



On the nomenclatural status of some species of Haplotaxidae (Clitellata) from Guinea

PATRICK MARTIN^{1*}, PIETRO OMODEO^{2,3} & EMILIA ROTA^{2,4}

¹Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Taxonomy and Phylogeny, 29 rue Vautier, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium.

✉ patrick.martin@naturalsciences.be; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6033-8412>

²Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche, della Terra e dell'Ambiente, Università di Siena, Via Mattioli 4, 53100 Siena, Italy.

✉ omodeo.pietro@libero.it

⁴rota@unisi.it; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8235-6419>

*Corresponding author

Our attention was recently drawn to a problem of homonymy with *Villiersia* d'Orbigny, 1837, a nudibranch genus, posed by *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987, an oligochaete genus of the family Haplotaxidae described from the Segea cave near Kindia, Guinea (Omodeo 1987). Examination of this case of homonymy has revived an old nomenclatural issue that dates back to 1958 when several taxa of the family Haplotaxidae were first proposed in a work on the oligochaete fauna of Mount Nimba (West Africa) (Omodeo 1958). A re-examination of the nomenclatural history of these taxa shows that subsequent nomenclatural interpretations made by some were unjustified, leading to a confusing situation. The taxa concerned, as currently accepted (Reynolds & Wetzel 2020), are the following:

Haplotaxis villiersi Omodeo, 1987, syn. *Haplotaxis carnivorus* Omodeo, 1958 (nom. nud.);

Villiersia Omodeo, 1987, syn. *Haplolumbriculus* Omodeo, 1958 (nom. nud.), type species: *Villiersia guanivora* Omodeo, 1987;

Villiersia guanivora Omodeo, 1987, syn. *Haplolumbriculus insectivorus* Omodeo, 1958 (nom. nud.);

Metataxis carnivorus Omodeo, 1987, syn. *Pelodrilus carnivorus* Omodeo, 1958 (nom. nud.).

It may be useful to point out that *Metataxis* was later, in a morpho-cladistic analysis, removed from *Haplotaxidae* by Brinkhurst (1988) and considered “incertae sedis” within an order “Lumbricina”. Current online databases, however, maintain the genus in Haplotaxidae.

The purpose of this correspondence is, by placing the nomenclatural problem in its historical context, to clarify the situation once and for all and to settle the problem of homonymy mentioned above.

Historical background

The Mount Nimba, located on the borders of Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire is home of a particularly rich flora and fauna, with endemic species (Lamotte 1998). Declared a strict nature reserve in 1944 (Schnell, 1950), it was the focus of several scientific missions in the 1950s. Thus, Professor Pietro Omodeo was entrusted by Professor Maxime Lamotte with the collection of oligochaetes collected in the Mount Nimba nature reserve during scientific missions carried out in 1942 and 1951. Lamotte's collection was mainly composed of terrestrial or semi-aquatic megadriles (= Crassiclitellata) but also contained some Enchytraeidae and Haplotaxidae microdriles.

In 1958, the inventory of the Mount Nimba material was published and a detailed description was provided for each new species (Omodeo 1958). At the request of Lamotte, who wished to provide identification keys to assist local investigators in the identification of material, this work was complemented by the publication of identification keys for families, genera and species known at that time from tropical Africa. As a result, some new haplotaxid taxa were mentioned from the biological material entrusted to Omodeo in 1954 by André Villiers (then Head of Entomology at IFAN—Institut français d'Afrique noire, in Dakar), independently from Lamotte, material originating from Segea cave near Kindia (western Guinea). For the latter taxa, only a couple of differential characters were given for the purposes of dichotomous keys,

and a Latin name was assigned, followed by the words “Omodeo (*in litt.*)”, namely “*in litteris*”: *Haplotaxis carnivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*), *Haplolumbriculus* Omodeo (*in litt.*), *Haplolumbriculus insectivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*), and *Pelodrilus carnivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*).

