Canadian Journal of Zoology

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Journal:	<i>Canadian Journal of Zoology</i>
Manuscript ID	cjz-2019-0295.R2
Manuscript Type:	Article
Date Submitted by the Author:	29-Sep-2020
Complete List of Authors:	Penney, Brian; Saint Anselm College, Biology Sigwart, Julia; Queen's University Belfast, Marine Laboratory Parkinson, Dilworth; Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Advanced Light Source
Is your manuscript invited for consideration in a Special Issue?:	Zoological Endeavors Inspired by A. Richard Palmer
Keyword:	HISTOLOGY < Discipline, MORPHOLOGY < Discipline, MOVEMENT < Discipline, MUSCLES < Organ System, SKELETAL SYSTEM < Organ System, MOLLUSCA < Taxon, GASTROPODA < Taxon

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**Spicules and skeletons: Mantle musculature of two species of dorid nudibranchs
(Gastropoda: Nudibranchia: Doridina)¹**

RUNNING TITLE: The dorid skeleton

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¹ This article is one of a series of invited papers arising from the symposium "Zoological Endeavours Inspired by A. Richard Palmer" that was co-sponsored by the Canadian Society of Zoologists and the Canadian Journal of Zoology and held during the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Zoologists at the University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, 14–16 May 2019.

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Abstract

Molluscs often possess complex calcified elements in addition to the shell, but how these elements function and relate to other tissues is often poorly understood. Dorid nudibranchs typically possess innumerable calcareous spicules arranged in complex networks. To describe how these spicules interact with muscles and connective tissue, we reconstructed tomographic digital models using serial sections and synchrotron micro-CT. In two species with dramatically different spicule network morphologies, musculature was divided into a dorsal layer of crossed fibres, a ventral layer of branching radial fibres, and scattered dorsoventral fibres in between. These two species differed in the size of their dorsal tubercles, which was reflected in the organization of dorsal musculature, and in the amount and organization of connective tissue. In *Platydoris sanguinea* Bergh, 1905, dense mats of spicules sandwiched a layer of connective tissue with fewer spicules and muscle insertions only onto the ventral spicules. In *Cadlina luteomarginata* MacFarland 1966, thick tracts of spicules are surrounded by a sheath of connective tissue. Muscles surround and insert into the dorsal tubercle spicule layer. Thus, both species appear to use the spicule network for muscle antagonism and transfer of motion, but the different arrangement of elements suggests that they use this skeleton in quite different ways.

KEYWORDS: *Cadlina luteomarginata*; *Platydoris sanguinea*; nudibranch; skeleton; spicule; connective tissue; musculature; computed tomography; histology

Introduction

Molluscs produce a variety of hard parts, from shells to plates to spicules, and understanding the form and function of this diversity is important to revealing how molluscs evolved (Chen et al. 2015; Sigwart 2017). In particular, one group of recently derived, shell-less molluscs—dorid nudibranchs (Heterobranchia: Nudibranchia: Doridina)—have extensive networks of internal calcareous spicules (Penney et al. 2020). These elements are unusual among mollusc sclerites in that they are formed by intra-cellular rather than extra-cellular secretions, and they are buried deep in mesodermal tissue rather than sitting above the epidermis (Hyman 1967). Spicule networks differ among dorid species, and the morphology of network arrangement is broadly aligned to phylogeny within the suborder Doridina (Penney et al. 2020). The spicule networks are large—up to 50% of an individual's dry weight (Carefoot 1967; Penney 2006)—and apparently reflect a substantial investment by the animal, yet we have little idea what function they serve. Prior work suggests the spicules have only a minor role in defense, so their primary role is inferred to be structural (Penney 2002, 2006). Dorid spicule networks could be characterized as extensive unbraced frameworks, similar to those seen in the demosponges (Vogel 1988). However, sponges lack muscles; how might this type of network interact with the musculature in a mobile animal?

