



*Véra Eisenmann, 2006, in the Palaeontology Gallery of the Natural History Museum, Paris
(photo by Mahvash Mehramouz)*

Véra Eisenmann and the Equid osteological research

Marjan Mashkour

Several years ago when I was working on a French medieval assemblage I was confronted for the first time with a great number of Equid remains. That was how I came to knock at the door of Véra Eisenmann's second floor office in the Paleontology Lab of the Paris Natural History Museum Paris. She immediately offered me her help. Later on when beginning my PhD on Iranian fauna, I came across a very diverse and important prehistoric assemblage of Equids. That was when I began my real training with her. She offered me her knowledge, and over all those wonderful years I observed Véra and tried to learn from her, particularly her rigorous research methods. But the most impressive thing about working with Véra is how she uses her experienced eye and mind; it was a magic time I had the chance to share with her. Véra Eisenmann is one of the true "specialists" who have devoted an important part of their life to studying and investigating one major problem. For more than 30 years she has worked continuously on Equids in the same patient, humble manner. For her the question is Evolution and Equids are the object she has followed to understand its tortuous trends.

The quest began in 1966 after having accomplished her medical studies, when she knocked at the door of the Natural History Museum in Paris and was graciously allowed to work on Oligocene carnivore remains in Quercy (France), (cf. bibliographic list N°2), for her second Thesis. This was her introduction to the area of professional scientific techniques that involves rummaging and fumbling through cupboards. But that was when a major event occurred: she found a badger, classified among the hystrixis! From then on, refined scepticism and highly critical insight became qualities synonymous with her work.

In 1969, the Holy Grail was near to hand a second time. She had finally entered the realm of Equids. Her favourite animals where the Hipparions (N° 4, 11, 13, 18 etc..) and also Horses (N°14, 15), Zebras (N°6) , Asses,

Hemiones, and of course the mysterious Hydruntinus. Her favourite bones: skulls and metadipials. Studying these animals needed an overall view, which meant gathering large amount of data on all extant species, the result of which is the precious metrical database she established and which drove her to investigation in some 40 Museums around the world, in Africa, Europe, America and Asia. A major reflection on the systematic of Equids was born with her "State Thesis" in 1979 (N° 15 and 16). After all these years of work, and the countless hours of scrutinizing thousands and thousands of bones, she still continues to be amazed by a tooth, a small piece of bone, the possibility of a new discovery...

I am personally indebted to Véra, not only for the training she provided in the field, but also for all the great lessons of life I have learned from her. Organising a meeting to honour her titanic "Œuvre" at the IXth International Conference of Archaeozoology at Durham has been a great pleasure for me, and I have been kindly supported and helped by Richard Meadow, Keith Dobney and Umberto Albarella and the scientific team I belong to. This is my way of thanking her, and an acknowledgement of the huge impetus she has given to the study of Equids in paleontology and archaeozoology. The meeting brought together more than 20 researchers dealing with specific problems posed by the study of Equids working all over the world. The papers presented in this volume reflect the extent of the theme of this meeting.

I am particularly grateful to all the contributors, who have worked patiently with me during the last two years to build up this volume. Also I am particularly indebted to all the colleagues who accepted to review the papers: Michel Baylac (MNHN/CNRS), Jean Philip Brugal (MMSH/CNRS), Jean Desse (CRA/CNRS), Daniel Helmer (MOM/CNRS), Marsha Levine (McDonald Institute), A. Stubbe (Univ. Halle/Leipzig), Jean Denis Vigne (MNHN/CNRS), Jacobo Weinstock (Univ.Oxford),

and Véra Eisenmann (MNHN/CNRS). I also managed to extract a paper from Véra herself on her recent research. I would also like to thank the people who helped me with the heavy editorial work, Anita Lau for checking and formatting of bibliographies and Clare Perkins for editing the English for some of the papers.

Finally, Véra loves fun and I could not resist offering her, a “souvenir” of her husband Daniel she showed me some time ago; a very personal and synthetic glance of her life.

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