

# New research reveals Ming the Mollusk actually 100 years older than thought

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Arctica Islandica

(Phys.org) —A team of international researchers has, after conducting a new, more thorough study of the clam known as Ming the Mollusk, found it to be 507 years old, making it 102 years older than was originally thought.

The saga of the famous clam began back in 2006 when [climate](#)

[researchers](#) pulled the ocean quahog (*Arctica islandica*) from the bottom of the sea near Iceland. Scientists have known for quite some time that a clam's [age](#) can be found by counting the bands in its shell—a new one is grown each summer. The original count was 405, which meant that the clam was the oldest organism ever found. Now, it appears that the original researchers made some mistakes—a new count reveals that the clam actually has 507 bands, which means it was born in 1499.

The age of the clam caused great excitement in the press at the time, leading the research team to christen the mollusk Ming, after the Chinese dynasty. Unfortunately, the same research team split the clam open to get a look inside, killing it, thus, it has not aged since. But still, the record remains.

This time around, the researchers used a variety of techniques to verify the clam's age. In addition to counting the bands on its outside and near the ligaments where the shells of the two halves join, the team used carbon-14 dating and even compared changes in more recent growth bands with other organisms that lived in the same environment. They are confident they have the age right this time.

Pushing the year back over a century means the clam was born just a few years after Columbus discovered America, and was sitting down there at the bottom of the ocean through the Reformation, the establishment of the Romanov dynasty in Russia, the building of the Taj Majal in India, two world wars—countless moments in human history.

Finding such an example of an organism that lives so long has spurred research into how it achieves such a feat, and perhaps, ways that we humans might gain some years as well (the study was partly funded by the organization "Help The Aged"). Also, by studying each band layer, researchers are able to ascertain the ocean temperature for every year over the past five centuries—data that is sure to prove helpful in

measuring the impact of greenhouse gases on global warming.

**More information:** [www.werh.org/Communicating%20Science%20workshop/documents/JamesScourse.pdf](http://www.werh.org/Communicating%20Science%20workshop/documents/JamesScourse.pdf)  
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