



HAL
open science

Minouche Knoepffler-Péguy (1934-2018), the 'Dame de Banyuls' (the Lady of Banyuls)

Charles-François Boudouresque

► **To cite this version:**

Charles-François Boudouresque. Minouche Knoepffler-Péguy (1934-2018), the 'Dame de Banyuls' (the Lady of Banyuls). *Cryptogamie Algologie*, 2018, pp.525-530. 10.7872/crya/v39.iss4.2018.525 . hal-01976024

HAL Id: hal-01976024

<https://hal.science/hal-01976024v1>

Submitted on 9 Jan 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Minouche Knoepffler-Péguy (1934-2018), the ‘*Dame de Banyuls*’ (the Lady of Banyuls)

Charles-François Boudouresque

Aix-Marseille University and University of Toulon, OSU Pythéas, MIO (Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography), CNRS, IRD, campus of Luminy, Marseille, France

Michèle Knoepffler-Péguy, whom everyone called ‘Minouche’, was born on 12th January 1934 at Tunis, Tunisia (**Fig. 1**). Her father, Georges Péguy, was an army officer (commanding a battalion of colonial infantry). Her mother, born Suzanne Berthier, was a ‘housewife’ (as they were termed in those days). Minouche spent her childhood in Tunis, she studied there and got her *Baccalauréat* (1951), then the SPCN (first year undergraduate course, in France and in Tunisia during the French colonial period; 1952). She continued her scholar training at the university in Paris (*Université Pierre et Marie Curie*), and was awarded the *Licence-ès-Sciences* (equivalent of BSc) in 1958. From 1958 to 1968, she was *Assistante* (junior lecturer) in plant biology at the *Faculté des Sciences d’Orsay*, near Paris; from 1968, she was *Assistante* in marine plant biology working at the Laboratoire Arago, Banyuls-sur-Mer (in French Catalonia); the Laboratoire Arago is one of the three marine sciences research stations attached to the *Université Pierre et Marie Curie*. From 1974 to 2001 (when she retired), Minouche was *Maître-Assistante* (Lecturer), then *Maître de Conférences* (Senior Lecturer)



Figure 1. Michèle Péguy (‘Minouche’). This painting shows her at the age of 19, in a ball dress, in Tunis (Tunisia). Portrait painted by Geneviève Gavrel (1909-1999).

Minouche wanted to do a doctorate in zoology; but when she went to see the professor who might have given her a project in this field, she went the wrong door: she knocked at the office of Jean Feldmann. Jean Feldmann was at the time one of the best known phycologists in Europe. His charisma was such that she left his office with a doctoral research subject focusing on the Ectocarpaceae, a ‘diabolical’ group of brown algae (Phaeophyceae), today placed within the kingdom of the Stramenopiles (Boudouresque, 2015). The Ectocarpaceae

constitute a 'diabolical' taxon because of the unbelievable complexity of their biological cycles, where almost ten generations may succeed each other, their morphological plasticity according to environmental factors and the rarity of characters that allow proper diagnosis between the species; at the time of Minouche's doctoral thesis, genetic tools did not yet exist; today, these tools are used, but it is not certain that they have succeeded in 'de-diabolising' the taxonomy of the Ectocarpaceae. Minouche's doctoral research was carried out at Banyuls-sur-Mer (French Catalonia). Her thesis entitled 'Recherches sur le polymorphisme en culture de quelques Ectocarpacées (*Feldmannia* et *Acinetospora*)' was defended in 1974 in Paris, before an examining committee consisting of Jean Feldmann, Marius Chadeffaud, Francis Magne, René Nozeran and Pierre Drach; she was awarded her doctorate with the distinction '*très honorable avec félicitations du jury*', the highest distinction awarded by French universities.

