

The friction continues: another nasty letter from J.-R. Bourguignat

WIM BACKHUYS

Frieslandhoeve, Slikweg 6, 4321 SV Kerkerve, The Netherlands



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Abstract

Following the discovery of two letters from Jules-René Bourguignat to Crosse, another letter from Bourguignat shows the disdain he felt for the French malacologist Jean-Baptiste Gassies (1816–1883).

Key words. Bourguignat, Crosse, Gassies, history of French malacology.

Introduction

This publication is a follow-up to a paper in which two letters from the French malacologist Jules-René Bourguignat to Hippolyte Crosse were described and commented (Audibert et al., 2016). Hippolyte Crosse was director and editor of the *Journal de Conchyliologie*. From these letters it became clear that the relationship between these two malacologists was not very amicable.

In the first letter Bourguignat informs Crosse that he is willing to meet the French malacologist Jean-Baptiste Gassies and have lunch with him and Crosse. The reason for this meeting was the publication by Bourguignat of his letters to Gassies, in which he attacks the latter in a brutal and blunt way (Bourguignat, 1867). Bourguignat proposed to have this lunch-meeting “dimanche prochain”, being Sunday, 17 February 1867. We do not know if this meeting has taken place.

A third letter

Recently, another hand-written letter (Fig. 1) from Bourguignat to Crosse turned up, dated 20 February 1867. This is three days after the proposed lunch-meeting and eight days after the first letter.

By chance, Bourguignat had opened the latest issue of the *Journal de Conchyliologie* and read a paper by Gassies that prompted an insulting, unkind, and blunt tirade against Gassies. The victim of Bourguignat’s attacks was a well-known French malacologist. He was born in Agen,

Département Lot-et-Garonne, region Nouvelle-Aquitaine, on 11 January 1816. He was curator and one of the founders of the Musée préhistorique de Bordeaux, now incorporated in the Muséum de Bordeaux. He died 14 April 1883 in Bordeaux at the age of 67 years.

The letter concerns a paper of Gassies (1867a)—which had been published on 10 January 1867 (Breure & Fontaine, 2019). The use of some anatomical terms triggered Bourguignat to write this nasty letter. Further on he criticises the description by Gassies (1867b) of the umbilicus of *Helix apoana* Gassies, 1867. The condescending tone of it will probably not have contributed to a cordial relationship. The transcription of this letter (Fig. 1) is as follows:

Paris, 20 fev., 1867

Mon cher ami

En ouvrant par hasard ce matin votre dernier n° du *Journal de Conchyliologie*, mes regards se sont portés sur une note de Mr. Gassies, relative à l’*Helix constricta*.

Comment avez-vous pu laisser passer le style de ce pauvre homme.

Je cite textuellement.

“nerfs rétractiles des grand tentacules très-noirs, s’allongeant en arrière sur le collier et se perdant sous la coquille, etc. ...” et plus bas

“les apophyses musculeuses” etc.

Est-il permis, en si peu de mots, de dire de si grosses bêtises et de montrer tant d’ignorance!

Où Mr. Gassies a-t-il jamais vu des nerfs rétractiles.

Les nerfs œulaires des points oculaires, qui servent à la sensation, n’ont jamais été rétractiles. — rétractiles est joli. — S’il avait mis muscles rétracteurs, j’aurais pu comprendre.

Sont-ce les nerfs rétractiles ou les grands tentacules qui sont très-noirs. Veuillez le lui demander de ma part.

La fin de la phrase est également fort jolie. “Les nerfs rétractiles s’allongeant en arrière sur le collier et se perdant sous la coquille”.

et cette expression sublime, phénoménale

“une apophyse musculeuse”.

Qu’entend-t-il par apophyse, surtout par apophyse musculeuse. Je serai enchanté de le savoir.

Toujours, comme d’habitude, il se sert d’expressions dont il ne comprend pas la valeur.

Et un peu plus loin dans sa diagnose de l’*Helix apoana*.

