

# Joachim Johann Nepomuk Spalowsky

## *Prodromus in systema historicum testaceorum* (1795)



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### **J.J.N.A. Spalowsky (1752-1797) and the *Prodromus in Systema Historicum Testaceorum* (1795)**

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This paper catalogues the publications of J.J.N.A. Spalowsky (1752-1797) and discusses the new species described in his conchological treatise, the *Prodromus in Systema Historicum Testaceorum* (1795).

#### INTRODUCTION

Joachim Johann Nepomuk Anton Spalowsky (1752-17 May 1797) was a veritable polymath in the Austrian Empire of the late eighteenth century. Few biographical data are available on him (Anonymous, 1798), but he was presumably of Polish Silesian ancestry, being born in Reichenberg [currently Liberec, Czech Republic], and he was a surgeon attached to the civic regiments of Vienna. Spalowsky was a member of the *Königlichen Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* [Prague], although he was not mentioned in the exhaustive history of that society, even with regard to their "Conchyliensammlung" (Kalousek, 1885: 141ff).

His erudition is evidenced by the range of his publications. His 1777 inaugural dissertation treated poisonous plants (e.g. hemlock, monk's hood) and related topics. In addition to the *Prodromus in Systema Historicum Testaceorum* (1795) he authored works on such diverse topics as birds, mammals and even a disquisition on economics and numismatics, a further sign of his scholarly breadth.

For the reader's convenience, I have included a listing of his known (or supposed) publications, mostly

taken from Meusel (1813: 211-212), Engelmann (1846), Agassiz (1854: 358), Carus and Engelmann (1861), Wurzbach (1878: 56) and Popst and Schöller (1985: 290). Although four of these sources listed a ten-volume work "Naturgeschichte der vierfüßigen Thiere, Vögel, Amphibien und Conchylien, nebst Abhandlungen von ökonomischen Wissenschaften, dann der Numismatik" there is some doubt as to the existence of this work. Sherborn (1902: li) questioned whether it was actually issued; he only saw the "Erste Beitr." of 1794 (*q.v.*). It seems probable that this series was merely announced for publication, but was never completed.

Spalowsky's 1795 treatise on conchology, of which a plate is here illustrated (Figure 1), is among the rarest of published books on mollusks and other shelled organisms. There are copies of this work in The Natural History Museum, London; University of Cambridge; Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia; Smithsonian Institution; Houghton Library (Harvard); Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique (Bruxelles); Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris); Zoölogisch Museum, Amsterdam; Staatliche Bibliothek, Passau [Germany]; National Library of Russia [Natsional'naja Rossijskaja Bibli- **[End Page 245]**



Figure 1. Plate 13 (of 13) from Spalowsky. 1795. The original captions read as follows: 1. *Pinna rudis*. Der rohe Schinken. 2. *Lepas pollicipes*. Die Fusszehe. 3. *Lepas rintinnabulum*. Die Seetulpe. 4. *Pholas costatus*. Die geribbte Pholade. 5. *Pholas dactylus*. Der Steinbohrer. 6. *Chiton auratus*. Die Goldkäfermuschel.

oteka] (St Petersburg); Naturhistorisches Museum, Wien; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Wien (2 copies); and in several private libraries. The copy in the Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek (München) was destroyed during the Second World War.

This work remains of importance in containing the original descriptions of several new species and varieties, of which at least two are valid today. Although intended as a **[End Page 246]** "prodrome" or introduction to shelled animals, Spalowsky's death in 1797 precluded the publication of a more comprehensive review.

Certain of the fine illustrations of shells in this book readily strike the viewer for their metallic, almost iridescent sheen. As noted by Finlay (*in* Finlay and Garvey, 1988: 112): -- "Although the text ... is of little interest, the manner in which the hand-colored plates capture the iridescent quality of the shells has never been surpassed. This was achieved through the use of gold and silver leaf, in some cases heavily overpainted with watercolor, for the shiny inside surfaces of shells, such as the *Haliotis*, or abalone."

