

OBITUARY

FABRIZIO CECCA (1956-2014)
René Zaragüeta i Bagils

As Biogeografía readers know, a feature of biogeography is the lack of researchers who define themselves primarily as biogeographers. Fabrizio Cecca was probably the only researcher in France definable as a biogeographer. Unfortunately, Fabrizio died on May 31, and with him, a great piece of research in historical biogeography in France.

An Italian citizen, Fabrizio was born in Rome on September 1956. He studied the Geological Sciences, and he received the Laurea University of Rome in 1982, working on the ammonites of the Jurassic-Cretaceous boundary of the Apennines. He prepared his PhD in the Department of Earth Sciences of the University of Lyon on "The Tithonian of the Ardèche border in the surroundings of the Ardescian stratotype: a stratigraphic and paleontological study," a subject distant from biogeography and phylogenetic systematics in general. Fabrizio Cecca obtained his PhD in April 1986. He returned to Italy during

the following decade (1987-1996), where he worked on the establishment of geological charts, a relatively frustrating job for him as it was far from his research interests on the palaeontology of ammonites. Only a collaboration within the Tethys program, at the University Pierre et Marie Curie (UPMC) between 1990 and 1992, allowed him to pursue his main research topics.

The French system has a particular idiosyncrasy concerning the career of researchers: the need to obtain the "certification to supervise research" (called HDR in French), which allows lecturers to supervise PhD students. It is a necessary step for applying to professor positions. Fabrizio defended his HDR in 1996 at the University Pierre et Marie Curie, entitled "Biostratigraphy, biogeography, and paleoenvironmental study of the ammonites of the Upper Jurassic-Lower Cretaceous transition of Umbria-Marche Apennines in the paleogeographic framework of the Tethys". The same year, he left the Italian Geological Survey for a lecturer position at the Institute of Geology of the University of Urbino. Just two years later, in 1998, he was appointed professor at the University of Provence, on the site of Marseille-Saint Charles. In 2002, he finally moved to the University Pierre et Marie Curie.

His work has focused on the systematics of ammonites from the Upper Jurassic and Lower



Cretaceous of Italy and southern France. He improved biostratigraphy of the Jurassic-Cretaceous transition, including the use of ammonites as biochronological markers. He was very interested in biological crises of the Toarcian in relation to environmental changes. Finally, he helped establish a palaeogeography of the Tethys, based on bathymetric interpretation of fossil ammonites.

I met him when he arrived at UPMC, at the same Joint Research Unit (UMR) in which I was doing my PhD. This UMR was recognized as hosting the majority of cladists in France. Fabrizio came from a totally different world, that of classic invertebrate palaeontology, centred on biostratigraphic and paleoenvironmental problems and what is usually called evolutionary taxonomy. Nevertheless, he joined the systematic and biogeography research team, which had a high theoretical content, and although there was some initial scepticism among some of his colleagues, his work was more and more appreciated as his collaborations went along.

He joined the teaching staff of the SEP (Systematics, Evolution, Paleontology) specialty of the Master degree, jointly accredited by UPMC and the National Museum of Natural History. In this master, he was responsible for a Teaching Unit of second year called "Paleo-Biogeography and Paleo-Biodiversity," in which a broad spectrum of theoretical and empirical approaches is presented.

The involvement of Fabrizio in biogeographic research is reflected in his book "Palaeobiogeography of marine fossil invertebrates: concepts and methods", published in 2002 at Taylor & Francis, and also in numerous articles on this topic, the list of which is available on his professional web page at <http://paleo.mnhn.fr/pal/cecca.php>. He also led the organization of the First International Symposium of Palaeobiogeography, which took place in Paris from 10th to 13th July 2007. SEBA was born during this Symposium, as well as scientific projects such as ICAN, the area nomenclature code project.

We were also finalizing a book to be published at EDP Sciences entitled "Palaeobiogeography" that will hopefully come out shortly as a posthumous work. It is in French, and is intended primarily for master and PhD students.

Fabrizio Cecca had a second, artistic life, as a double bassist and jazz composer. He began playing in Rome with Massimo Urbani and then extended the study of the instrument and music theory from 1975. You can see and hear him play on his MySpace page <https://myspace.com/fabriziocecca>. In 2008, he produced his first recording, as both musician and composer: Southern Avenue, an imaginary line linking Paris and Rome, as Fabrizio Cecca created all its themes during his travels between the two capitals. The characteristic elements of the album are the sounds of bass, which sometimes adds

vibraphone, the balance sheet and improvisation structures and compositions, which generally do not correspond to classical structures in 32 steps. The album reflects his musical experiences and tastes, deeply rooted into the late 1960s to early 1970s. From 2011 he played in the U-Man Trio, along with Gaia Possenti and Massimo Carrano. A recent video interview can be viewed in Italian, from the Twitter account that Fabrizio kept active until just a month before his death: <https://twitter.com/FabrizioCecca1>

Fabrizio was a very enjoyable colleague. With a strong Latin character, he used to react passionately to emails even before he finished reading them. A short reply asking him to read the whole message was sufficient to get an

interesting and constructive feedback. He was also highly appreciated by students. The 2014 promotion of the master degree in Systematics, Evolution and Palaeontology has been named in his honour.

Fabrizio left us at only 58 years old, after a struggle against cancer. We thought he had won the war against illness, but a second wave of the disease prevailed faster than any of us expected. Fabrizio will long remain with us through his scientific publications and musical works, the memories of his friends and colleagues, and the numerous traces he left in the internet.



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