Minouche's research was at first focused on the Ectocarpaceae (the subject of her doctoral thesis). Subsequently, she also took an interest in the *Cystoseira*. The Banyuls-sur-Mer region, at that time, was a hotspot of diversity for this genus of brown algae (Feldmann, 1938); since then, many species of *Cystoseira* have been considered as locally extinct in French Catalonia (Thibaut *et al.*, 2005). Finally, Minouche worked on biological invasions (*Sargassum muticum* and *Undaria pinnatifida*). She described one species: *Pedobesia solieri* Feldmann ex Abélard & Knoepffler. She also proposed two new combinations: *Feldmannia caespitula* (J. Ag.) Knoepffler-Péguy (now: *Feldmannia paradoxa* (Montagne) Hamel var. *donatiae* (Ercegović) Antolić & Span) and *Feldmannia caespitula* var. *lebelii* (Areschoug ex P. Crouan & H. Crouan) Knoepffler-Péguy (now: *Feldmannia lebelii* (Areschoug ex P. Crouan & H. Crouan) Hamel). The four most often cited of Minouche's publications are: Boudouresque *et al.* (1992; 77 citations), Boudouresque *et al.* (1985; 69 citations), Boudouresque *et al.* (1984; 41 citations) and Knoepffler-Péguy *et al.* (1985; 41 citations).

Minouche loved teaching. While very young, she taught as an assistant for laboratory practical work in Tunis (Tunisia), then in Paris (France); she was also a peripatetic teacher (*maîtresse auxiliaire*) in French secondary schools, replacing teachers who were on sick leave or maternity leave. The rest of her university career [*Assistante* (Junior Lecturer), then *Maître-Assistante* (Lecturer) and finally *Maître de Conférences* (Senior Lecturer)] has already been outlined. The course in marine phycology and ecology (hereafter 'phycology course') at Banyuls-sur-Mer constituted the great adventure of her professional life. This course was set up in 1950 by Prof. Jean Feldmann; René Delépine was the organiser, and Minouche was associated with it from 1968. In 1972, when René Delépine was transferred (at his request) to Villefranche-sur-Mer (another of the *Université Pierre et Marie Curie* marine sciences research stations), Minouche took the lead of the phycology course. This course played a major role in the development of Mediterranean phycology. At first, it was opened to students from the *Université Pierre et Marie Curie* (Paris); but it soon took on an international dimension; it began by accepting students from other French universities, then from other universities in European and Mediterranean countries; finally, it became officially a European course (with the European Union label Erasmus, then Socrates) (**Fig. 2, 3**). The teaching staff, in particular Francesco Cinelli (Italy), Andrea Cossu (Sardinia), Hans Frei (Germany), Vittorio Gazale (Sardinia), Amelia Gómez, María Antonia Ribera, Conxi Rodríguez-Prieto (Catalonia), Marie-Claude Noailles (Paris) and myself, came from all over Europe. The Banyuls course was attended by hundreds of students, young researchers and teachers; it would be hard to find a country in Europe or around the Mediterranean where there was not at least one person who had attended the Banyuls-sur-Mer course. Overall, in Western Europe and the Mediterranean basin, large numbers of people who are now researchers, teachers or managers have taken this course; they did not all become phycologists, however they all have

rich memories of the course. Minouche made this course into not only a learning experience in phycology and marine ecology, but also an experience that was fun, inclusive and a hotspot of cultural exchange. The highpoint of the course, which was held over three weeks in July and August, was the 'international meal'; in her large house in the Rue Barra, she and her husband and children welcomed not only the lecturers and students from the course, but also the researchers from the Laboratoire Arago. Each group of course students prepared a dish from their country: the Spanish *paella* stood beside the Corsican *lonzu*, the Moroccan *tajines*, the Greek *moussaka* and the Venitian *linguini alle vongole*. Minouche presided like a queen in the centre of the apartment, surrounded by students and colleagues; she was happy when she saw people being happy.



Figure 2. Michèle Knoepffler-Péguy ('Minouche') (right), in the practicals lab at the Laboratoire Arago, with phycology course students, Delphine Willsie (left) and X (back view), July 1981. Photo © Boudouresque.