In molluscs, muscles interface with shell through specialized epithelium, called tendon cells; connective tissue fibers may extend into larger shell elements (Bonar 1978; Tompa and Watabe 1976). Muscle termini that do not insert onto the shell instead generally fan out into connective tissue (Hyman 1967). Dorids may interface with their hard elements differently, as collagen fibers appear to insert into the connective tissue sheath surrounding spicules in caryophyllidia—specialized dorsal sensory tubercles—of *Rostanga arbutus* (Angas, 1864) and

Jorunna sp. (Foale and Willan 1987). However, most species lack specialized caryophyllidia (Valdés 2002), and connections to outlying structures may not be representative of the broader whole-body network. Connections between muscles and spicules were also found in another dorid, *Cadlina luteomarginata* MacFarland 1966 (Penney 2006). In both observations of potential connection between dorid musculature and the spicule network, it is unclear whether muscle insertions are widespread throughout the general network, and whether muscle fibres attach to spicules at both ends.

To investigate these connections, we used light microscopy and synchrotron micro-CT to reconstruct three-dimensional digital tomographic models of the spicule network, and musculature of dorid notum tissue. The notum is a thickened but flexible mantle tissue that extends outward from the body wall, much like the cap of a mushroom, and has some of the highest investment of spicules in the animal (Penney 2002). We compared two target species in separate families representing different network morphologies: thick, consolidated tracts of spicules in *Cadlina luteomarginata*, and a dispersed, cobweb-like network with caryophyllidia in *Platydoris sanguinea* Bergh, 1905 (Penney 2008; Penney et al. 2020). If dorid spicule networks act as a hard element skeleton, we would expect to see regular and potentially patterned insertion of muscles to the spicules throughout the spicule network and not restricted to specialized structures like tubercles. Alternatively, if dorid spicules primarily contribute a stiffening agent in a muscular hydrostat, we might expect to see more irregular distribution of spicules relative to musculature and connective tissue.

Methods

Cadlina luteomarginata MacFarland 1966 (BKP personal collection) and *Platydoris sanguinea* (California Academy of Sciences, CASIZ 110458) were initially fixed in formalin for a short time and then transferred to 70% ethanol for preservation and storage. Tissue samples approximately 4 mm long and 1mm wide were taken through the notum edge from one specimen each, near the midpoint of the animal, and were selected to ensure the sample included at least one complete dorsal tubercle. Tissues were processed for serial sectioning following established protocols (Ruthensteiner 2008; Sigwart et al. 2014), including postfixation in 1% osmium tetroxide, decalcification in 2% EDTA, serial dehydration in acetone and embedding in epoxy resin (Sigma 45359 Epoxy Embedding Kit), serial sectioning at 1 μ m using a Leica Ultracut E ultramicrotome, and high contrast monochromatic staining using Richardson's stain. Resulting sections represent sagittal cuts through the notum. Sections were coverslipped in Araldite (Sigma), then every section for a range of 200+ sections photographed on a compound microscope (Olympus BX41 or BX60) with images captured via digital camera (Olympus E-600 or DP71) mounted on the microscope trinocular. The resulting digital image stacks were imported to AMIRA ver. 5.3.3, and aligned using a combination of automatic and manual alignment adjustments. Muscle, nerve, and connective tissues were identified based on histological structures, and spicules identified by spaces formed by decalcification; these materials were highlighted throughout the stack before surface rendering and smoothing to produce 3D tomographic models.

Prior work could only identify the general extent of the total network rather than individual spicules (e.g. Penney et al. 2020: fig. 6F). For high-resolution models, mantle tissue samples were taken as above and scanned at the Hard X-ray Tomography Beamline (8.3.2) of the Advanced Light Source, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (MacDowell et al. 2012).

