In memoriam of Jean Huard (1938–1973)

Jean Huard was born in Paris, on June 4th, 1938. In 1959, following his studies in natural sciences, he began his work as a researcher at the National Museum of Natural History, Paris, in the laboratory of “Comparative anatomy of living and fossil plants” directed by Prof. Edouard Boureau (1913–1999). To start with, he worked on wood anatomy of Rhopalocarpaceae, a small endemic family from Madagascar, the subject of his Diploma of Higher Studies (DÉS), and he later published it in Adansonia (Huard 1965a).

To further his knowledge of this plant family, he carried out precise palynologic descriptions, under the direction of Mme Madeleine Van Campo in the laboratory of Palynology of the National Museum of Natural History, Paris. This study enabled him to bring the Rhopalocarpaceae closer to the Tiliales, particularly from some Sterculiaceae (Huard 1965b). In addition, he underlined the evolutionary differences of anatomical and palynological characters in this family, differences which explain its multiple morphological affinities (Huard 1965c).

In 1961, he became Lecturer at the Faculty of Science, University of Paris, where he gave lessons in botany and palynology. He devoted his research to palaeobotanical studies of the Neogene lignite layers in the ‘Landes’ region (southwestern France). During fieldwork in 1961 to 1967, he collected abundant plant macroremains (Huard & Klingebiel 1965). The sampling of fossil leaves was carried out based on a new method, which enabled him to preserve leaf specimens between two slides in Canada balsam (Huard 1965d).

At first, he was particularly interested in wood anatomy of conifers. He described, with precision, fossil wood anatomy of Cupressaceae, Pinaceae and Taxodiaceae in his Thesis of ‘third cycle’ (Huard 1965f). Nine species were described and named including five new ones. Affinities of these fossils were identified by comparison with wood collections, particularly those housed in the Senckenberg Museum, Frankfurt am Main (Huard 1965e, 1965f, 1966).

The description of two species of Taxodium, T. distichoides, close to T. distichum, and T. mucronatum, allowed Jean Huard to contest the idea that fossil Taxodium should evoke a marshy landscape (T. distichum). There is a clear difference between Arjuzanx, where woods closely resembling T. mucronatum (Highlands of southern Mexico) are abundant, and Hostens, where the ancestor of T. distichum is more abundantly represented (Huard 1966).

He also studied Angiosperm wood from the same sites, belonging to Lauraceae and Quercus (Huard 1967c, 1967d). He was the first to acknowledge that fossil samples similar to unidentified specimens from the German lignites were spiny bases of palm leaves. These identifications were obtained after a very precise anatomical study (Huard 1967a, 1967b). Also, with the help of a bryologist, he could identify the Bryophyte remains of the Arjuzanx flora (Jovet-Ast & Huard 1966).