

In memoriam

PHILIPPE MOREL

(9 November 1959-6 June 1999)

The members of the Institute of Prehistory of the University of Basel (Switzerland) mourn for their friend and colleague Phillippe Morel. One of them, Barbara Stopp, tried to remember his years in Basel from the early 80's to the middle of the 90's.

I met Philippe during my first days at the University of Basel in spring 1983. Not only due to the few students in prehistory there was no way to miss his, in the true sense of words, outstanding figure. It was not difficult to become acquainted with him since he dedicated himself to introduce the three freshmen to the top of his interests by inviting them to dinner at his home. It was there that I was first nearly struck by bones. I was, to say the least, quite impressed by his two-room flat, which not only served as his living quarters but also, which was probably much more important to him, store his then already quite impressive comparative collection of animal bones. He proudly showed us the youngest elk bones ever found in Switzerland, now housed in a box under his bed. The climax was the dinner, spaghetti with a tasty tomato sauce, served in his kitchen between glasses of decaying animal bodies in various states. And this was in no way some sort of crucial test, just his normal way of life.

Later, when I started my career as an archaeozoologist, he became one of my teachers. I still remember mine and my colleagues' somewhat nervous anticipation every time he entered our common working-room and came over to our places not only to have a little chat but also to check our work. Friendly, but mercilessly, he found all our "misplaced" bones and corrected us with just a hint of reproach in his eyes.

Philippe was an extremely dedicated collector of animal bones. Already as a teenager he started to collect those he found by chance. Later on it became an important part of his life. It did not matter to which animal class the find belonged, whether the bones were still attached to a more or less decaying body or already clean. He was grateful for nearly everything: from a rabid lynx he himself "imported" from France in his rucksack - by train notabene and yes, the people did smell something



strong - to all sorts of run over animals his many friends collected for him. Most of them never went to the countryside without a plastic bag at hand. One can easily imagine the strange packets he sometimes got. From a former teacher who collected (living) snakes he got some of the dead animals, also exotic and poisonous ones. His second passion became speleology, especially when he detected that caves contain a lot of natural traps for animals. Bats for example, which are quite rare in modern Switzerland, were not so rare in some of the older cave sediments. Probably no speleologist in Switzerland did not know Philippe and his love for bones. He provided them with containers and bags and instructed them on how to collect the bones correctly.

His overall generous and friendly nature, his dedication and interest made it easy for him to gather new friends. When he started to build up a comparative collection for fish in the early 80's he was in no time befriended with a lot of fishermen and anglers of Basel who brought him their unwanted catch. It is quite useless to say that he quickly became a well-known specialist for fish in Basel who also worked together with the officials.

After achieving his degrees in 1985 he decided to leave the Institute of Prehistory at the University and to set up his own institute in Basel. At least he decided this time to separate living quarters and working place. So he rented a flat with three rooms and a kitchen which served him as a preparatory. The contact with him never broke. When there were problems with bones especially hard to determine, he was always happy to help out with his well assorted comparative collection

or with some special literature. By entering his laboratory one immediately stood in a narrow passage filled with bone-boxes to the left and right high up to the ceiling, a familiar odour of decay coming out of his preparatory which also served as his coffee and tea kitchen. Since he was normally quite pleased with visitors, there was no way to escape an offer of tea/coffee.

Coming from the French speaking part of Switzerland, he returned there in the middle of the 90's where he set up his new office in Neuchâtel.

His scientific career began with his examination work, the analysis of medieval bone material



from Basel under the direction of Prof. E. Schmid (University Basel). After having received his master degree he stayed at the Institute and worked on Roman bones from Oberwinterthur (canton Zürich). During this project he got the opportunity to start with the examination of the Palaeolithic site of Champréveyres near Neuchâtel together with Werner Müller also here in Basel. Besides these big research projects he always worked on a lot of smaller archaeozoological projects from different medieval sites in Switzerland excavated by Prof. Werner Meyer and Jakob Obrecht. He participated also at their excavations. The results of his scientific work were presented at the ICAZ-conferences in London, Bordeaux and Konstanz. He was particularly active in the fish-working-group of ICAZ where he attended almost every meeting. These meetings were also an opportunity for him to collect fish bones from all over Europe to complete his collection. Besides his archaeozoological work he was also interested in zoecological projects, specially on fishes and birds of Switzerland. A special topic of his archaeozoological interest was the research on early faunal material. Therefore he began to investigate cavebear bones from various sites in the Swiss Alps. Not only in Europe but also in Syria he was involved in excavations of early Palaeolithic sites. For several years he participated at summer campaigns in El Kowm together with a team of the Institute of Prehistory from the University of Basel under the direction of Prof. J. M. LeTensorer. There he was very enthusiastic to describe new species of the local fauna. For sure this list of his scientific work is incomplete but shows very clearly how broad his interests were and how much important scientific work Philippe had done in his young life.

Philippe died on the 6th of June 1999 during a speleological expedition in the Swiss Alps only 39 years old.