This book was published in Wien [Vienna] in 1795. However, the copy recently acquired by the Smithsonian Institution Libraries includes a printed dedicatory letter to Prinz Carl Ludwig, signed by Anna von Spalowsky (the widow) with a date of 26 August 1801. This dedicatory letter is printed on a folio sheet distinct from the remaining fascicles, and the watermark of this 1801 folio sheet is quite different from that of the remaining 1795 text. This suggests that copies of this letter (folio sheet) together with a facing dedicatory illustration and statement were printed in 1801 and inserted into the then-extant stock on hand prior to binding. These two issues (1795 and 1801) differ solely in the presence of the dedicatory material and in the completion of the frontispiece.

Of the aforementioned libraries and private holdings, only the Smithsonian Institution, the Houghton Library, the University of Cambridge and the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique (Bruxelles) have the 1801 issue. The Houghton copy, however, has the dedicatory illustration facing the title page (i.e., as a frontispiece), and the Index/Inhalt (iv pages) precedes the Praefatio/Vorrede (viii pages) rather than following as in the Smithsonian copy. Obviously individual purchasers must have varied in their collation of the pages prior to binding.

The nature of the frontispiece itself is worth considering, as there are significant differences between the 1795 issue and the 1801 issue. A description of the latter version is here provided and contrasted with the earlier rendition.

The illustration shows a classical "folly" in a seaside setting. The folly is an open-air cupola supported by columns, reminiscent of a ciborium or baldacchino. In the centre of the folly is a large cubical podium bearing the royal coat-of-arms, topped by an engraving of Prinz Carl Ludwig in full dress uniform. In the 1795 frontispiece, these two cartouches were left blank, as there was no patron at that time for this work. The folly itself is in the Roman style, with four pairs of columns in the Roman Composite order. The finial on the cupola differs in the two issues: in 1795, the folly is topped by a large, closed, plant bud; whereas in 1801 this space is occupied by an erect wreath through which a sword and a hunting horn pass from opposite directions. On the steps leading to the folly is standing a helmeted female figure, obviously Athena (Minerva) as shown by her Aegis. Athena has a shell in her left hand which is held up to the chest of Carl Ludwig for his edification (there is no shell in her hand in the 1795 issue). The index finger of Athena's right hand is clearly pointing (signifying) towards a half-dozen stylized marine shells in the left foreground. Similarly, her right foot is pointing towards a miscellany of land shells in the right foreground. In the left background is a nautical scene containing a two-masted ship; a classical temple on a hill is in the far distance.

Several other minor differences are here noted: the foreground is filled (darkened) in the 1795 issue whereas in the 1801 issue the bottom-most region of the figure is left blank; the fir trees in the upper right corner are shorter and less well defined in the 1795 issue; the [End Page 247] clouds in the upper center and left regions of the 1795 issue are missing in the 1801 issue. Obviously the plate was slightly reworked in order to make these latter changes, as well as adding the cartouche and finial figures.

The frontispiece in the Academy of Natural Sciences copy (1795) was coloured at a later date: the colouring is not commensurate with the quality of the plates themselves and was obviously done by a different artist.

Spalowsky's other publications are perhaps of less importance today. Sherborn (1902: li) noted that several were not consistently binominal. Anker (1938: 36) placed the 1790-1795 ornithological *Beytrag* in the category of "less important treatises..."; Nissen (1953: 169; 1968: 390; 1973: 152) and Sitwell *et al.* (1990: 143) devoted few lines to Spalowsky, but their inclusion indicates the artistic significance of his works. The absence of any mention of Spalowsky from biographical dictionaries (e.g. Poggendorff, 1863) and from the latest history of conchology (Dance, 1986) indicates his neglect in modern times.

#### NEW TAXA OF THE 1795 *PRODROMUS*...

*Serpula verticillata* pages 3-4, plate 1, figure 3. "Mare mediterraneum". Appears to be a polychaete worm.

*Argonauta argo* var. *nodoso-costata* page 6, plate 1, figure 6. Cited from Martini (1769) but the page reference given is actually that of Gmelin (1791). "Mare indicum, africanum meridionale, mediterraneum, adriaticum". Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Argonauta nodosa* Lightfoot, 1786 (Cephalopoda: Argonautidae).