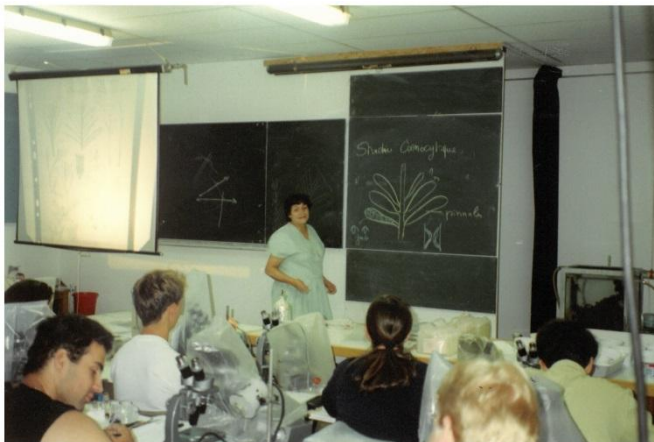


Figure 3. Michèle Knoepffler-Péguy ('Minouche'), giving a class to students on the phycology course, in the practicals lab at the Laboratoire Arago, July 1990. Photo © Charles-François Boudouresque.

Minouche's successors, after her retirement in 2001, were not able or willing to carry on with the Banyuls-sur-Mer phycology course; perhaps they possessed neither her general competence in taxonomy, nor her charisma that enabled her to mobilise the Mediterranean phycologists. And perhaps this course was too much of an overlap with the one held at Roscoff (another marine sciences research station run by the *Université Pierre et Marie Curie*). Perhaps finally, in the age of the all-powerful DNA sequencing (a precious tool, powerful and of proven value), this course had lost its *raison d'être*. Paradoxically, as Boero noted (2016a, 2016b), the famous Rio summit in 1992, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, have not led to a surge in taxonomy, but rather to its decline, in terms of posts and budgets. The result is a disaster (for the sciences of the environment) (Hutchings, 2018). But there is always room for a swing in the other direction, a return of the pendulum; now it is coming from the USA, where the disaster has been fully perceived (Boero, 2016a, 2016b; Thibaut *et al.*, 2018).

On the occasion of the 14th International Seaweed Symposium, at Brest and Saint-Malo (France), Minouche organised (with Marie-Claude Noailles and the author of the present obituary) the pre-symposium excursion to the Western Mediterranean, at Banyuls-sur-Mer, from 10th to 15th August 1992.

In 1967, Michèle Peguy married Louis-Philippe Knoepffler (1926-1984), a herpetologist of international repute, *Directeur de Recherches* at the CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*), a major French scientific research organisation. They had five children: Frédérique (nicknamed ‘Frika’; 1965), Ragnar (1967), Harald (1971), Herrade (1974) and Sieghilde (1976). Minouche died on Friday 14 September 2018, at the age of 84.

For her collaborators who were with her on the Banyuls course, Minouche was sometimes difficult to live with. She was to all appearances the soul of disorder; she made everything complicated, to the point that we nicknamed her ‘Why make things simple when you can make them complicated?’. Her office accommodated a mountain of documents, from floor to ceiling, where you could hardly move and where a cat would have had trouble finding her kittens; and she could never find anything. But thanks to her charisma, she always got what she wanted: in Brussels and in Strasbourg (the European capitals), in Paris and at Banyuls, many people detested the confusion of her projects, her apparent or real disorganisation; and yet, her projects were accepted in the end. Minouche did not speak English, or if she did it was a kind of unbelievable pidgin English, a mixture of French words pronounced in a more or less English way and English words pronounced in a French way; and yet, many of her audience had a good laugh but understood her. I admit that I, who put some effort into speaking a rather more academic form of English, and despite that I am often misunderstood, I was a little vexed and jealous of her because of this.

Minouche was a practising Catholic, who would not miss the Sunday mass for anything in the world; she professed in particular a deep devotion to Mary, mother of Jesus. At the same time, Minouche was extraordinarily tolerant and respectful of other cults and religions and of non-believers. The way she managed the phycology course, a real melting pot of all the Mediterranean cultures, testifies to this. Minouche also loved cats; they ruled as true masters in her house; in French, besides, ‘minouche’ is a name often given to female cats. Finally, she had a special relationship with frogs, which she collected representations of, following in the footsteps of her husband Louis-Philippe. According to her daughter Frika, she owned more than 700 of them.