A few years later, Brinkhurst (1966) reviewed the family Haplotaxidae and in a “Note added in proof” (pp. 47-48) commented on the “fragmentary account” of the new African members of the family given by Omodeo (1958). He interpreted all taxa names designated “*in litt.*” as *nomina nuda*, except for the genus name *Haplolumbriculus*.

In their compendium on the *Aquatic Oligochaeta of the World*, Brinkhurst and Jamieson (1971: 299) proposed the same opinion for all these taxa, with the addition that they were also listed among the *Nomina dubia* (p. 299).

In 1987, Omodeo published a complete description of those three species and the one genus “*in litteris*” from Guinea in the Proceedings of the 1986 International Symposium on Aquatic Oligochaeta in Hamburg, edited by Brinkhurst and Diaz (Omodeo 1987). He revised their nomenclature as follows:

- (1) The name of the genus “*Haplolumbriculus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)” was changed and replaced with the name *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987, without being aware that the name was already preoccupied.
- (2) The name “*Haplolumbriculus insectivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)” was changed to *Villiersia guanivora* Omodeo, 1987 (misspelled as “*Villiersia guanivora*” in the text on page 5 but not in the figure caption, which suggests a *lapsus calami*—the genus name was spelled *Villiersia* and was dedicated to Dr. A. Villiers), because it was pointed out that the chitinous residues in the digestive tract of worms derived from eating bat guano, not insects. This species was designated as the type species of *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987.
- (3) The name “*Haplotaxis carnivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)” was changed to *Haplotaxis villiersi* Omodeo, 1987, to avoid the coexistence of two specific epithets “*carnivorus*”.
- (4) The name “*Pelodrilus carnivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)” was changed to *Metataxis carnivorus* Omodeo, 1987 (the genus *Metataxis* had been established in the meantime by Righi in 1985, and the species was, for reasons of taxonomy, transferred to this genus).

That is, in 1987, all the taxa *in litteris* acquired the dignity of valid genera and species, respectively, but with names different from the original ones. From this historical account, three elements can be distinguished, which is preferable to treat separately for the sake of clarity: (1) the validity of the nomenclatural interpretations of the names *in litteris* as *nomina nuda* by Brinkhurst (1966) and Brinkhurst and Jamieson (1971) (2) the nomenclatural status of the names «*in litteris*», and (3) the junior homonymy of *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987.

Validity of the nomenclatural interpretations of the names *in litteris* as *nomina nuda*

The nomenclatural interpretation that led to considering Omodeo’s (1958) taxa “*in litt.*” as *nomina nuda* was not made explicit by Brinkhurst (1966), although the justification can be found in considering their account “fragmentary” (p. 48). However, a re-examination of Omodeo (1958) leads one to conclude that this interpretation is invalid under the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999) (“Code” in the following).

In the glossary of the Code, a *nomen nudum* is defined as “a Latin term referring to a name that, [...] if published after 1930, fails to conform to Article 13. A *nomen nudum* is not an available name, and therefore the same name may be made available later for the same or a different concept” (ICZN 1999).

The Code does not require that the diagnosis or definition proposed for a taxon be accurate or exhaustive (Dubois 2008) as long as there is an intention to differentiate, in accordance with Art. 13:

“Article 13. Names published after 1930.

- 13.1. Requirements. To be available, every new name published after 1930 must satisfy the provisions of Article 11 and must
 - 13.1.1. be accompanied by a description or a definition that states in words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon.”

In Omodeo (1958), there is an explicit or implicit diagnosis, which can be deduced from the identification keys provided to differentiate each African haplotaxid species from one another, including those from the Segea cave. Since the intention to differentiate cannot be disputed, it is incorrect to consider the haplotaxid names “*in litt.*” adopted by Omodeo

(1958) as *nomina nuda* and, if one were to stick to this point alone, these names would remain available. This brings us to the second component of the issue.