Synchrotron CT provides lower energy X-rays, higher X-ray flux, monochromatic and higher coherence light compared to benchtop machines. Monochromatic 20keV X-rays were used to illuminate the sample, and detection was accomplished with a 50 micrometer thick LuAG:Ce scintillator, a 10x Olympus objective in an Optique-Peter lens system, and a PCO.edge sCMOS detector. Initial tomographic reconstructions were performed with Xi-CAM and TomoPy (Gursoy et al. 2014; Pandolfi et al. 2018). Stacks were converted to 8 bit format, cropped in Fiji (Schindelin et al. 2015), and spicule networks segmented in Dragonfly 4.0 (Object Research Systems).

Results

Platydoris sanguinea.

The notum had a one-cell thick epidermis on both the dorsal and ventral surface; the dorsal epidermis is partially missing on this specimen (Fig. 1A). Loose connective tissue ran from the dorsal to ventral basal lamina, and all other components described were embedded in this layer. No hemocoel channels were found. On the dorsal surface, each tubercle (caryophyllidia) was supported by a ring of 4-7 vertical spicules (Fig. 2A, 3B). These were surrounded by a ring of 5-11 spicules that radiated outward and ventrally; the dorsal ends of this outer ring are only slightly ventral to, and in contact with, the dorsal ends of the inner vertical spicules. The ventral ends of the radial spicules were positioned just above a mat of irregularly arranged, overlapping, horizontal spicules (Fig. 2B). This horizontal sheet was several spicules thick (Fig. 3A). On the ventral side of this sheet, large spicules were oriented downwards at approximately 30-45° to the surface (Fig. 3A, not shown in Fig. 2). These met similar large spicules oriented upward from a

basal horizontal mat of spicules, sometimes via vertically oriented spicules, to form pillar-like structures. Horizontal locations of these pillars were not coordinated with the location of caryophyllidia. The basal horizontal mat was similar in structure to the dorsal horizontal mat (Fig. 3A, not shown in Fig. 2). A thick mat of vertically oriented spicules was embedded in the ventral horizontal mat and formed the last spicule layer above the ventral epidermis (Fig 3C).

Surrounding the spicules associated with the caryophyllidia, the dorsal muscle sheet was comprised of longitudinal and transverse fibres approximately 20 μm thick, forming a nearly orthogonal grid (Fig. 2A). Spicules from the caryophyllidia passed through the openings of this grid, with no connections between spicules and muscles (Fig. 2A). The central area of the notum was filled with thin, dorso-ventral muscle fibres (Fig. 2A,C); these fibres were evenly distributed except where interrupted by the large pillars of spicules connecting the two horizontal sheets. These dorsoventral fibres appeared to bypass the pillar spicules and inserted into the horizontal spicule layers. A thick nerve (Fig. 2A) branched and anastomosed to form a plexus (Fig. 2), and connected to both the dorsal and ventral muscle layers (Fig. 1B, Fig. 2A). The ventral muscle layer consisted of two parts: a transverse proximal layer 10 μm thick and a more ventral, thinner (<5 μm) layer of obliquely longitudinal fibres just above the basal lamina (Fig. 1D). The longitudinal fibres of the ventral muscle sheet inserted onto vertical spicules that formed the basal mat (Fig. 1D). Neither set of muscle fibres branched within the portion of tissue that was reconstructed.

Cadlina luteomarginata

The notum had a one-cell thick epidermis on both the dorsal and ventral surface (Fig. 4A). Connective tissue was only found surrounding the spicule tracts, which created a trabecular

arrangement with many interconnected sinuses (Fig. 5A); other tissues such as muscle fibres and nerves were mostly in these hemoceolic sinuses rather than in the connective tissue. On the dorsal surface, each tubercle was supported by a column of connective tissue filled with dozens of spicules (Fig. 5A, 6). This column extended ventrally to the trabecular network. The column passed through the grid of dorsal musculature, where it was surrounded by a thicker band of muscle fibres (Fig. 5A). Underneath this dorsal muscle grid, running through the interstices of the trabecular network, was the nerve plexus (Fig. 4A, 5B). Below this, large radial muscle fibres extended and branched distally. Longitudinal muscle fibres ran parallel to the anterior-posterior axis (Fig. 5D) but were so thin they were difficult to detect at this magnification and did not appear to form a coherent pattern.

