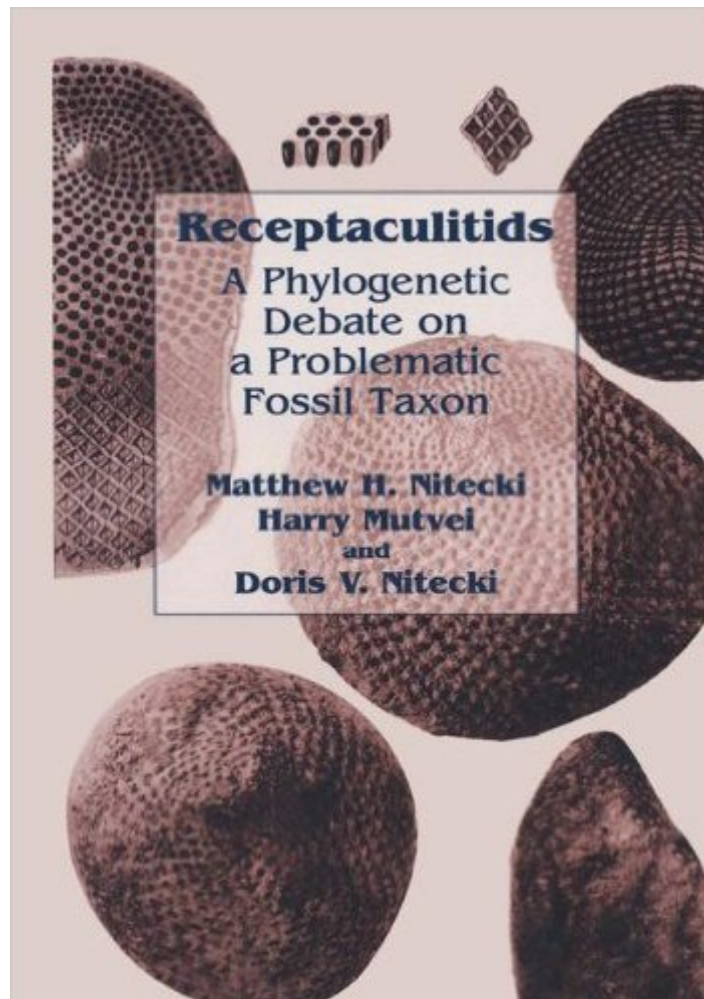


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Receptaculitids: A Phylogenetic Debate On A Problematic Fossil Taxon



Synopsis

Receptaculitids are extinct high-level fossils that provide a window into the history of life. After the discovery and analysis of a deposit of phosphatized receptaculitids on the Baltic Sea island of Ål-land, the authors conclude that receptaculitids possess an attribute not found in any other group of organisms, living or fossil.

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Nothing excites me more than scientific conflict. Take the case of receptaculitids, a fossil taxon which has been classified variously as a family of marine sponges, calcareous alga, or... What? I am not sure we really know what this sea creature was in life. A geologist once took me (an amateur paleontologist) to task for challenging the consensus about receptaculitids; she barked "it's calcareous alga, period, so that's that"--yet, there really isn't hard evidence to support this idea. A geologist does not a paleobiologist make. I come away from reading this book convinced that the fossil taxon in question is still pretty much a big mystery. And having myself collected specimens of this fossil in northern New England USA, I have become fascinated with the unanswered questions: What are the origins of this fossil and what caused its ultimate extinction? Important questions to explore for nothing like it exists in Earth's oceans today. While the book will not be easy reading for the lay person, I view it as an important volume in the field. If you seek information about Receptaculitids, this book is the only definitive modern work on the topic. As far as I know, no one is doing research on the fossil. Fertile ground for a doctoral thesis--if you dare!

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