Nomenclatural status of the names *in litteris*

In Mount Nimba's work on oligochaetes (Omodeo 1958), there was a clear intention to distinguish between the haplotaxid taxa fully described as new (such as *Pelodrilus falcifer* n. sp.) and those recognized as new but not intended to be described in this work (therefore indicated as taxa *in litt.*). This is enough to consider names *in litt.* as *not published* for the purposes of zoological nomenclature, according to the following rules:

“Article 11. Requirements. To be available, a name or, where relevant, a nomenclatural act must satisfy the following provisions:

11.1. Publication. The name or nomenclatural act must have been published, in the meaning of Article 8, after 1757.”

“Article 8.3. Names and acts may be disclaimed. If a work contains a statement to the effect that all or any of the names or nomenclatural acts in it are disclaimed for nomenclatural purposes, the disclaimed names or acts are not available.”

The specification “*in litteris*” by Omodeo (1958) was equivalent to saying that, in that publication, a certain name was not proposed as new for the purposes of nomenclature and was therefore not available under Article 8.3. As a result, there is actually nothing to discuss in terms of *nomina nuda*, because the availability of the name is excluded at a more radical level. Therefore, any interpretation of the names *in litteris* as *nomina nuda* should be removed when these names are cited.

Being not available under Article 8.3, these names remain available later for the same or for different concepts, respectively. Omodeo (1987) considered this option carefully but finally discarded it for all taxa in question, and coined new names.

Junior homonymy of *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987

When creating the genus name *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987, the intention was to dedicate this genus to Dr. André Villiers (died in 1983) who provided this interesting material. The fact that the name *Villiersia* was already “preoccupied” with the monotypic nudibranch genus *Villiersia* d’Orbigny, 1837 unfortunately went unnoticed. Hence, *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987 is a junior homonym of *Villiersia* d’Orbigny, 1837 and cannot be used as a valid name for this haplotaxid taxon (Art. 52) (ICZN 1999).

The name *Villiersia scutigera* d’Orbigny, 1837 is currently considered as a *nomen dubium* (Bouchet 2012) but the Code does not contain specific provisions for a *nomen dubium*, which means that the availability of the genus name *Villiersia* d’Orbigny, 1837 cannot be called into question for this reason alone.

As a result of the above, we propose, as a replacement name for *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987:

***Villiersidrilus* Omodeo, 2021 nom. nov. pro *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987 (non *Villiersia* d’Orbigny, 1837)**

Syn. *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987 non d’Orbigny, 1837; “*Haplolumbriculus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)”: Omodeo 1958.

Type species: *Villiersia guanivora* Omodeo, 1987

Etymology: The genus name is dedicated to Dr. A. Villiers.

Species included:

Villiersidrilus guanivorus (Omodeo, 1987)

Syn. *Villiersia guanivora* Omodeo, 1987; “*Haplolumbriculus insectivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)”: Omodeo 1958.

Villiersidrilus kraepelini (Michaelsen, 1914)

Syn. *Lycodrilus kraepelini* Michaelsen, 1914; *Eclipsoidrilus kraepelini*: Michaelsen 1932; *Pelodrilus kraepelini*: Hrabě 1931.

Conclusion

To conclude what has been discussed above, the nomenclatural situation of the Haplotaxidae taxa “in litt.” mentioned by Omodeo (1958) can be summarized as follows:

Haplotaxis villiersi Omodeo, 1987; syn. “*Haplotaxis carnivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)”: Omodeo 1958.

Villiersidrilus Omodeo, 2021, nom. nov. pro *Villiersia* Omodeo, 1987; syn. “*Haplolumbriculus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)”: Omodeo 1958. Type species: *Villiersia guanivora* Omodeo, 1987.

Villiersidrilus guanivorus (Omodeo, 1987); syn. *Villiersia guanivora* Omodeo, 1987; “*Haplolumbriculus insectivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)”: Omodeo 1958.

Metataxis carnivorus Omodeo, 1987; syn. “*Pelodrilus carnivorus* Omodeo (*in litt.*)”: Omodeo 1958.

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