

Notas Nomenclaturales / Nomenclatural Notes

Vipera latasti vs. *V. latastei*: a poisoned affair

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Boscá (1877) described a Spanish viper as *Vipera ammodytes*, in the belief that it was conspecific with that living in the Balkans. However, Boscá (1878) was doubtful about its real status, considering it could represent a valid species and, on p. 121, he added the following comment: “*si de nouvelles recherches établissaient la nécessité d’élever au rang d’espèce cette forme nouvelle, je me propose de la dédier à M. Fernand Lataste, savant herpétologue de France, et je la nommerai Vipera latasti*”. There is no proof in this text that an incorrect original spelling had occurred; Boscá could have latinized Lataste’s name as Latastus, whose genitive is Latasti. The name *Vipera latastei* does not appear in this text. *Vipera latasti* is also the only spelling appearing in the list of new species published in this volume on p. 355.

The first time the spelling *Vipera latastei* appears in writing is on the caption to Plate IV (*Planche IV* in French) present on p. 201 of the same volume. This plate represents a viper and was signed by J. Terrier, it has no reference to Boscá’s paper, a strange fact given that all plates except this one carry a reference to the article to which they belong. The text of the article and the captions for the plates are almost 80 pages apart. All the plates are gathered at the end of the volume, and not within the corresponding articles. This casts strong doubts on whether the plate was made with Boscá’s knowledge at the time of writing his article, and the

plate could have been added by the editor perhaps under Fernand Lataste’s request.

Both spellings are in current use in articles and monographs, including revisions and field guides (e.g. for *Vipera latasti*: Bons & Geniez, 1996; Gasc *et al.*, 1997; Salvador, 1998; Barbadillo *et al.*, 1999; Pleguezuelos & Santos, 2002; Santos *et al.*, 2004; Fahd *et al.*, 2006; Soler Massana *et al.*, 2006; Real *et al.*, 2010; Blain *et al.*, 2011; Saz-Parkinson *et al.*, 2012; Real *et al.*, 2013; e.g. for *V. latastei*: Crespo & Oliveira, 1989; Godinho *et al.*, 1999; Pleguezuelos & Santos, 1997; Schleich *et al.*, 1996; Ferrand de Almeida *et al.*, 2001; Salvador & Pleguezuelos, 2002; Crespo & Sampaio, 1994; Golay *et al.*, 1993; McDiarmid *et al.*, 1999; Mallow *et al.*, 2003; Santos & Poquet, 2010; Velo-Antón *et al.*, 2012). As can be seen, some authors are unsteady in their use of the spelling.

Authors treating this problem later include Saint-Girons (1977), who stated that the spelling *latasti* was a *lapsus calami* and that the correct spelling had to be *latastei*, Golay *et al.* (1993) who considered the latter a justified emendation, Alonso-Zarazaga (1998) who considered *latasti* not to be an incorrect original spelling, and thus that *latastei* could not be a justified emendation, and David & Ineich (1999) who, claiming to act as First Revisers, chose *latastei* as the correct spelling, treating both names as alternative original spellings.

This later action would have settled the issue, were it not invalid. An action of First Reviser is used to establish a subjective precedence between two or more simultaneous acts or names (Art 24.2). However, the spelling *latasti* predates the spelling *latastei*. Answering my question about the details of the publication of the third volume (1878) of the *Bulletin de la Société zoologique de France*, Dr Ivan Ineich kindly informed me in an e-mail sent 6 November 2008 as follows: “*avec l’aide de Jean-*

Loup d'Hondt, actuel Président de la Société zoologique de France, nous avons abouti aux conclusions suivantes : Les pages 1-108 correspondent au premier fascicule du volume 3 de 1878 qui rassemble des communications présentées avant fin juin 1878 et publié donc vers les semaines suivantes. Les pages 109-200 correspondent au second fascicule publié en 1878 mais de date inconnue. Enfin les pages 201-362 correspondent sans doute à un fascicule double (fascicules 3 et 4) avec des communications présentées dans les comptes-rendus du Conseil de la Société du 20 décembre 1878. Ce troisième fascicule (double) a donc très certainement été publié en 1879 étant donnée la date tardive de présentation. [...] La description de Bosca dans les pages 116-121 a sans aucun doute été publiée en 1878 dans le fascicule 2 du volume 3, mais la date n'est pas connue mais est après juin 1878." In summary, the spelling *latasti* has to be dated 1878, but the spelling *latastei* appeared in 1879. Thus, no action of First Reviser can be applied to these names.

Boscá (1879, 1891) used only *V. latastei*, but this does not turn him into the First Reviser of these spellings under Art. 24.2.4, since, as explained above, a First Revision act in this case is invalid, both spellings not being simultaneous.

While preparing a new edition of the Volume of Reptiles for the Fauna Iberica project, to supersede the first edition (Salvador, 1998), in which the spelling *V. latasti* was used, I was told that the authors preferred to use *V. latastei* because it was in "prevailing usage" and David & Ineich had already settled the matter. I opposed this (which prompted the present note), not only because of the above mentioned invalidity of David & Ineich's action, but also because the increase of use in the later years is due to the uncritical following of David & Ineich's incorrect conclusions. A search in the Zoological Record shows that in the immediate ten years before David & Ineich's paper, the spelling *latasti* was used 10 times against 8 uses of *latastei*, while after their paper (2000-2013) the former was used 14 times and the second 43. This is also a significant example of how an incorrect use of the Code can mislead other scientists to an incorrect usage of species names and alter the trend towards the steady establishment of the correct name by application of the rules contained in the Code. Moreover, the application of "prevailing usage" is highly subjective since there is no clear definition in the Code.

In summary, the correct name of Lataste's viper is *Vipera latasti* Boscá, 1878. The spelling *V. latastei* is originally an incorrect subsequent spelling (thus unavailable) of anonymous authorship that can be credited as an available name (an unjustified emendation) only to Saint-Girons, 1977, as *V. latastei* Saint-Girons, 1977.

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