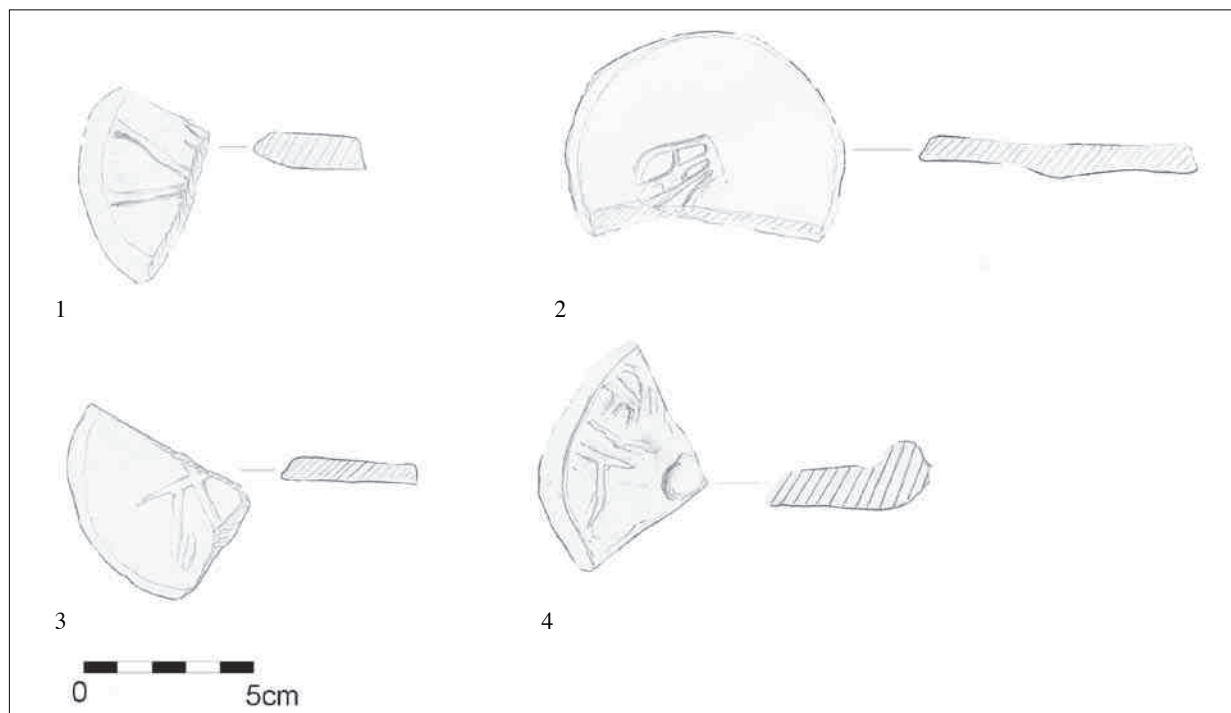


Fig. 3. Amphora stoppers found in the building at the southern end of the city walls (1: Type: Ab; diameter: estimated 8-9 cm; thickness: 1,1 cm. 2: Type: C; diameter: 8,3 cm; thickness: 0,9 cm. 3: Type: C; diameter: estimated 9-10 cm; thickness: 0,8 cm. 4: Type: C; diameter: estimated 9-10 cm; thickness: 1,4 cm) [R. Wedenig, Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike, Österr. Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW); M. Auer Institut für Archäologien, Universität Innsbruck].

decorations can be compared to the material from the Magdalensberg in Carinthia³, the possibly inscribed specimens are mostly fragmented and therefore difficult to interpret and the palm knob – decorated stopper has to be referred to as a singular piece.

But why are there only a few pieces of decorated stoppers in Aguntum? The Roman town was first mentioned by Pliny as one of five Claudian Municipia of Roman Noricum⁴. This leads to the conclusion that Aguntum was founded in Claudian times. Up to now pre-Claudian pottery is extremely rare; the same is true for coins and fibulae. Some of the earliest find are very fragmented and have been found in layers which are of a definitely later date. Among them, one can find Vernice Nera, Aco and Sarius ware and also Augustean coins and a fibula of the Alesia-type⁵. But the quantity of find dateable into the pre-Claudian period is extremely small. This is the main difference compared to the Magdalensberg, where the settlement ends at the beginning of the Claudian period. Import routes are almost the same at the Magdalensberg and at Aguntum, which is reflected by Italian Sigillata, Amphorae which come mostly from Istria, Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean and pottery fine wares, which have been chiefly imported from Italy. So, one would expect Amphora stoppers to show some similarities in both settlements. But this is hardly to be observed, a fact which requires explanation. Most likely, the differences in settlement dating at the Magdalensberg and Aguntum are the reason, why decorated Amphora lids are very common at the earlier and very rare at the later site. The import of Amphorae with decorated lids seems to decline in Southern Noricum already in the Claudian period.