There were few dorsoventral muscle fibres that ran from one basal lamina to the other. Instead, short fibres in the central mantle were largely associated with the spicule network, running horizontally as well as dorsoventrally just outside the connective tissue sheath (Fig. 5C-F). These sometimes showed insertion points similar to those seen in *P. sanguinea* (Fig. 4 C,F), sometimes appeared to fan out into the connective tissue (Fig. 4D) and sometimes to bypass areas of the connective tissue to insert elsewhere (Fig. 4E,G).

172 Discussion

173 In both *Platydoris sanguinea* and *Cadlina luteomarginata*, muscles insert into connective
174 tissue near spicules. The connective tissue did not appear to penetrate the spicules, as in some
175 molluscan shells (Tompkins and Watabe 1976) or the Sharpey's fibers of vertebrates ; further
176 studies using transmission electron microscopy could detect if such connections exist. In both a
177 consolidated and more diffuse spicule network, there are a dorsal muscular grid, dorso-ventral
178 muscle fibres, a ventral muscle sheet, and central nerve plexus, within the notum tissue. These
179 are common elements in molluscan tissues (Hyman 1967; Satterlie 2015), apparently even when
180 the mantle is expanded and partially skeletonized as in dorids. Muscle fibres sometimes insert
181 into the spicule network and sometimes fan out into the connective tissue. Most gastropods have
182 a mix of soft tissue and hard insertions, e.g. the pedal retractor muscle which connects the
183 columella to the foot of foot musculature (Hyman 1967), but such a high number of these
184 connections is unusual among molluscs.

185 Interactions between hard elements and muscles generally take one of two forms: either
186 1) stiffening gelatinous tissue, as in cnidarian spicules and holothurian ossicles, or 2) as points
187 for muscle insertion that allow muscle antagonism and transfer of motion, as in sea star ossicles,
188 mollusc shells, and vertebrate bones (Koehl 1982; Brusca and Brusca 2003). The first
189 arrangement remains functionally a hydrostat, while the second functions as a hard element
190 skeleton. The dorid arrangement appears intermediate, with muscle fibers pulling on discrete
191 points of a network. A gradient presumably also exists in echinoderms, where most asteroids
192 have muscles and connective tissue inserting into ossicles (Blowes et al. 2017) unlike
193 holothurians, that have dispersed ossicles and depend on a more classic hydrostat. This

intermediate of muscles attaching to a stiffened network may be worth further exploration as a transitional form.

Spicule networks may provide a cheap way to allow circular and longitudinal muscles to oppose each other without undue deformation of the notum. As circular muscles antagonize longitudinals in typical hydrostatic skeletons, dorsoventral muscles must contract to prevent changes in thickness (Kier 1988, 2012). In many muscular hydrostats, connective tissue fibres prevent thickness changes, reducing the physiological cost of unneeded contraction (Kier 2012). Here, the spicule network may instead prevent the notum from changing thickness, also reducing the structural cost. Spicules may provide a cheaper alternative than investing protein into connective tissue fibres, as the calcium carbonate portions of gastropod shells have been found to be much cheaper than the organic portion (Palmer 1983; Palmer 1992). Indeed, the high growth rate of the dorid *Doris pseudoargus* (Rapp, 1827) has been attributed to supplementation of organic growth by spicules; this may be an important adaptation to the sponge-consuming lifestyle of this group (Carefoot 1967). Change in notum width *in vivo* is also restricted due to the transverse parts of the network, so most movement will be flexions of the notum edge. This is similar to the movement seen in squid fins (Johnsen and Kier 1993), albeit with a different tissue composition.