Michèle Knoepffler-Péguy was certainly not among the most prestigious of 20th century phycologists and ecologists. This was in any case never her ambition. She described few species, she did not revolutionise our vision of the world of algae and she was not a precursor of the ecosystem-based approach (Personnic *et al.*, 2014; Boudouresque *et al.*, 2017; Thibaut *et al.*, 2017). Her legacy resides rather in the Banyuls phycology course, which laid new foundations in Europe, and which will perhaps prove to be the foundation of a renewal of taxonomy (Boero, 2016b; Boudouresque *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings, 2018; Thibaut *et al.*, 2018). This would indeed be a fine homage to Minouche.

Acknowledgements. Michèle Perret-Boudouresque, curator of the *Plateforme Macrophytes* at the Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography (MIO; Aix-Marseille University) helped me to reconstitute the list of works by Michèle Knoepffler-Péguy. Frédérique Knoepffler (‘Frika’, her daughter), designated as my contact within the family by her siblings (Ragnar,

Harald and Sieghilde), gave me the biographical details I needed. Finally, Michael Paul, a native English speaker, and Line Le Gall helped me to translate this obituary into English.

Publications by Michèle Knoepffler-Péguy

- ABÉLARD C. & KNOEPFFLER M., 1986. *Pedobesia solieri* nov. sp. (Chlorophycophyta, Derbesiales) en Méditerranée occidentale: morphologie et reproduction. *Cryptogamie, Algologie*, 7 (4): 301-316.
- BOUDOURESQUE C.F., PERRET-BOUDOURESQUE M. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1984. Inventaire des algues marines benthiques dans les Pyrénées-Orientales (Méditerranée, France). *Vie Milieu*, 34 (1): 41-59.
- BOUDOURESQUE C.F., GERBAL M. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1985. L'algue japonaise *Undaria pinnatifida* (Phaeophyceae, Laminariales) en Méditerranée. *Phycologia*, 24 (3): 364-366.
- BOUDOURESQUE C.F., MEINESZ A., VERLAQUE M. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1992. The expansion of the tropical alga *Caulerpa taxifolia* (Chlorophyta) in the Mediterranean. *Cryptogamie, Algologie*, 13 (2) : 144-145.
- BRICOUT J., KNOEPFFLER-PEGUY M., PERGENT G. & BOUDOURESQUE C.F., 1990. Le rapport 13C/12C chez quelques végétaux marins de Méditerranée. *Posidonia Newsletter*, 3 (2): 19-21.
- CALTAGIRONE A., BOUDOURESQUE C.F. & KNOEPFFLER-PEGUY M., 1990. Croissance de l'oursin *Paracentrotus lividus* en fonction de l'algue consommée. *Rapports et P.V. des Réunions de la Commission Internationale pour l'Exploration Scientifique de la Méditerranée*, 32 (1): 37.
- GROS C. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1978. Culture en mer de *Cystoseira* (Fucales) sur la côte des Albères. I. – Matériel et techniques. *Société Phycologique de France, Bulletin*, 23: 51-56.
- GROS C. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1982. Croissance comparée de *Cystoseira barbata* (Good. et Woodw.) Ag. (Fucales) cultivée dans deux milieux naturels. In: *Colloque VALVA*, DELÉPINE R., GAILLARD J., MORAND P. (eds.), CNRS-Ifremer publ., Paris: 153-156.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1970. Quelques *Feldmannia* Hamel 1939 (Phaeophyceae – Ectocarpales) des côtes d'Europe. *Vie et Milieu*, 21 (1A): 137-188.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1972a. Growth and development of Mediterranean *Cystoseira* (Fucales). Culture attempts in the sea. In: *Biologische Anstalt Helgoland, International symposium 1972* (abstracts): 26.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1972b. Comportement de deux espèces suédoises de *Feldmannia* cultivées en diverses conditions de température et de salinité. *Bulletin de la Société Botanique de France*, 119 (suppl. 1): 101-104.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1973a. Étude expérimentale du polymorphisme chez quelques Ectocarpales (*Feldmannia* et *Acinetospora*). I- Méthodes d'étude expérimentale. *Vie et Milieu*, 23 (2A): 171-189.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1973b. Croissance et développement de *Cystoseira* (Phaeophyceae, Fucales) méditerranéens. *Helgoländer Wissenschaftliche Meeresuntersuchungen*, 24(1): 476-489.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1974a. Le genre *Acinetospora* Bornet 1891 (Phaeophyceae – Ectocarpales). *Vie et Milieu*, 24 (1A): 43-72.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1974b. *Recherches sur le polymorphisme en culture de quelques Ectocarpacées* (*Feldmannia* et *Acinetospora*). Doctoral Thesis, University of Paris VI: xvii + 206 p.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1977. Polymorphisme et environnement chez les *Feldmannia* (Ectocarpacées). *Revue Algologique*, 12 (1-2): 111-128.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1987. Les algues dans la vie des hommes. *Exocetus volitans*, 1: 1.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M. & FUCHS A., 1983. Étude préliminaire de l'influence des eaux d'un élevage piscicole sur la germination et le développement d'embryons de *Cystoseira barbata* (Phaeophyceae Fucales). Conditions de culture. In: *Actes du Colloque de l'Association française d'algologie appliquée*, 2: 29-41.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M. & GROS C., 1982. Cultures expérimentales d'une alginophyte de Méditerranée: *Cystoseira barbata* (Fucales). In: *Colloque VALVA*, DELÉPINE R., GAILLARD J., MORAND P. (eds.), CNRS-Ifremer publ., Paris: 165-168.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., NATTERO M.J., 1996. Comportement de *Paracentrotus lividus* en présence de la souche de *Caulerpa taxifolia* du port de St Cyprien (Fr. Pyr. Or.). In: *Second international workshop on Caulerpa taxifolia*, Barcelona, Spain, 15-17 December 1994, RIBERA M.A., BALLESTEROS E., BOUDOURESQUE C.F., GÓMEZ A., GRAVEZ V. (eds.), University of Barcelona publ., Barcelona: 309-314.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., BELSHER T., BOUDOURESQUE C.F. & LAURET M., 1985. *Sargassum muticum* begins to invade the Mediterranean. *Aquatic Botany*, 23: 291-295.
- KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., MAGGIORE F., BOUDOURESQUE C.F. & DANCE C., 1987. Compte-rendu d'une expérience sur les préférences alimentaires de *Paracentrotus lividus* (Echinoidea) à Banyuls-sur-Mer.