This leads to the question whether one can use decorated Amphora stoppers for dating a site. Although it is clear that Amphora stoppers, as Amphorae in general, will never provide a perfect chronology, the difference between earlier and later settlements seems interesting. The same could be true for the above-mentioned find spots in Aguntum itself. The Atrium house (fig. 1, 1), which was built in the Claudian period – and therefore used in the second half of the first century – only provided two decorated lids, one of them is not certain to be connected with the building. The Thermae (fig. 1, 3), which contain considerable pre-Claudian structures show at least six decorated stoppers. Finally, four decorated stoppers have been found in the building connected to the city walls in the south of the town (fig. 1, 2). Although the excavated area is very small as the main goal of the excavator was to find the city walls, 39 Amphora Individuals have been recovered here. Various types such as Dressel 6B, Porto Recanati, Schörgendorfer 558, Troncoconiche di olive, Forlimpopoli, Camolodunum 186 and one Dressel 20⁶ have been found. The much bigger building of the Atrium house contained at least 145 Amphora Individuals (the data for the old 30^{-ies} and 50^{-ies} excavations is not perfectly clear), but much less Amphora stoppers. We have almost no dating evidence for the building on the southern end of the city walls, but together with the above mentioned connection of decorated and inscribed Amphora stoppers to pre-claudian times one could assume that this building, or at least the Amphora-wasters found inside it, provide one of the earliest known features of Aguntum.

