



## The nominal species of rays (Chondrichthyes) described by Stephan (1779)

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### Abstract

Stephan's doctoral dissertation (1779) often appears in bibliographies but it does not seem to have been examined in the last 200 years. Ten names are available from it. Six are junior homonyms and three are junior subjective synonyms and do not present major nomenclatural problems. *Raia sloani* Stephan, 1779 is a potential senior synonym of *Raja ajereba* Walbaum, 1795. Both names are based on several species. A common lectotype is designated and *Raja ajereba* is declared *nomen protectum* and *R. sloani* is declared *nomen oblitum*.

**Key words:** nomenclature, *Paratrygon ajereba*, Artedi, Potamotrygonidae, Marcgrave

### Introduction

It is somehow amazing when works are mentioned in a large number of bibliographies although it seems that nobody ever tried or managed to see them in the last 200 years, or at least nobody provided real information on their content. In ichthyology, one such work is Stephan (1779), often listed as 'Schediasma de raiis'. There is hardly a large bibliography in which it does not appear, usually with the mention 'not seen', or with information on what it is *expected* to contain, or other comments such as 'probably not binominal', etc.

The author of the work is Christian Friedrich Stephan (Christianus Fridericus Stephan, as it appears in Latin on the title page) (1757–1814). Stephan was born and received a degree in medicine in Leipzig (Germany). He later became professor of chemistry and botany in Moscow (1786), then in St. Petersburg (1811) (Dayton, 1951). The 'Schediasma de Raiis' in fact is Stephan's doctoral dissertation at the University of Leipzig, printed by Walther ["Lipsiae, ex. Officina Waltheria"]. The exact title is "De raiis. Shediasma primum". As understood today, shediasm (or schediasm), from the classical Greek σχεδιαστικώς, applies to any off-hand writing on a loose leaf. In the present case, one should understand it as a short work or notes. It is 24 pages long.

As most dissertations of that time, the print run was probably small, but it was certainly distributed, since it was cited in a few contemporary works (e.g. Leske, 1788: 424) while other contemporaries ignored it, including Schneider, who published a paper on a similar topic only a few years later (Schneider, 1783; see also Schneider, 1801).

The dissertation is mainly a small literature review of the rays as then understood. Stephan apparently also examined some material, but there is no information that material had been preserved. Stephan seems to have been much inspired by Artedi, although his work has a much smaller scope. Stephan clearly used a binominal system but he seems to make only passing discussion of Linnaeus. Noteworthy is that his synonymies are restricted to the mention of Artedi and a few works posterior to or not mentioned by Artedi and Linnaeus, which in fact restrict them to Gronow, Klein, Marcgrave and Sloane. Other authors are rarely mentioned: Rondelet (1554; twice), Salviani (1558; once), Columna (1616; twice) and Baster (1762; once).