*Nautilus discors* pages 8-9, plate 1, figure 8. "Concretiones zoophyticae maris mediterranei, raro foss. ad

*Coroncinam senens. Hetrur [Siena]*". A fossil foraminiferan.

*Nautilus gazellicornis/Orthoceras gazellicorne* page 10, plate 1, figure 10. "Littus ariminense in adriatico, et concret. zoophyt. in mediterr. mari; fossilium Coroncina in tractu senens. Hetr. [Siena]". A fossil foraminiferan.

*Conus virgo* var. *alba* page 16, plate 3, figure 2. "Ocean. afric. ad ins. Mauriti, et ad Amboinam Ind. orient." Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Conus virgo* Linnaeus, 1758 (Gastropoda: Conidae).

*Conus ammiralis* var. *trifasciata* pages 16-17, plate 3, figure 3. "Oceanus australis Indiae et Americae". Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Conus ammiralis* Linnaeus, 1758 (Gastropoda: Conidae).

*Voluta oliva* var. *atro-fusca* pages 31-32, plate 5, figure 3. "Mare indicum orient". Although described as a variety of *Oliva oliva* (Linnaeus, 1758), this actually resembles the melanistic colour form of *Oliva vidua* (Röding, 1798) which would presumably be a junior synonym of Spalowsky's name. (Gastropoda: Olividae).

*Buccinum gibbosulum* var. *rubra* pages 37-38, plate 6, figure 2. "Mare Ind. orient". Is representative of *Nassarius (Plicarcularia)*; however, the bright red dorsal colouration does not match any of the known Indo-Pacific species of this group (Cernohorsky, 1984: 64-78, pls. 3-7). *Nassarius gibbosulum* (Linnaeus, 1758) is actually from the Eastern Atlantic; some specimens have a reddish colour and it is here presumed that Spalowsky actually had an erroneous geographical locality for his specimen (Gastropoda: Nassariidae). **[End Page 248]**

*Buccinum spiratum* var. *albo-rubra* page 39, plate 6, figure 4. "Mare mediterr. et Ind." Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Babylonia spirata* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Gastropoda: Buccinidae).

*Strobus [sic] auratus* pages 43-44, plate 6, figure 9. "an India orientalis?" Spelled as "*Strombus*" in the index and plate caption. Abbott (1960: 122) listed this as a junior synonym of the tropical Eastern Atlantic *Strombus latus* Gmelin, 1791 (Gastropoda: Strombidae).

*Murex melongena* var. *laevis* page 47, plate 7, figure[s] 4a, 4b. "America, Amboina". Herein considered to be a junior synonym of the Western Atlantic *Melongena melongena* (Linnaeus, 1758); representing the juvenile aspinose form (Gastropoda: Melongenidae). However, Spalowsky's name is also a senior homonym of *Murex levis* McClelland, 1841 [per ICZN Article 58(1)], a fossil taxon from the Cretaceous of India.

*Trochus niloticus* var. *viridi-rubro-albo-maculata* page 49, plate 8, figures 1a, 1b. "Mare Ind. orient." A polynomial, descriptive term (non-binomial); equivalent to *Trochus niloticus* (Linnaeus, 1767) (Gastropoda: Trochidae).

*Turbo scalaris* var. *rosea* page 53, plate 8, figures 7a, 7b. "littus ad Coromandel ind. orient." Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Epitonium scalaris* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Gastropoda: Epitoniidae).

*Helix decollata* var. *fasciata* page 57, plate 8, figure 12. "Europa meridionalis et orientalis, Africa et India orient. terrestris". Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Rumina decollata* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Gastropoda: Subulinidae).

*Nerita corona* var. *fasciata* pages 59-60, plate 8, figures 15a, 15b. "in fluviis Indiae orientalis, inf. S. Mauriti, Americae australis". Is a senior synonym of *Clithon spinosa* (Sowerby, 1825), although that species is actually restricted to the Society Islands. However, Spalowsky's name is itself a junior homonym of *Nerita fasciata* Müller, 1774 (European freshwater) so Sowerby's name remains valid. The spines and colouration of *Clithon corona* (Linnaeus, 1758) and *C. coronata* (Leach, 1815) do not match the detailed figure of Spalowsky's *fasciata*. (Gastropoda: Neritidae).