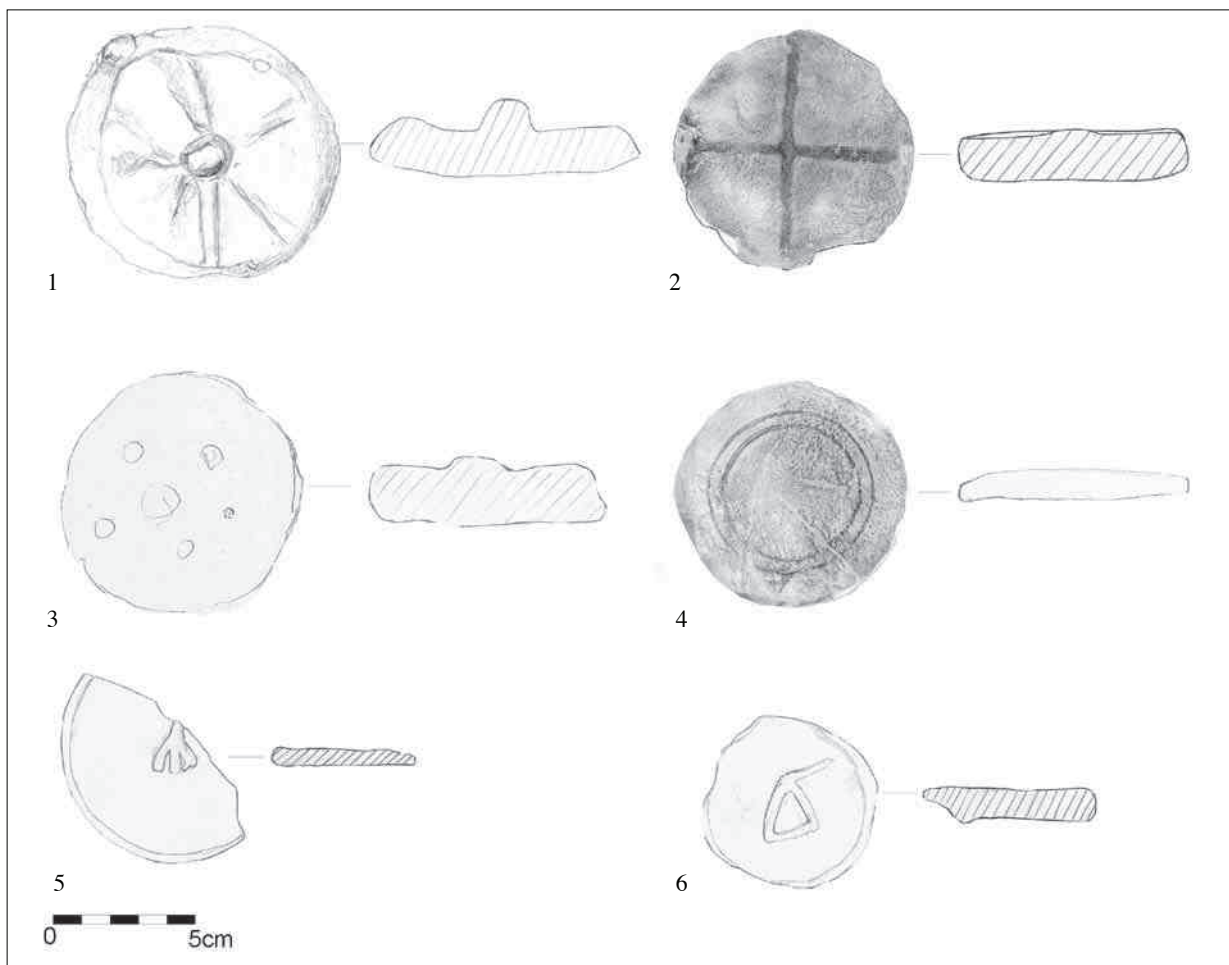


Fig. 4. Amphora stoppers found in and around the Thermae (1: Type: Ab; diameter: 9,6 cm; thickness: 1,6 cm. 2: Type: Af; diameter: 8 cm; thickness: 1,6 cm. 3: Type: Aa; diameter: 8 cm; thickness: 2 cm. 4: Type: Ac; diameter: 8 cm; thickness: 1,2 cm. 5: Type: C; diameter: estimated 7-8 cm; thickness: 0,6 cm. 6: Type: C; diameter: 6,2 cm; thickness 0,9 cm) [R. Wedenig, Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike, Österr. Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW); M. Auer Institut für Archäologien, Universität Innsbruck].

On the other side undecorated Amphora stoppers – also mould-made ones – are common in the *Atrium house* of Aguntum. These mould-made stoppers, together with hand-made ones are still in use towards the beginning of the second century. The same is true for lids, which were cut out of body sherds. The majority of these lids are cut out of Amphorae and have considerably bigger diameters than mould made stoppers (fig. 5). I would like to propose that the lids were produced on the consumption site (in this case Aguntum) itself, whereas the mould-made stoppers surely were produced at the Amphora-production sites. So the latter serve as primary fastening of Amphorae and have been used inserted in the neck of the Amphorae⁷. On the contrary, cut lids may have been used as a baring after the primary fastening was opened and in many cases broken. So one can distinguish between Amphora stoppers as primary fastening and Amphora lids as secondary coverage. As the latter are very common not only in Aguntum up to the second century, this could be seen as a result of organic Amphora-fastenings like cork, which could not be reused after removing. The decline of mould-made Amphora-stoppers during the first century A.D. may therefore be connected with an increased use of organic fastenings.

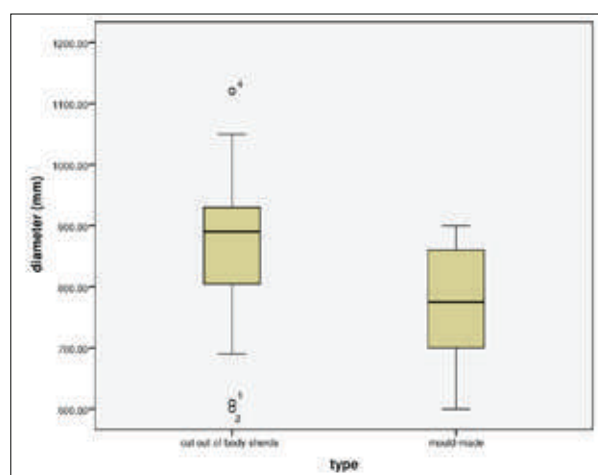


Fig. 5. Boxplott of diameters of cut Amphora lids (N=22) and mould-made stoppers (N=15) found in the “Atrium house” [M. Auer (SPSS Statistics 19)].

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Anmerkungen

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- ² MAYERSON 2001.
- ³ WEDENIG 2001.
- ⁴ Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, III, 146.
- ⁵ AUER, TSCHURTSCHENTHALER in print.
- ⁶ According to ALZINGER 1955.
- ⁷ On the issue of Amphora sealings: DENECKER, VANDORPE 2007.

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Summary

In the Roman Municipium Claudium Aguntum decorated Amphora stoppers are comparatively rare. Although the Amphorae found in Aguntum show in large part the same provenance as for example the Amphorae found at the pre-claudian Magdalensberg, decorated stoppers are much more common there. This disparity seems to follow from an increasing use of Amphora stoppers made out of organic materials during the second half of the first century A.D.

Key words: amphora stoppers; amphorae; Aguntum; Noricum.

Riassunto

Nel *Municipium Claudium Aguntum* i tappi d'anfora decorati sono relativamente rari. Benché le anfore trovate ad *Aguntum* abbiano in larga parte la stessa provenienza di quelle rinvenute sul Magdalensberg, i tappi decorati sono molto meno comuni. Questa diversità sembra derivare da un crescente uso di tappi d'anfora realizzati con materiale organico nel corso della seconda metà del I secolo d.C.

Parole chiave: tappi d'anfora; anfore; *Aguntum*, Norico.