

HOLACANTHUS SEMICIRCULATUS (Cuv.)

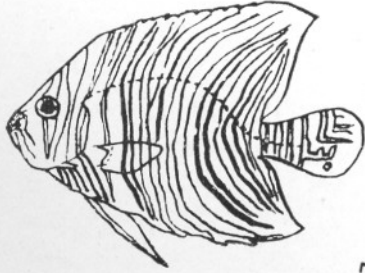
By

H. COPLEY.

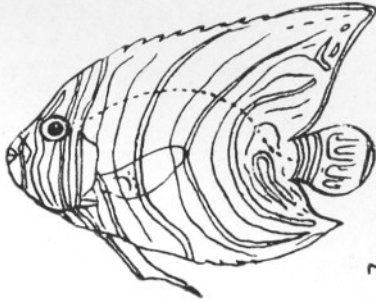
There has been added to the fish collection of the Museum a specimen of this fish, one of which caused such a sensation a few months ago in Mombasa.

This fish belongs to the large family of carnivorous tropical reef fishes, the *Chaetodontidae*, and the Genus *Holacanthus*. Generally the whole family have gaudy and beautiful colour patterns on a body ovoid or subrhomboid in shape with often sharp dorsal fin rays. Day, "The Fishes of India" gives it the name *Holacanthus Nicobariensis* var, *semicirculatus* and Playfair, "The Fishes of Zanzibar" calls it *Holacanthus Alernans*. It is found from Mozambique to Aden, the whole of the East Indies, Melanesia and Polynesia and is a common fish. The general body colour is a rich blackish brown or chocolate with whitish lines that can easily be seen in the photograph. Plate I. The border of the soft vertical fins have narrow blue lines, also the ventral has the front edge bordered with blue and several blue lines. The pectoral fin is brownish and the caudal has two, three or four white bars near the caudal peduncle while the posterior portion has a number of broken lines and dots. It is these broken lines and dots which make the fish so interesting. The number and position of these white line markings is very variable and three examples are shown in the line drawings which are taken from Fowler, "Fishes of the Philippine and adjacent Seas." Sometimes the lines and dots on the caudal form the

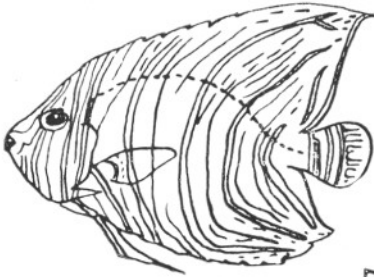
Arabic *Wali* (Sham-a-la; the Work of Good or Shanu Allah, the Miracle of God.) Then the fish causes great excitement and the particular specimen is carefully preserved in the Mosque for the Faithful to come and marvel at. This was the case of the Mombasa fish for the sacred writing was found on its tail. The specimen deposited in the Museum has not the sacred characters, so is a very common specimen. There is a specimen in Cairo, one I remember being caught at Port Sudan and going to Medina, one in Zanzibar and the one in Mombasa all with the same inscription on its tail. There may be more but those are personally known to me but the more one thinks of it the more extraordinary it is that a number should be obtained to be a marvel to the Faithful and an enigma to the learned.



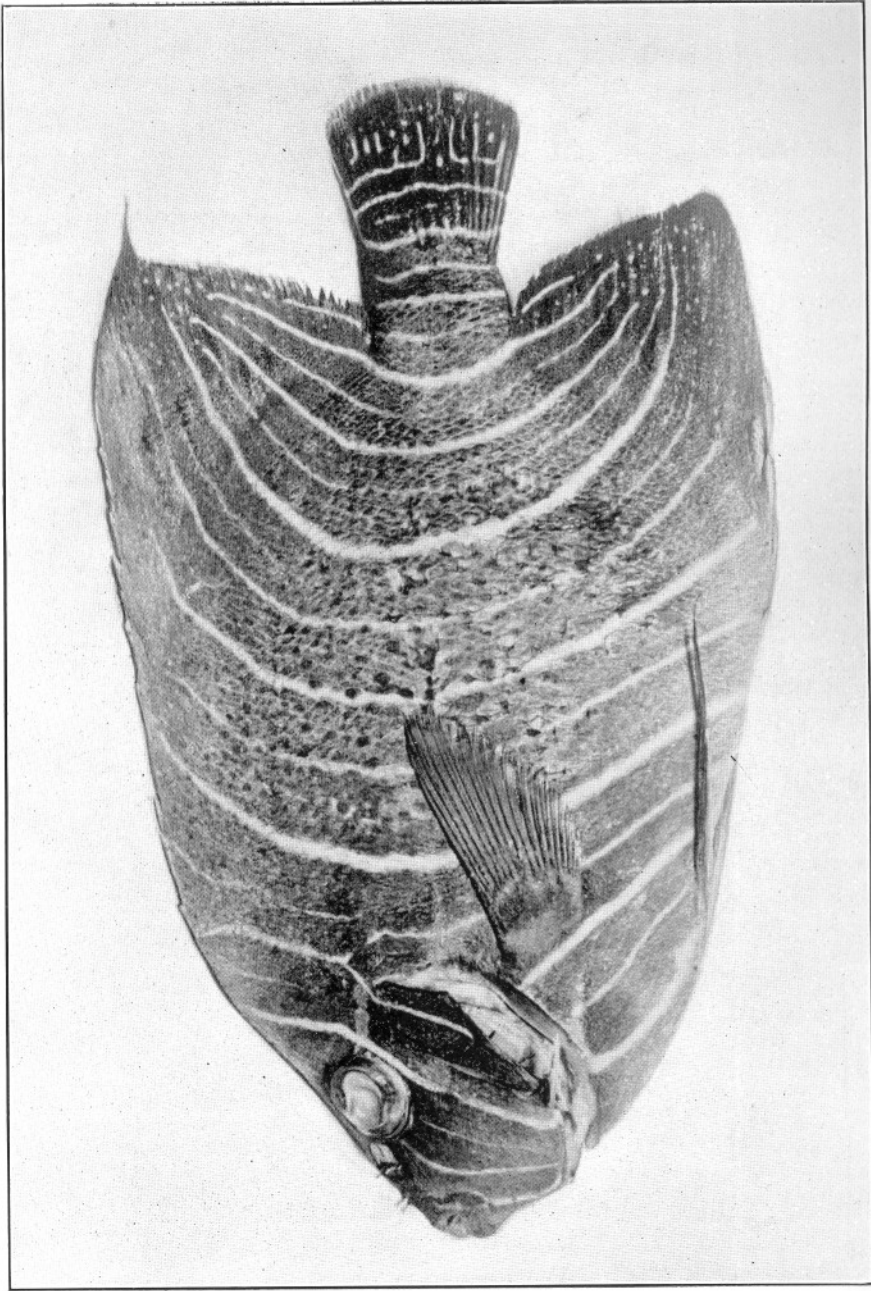
No. 1



No. 2



No. 3



Holacanthus semicirculatus.