

BOOK REVIEW

The Sea Shells of Greece by Thanasis Nanousis. Published by Kyriakidis Brothers (Konstantinou Melenikou 5, 546 35 Thessaloniki, Greece) 2012. ISBN 978.960.467.335.3. Hardback 382 pages, price 50 euros.

In the foreword to this book the author writes that "This work is not and does not pretend to be a thorough revision of the malacofauna of the Greek seas. It is a useful photographic guide provided that it is utilised in combination with other sources of information". While the book must be considered in the light of this statement, the statement belittles a work which may be considered a major addition to the available identification guides to Mediterranean shells.

The author spent the period from 2005 to 2011 intensively collecting specimens, particularly by diving and sieving soft substrate, largely in the Gulf of Thermaikos. This provided the core of specimens figured, though these have been supplemented with specimens from elsewhere in Greece.

The book opens with basic introductory sections covering, among other things, 'the Phylum Mollusca', 'Systematics, Taxonomy and Nomenclature', 'where and how to find shells', 'cleaning, identifying, labelling and storage' and some information about the Gulf of Thermaikos. These sections are bilingual with parallel texts – English on the left page, Greek on the right. There follows a 32 page section on molluscan families – again parallel English and Greek texts – giving clear and concise paragraphs about each molluscan family featured in the book. These highlight biology, taxonomy and habitats. Much of this will be familiar to experienced collectors, although the accounts of more obscure families – for example Cornirostridae, Cimidae, Murchisonellidae and Diaphanidae – provides less familiar information. The translation from Greek to English (by the author) is generally very clear beyond the odd, obvious, spelling mistake/typo. Two confusions which arise through translation are however worth noting. Pinnidae are referred to as 'Pine' shells rather than Pen shells, while Vermetidae are compared to "ringworms (Annelidae)" – presumably the intended reference was to *Sabella*, or similar tubed polychaetes. 'ring worm' (in Britain at least) being a common term for a fungal skin disease.

The core of the book consists of some 248 full colour photographic plates, which illustrate 1,123 species. Multiple specimens are figured for variable species, e.g. eleven of *Gouldia minima*. There are at least dorsal and ventral views of each gastropod, with additional images where these most help identification. *Scissurella costata* is shown from five different angles for example, while all trochids get basal views. There are numerous enlargements of protoconchs or details of sculpture. For bivalves there are internal and external views, with enlargements of sculpture and of hinge teeth. For both gastropods and bivalves many species also have juvenile forms illustrated. Altogether 1,800 specimens are shown in 4,331 separate photographic images. A huge amount is crammed into the plates, yet the layout (by the author) is such that they are never crowded or confusing to follow. Apart from the scientific name only a scale bar for each figure is included, so the photos are allowed to speak for themselves. One could not expect more from "a photographic guide". It is pleasing to see among the cephalopods both cuttlebones and the internal 'pens' of squids, although it is perhaps surprising that when we are told "Greek coasts are mainly rocky" the collection of chitons is, as the author acknowledges, "rather poor". Perhaps this is just in comparison with the in-depth coverage of everything else. To give some idea of coverage, there are: 11 species of *Caecum* with 58 separate photographic images; 32 species of *Alvania* with 84 photos and an additional drawing; and no less than 13 pages of pyramidellids! There are a huge number of the micros simply ignored in many other identification guides.

Overall the quality of the photography (by the author, with camera and method detailed) is superb. If there are one or two slightly fuzzy images -compare *Limacina bulimoides* and *L. trochiformis* – these can be forgiven considering the size of these shells, less than 1 mm, their semi-translucency, and especially without the advantage of electron microscope facilities.

Some 177 species recorded from Greece, but where specimens were not available for photography, are shown in the form of digital drawings (by the author). It is a pity, however, that there is no indication of scale for these drawings, and some offer little more than an outline and some shading, presumably depending upon the source of illustration used for reference.

Fifteen land or freshwater species which were encountered during collecting have been included, as have four species of brachiopod and the calcareous tube of the annelid *Ditrupa arietina* (originally described as a *Dentalium*, and easily confused with tusk shells). All appear on the principle that others might be expected to find similar material and be 'fooled' into thinking them marine shells. They are clearly labelled to show what they really are. One of the non-marines unfortunately appears as '*Potamias*' *elegans* rather than *Pomatias*.

Completing the book is a good three page bibliography, including some relevant web sites. A list of families is given providing references to text and plates, and a separate list of species which indexes the plates. The latter helpfully indicates which species were not found in the

Gulf of Thermaikos. There are two lists of vernacular names – one in English, one in Greek – printed together with English on the left page, Greek on the right page. Finally there are two 14 page glossaries – again left page English, right page Greek – which as well as the term and its definition indicate the corresponding Greek or English term. It is perhaps surprising not to find a definition of Lessepsian migrants here as the term is used in the family accounts, and unfortunate that the term recent, for living species, should appear as 'resent'.

This book will not only be indispensable for anyone studying Greek marine shells, it will be extremely useful for identifying material from much of the wider Mediterranean, although some western Mediterranean species will not, of course, be covered. As a "photographic guide" this would be hard to improve upon, and at a very modest 50 euros there should be no hesitation in buying the book.

The multi-tasking author – collector, photographer, illustrator, designer and translator – is to be congratulated on producing such a comprehensive yet user friendly work.

Kevin Brown