

'UNE PETITE HISTOIRE MALACOLOGIQUE': TWO LETTERS FROM BOURGUIGNAT TO CROSSE, OR A STORY OF FRICTION BETWEEN MALACOLOGISTS

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Abstract Two letters, written in 1867 and 1878 respectively, illustrate the deteriorating relations between Bourguignat and Crosse. At the same time, they shed some light on the aftermath of the conflict between Bourguignat and Gassies concerning a publication by Paladilhe, and place into context the later frictions between the Société malacologique de France and the Journal de Conchyliologie.

Key words Bourguignat, Crosse, Gassies, Paladilhe, French malacology

INTRODUCTION

Jules-René Bourguignat and his 'Nouvelle École' are well-known to have stirred up French malacology during the late 19th century (Kuiper, 1969; Dance, 1970). Correspondence by letter was in those days the normal way of contact, but very few letters from Bourguignat have survived. Hippolyte Crosse was director of the Journal de Conchyliologie from 1861 to his death in 1898, and played an important role in the malacological world at that time (Backhuys & Breure, in preparation). He often served as the middle-man between malacologists (e.g., Breure & Backhuys, 2016), as is evident from the correspondence in his archive, currently in the private possession of one of the authors (W.B.). This archive contains two letters from Bourguignat to Crosse, which we will discuss here as part of our ongoing research on the history of European malacology.

"MON CHER AMI"

In February 1866 Paladilhe began a series of miscellaneous notes in the *Revue et Magasin de Zoologie*, which was edited by Guérin-Méneville (Paladilhe, 1866). In the May issue a note appeared on *Valvata* species, including the following text

"Il a suffit aux auteurs de trouver une Valvée microscopique pour s'imaginer posséder la vraie *minuta*. C'est M. Gassies qui a commencé à égarer, suivant son habitude [italics added], les

naturalistes sur la valeur des caractères de cette espèce, en décrivant, sous le nom de *minuta*, une charmante Valvée microscopique de forme globuleuse. Depuis, les malacologistes, en accordant trop de confiance aux *pauvres* [italics added] déterminations de l'auteur des Mollusques de l'Agenais, n'ont fait que suivre la même erreur"^a (Paladilhe, 1866: 168–169).

This was a rather offending text, especially since it was published in a general zoology journal with many non-malacological readers. Arthur Morelet and others were quick to warn Gassies about this unflattering text: "L'auteur, cédant à de mauvaises suggestions, s'est trompé sur l'effet qu'il voulait produire; son article inconvenant dans la forme, est dépourvu, d'ailleurs, de toute autorité"^b. After an inquiry, Gassies also received a reaction from Paladilhe: "Quant à la phrase incidente: suivant son habitude et l'épithète accolée au mot déterminations, elles ne sont pas de moi, n'ont jamais existé dans mon manuscrit, et elles ont si bien été ajoutées à mon insu, que j'ai envoyé mon opusculé à mes correspondants sans en avoir connaissance, m'étant contenté de le parcourir d'une manière superficielle. Je le répète, ces quatre mots ne sont pas de moi!"^c. Having received this information, Gassies wrote a letter to Guérin-Méneville, including a citation from the original letter from Morelet to Gassies, in which he supposed that the editor of the journal had taken the liberty to emend Paladilhe's original text. Gassies then asked to Guérin-Méneville: "Ces mots, pourtant, ont été imprimés dans

vosre journal; c'est donc à vous, Monsieur, que je dois m'adresser pour avoir des explications à leur sujet. J'ose espérer que vous voudrez bien me les donner, tout en retirant ces mots malencontreux dont personne ne veut reconnaître la paternité" ^d. The letter was published *in extenso* in the December issue of the journal (Gassies, 1866), together with a response. However, this response was not by Guérin-Méneville but by Bourguignat! It appeared that Paladilhe had sent his manuscript to Bourguignat, who had inserted the disputed four words. Bourguignat tried to justify himself by stating that Paladilhe had authorised him: "retrancher ou d'ajouter ce qu'il jugerait utile et convenable" ^e. By playing with some of the wording, he managed to alert the readership of the Revue to Gassies' betrayal...