- Colloque international sur Paracentrotus lividus et les oursins comestibles*. BOUDOURESQUE C.F. (ed.), GIS Posidonie publ., Marseille: 59-64.
- MARCOT-COQUEUGNIOT J., BOUDOURESQUE C.F. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1983. Le phytobenthos de la frange infralittorale dans le port de Port-Vendres (Pyrénées-Orientales) : première partie. *Vie et Milieu*, 33 (3-4): 161-169.
- KNOEPFFLER M., NOAILLES M.C., BOUDOURESQUE C.F. & ABELARD C., 1990. Phytobenthos des Pyrénées-Orientales. Complément à l'inventaire. Présence d'espèces non-indigènes (*Sargassum* et *Undaria*). *Bulletin de la Société Zoologique de France*, 115 (1): 37-43.
- NOAILLES M.C., BOUDOURESQUE C.F., GOMEZ-GARRETA A. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1993. Eléments pour une flore des algues de la région de Banyuls-sur-Mer. Deuxième édition. Observatoire océanologique de Banyuls publ.: 55 p.
- ODILE F., BOUDOURESQUE C.F. & KNOEPFFLER-PÉGUY M., 1989. Etude expérimentale des préférences alimentaires de *Paracentrotus lividus* (Echinoïdea). *Marine Life*, 10 (HS) : 85.
- PÉGUY M., 1961. À propos de l'activité antibiotique présumée d'une solution aqueuse du corps phénolique bromé et sulfoné extrait du *Polysiphonia lanosa* (Linné) Tandy (Floridée Rhodomélacée). *Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des Séances de l'Académie des Sciences*, 252 (14): 2134-2135.
- PÉGUY M., 1964a. Quelques essais de séparation par chromatographie sur papier des corps phénoliques bromés extraits de certaines Rhodomélacées. In: *Proceedings 4th International Seaweed Symposium*, Biarritz, Sept. 1961. Pergamon Press publ., Oxford, 4: 366-369.
- PÉGUY M., 1964b. L'observation microscopique en biologie. 2. In: *Stage d'initiation pédagogique*, Université de Grenoble. Éducation nationale, Direction de la coopération publ., Paris: 134-142.
- PÉGUY M., 1965. Sur la croissance en culture de quelques individus de *Cystoseira mediterranea* (Ag.) Sauv. en vue de l'étude du cycle de reproduction d'une Ectocarpacée épiphyte. *Vie et Milieu*, 16 (2A): 811-817.
- PÉGUY M., 1966a. Initiation à la langue scientifique à partir d'un appareil de base. In: *L'initiation des étudiants et chercheurs étrangers à la langue scientifique et technique*. Éducation nationale, Direction de la coopération publ., Paris: 73-76.
- PÉGUY M., 1966b. Préparation des chercheurs étrangers à la rédaction scientifique et à la rédaction d'une thèse. In: *L'initiation des étudiants et chercheurs étrangers à la langue scientifique et technique*. Éducation nationale, Direction de la coopération publ., Paris: 137-139

