
Philippe Lefevre-Witier Obituary

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Philippe Lefevre-Witier was born in Reims, France, on November 11, 1934, and died on November 15, 2011. A few years ago, he retired from CNRS in Toulouse but continued teaching Ecology at Toulouse University. After his primary and secondary education in northern France, Philippe received his M.D. degree in Paris in 1963. From 1963–1964, he served as the head of a department of clinical medicine in a hospital in Annaba, Algeria. In 1965, he became the head of the laboratory of physical anthropology in the Institute of Human Sciences at the University of Alger. He returned to France in 1968 as a Research Fellow (research on genetic polymorphisms of the blood) in the Center of Hemotypology at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Toulouse. In 1977 he became Maitre de Recherches (equivalent to assistant professor), followed by a promotion to Directeur de Recherches (Professor) in 1982.

Philippe Lefevre-Witier conducted a series of long-term, inter-disciplinary field investigations on four different continents: Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. From 1976 to 1987 he studied human adaptation, development, and ecology in the Algerian Sahara (in Hoggar and Tassili n'Ajjer). He also focused on Tuareg populations of Niger and Mali. He investigated the genetics and population dynamics in the village of Ideles in the Hoggar region of North Africa, and published a highly acclaimed volume on the Isseqqamaren genetic structure. Lefevre-Witier organized and conducted a joint research project with UNAM on an assortment of biocultural studies involving DNA analyses, serology, and parasitology (1983–1988) in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, with the Mixteca Alta. He led field investigations on the hemotypology of Nepalese populations and Tibetan refugees in the Takhola Valley of Nepal. His research experience in Europe was limited to the population of the Capcir plateau in the French of eastern Pyrenees. He traced the contemporary gene pool through genealogies back to 1740. The dominant themes that appear throughout his research included bio-cultural adaptation, ecology, disease, and genetic markers.

I first met Philippe during the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Chicago in 1974. I had contracted a particularly virulent form of the flu, and during most of the Congress was confined to my bed at the hotel. However, on learning about my condition, Philippe was extremely kind, and he organized visits by groups of colleagues bearing good cheer and appropriate libations. In 1979, when James Mielke and I organized a seminar

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Figure 1. Professor Philippe Lefevre-Witier, 1934–2011. Photo courtesy of Catherine Lefevre-Witier.

series on anthropological genetics at the University of Kansas, we invited Philippe to give a presentation on the genetic structure of the Tuaregs of North Africa. He came to Lawrence and gave a stimulating talk which was published in 1982 as a chapter “Ecology and Biological Structure of Pastoral Isseqqamaren Tuareg,” in the second volume of *Current Developments in Anthropological Genetics* (Crawford and Mielke 1982).

Philippe’s final publication will appear in October 2012, as a chapter, entitled “Human Migrations in North Africa,” in a volume *Causes and Consequences of Human Migration: An Evolutionary Perspective*, Cambridge University Press. He reconstructed in great detail the complex history of migrations, invasions, and colonization of the North African Maghreb. Earlier, Lefevre-Witier and colleagues (2006) examined the genetic structure and consequences of these population movements in North Africa based on classical genetic markers.

Dr. Lefevre-Witier was highly active on the international academic stage. He served as the International Editor of the journal *Human Biology*. He solicited manuscripts for publication from European scholars, and represented the journal at various academic venues. He was co-founder of the International Certificate of Human Ecology at the Paul Sabatier University of Toulouse.

LeFevre-Witier was one of the leading scholars on the genetic structure and variation in populations of the Sahara. He published more than 100 articles, chapters, and books. I have identified and selected a small sample of these contributions to the literature. He was unique in the geographical breadth of his interests, from Nepal to the Sahara, to the Pyrennes of France, and to Oaxaca of Mexico.

Philippe had an exceptional zest for life, and enjoyed traveling, visiting friends, and colleagues all over the globe. He continued his research and quest for knowledge to the very end. We will all miss his shining countenance, sense of humor, his resilience, and the will to live in the face of an assortment of illnesses.

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