Bourguignat's response is scathing, marked with contempt and irony, as in this sentence: "Vous avez trop de délicatesse, je pense, pour que vous prétendiez me forcer à dire, « *ex abrupto*, » que vos écrits sont des modèles de précision, de style et d'érudition. non! n'est-ce pas?" ^f. This lack of respect is even more compelling when one realises that in 1866 Gassies was 50 years old, while Bourguignat was just 37. He further proposed to verify the validity of the species: "je vais voir si les déterminations des espèces nouvelles (...) sont bonnes ou mauvaises" ^g. This final remark is interesting as it explains what species concept Bourguignat had and why he put his authority above another: he was able to judge if a newly described taxon was correct or wrong. This statement tells us something about his self esteem. In his response Bourguignat also announced a more elaborate response to be published elsewhere, because "It would be too boring for subscribers". This publication was issued by Bourguignat himself and bears "Janvier 1867" on the title page (Bourguignat, 1867). It includes the text from the Revue et Magasin de Zoologie, supplemented with facsimile extracts from letters involving Gassies (a letter from Paladilhe to Bourguignat, and one from Gassies to Moitessier), clearly with the intention to confront Gassies with his contradictions. Bourguignat did this by giving a review of all of Gassies' work by judging whether his species were "good or bad". Once this demonstration was made, Bourguignat concluded that he was right to accentuate the manuscript of Paladilhe as he did, and ended his pamphlet with a moralistic diatribe.

Shortly after the publication of the letter from Bourguignat to Gassies, Bourguignat wrote to Crosse on the 12th February 1867 (Fig. 1). The transcription is as follows:

"Mon cher ami,

Je suis enchanté de savoir M. Gassies à Paris.

Veillez lui faire remettre ma carte en échange de la sienne.

Si Gassies désire faire ma connaissance, ce qui sera très flatteur pour moi, la politesse et les convenances exigent qu'il vienne le premier chez moi.

Comme, après tout, Gassies est un brave homme, à ce que l'on dit, et, contre lequel du reste, je n'ai pas le moindre ressentiment, veuillez le prier, s'il désire me tendre la main, d'accepter sans cérémonie mon déjeuner de dimanche prochain à 11 h du matin.

Je vous prie de vouloir accepter également.

Je serai heureux de vous recevoir tous les deux.

Vous seriez bien aimable si vous pouviez me rendre réponse pour samedi matin,

afin que je puisse prévenir le baron Brisse de ma cuisine ^h, pour que mon

menu soit digne des personnes que j'invite.

J'oubliais mes recommandations. Je ne veux pas entendre parler de question

Baeticus – mais, en revanche, en personnes bien pensantes, nous parlerons de

choses et d'autres, de canons rayés, de fusils à aiguilles, en un mot de toutes les belles inventions destinées au[x] bonheurs de l'humanité.

Daignez agréer, mon cher ami, l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus distingués.

(J.R.Bourguignat)" ⁱ.

This letter is interesting because it shows the willingness of Gassies to meet with Bourguignat, although in the case of the latter perhaps not whole-heartedly as he speaks about 'politeness and etiquette require him to come first to me'. His wording treads a fine line between maintaining his pride and a desire for reconciliation, that ended with an invitation for lunch. However, during this lunch Bourguignat did not want to speak about "Baeticus" (referring to *Helix may-rani* Gassies, 1856 which Bourguignat regarded