A somewhat separate potential function of the spicule network may be to provide a “pop up” recovery. Connective tissue can provide elasticity to a form, as seen in squid mantle (Kier 1988). Dorid nudibranchs, like many other benthic molluscs, often deform themselves to crawl into protective crevices, but re-inflate hydrostats or alter deformed parts to regain normal shape on emergence. It may be useful for the notum to return to its shape without expending energy or time. This is additionally important for dorids, given that they may avoid predator attack in part

by resembling stationary colonies of non-preferred invertebrates (Todd 1981). An unbraced framework of hard elements in gelatinous connective tissue could provide a cheap way to construct such concealment.

Despite the gross similarities between these species, the arrangements of, and connections between, elements differ greatly. *Cadlina luteomarginata* MacFarland 1966 has its spicules bound into cable-like structures embedded in connective tissue, with the dorsal mantle musculature wrapping around and inserting at the base of the tubercle and large hemocoelic spaces around the network (Fig. 7). *Platydoris sanguinea* Bergh, 1905 has a less defined spicule network in the middle of the mantle, and the connective tissue occupies almost the whole central space without hemocoelic channels (Fig. 7). Muscle bundles extending from the caryophyllidia base have been reported in *Rostanga arbutus* and *Jorunna* sp. (Foale and Willan 1987). We did not find these in *Platydoris*, even though it possesses caryophyllidia and the resolution of our visualisations should have been sufficient to detect them. The size of openings in the dorsal grid roughly correlated with the size of the tubercles (Figs 2A, 5A). The ventral networks in *Platydoris* showed clear longitudinal muscle fibres that inserted into the vertical spicule layer; longitudinal muscle fibres were weak or lacking in *Cadlina*. *Platydoris* also had clear dorsoventral muscle fibres that ran from the dorsal muscle grid to the ventral spicule and muscle layers. In *Cadlina*, muscle fibres in the middle of the mantle followed the spicule network just outside of the connective tissue and inserted into it; these fibres were oriented in multiple directions, not just dorsoventrally. We know of at least two other spicule network forms: overlapping sheets of large spicules and dispersed spicules (Penney 2008; Penney et al. 2020). Future work should explore how muscles and connective tissues differ in these groups and how the forms may have evolved.

While it is clear these two species have very different spicule/muscle constructions, we know too little about their ecology to generate adaptive hypotheses for the different organizations. In sea stars, body wall thickness correlates with the need for defence versus the need for flexibility (Blake 1990). The relative proportion of hemoceolic space to musculature varies among hydrostatic skeletons (Kier 1988) and less fluid-filled space generally means finer, but slower, control of movement (Kier 2012). Other trabecular fibre networks are found in the mammalian penis, eye and subarachnoid space, and may play a role in mechanical resilience and fluid flow (Tamm 2009; Mortazavi et al. 2018; Warburton et al. 2019). As another possible explanation, tissue from some caryophyllid-bearing dorids tears more easily than *Cadlina* mantle (B. Penney, pers. obs.) and some use autotomy as a defense (Todd 1981), so differences may relate to how the two species deal with predators.

The spicular networks of dorids fit into the broad diversity of calcified elements among molluscs, and these networks also demonstrate a diversity of forms (Penney et al. 2020). While most skeletons fall into one of two classes— hard elements with muscular bundles or hydrostatic with muscles in sheets or complex 3D arrays (Kier 1988)— the dorid spicule skeleton may fall somewhere in between. Molluscs frequently have additional calcified elements beyond the canonical shell or shells. Examples of these secondary structures include the calcareous spicular cuticle in chitons and aplacophoran molluscs (Sigwart 2017), evolutionary oddities such as the scaly-foot gastropod *Chrysomallon squamiferum* C. Chen, Linse, Copley & Rogers, 2015 (Chen et al. 2015), but also additional ordinary calcareous elements embedded within the tissue such as ligamental lithodesma in some bivalves, and gastropod opercula. Studying the function of spicule networks and other ‘atypical’ calcareous inclusions could also help us better understand the diversity of body forms seen in the Mollusca.