Other references

- BOERO F., 2016a. The zoology of Babel. *Italian Journal of Zoology*, 83 (2) : 151-152.
- BOERO F., 2016b. Marine biodiversity and ecosystem functioning: the pillars of Good Environmental Status. *Biologia Marina Mediterranea*, 23 (1): 50-57.
- BOUDOURESQUE C.F., 2015. Taxonomy and phylogeny of unicellular eukaryotes. In: *Environmental microbiology: Fundamentals and applications. Microbial ecology*. BERTRAND J.C., CAUMETTE P., LEBARON P., MATHERON R., NORMAND P. & SIME-NGANDO T. (eds.), Springer publ.: 191-257.
- BOUDOURESQUE C.F., BLANFUNÉ A., RUITTON S., THIBAUT T., 2017. L'approche écosystémique. Un petit pas pour l'homme, un grand pas pour la gestion de la nature. *Le Tropézien*, 95: 12-13.
- FELDMANN J., 1938. Recherches sur la végétation marine de la Méditerranée : la côte des Albères. *Revue Algologique*, 10 (1-4) : 1-340.
- HUTCHINGS P., 2018. An advocate for taxonomic research in Australia. *Pacific Conservation Biology*, xx: xx-xx.
- PERSONNIC S., BOUDOURESQUE C.F., ASTRUCH P., BALLESTEROS E., BLOUET S., BELLAN-SANTINI D., BONHOMME P., THIBAUT-BOTHA D., FEUNTEUN E., HARMELIN-VIVIEN M., PERGENT G., PERGENT-MARTINI C., PASTOR J., POGGIALE J.C., RENAUD F., THIBAUT T., RUITTON S., 2014. An ecosystem-based approach to assess the status of a Mediterranean ecosystem, the *Posidonia oceanica* seagrass meadow. *PlosOne*, 9 (6): 1-17 (e98994).
- THIBAUT T., PINEDO S., TORRAS X. & BALLESTEROS E., 2005. Long-term decline of the populations of Fucales (*Cystoseira* spp. and *Sargassum* spp.) in the Albères coast (France, North-western Mediterranean). *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 50: 1472-1489.
- THIBAUT T., BLANFUNÉ A., BOUDOURESQUE C.F., PERSONNIC S., RUITTON R., BALLESTEROS E., BELLAN-SANTINI D., BIANCHI C.N., BUSSOTTI S., CEBRIAN E., CHEMINÉE A., CULIOLI J.M., DERRIEN-COURTEL S., GUIDETTI P., HARMELIN-VIVIEN M., HEREU B., MORRI C., POGGIALE J.C., VERLAQUE M., 2017. An ecosystem-based approach to assess the status of Mediterranean algae-dominated shallow rocky reefs. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 117: 311-329.
- THIBAUT T., BLANFUNÉ A., BOUDOURESQUE C.F., 2018. Une idée neuve, la taxonomie (Nomina si nescis, perit cognitio rerum). *Le Tropézien*, 99: 14-15.