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MAX VACHON, 1908–1991

Prof. Maxime (Max) Vachon died on 3 November 1991, after a long illness. With his passing, arachnology has lost an innovative thinker and one of its most influential figures.

Vachon was born in Dijon, France, on 4 January 1908, and it was here that he followed his university studies. Initially working part time, supporting himself with teaching jobs, he began his thesis on the reproduction and development of pseudoscorpions in 1932, under the entomologist J. R. Denis. It was at this time that he began visiting the Laboratoire de Zoologie (Vers et Crustacés) of the Paris Natural History Museum. Shortly after presenting his thesis at the Sorbonne, Vachon took up a post as Assistant at the Laboratoire, where he was to stay for the rest of his career. In 1955 he succeeded Louis Fage as Director, finally retiring in 1977.

Vachon's early papers were devoted to pseudoscorpions. The first, published in 1932, was on the feeding of *Chelifer cancroides*, followed by others on biology, ontogeny, morphology, systematics and biogeography — themes which were to continue throughout his later work. These papers show his enthusiasm and ability for patient observation and analysis of the smallest details. His thesis, published in 1938, is a classic and has served as the basis for subsequent investigations on the biology and morphology of the group. There were also important papers on chelal growth, morphology of the mouthparts, development and phoresy. The papers he co-authored with Peter Gabbutt in the 1960s, on the development of British Chthoniidae and Neobisiidae, picked up the thread of his earlier study of *Chthonius tetrachelatus* and set a standard for modern descriptions of pseudoscorpions.

In 1940 Fage had asked Vachon to undertake a study of the scorpions of North Africa. The results were published in the latter's 1952 monograph, which represented a milestone in the study of the order. In addition to a large number of systematic papers, the following years saw contributions on the biology, embryology, chemosystematics, cytogenetics, integumentary fluorescence and radiation resistance of scorpions.

Vachon's studies on scorpions culminated in his last major paper, published in 1974, on trichobothriotaxy. This is arguably his most important work, being of more general interest than its title suggests, and its significance



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is perhaps not yet fully appreciated. Early on in his studies of pseudoscorpion development, Vachon had discovered that the numbers of trichobothria added to the chela at each stage are generally constant (eustasic). Using the designations proposed by Chamberlin, Vachon succeeded in identifying individual trichobothria from one stage to the next. This opened up a wide field of chaetotaxic research, to which he later brought the concept of idionymy, developed by the acarologist F. Grandjean. Vachon also proposed a new system of notations for scorpion trichobothria, based on those employed for pseudoscorpions, and was the first to fully exploit their systematic potential in this group.

Vachon was firmly convinced of the importance of ontogeny in systematic and evolutionary studies. One of the strengths of his work was his very broad knowledge of the Arachnida. By applying insights gained from his studies of scorpions and pseudoscorpions, he was able to produce original contributions to a variety of subjects, including the ontogeny of spiders, solifuges and millipedes, the biology of a hymenopteran parasite of spider eggs, solifuge genitalia, limb segmentation in *Limulus* and other chelicerates, and the concept of character in systematics. A full list of his works, which runs to about three hundred titles, will be published in the *Bulletin de la Société zoologique de France*.

Throughout his varied activities, Vachon demonstrated a remarkable industry and efficacy. He was a

man of considerable charm and wit, equally at home in the laboratory and the conference hall. There was something of the politician about him (he was in fact a Municipal Councillor for Orly, 1945–1948) and he served on numerous committees, notably for the CNRS (Centre National de Recherche Scientifique). For many years he was director of both the *Bulletin du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* and the mite journal *Acarologia*. In addition to many other scientific honours, Vachon was president of the Académie des Sciences d'Outre-mer and the Société zoologique de France, an honorary member of the British and American Arachnological Societies, and the founding president of CIDA. As he hoped, the latter has done much to promote co-operation between the arachnologists of the world, both through its publications and its role in organising the international congresses of arachnology.

Always a keen sportsman, Vachon was successively captain of the football and basketball teams at Dijon, and held a diploma in gymnastics. During his later years he became increasingly interested in the history of biology, particularly the life and work of Lamarck, who had once held the same chair of zoology at the Museum. Another of his pastimes was archaeology, and he directed the excavation of a tumulus on Mont de Bertin (Côte-d'Or) during 1958–1960.

Vachon's approach to arachnology emphasised the dynamic aspects of morphology and evolution. Although not all of his ideas may stand the test of time, he had a keen eye for interesting questions and his pioneering studies have opened several important fields of research. He leaves a rich legacy in the form of his publications, which will continue to both provoke and inspire future research.

Mark Judson