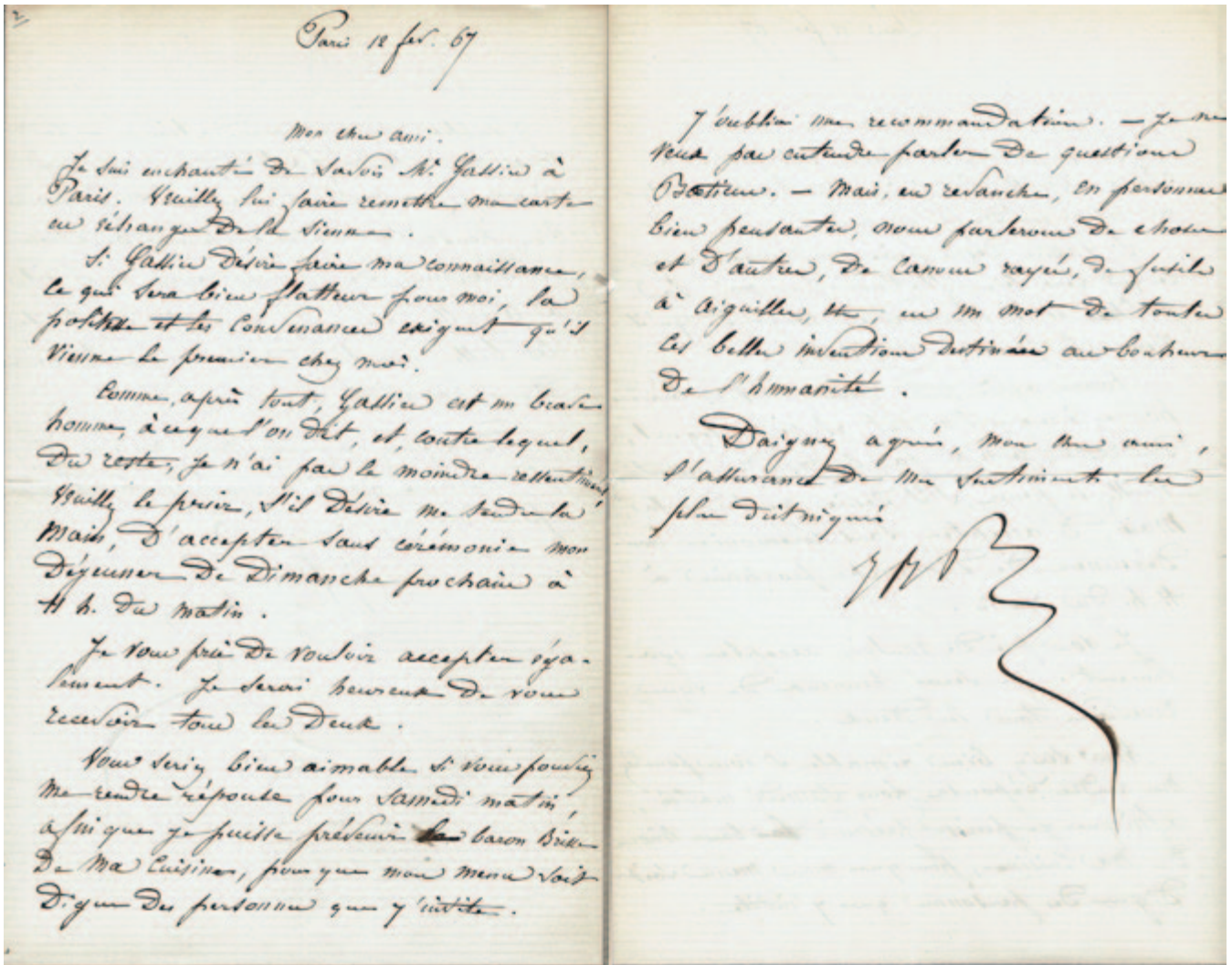


Figure 1 Letter from Bourguignat to Crosse, 12.ii.1867 (21.4×13.5cm).

as synonym of *Zonites baeticus* (Rossmässler, 1854) in his self-issued pamphlet (Bourguignat, 1867)). In other words, he did not want to confront Gassies frontally on controversial subjects. He seemed to be more peaceful now, seeing things more philosophically.

"MONSIEUR"

More than twenty years later, Bourguignat sent a second letter to Crosse. This letter, dated 14th December 1878 (Fig. 2), may be transcribed as follows:

"Monsieur,

Je ne sais pour le moment où se trouve le double de ma monographie du genre Macea.

J'ai adressé, il y a quelques années, le travail à mon ami Macé, qui, l'aura sans doute égaré.

Autant que je puis me le rappeler la Macea est une forme excessivement intéressante intermédiaire entre les Cama et les Pecten.

