

IN MEMORIAM

PROFESSOR JEAN NICOD
(1923-2021)



With pain and sadness, we have received news about the death of Prof. Jean Nicod.

Prof. Jean Nicod was Dr. Litt., retired Professor Emeritus of Physical Geography at the University Aix-Marseille, Institute of Geography, Aix-en-Provence, honorary doctor of the University of Silesia (1994), and Corresponding member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (2003).

Prof. Nicod was an outstanding geographer, geomorphologist, researcher of karst phenomena and Mediterranean geomorphology, the founder of the French school of karst geomorphology, and of *Association Française de Karstologie* (French Association of Karstology), its first president (1977-1986), later its honorary president. Additionally, he was president of *Commission de Phénomène Karstique du Comité National de Géographie* (Commission of karst phenomena at the National Geographic Committee), and the founder and editor of the journals *Karstologia* and *Méditerranée*.

Prof. Nicod was born in 1923 at Vesoul, Department Haute-Saône (France), not far away from the karst plateaux of Jura. Already as a pupil of the Vesoul secondary school (up to 1940) he was enthusiastically visiting and

investigating caves in the surroundings of the town. He studied at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Nancy (1941-1944) and for the *Diplôme d'Etudes supérieures* he described karst phenomena of the Haute-Saône plateaux. In 1944 he became Master of Geography and after state's examinations he obtained the title of *Professeur Agrégé de Géographie* (1947). As a teacher at the *Lycée de Marseille* he started cooperating with Professor Jules Blache, later rector of the *Université d'Aix-Marseille*, on preparation of his thesis titled "The Karst Morphology of the Limestone Basse Provence". During this time, he was teaching at secondary schools at Nancy and Marseilles, working as a researcher of C.N.R.S. (National Centre of Scientific Research) 1953-1955, acting as the head of the Regional Centre for Pedagogical Documentation at Marseilles, and working as the assistant, later master-assistant, at the Faculties of Aix-en-Provence and Nice. In 1967 he obtained the state's doctorate. Throughout all the years until his retirement he was teaching at the University of Aix-Marseille.

In his thesis on "The Karst Morphology of the Limestone Basse Provence" he demonstrated and described the existence of various types of karst, from Calanques at

the Mediterranean coast all the way up to Grand Canyon of Verdon. He also presented a plethora of hydro chemical observations as a novel useful tool to measure the rate of denudation. During his long career as the university teacher, he relentlessly emphasized the research problems of the karst of South-East France. This was especially evident in his excellent teaching courses as well as in his field work. Prof. Nicod was the founder and the director of the main karst project of France, "Karst evolution in Mediterranean and Alpine environments" in the frame of C.N.R.S. (1971-1983). This project enabled the foundation of the group named "Procope" established together with Prof. Pfeffer (Tübingen). The main intended aim of this collaboration was the study of erosion and alteration of dolomite. He was initiator and long-time co-worker of the two leading French karstological journals, *Karstologia* and the *Méditerranée*; in admiration of his research work and other contributions these journals have named Prof. Nicod an honorary president and an honorary member, respectively.

Most of Prof. Nicod's professional work is oriented towards karst regions of Provence and karst of France, but not exclusively. As a karstologist and geographer he dedicated his life's work to karst in the broadest sense possible, namely to geomorphology, geomorphologic mapping, karst typology, evaporite karst, karst canyons, alteration of dolomite, cryptokarstic corrosion, palaeo-karst, glaciokarst, tuffa, poljes, calanques, hydrological regimes, forests and the impact of fires, traffic, olive cultivation, and water use, management and conservation, especially regarding harvesting the energy of water on karst. He was investigating the karst problems in the area of Mediterranean, including Dinaric Karst and karst of the Near East. Special attention merits his research conducted in Slovenia and Croatia, his research on poljes in Dinaric Karst and in Eastern Serbia, and of Durmitor Mountains in Montenegro.

The first contact between Prof. Nicod and karst researchers from Slovenia happened in 1972. From there on the contacts were regular, both personal and via correspondence, as well as through exchange of professional and scientific literature. It can be said that the beginning of close contacts between young karstologists from the group of Prof. Nicod with his Slovenian peers, started with a brief but later recognized as an important visit of the author of these lines to Prof. Nicod at Aix-en-Provence in 1972. This visit also included a field trip to some of the most impressive and scientifically important karst areas of Provence. This initial co-operation was formalized through agreements between the research institutions signed in 1975, later continued in the frame of the programme named Proteus. Prof. Nicod organized a series of bilateral round-tables on karst, during the tur-

bulent year of 1991 the Franco-Slovene one. In the majority of his numerous publications on karst he has described Dinaric Karst. Consequently, he authored about 20 papers that are dedicated exclusively to this karst area, some of them published in Slovenian scientific journals. His book *Les karsts dinariques, paysages et problèmes* (Dinaric Karst, landscapes and problems) published in 2003 in collaboration with the Karst Research Institute ZRC SAZU at Postojna and its journal *Acta carsologica* and French *Karstologia* deserves a special mention. Slovenian karstologists are deeply thankful to Prof. Nicod for enabling them to establish and nurture plentiful and fruitful contacts through mutual visits of Slovenian and French colleagues, for the invitations to numerous international meetings received from him, for visits to and detailed explanations of French karst including multifaceted points of view and for keeping them informed on novelties from French karstological spheres. Additionally, Slovenian researchers in him always found a well-respected and rewarding partner for discussing karstological achievements. He was proud to be able to publish his state-of-the-art research results in adequate Slovenian literature, and he furthermore provided many reports on various karstological events in Slovenia, all of these being of paramount importance for the promotion of Dinaric Karst and of Slovenian karst research in France and worldwide. On the other side it is French karst, being among the most important in Europe, that he was able to bring into focus of well-known Slovenian karstologists as well. This can be easily seen through the influence of French specialists reflecting in many publications of Slovenian researchers. And all these achievements are in a major part due to the influence and work of Prof. Nicod. These are also among the reasons that Prof. Nicod received the prestigious award of Slovenian Ministry of Science and Technology, that he was elected to become an honorary member of the Association of Slovenian Geographers, and to be included among the Corresponding members of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

For many years he was a member of the Editorial Board of *Acta carsologica*, and he regularly informed French and broader professional spheres about its contents. It is not so long ago that he sent congratulations and thanks for the achievements of the journal. It can be said that he has been actively participating practically all the time to his death. Not at field work, of course, but by publishing a variety of results from his treasured documentation and archive on karst, unpublished up to then.

In important and comprehensive book edited by P. Audra on *Grottes et karsts de France* (Caves and karsts of France) (2010) there are 8 contributions by Prof. Nicod. In 2012 he has published the book *Sources et sites des eaux karstiques* (Springs and sites of karst waters). Ad-

ditionally, there are his numerous articles in French journals, to mention just two the most exciting: *Toujours les problèmes du lac de Besse-sur-Isole* (Persisting problems of the lake Besse-sur-Isole) or *Sur quelques sources littorales et sous-marines autour de la Méditerranée* (Some littoral and submarine springs round the Mediterranean) both published in *Études de Géographie Physique*. Maybe the last of his professional papers is *Sites du Bas-Verdon* (Sites of Bas-Verdon) published in *Physio Géol* 2018. It was a deeply touching moment when we received his

last post card from his favourite lake Lac de Roselend in February of this year, written by his own trembling hand evoking memories of Dinaric karst.

We lost one of the last, maybe the last great scholar of karst science, who was a specialist but at the same time possessing large knowledge and broad experience, professor of the old French school in the best sense of this word.

Andrej Kranjc