*Venus corbicula* var. *scripta* page 72, plate 10, figures 11a, 11b. "litt. Guineens. et Americ. occidentalis". Does not resemble any known Atlantic or west American species. Appears to be either a *Lioconcha [cf. ornata]* (Dillwyn, 1817) or a *Meretrix [cf. meretrix]* (Linnaeus, 1758), both from the Indo-Pacific. The description and figure do not allow for resolution of the identity of Spalowsky's "*scripta*" (Bivalvia: Veneridae).

*Ostrea maxima* var. *rosea* page 78, plate 11, figure 7. "Mare europaeum". Herein considered to be a junior synonym of *Pecten maximus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Bivalvia: Pectinidae).

*Ostrea malleus* var. *alba* page 80, plate 12, figure 3. "Mare Ind. orient. praesertim ad Ceylon, moluccens. et

nicobariens. Isle aux marteaux prope novam Britanniam mar. austral." A valid species; is both a senior synonym and a senior homonym of *Malleus albus* Lamarck, 1819 (Bivalvia: Malleidae).

*Chiton auratus* page 88, plate 13, figures 6a, 6b. "Mare australe (ad inf. Otaheiti?)" A valid species of *Plaxiphora* (Polyplacophora: Mopaliidae); known from Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and the sub-Antarctic islands.

*Chiton auratus* Spalowsky, 1795 has had a chequered taxonomic history which I will briefly explicate. This species was described from "Mare australe (ad inf. Otaheiti?)" a [End Page 249] rather broad and tentative locality. Ferreira (1982) considered the status of this name with regard to the type species of *Plaxiphora* and concluded that *auratus* was not a senior synonym but rather should "be suppressed as a *nomen dubium*." Ferreira's conclusion was based on the supposedly indeterminate nature of the original description and figure, as well as on the fact that "no type material of *C. auratus* has been found at the British Museum (Natural History) ..." (Ferreira, 1982: 47). This latter statement is illogical as there is no reason to expect that Spalowsky's type material would have ended up in London, and its absence there is not a meaningful criterion for a judgment on the taxonomic validity of this species.

Kaas and Van Belle (1994: 266-269) instead recognized *Chiton auratus* as the oldest name for the common antiboreal species of *Plaxiphora*, and they suggested that the type locality may have been referable to "Falkland Islands" rather than Tahiti [Otaheiti]. Fitzinger (1856: 477; 1868: 1019, 1061, 1090) mentioned that part of Spalowsky's collection ended up in what is now the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien, and it is possible that the type material of the new species or other figured specimens may be present in that museum. However, Dr Karl Edlinger (*in litt.*, 20 February 1995) stated that neither *Chiton auratus* nor *Strombus auratus* could be found in the collection. It is possible that other mollusk specimens (types or figured "vouchers") from the Spalowsky collection are extant in that museum.

In conclusion, this paper has delineated the contributions of Spalowsky, with emphasis on the malacological portion, and perhaps will serve to rescue him from oblivion. It is interesting to compare Spalowsky with his Viennese contemporary Ignaz Edler von Born (1742-1791). Born, although primarily a mineralogist and mining engineer, is today best known for his catalogues of the Imperial conchological collection which included a large number of previously undescribed species (Johnson, 1984). If Spalowsky had lived longer, and published the promised comprehensive treatise on shells (in addition to the 1795 "*Prodrumus*"), then certainly his name could have eclipsed that of Born in the annals of conchology.

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*österreichischen Kronländern geboren wurden oder darin gelebt und gewirkt haben.* Volume 36 [of 60], pp 336. Wien, Kaiserlich-Königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerie.

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#### NOTE

Two additional copies of Spalowsky's conchological treatise are present in Polish libraries: the Biblioteka Jagiellonska (Kraków) the Biblioteka, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich (Wrocław); both copies are the 1801 issue. I thank Piotr Hordynski (Kraków). W. Tyzowski (Wrocław) and Michał Spandowski (Biblioteka Narodowa, Warszawa) for informing me of these copies. [End Page 253]

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