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Acknowledgements:

Financial support was provided by Department of Biology, Saint Anselm College, an American Microscopical Society Training Fellowship, Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory Advanced Light Source RAPIDD, NSF CC*grant 1440661, and New Hampshire-INBRE through an Institutional Development Award (IDeA), P20GM103506, from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the NIH. This research used resources of the Advanced Light Source, a U.S. DOE Office of Science User Facility under contract no. DE-AC02-05CH11231. We thank Elizabeth Kools and Terry Gosliner for access to collections at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco. University of California Museum of Paleontology at Berkeley provided space and facilities. Joseph Mitchell Young helped process samples. Bill Ryerson, Ted Uyeno, and Alicia Donahue provided useful discussion on muscular and trabecular networks. Lastly, we thank Rich Palmer for inspiration and support during our graduate (BKP) and undergraduate (JDS) programs.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Photomicrographs of *Platydoris sanguinea* mantle in saggital section. A. Overview. Letters indicate the location of detail panels. Dorsal is to the top of the image. Bar=100 μ m. B. Detail of nerve/muscle interaction within the dorsal network. Bar=10 μ m. C. Detail of nerve plexus branches. Bar=20 μ m. D. Detail of muscle insertions. Arrowheads indicate insertions of longitudinal muscle into the basal spicule mat. Bar=10 μ m. Abbreviations: ct, connective tissue; dv, dorsoventral muscle; e, epidermis; lm, longitudinal muscle; n, nerve; s, spicule; tm, transverse muscle.

Figure 2. Reconstruction of *Platydoris sanguinea* mantle edge tissue based on semithin slices. A. Three quarter view of tissue organization. Dorsal is to the top and anterior is to the right. Only a few caryophyllidia are shown and the dorsoventral muscle fibres are excluded on the right side of the panel to better show the ventral structures. B. Side view of dorsal surface without musculature, showing the relationship of the caryophyllidia to the dorsal sheet of underlying spicules. C. Three quarter view of dorsal surface from below, showing the relationship between the caryophyllidia and the dorsal muscle grid, with spicules hidden and the muscles partly transparent. In all panels connective tissue/spicule network: translucent, dorsal and ventral musculature: light red, dorsoventral muscles: dark red, nerve: magenta, caryophyllidia spicules: dark blue, radial spicules: light grey, horizontal spicules: light blue.

Figure 3. Micro CT of *Platydoris sanguinea* mantle spicule network. A) virtual cross section 0.3mm slab through network showing multiple layers, with vertical pillars of spicules and the

301 angled support spicules (arrowheads), bar=1mm; B) virtual frontal section 0.1mm through
302 mantle surface showing arrangement of caryophyllidia, bar=0.5mm; C) virtual frontal section
303 0.1mm through ventral mantle, bar=0.5mm. Caryophyllidia (cy), horizontal sheet spicules (hz),
304 vertical spicules (vt).

305
306 Figure 4. Photomicrographs of *Cadlina luteomarginata* mantle in saggital section. Dorsal is to
307 the top of all images. A. Overview. Letters indicate the location of detail panels, except G.
308 Bar=100µm B) Detail of nerve plexus branches. Bar=10µm. C) –F) Details of muscle interaction
309 with the spicule network and the overlying connective tissue sheath. Bar=10µm. G) Detail of
310 muscle interaction with connective tissue sheath surrounding a tubercle base. Note this image is
311 from a different section than the other panels, bar=10µm. Abbreviations: ct, connective tissue;
312 dv, dorsoventral muscle; e, epidermis; h, hemocoel; lm, longitudinal muscle; n, nerve; s, spicule;
313 tm, transverse muscle.

