ASTERIAS CAPUT MEDUSÆ.

CHARACTER GENERICUS.

Corpus depresso: crusta subcoriacea, tentaculis muricata.

Os centrale, quinquevalve.

Lin. Syst. Nat. p. 1098.

CHARACTER SPECIFICUS, &c.

ASTERIAS radiis dichotomis, ore depresso.

ASTERIAS CAPUT MEDUSÆ.

Lin. Syst. Nat. p. 1101.

STELLA MARINA.

Jonst. inf. t. 26. f. 11.

Asteriæ, seu stellæ æquoreæ, ut vulgo nominantur, mirum et numerosum constituunt genus animalium marinarum. Specierum diversarum diversa admodum est facies externa. Pars maxima formæ sunt stellatæ, seu in quinque radios æquales divisæ: aliæ in plures radios, decem nempe vel tredecim: nonnullæ scabræ et tuberosæ, nonnullæ læves, aliæ denique spinosæ sunt. Species vero reliquis longe mirabilior Asterias caput Medusæ vocatur. Hæc a centro in quinque æquales et æque distantes radios geniculatos primum dividitur, quorum singuli dein in duos alios minores divaricant;

hi iterum paulo longiore intervallo in duos adhuc minores separantur; et hoc modo, divisionibus minoribus et numerosioribus, infinita pene serie sensim attenuata et multiplicata, distribuuntur membra, donec millia multa numero superent. Inde fit ut animal quasi rete sit vivum, nec immerito *rete mirabile* possit dici, cum illa quæ pro cibo natura voluit animalia, contractis subito innumeris ramulis amplectatur, et adempta aufugendi potestate, misera devoret. Asteriæ facultatem repullulandi habent, membrumque aliquod vel casu vel vi abruptum aut avulsum progressu temporis renovatur. In oceano, præsertim prope littora cibi captandi gratia vagantur, animaliaque non tantum nuda et molliora sed etiam testis obtecta comedunt; dentibus enim duris et acutis spinas referentibus armantur, adeo fitis ut aculei omnes ad centrum convergant, dispares in diversis speciebus. Species hic depicta in oceano fere omni invenitur, præcipue in mari Mediterraneo. Colore variat: interdum pallida, seu rufo-albescens, interdum fuscescens, immo etiam penitus fusca reperitur. Asteriæ (fortasse,) ut plurimum, viviparæ? sunt.

THE
BRANCHED ASTERIAS,
OR
MEDUSEAN STAR-FISH.

GENERIC CHARACTER.

Body depressed; covered with a coriaceous crust,
muriated with tentacula.

Mouth central, with five valves.

SPECIFIC CHARACTER, &c.

ASTERIAS, with regularly-divided and subdivi-
ded branches, and depressed mouth.

MEDUSA-HEAD STAR-FISH.

BASKET STAR-FISH.

The Asteriæ or sea-stars, as they are generally called, form a very numerous and wonderful genus of marine animals. The several species differ greatly in appearance from each other: the greater number are of a stellated form, and are divided into five rays or processes; others are divided into a much greater number of rays, as ten, and thirteen. Some species are smooth, some tuberculated, others prickly. The species which of all others is most worthy of admiration is that called the Caput Medusæ, or Medusa's Head Star-fish: this
very

very curious animal is first divided into five equidistant, thickly-jointed processes, each of which is soon subdivided into two other smaller ones, and each of these, at a somewhat farther distance, into two others still smaller: this mode of regular subdivision is continued to a vast extent, and in the most beautiful gradation of minuteness, till at length the number of the extreme ramifications amounts to several thousands. By this most curious structure the animal becomes as it were a living net, and may well deserve the title of *rete mirabile*, and is capable of catching such creatures as are by nature destined for its prey, by the sudden contraction of all its innumerable ramifications, by which the unfortunate object is secured beyond all possibility of escape. The sea-stars have a very considerable degree of reproductive power, and if injured by accidental violence, or if one or more of their limbs or branches be torn or cut off, the creature will in time be furnished with new ones. They wander about the ocean, particularly near the shores, in quest of food, and prey not only on the softer animals, but even on the smaller shell-fish; and are armed for this purpose with hard and sharp teeth, resembling prickles, and situated in a circular form, with the points converging towards the opening of the mouth, and differing in number in the different species. The species here represented is not uncommon in most seas, and is frequently found in the Mediterranean. In colour it varies, being sometimes pale, or reddish white, and sometimes of a brown, more or less intense. The *Asteriæ* in general are viviparous? animals.

Shaw, George. 1792. "The Branched Asterias or Medusean Star-Fish, Asterias caput medusæ [Pl. 103]." *The Naturalist's Miscellany* 3(XXXIV), <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.304523>.

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