

On the validity of the genus *Strandzhia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013 (Gastropoda: Bythinellidae)

DILIAN GEORGIEV¹, PETER GLÖER²

¹*Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Biology, Department of Ecology and Nature Conservation, 24 Tsar Assen Str., 4000 Plovdiv, Bulgaria, diliangeorgiev@gmail.com*

²*Biodiversity Research Laboratory, Schulstrasse 3, D-25491 Hetlingen, Germany, gloeer@malaco.de*

Abstract. The genus *Strandzhia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013 (Gastropoda: Bythinellidae) was described from the Strandzha Mountain area in southeastern Bulgaria, with its type species, *S. bythinellopenia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013. The species was initially found in a spring near the village of Mladezhko, coexisting with *Bythinella dedovi* (Glöer & Georgiev 2011). This article addresses the critique by Jaszczyńska et al. (2024), who question the validity of the genus *Strandzhia* based on two key points: the examination of male specimens from the type locality revealing a penis morphology typical of the genus *Grossuana* Radoman, 1983, and the sequencing of these specimens confirming their identity with *Grossuana*. They consequently question the expertise of the original authors regarding penis morphology, concluding the genus is invalid. However, our studies involved dissecting nine male specimens of *Strandzhia*, confirmed the reported penis morphology. We assert the validity of the genus *Strandzhia* and the existence of *S. bythinellopenia* at its type locality, alongside *Bythinella* and *Grossuana* species. Future genetic studies are essential for specimens exhibiting the characteristic penis morphology of *Strandzhia*.

Key words: Gastropods, Rissoidea, Bulgaria.

The genus *Strandzhia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013 (Gastropoda: Bythinellidae) was described from the Strandzha Mountain area in southeastern Bulgaria, with one known species, the type species, *S. bythinellopenia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013 (Georgiev & Glöer 2013). The animals were found in a spring (source) near the village of Mladezhko, coexisting with a species of *Bythinella* – *B. dedovi* (Glöer & Georgiev 2011).

This brief article is a response to the publications by Jaszczyńska et al. (2024), where the authors express opinions on the invalidity of the aforementioned genus. The authors challenge the validity of the genus in two ways:

1. They examine the anatomy of male specimens with shells similar to those of *Strandzhia*, collected from the type locality (paratypes). They establish a penis morphology typical for the genus *Grossuana* Radoman, 1983;
2. After, they sequence the specimens with penis morphology identical to that of *Grossuana* and logically determine their identity with this genus (!);
3. Subsequently, they question the expertise of the authors of the genus *Strandzhia* regarding penis morphology and conclude that the genus is invalid.

During our studies, we both dissected nine male specimens of the genus *Strandzhia*, observing them under a microscope (Georgiev & Glöer 2013). We unequivocally confirmed the previously reported penis morphology. Based on these facts, we consider that:

1. The genus *Strandzhia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013 is valid;
2. The species *S. bythinellopenia* Georgiev & Glöer, 2013 exists at its type locality alongside a species of *Bythinella*, as well as a species of *Grossuana*, with which it shares a very similar shell morphology (this similarity led to the erroneous deposition of paratypes of *S. bythinellopenia*, which were, in fact, an unknown species of *Grossuana*);
3. Future genetic studies are required on specimens with the penis morphology characteristic of the genus *Strandzhia*, which is an indisputable scientific fact.

References

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