

The dermosphenotic in early actinopterygians, a nomenclatural problem

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Abstract

The dermosphenotic, dermal bone situated postero-dorsally to the orbit, was first defined in recent actinopterygians after anatomy (braincase and sensory canals), development, and innervation of neuromasts. The last two criteria are unusable in fossil groups without recent representatives, and recognition of the dermosphenotic after anatomical features proves often difficult because of many variations, also because some paleontologists try to apply the homologization principle of sarcopterygian bone nomenclature to actinopterygians. This resulted in a quantity of different names, more or less complicated, given to the bones lying in this region, and therefore to misunderstandings. A topographic definition of this bone is proposed, based on simple landmarks, in order to solve this problem and allow scientists to speak the same language. Its test within a small sampling (83 genera, 13 species) of mainly fossil taxa (basal Actinopterygii up to crown Neopterygii) reveals the existence of two main patterns in this region of the skull, which can be subdivided for mere practical reasons. It appears that groupings of taxa according to these patterns are often coherent with high levels of systematics. Consequently these new definition and nomenclature of the dermosphenotic suggest homologies and they are proposed here as tools for the search of phylogenetic relationships of actinopterygians, mostly early ones.

Introduction

Homologies of dermal cranial bones in gnathostomes are a matter of great debates as they are among the main characters used in phylogenetic analyses. They are expressed by specific bone nomenclatures. When all authors use a single name for the same bone, there is no problem. Unfortunately authors frequently use numerous different names for the same bone, or the same name for different bones: this leads to misunderstandings and confusions, which may hide homologies or, on the contrary, suggest questionable ones. In order to avoid this difficulty, zoologists and paleontologists should be urged to use the same nomenclature so that they speak the same language and understand each other, even if such an enterprise, already attempted by JOLLIE (1962, 1986), is difficult!

For this purpose, it is dealt here with the dermosphenotic in early actinopterygians and some of their extant relatives. Why the dermosphenotic? Firstly because the presence of this bone is a synapomorphy of Actinopterygii (SCHULTZE & CUMBAA 2001). Secondly because it is the key bone of the dermal cover bordering the postero-dorsal part of the orbit which is so variable, with regards to its anatomy and its morphology at different systematic levels, that it was named in many different ways in the past (see for instance HUTCHINSON 1975, GRANDE & BEMIS 1998).

Based on the main groups of Actinopterygii proposed, among others, by JANVIER (1996) and COATES (1998), the following taxa are quoted in this work:

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