314
315 Figure 5. Reconstruction of *Cadlina luteomarginata* mantle edge tissue based on semithin slices.
316 A. Three quarter view of dorsal surface, showing the dorsal musculature and interaction with
317 connective tissue/spicule bundles. Dorsal is to the top and anterior is to the right. B. Three
318 quarter dorsal view showing the relative position of dorsal muscle grid, nerve plexus and ventral
319 radial fibres, with the connective tissue omitted for clarity. C. View inside a section of the
320 trabecular network, showing the relationship of the nerve plexus, ventral musculature and
321 dorsoventral muscle fibres to the connective tissue/spicule bundles. Only a small area of
322 dorsoventral muscle fibres have been reconstructed for clarity. In all panels connective

tissue/spicule network: translucent, dorsal and ventral musculature: light red, dorsoventral
muscles: dark red, nerve: magenta.

Figure 6. Micro CT of *Cadlina luteomarginata* mantle spicule network, virtual cross section
0.3mm slab. Bar=0.5mm

Figure 7: Summary drawings of mantle architecture, in isometric views. A) *Platydoris*
sanguinea, cut away to eight layers. Top inset: dorsal surface at 3X magnification, showing
caryophyllidia bases. Bottom inset: ventral surface at 3X magnification, showing longitudinal
muscles inserting into vertical spicule array. B) *Cadlina luteomarginata*, cut away to five layers.
EP: epidermis, DMG: Dorsal Muscle Grid, DHS: Dorsal Horizontal Sheet, CP: Central Pillars,
VHS: Ventral Horizontal Sheet, VVS: Ventral Vertical Spicules, VMG: Ventral Muscle Grid,
RN: Reticulated Network. Not drawn to scale.

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Figure 1. Photomicrographs of *Platydoris sanguinea* mantle in sagittal section. A. Overview. Letters indicate the location of detail panels. Dorsal is to the top of the image. Bar=100 μ m. B. Detail of nerve/muscle interaction within the dorsal network. Bar=10 μ m. C. Detail of nerve plexus branches. Bar=20 μ m. D. Detail of muscle insertions. Arrowheads indicate insertions of longitudinal muscle into the basal spicule mat. Bar=10 μ m. Abbreviations: ct, connective tissue; dv, dorsoventral muscle; e, epidermis; lm, longitudinal muscle; n, nerve; s, spicule; tm, transverse muscle.

222x249mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Figure 4. Photomicrographs of *Cadlina luteomarginata* mantle in sagittal section. Dorsal is to the top of all images. A. Overview. Letters indicate the location of detail panels, except G. Bar=100 μ m. B) Detail of nerve plexus branches. Bar=10 μ m. C) –F) Details of muscle interaction with the spicule network and the overlying connective tissue sheath. Bar=10 μ m. G) Detail of muscle interaction with connective tissue sheath surrounding a tubercle base. Note this image is from a different section than the other panels, bar=10 μ m. Abbreviations: ct, connective tissue; dv, dorsoventral muscle; e, epidermis; h, hemocoel; lm, longitudinal muscle; n, nerve; s, spicule; tm, transverse muscle.

165x197mm (300 x 300 DPI)

A

B

C

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Figure 7: Summary drawings of mantle architecture, in isometric views. A) *Platydoris sanguinea*, cut away to eight layers. Top inset: dorsal surface at 3X magnification, showing caryophyllidia bases. Bottom inset: ventral surface at 3X magnification, showing longitudinal muscles inserting into vertical spicule array. B) *Cadlina luteomarginata*, cut away to five layers. EP: epidermis, DMG: Dorsal Muscle Grid, DHS: Dorsal Horizontal Sheet, CP: Central Pillars, VHS: Ventral Horizontal Sheet, VVS: Ventral Vertical Spicules, VMG: Ventral Muscle Grid, RN: Reticulated Network. Not drawn to scale.

189x286mm (300 x 300 DPI)