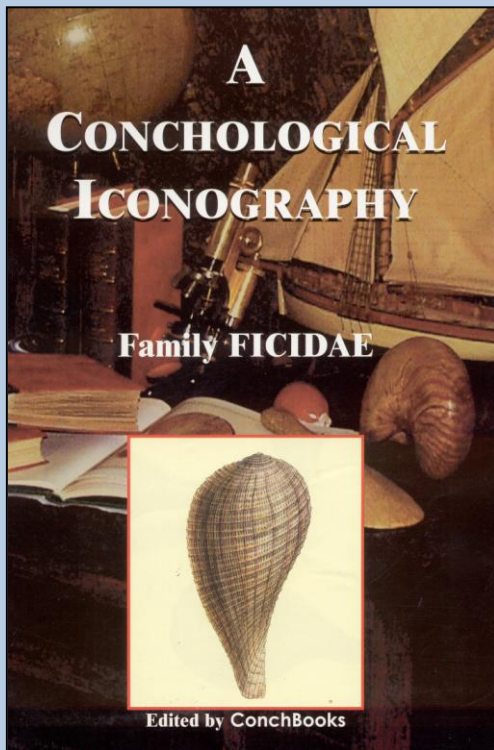


## Book Review

by Harry G. Lee, MD

*A conchological iconography [delivery 3]* The family Ficidae by Marcel Verhaeghe and Guido T. Poppe. ConchBooks, Hackenheim, Germany. pp. 1-31 with numerous b&w text figures + 27 color plates. 210 x 295 mm. Loose-leaf, four perforations, dedicated binder available. ISBN 3-925919-27-9 (masterwork); 3-925919-30-X [this delivery], 2000. See reviews of *delivery 1*. The family Harpididae of this masterwork by Patty Jansen and by Richard E. Petit [American Conchologist 27(2):30; 30-31. Sept., 1999 and *delivery 2*. The family Strombidae by Harry G. Lee [American Conchologist 28(1):11. March, 2000].



This is the third issue (the term “delivery” is put to use by the directors and editor) of a series of monographs produced by “directors” Guido Poppe and Klaus Groh and edited by Conchbooks (sometimes rendered ConchBooks). Like its predecessors, it is amply and beautifully illustrated in color, and this feature places it among the very best modern works of its kind.

The introductory text is organized into brief but illuminating passages dealing with the systematics, conchology, fossil record, habitat, morphology, general biology, history/anthropology, and acknowledgements (no less than twenty-one individuals cited). The authors are quick to acknowledge the only **major** barrier to our understanding of the taxonomy of the family is the proper identification of its **type species**, *Ficus communis* Röding, 1798 [by subsequent designation (Dall, 1906), which work I could not find in this bibliography or by any other means;

the tautonymic *F. ficus* (Linnaeus, 1758) is, obligingly, a senior subjective synonym (Röding, 1798)]. This point is well-taken and represents a **fundamental dilemma** which has received attention from past workers in the past. We shall return to this topic in the discussion below. Included is a single page “Systematic Arrangement,” which allows us to get a preview of the thirteen taxa [a single *Thalassocyon* (an obscure bathyal relative), nine species of *Ficus* - one with three subspecies and a “form”]. Unlike earlier “deliveries,” there are no gender-bending name combinations (*Ficus* is a *rara avis*, a second declension feminine noun with a *-us* termination; another noteworthy, but somewhat less tricky feminine genus is *Venus*, representing the third declension); all adjectival trivial names agree in gender! But, alas, the gremlins recurred as five instances of errors with parentheses (here rendered correctly): *F. variegata* Röding, 1798, *F. dussumieri* (Reeve, 1847), *F. laevigata* (Reeve, 1847), and *F. reticulata* (Reeve, 1847).

The taxonomic treatment follows; each taxon having type, type locality, range, habitat, dimensions, description and comparison, animal (when known), and remarks fields

formatted. Each has a fine pair of thumbnail images depicting dorsum and ventrum of the shell. While there is scanty comparative discussion and an alarming lack of information on types (for which the authors cannot be held fully responsible), this section serves well. Lumping of *F. howelli* Clench and Aguayo, 1940 and *F. atlantica* Clench and Aguayo, 1940 under the earlier synonym *F. pellucida* Deshayes, 1856 and arranging *F. papyratia* into three allopatric subspecies strikes me as reasonable; the discussion and illustrations are supportive.

The only real detraction in this section, and it harkens back to the fundamental type species concept, is the failure to define four important taxa: *F. ficus* (Linnaeus, 1758), *Ficus communis* Röding, 1798, *F. ficoidea* (Lamarck, 1822), and *F. subintermedia* of authors [not of (d'Orbigny, 1852); a fossil taxon, presumed extinct]. Each of the taxa is mentioned in the introduction in a manner suggesting the reader knows its identity, but the truth is that essentially nobody does. Before anyone can deal with this species or group thereof, the *Museum Boltenianum*, the Linnean collection, the Lamarck material, and doubtlessly other resources have to be scoured. Lectotypes or neotypes must be designated and illustrated. Only then will there be a foundation for a sober analysis of this "collectable" [sic] genus, which belies its manageable diversity by providing a head-spinning array of confusing species depictions in the literature. Verhaeghe and Poppe, to their credit, acknowledged the problem; it was just beyond the scope of this work.

The bibliography has over 90 entries - far exceeding those of previous deliveries, especially for such a small taxonomic unit. Regrettably the work of Dall and of Jutting, each pivotal to the underpinnings of the taxonomy, were omitted.

There follows a succession of color plates on black background which are certainly the finest renderings of this family ever assembled in a single work. Close-ups of the fine sculpture are helpful in some species distinctions. The apical views convince me that the protoconchs are indistinguishable.

This is the best-executed of the issues comprising the masterwork, *A conchological iconography*. Anyone with an interest in the Figsnails and their shells should order this **special delivery**.

Delivery 3 is available from several U. S. dealers at \$28.00 (30 Euro); special binder (commodious enough to store about three volumes but below the standard of *Indo-Pacific Mollusca*) at \$13.00. Future volumes are expected soon; topics include the Acavidae (in part), *Calliostoma*, Neritidae, etc. European customers may wish to contact the publisher, ConchBooks, Mainzer Str. 25, D-55546, Hackheim, Germany. <conchbooks..conchbooks.de>.

Reprinted from *American Conchologist* 29(1): 21. March, 2001 with the permission of editors Lynn Scheu and Tom Eichhorst.