Daignez agréer, Monsieur, l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus distingués.

(J.R.Bourguignat)

Pour copie conforme

J. Depontailier" ¹.

This letter, in its wording and brevity, gives the strong impression of coolness and distance. The relationship between Bourguignat and Crosse (and with him authors who published in the *Journal de Conchyliologie*) was already deteriorated since the previous letter (not "Mon cher ami" but "Monsieur"), and it would soon become hostile when Bourguignat and others founded the *Société malacologique de France* in 1884 as

J. germain, 14 Dec 78

Monsieur.

Je ne suis pour le moment en possession
 d'aucun double de ma monographie
 du genre *Macea*. —

J'ai adressé, il y a quelques années,
 le travail à mon ami Macei, qui, l'aura
 sans doute égaré.

Autant que je puis me le rappeler
 le *Macea* est une forme excessivement
 intéressante intermédiaire entre les
Camma et les *Pestae*.

Daignez agréer, Monsieur,
 l'assurance de mes sentiments les
 plus distingués.

Pour copie conforme
 J. Bourguignat

Figure 2 Letter from Bourguignat to Crosse, 14.xii.1878 (13.6×15.4cm).

we will show elsewhere (Audibert & Breure, in preparation).

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TRANSLATIONS

^aIt was enough for the authors to find a microscopic *Valvata* to imagine owning the real *minuta*. It is Mr. Gassies who has begun to mislead, according to his habit [italics added], the naturalists on the value of the characters of this species, describing, under the name of *minuta*, a charming microscopic *Valvata* of globular shape. Since then, malacologists, by giving too much confidence to the *poor* [italics added] determinations of the author of the Molluscs of Agenais, have only followed the same error.

^bThe author, yielding to bad suggestions, was deceived as to the effect he wished to produce; his article being of an inconvenient form, is devoid of any authority.

^cAs to the incidental phrase: according to its habit and the epithet attached to the word determinations, they are not of me, they have never existed in my manuscript, and they were added so unwittingly, that I sent my pamphlet to my correspondents without being aware of it, having contented myself with traversing it in a superficial way. I repeat, these four words are not mine!

^dThese words, however, have been printed in your journal; It is therefore to you, Sir, that I must address myself to have an explanation of them. I dare hope that you will be able to give them to me, while withdrawing these unfortunate words of which nobody wants to acknowledge paternity.

^eDeleting or adding whatever he deemed useful and suitable.

^fYou have too much delicacy, I think, for you to force me to say, "ex abrupto," that your writings are models of precision, style, and erudition. no! isn't it?

^gI will see if the determinations of new species (...) are good or bad.

^hA metaphoric reference to the family cooking of Brisse during the 19th century who had a gastronomic journal and wrote a famous cookbook.

ⁱMy dear friend,

I am delighted to know Mr. Gassies in Paris.

Please give him my card in exchange for his.

If Gassies wishes to make my acquaintance, which will be very flattering to me, politeness and convenience require him to come first to me.

As, after all, Gassies is a good man, as is said, and against whom, besides, I have not the slightest resentment, please beg him, if he wishes to extend my hand, accepting without ceremony my lunch next Sunday at 11 am.

I would ask you to accept as well.

I will be happy to receive you both.

You would be very kind if you could give me an answer for Saturday morning,

So that I could warn Baron Brisse of my kitchen, so that my menu is worthy of the people I invite.

I forgot my recommendations. I do not want to hear about

Baeticus – but, on the other hand, like well-meaning people, we will speak about

things and others, of striped cannon, needle-rifles, in a word, of all the fine inventions destined for the happiness of mankind.

Deign to accept, my dear friend, the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments. JRB

^jSir,

I do not know at the moment where the double of my monograph of the genus *Macea* is.

I sent a few years ago the work to my friend Macé, who will probably have lost it.

As far as I can remember *Macea* is an excessively interesting intermediate form between *Cama* and *Pecten*.

Deign to accept, Sir, the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments.

(J.R.Bourguignat)

Identical copy

J. Deponsaillier