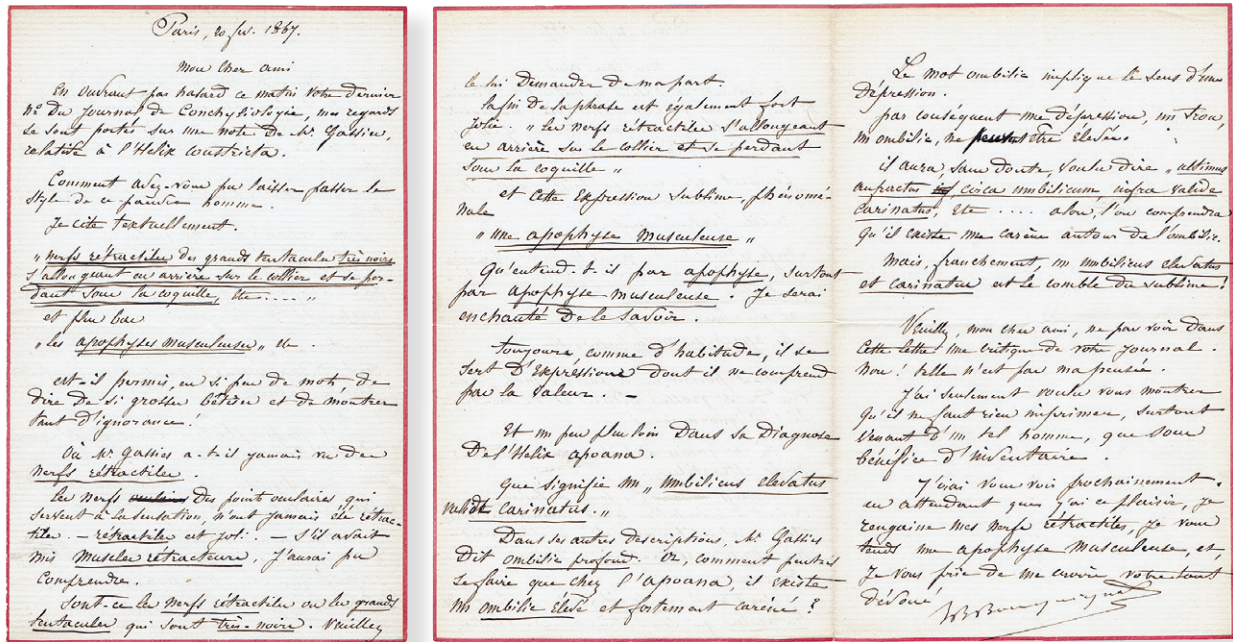


Figure 1. Letter of Bourguignat to Crosse, 20 February 1867 (Backhuys archive; 13.5 × 21.3 cm).

Que signifie un “umbilicus elevatus valide carinatus.”

Dans ses autres descriptions, Mr. Gassies dit ombilic profond. Ou, comment peut-il se faire que chez l’*apoana*, il existe un ombilic élevé et fortement caréné ?

Le mot ombilic implique le sens d’une dépression.

Par conséquent une dépression, un trou, un ombilic, ne peuvent être élevés.

Il aura, sans doute, voulu dire “altimus anfractus, circa umbilicum, infra valide carinatus, etc. ... alors, l’on comprendra qu’il existe une carène autour de l’ombilic.

Mais, franchement, un umbilicus elevatus et carinatus est le comble du sublime !

Veuillez, mon cher ami, ne pas voir dans cette lettre une critique de votre journal. Non! Telle n’est pas ma pensée.

J’ai seulement voulu vous montrer qu’il ne faut pas rien imprimer, surtout venant d’un tel homme, que sous bénéfice d’inventaire.

J’irai vous voir prochainement. En attendant que j’ai ce plaisir, je rengaine mes nerfs rétractiles, je vous tends mon apophyses musculuse, et, je vous prie de me croire votre tout dévoué

J.R. Bourguignat

Translation

Paris, 20 Feb. 1867

My dear friend

While opening by chance this morning your latest issue of the Journal de Conchyliologie, my eyes fell on a note by Mr. Gassies, relating to the *Helix constricta*.

How could you let this poor man’s style pass.

I quote verbatim.

“retractile nerves of the great tentacles very black, extending backwards on the collar and losing themselves under the shell, etc. ...”

and further down

“the muscular apophyses” etc.

Is it permissible, in so few words, to say such great nonsense and to show such ignorance!

Where did Mr. Gassies ever see retractile nerves?

The ocular nerves of the eye-spots, which serve for sensation, have never been retractile. — Retractable is nice — if he had put retractile muscles, I could have understood.

Is it the retractile nerves or the large tentacles that are very black. Please ask him for me.

The end of the sentence is also very nice. “The retractile nerves extending backwards over the collar and losing themselves under the shell.

and this sublime, phenomenal expression

“a muscular apophysis”.

What does he mean by apophysis, especially by muscular apophysis. I would be delighted to know.

As usual, he uses expressions whose value he does not understand.

And a little further on in his diagnosis of the *Helix apoana*.

What is meant by a “valid umbilicus elevatus carinatus.”

In his other descriptions, Mr. Gassies says deep umbilicus. Or, how can it be that in the *apoana* there is an elevated and strongly carinated umbilicus?

The word umbilicus implies the meaning of a depression.

Therefore a depression, a hole, an umbilicus, cannot be elevated.

He will, no doubt, have meant “altimus anfractus, circa umbilicum, infra valide carinatus, etc. ... then it will be understood that there is a carina around the umbilicus.

But, frankly, an umbilicus elevatus et carinatus is the height of the sublime!

Please, my dear friend, do not see in this letter a criticism of your journal. No, that is not my intention.

I only wanted to show you that nothing should be printed, especially from such a man, unless with introspection before publication.

I will go and see you soon. Until I have that pleasure, I will withdraw my retractable nerves, I will hand you my muscular apophysis, and, I beg you to believe me your most devoted

J.R. Bourguignat

Discussion

We do not know if the public letter to Gassies (Bourguignat, 1867) appeared before or after this correspondence. All we know is that during the following years the relationship between Bourguignat and Crosse would be a difficult one due to public attacks on Crosse by Bourguignat and his followers (Audibert & Breure, 2017). Crosse kept the polite way and never spoke evil of his former “friend” (Breure & Fontaine, 2019: 8).

Acknowledgements

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