

*Book Review***Fossil Invertebrates**

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(Translated by J. Lettau)

Cambridge University Press, 1983
Local price about R18,00

Beginning with a very brief mention of ideas on the origin of life, and whether there are two kingdoms of organisms or five, this book soon gets down to its main task: to provide a concise systematic-cum-morphological summary of invertebrate groups, with an idea of their geological and geographical occurrence. Depth of treatment varies according to the importance of each group in the fossil record — monerans are dismissed in a page and a half; protozoans get 17 pages; molluscs get 100 pages. At the back of the book are two charts showing the importance through time of particular invertebrate groups as biostratigraphic 'guide-fossils', one dealing with microfossils and the other with macrofossils, and a condensed standard geological time scale. It ends with a useful bibliography and an index.

The book is a translation of what the back cover calls the 'immensely successful German-language edition'. It grew out of the need to provide notes for the growing number of undergraduate students attending courses offered by the authors. The authors note that their intention has been to 'reduce the dread of the large number of (difficult) names and terms by relating them back to certain fundamental types'. Genera are dealt with as stylized collective representatives; the many line drawings that illustrate this work are also 'summarized' representations of a particular *bauplan* or functional principle.

It is not immediately obvious to me why the editors of the well established and respected Cambridge Earth Science Series should have chosen this particular work to translate and publish in their series. I don't think it quite achieves its aim of reducing dread, mainly because the style of presentation is a little stiff and uninviting. Although the book is liberally illustrated, the drawings are stark and rather forbiddingly formal. There is, however, no doubt that the interested beginner who perseveres and delves into it will find much that is helpful in running down an unfamiliar fossil, and in improving his understanding of its structure and classification. Perhaps in oil-rich north-western Europe there will be a continuing need for biostratigraphically 'literate' petroleum geologists, and for them this book might well fulfil a need. Locally, though, I doubt if it will find much of a viable market — unless, of course, SOEKOR makes a breakthrough!

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