

125 Years of the Department of Palaeontology of the Budapest University

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One of the earliests in its kind, the independent Department of Palaeontology of the Budapest University was founded in 1882, by the initiative of politicians aware of the potentials of a developing science. As first professor Miksa (Maximilian) HANTKEN, the internationally acclaimed paleontologist, then 63, was invited, who gave up his directorship of the Hungarian Royal Geological Institute for the chair of paleontology in the University. His effective work as founding professor was cut short by his sudden death in 1894. In a 10 year transitional time the Department was headed by Antal KOCH, professor of geology. Following his retirement Imre LÖRENTHEY, the gifted student of Hantken was entitled to the chair. After the tragic, untimely death of LÖRENTHEY in 1917, Professor Károly PAPP, the head of the Department of Geology was appointed to care also for the small Palaeontology Department, under the institutional name of both department as Geo-Paleontological Institute. After World War II the Department regained its independence under the short leadership of professor Elemér VADÁ SZ, who, while remaining the head of the Geology Department, passed the title to Professor Károly TELEGDI-ROTH. After the death of TELEGDI-ROTH in 1955, he was succeeded by Professor László BOGSCH, who remained head of department until 1973. Following his retirement, Professor Barnabás GÉ CZY headed the department, who handed the chair over to Professor Miklós MONOSTORI, who served 12 years as head of the Department and retired in 2005.

From the very beginning, the limited personnel of the Department played important role in teaching would-be scientists in natural history and later in the specialized education of

teachers in chemistry, biology and geography. This institution was for decades the only place in Hungary where degree was given in paleontology. After World War II, when education changed for even narrower tracks, the teacher training activity was supplemented with the special education in geology, where paleontology became an important element of the curricula. Recently the department took a primary role in introducing the new education scheme (BSc + MSc) and in organizing PhD training.

The Department traditionally incorporates the leading Hungarian paleontologists from other research institutions as lecturers of special courses. The professors of the Department wrote the first Hungarian coursebooks of Palaeozoology (*Ősállattan*, K. TELEGDI-ROTH, 1954), of General Palaeontology (*Általános őslénytán*, L. BOGSCH, 1968), Palaeobotany (*Ősnövénytan*, B. GÉ CZY, 1972), Palaeontology (*Őslénytán*, B. GÉ CZY, 1984) and the textbooks in Invertebrate and Vertebrate Palaeontology (B. GÉ CZY 1993).

Though small in number of staff – never outnumbering six – the Department of Palaeontology has been in the forefront of research in various fields. HANTKEN was a pioneering micropaleontologist, and LÖRENTHEY became a renowned specialist of molluscs of the Hungarian late Tertiary (Pannonian) molluscs and decapod crabs. Between World Wars I and II Endre KUTASSY, first lecturer of the Department made spectacular efforts in the study of Triassic molluscs, while K. TELEGDI-ROTH and L. BOGSCH were well-known specialists in Tertiary molluscs. The research of Professor Géczy brought international recognition to the

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Department as a center of studies on Jurassic ammonites and related topics. M. MONOSTORI's fields of interest encompass several branches of micro-paleontology but his main subjects are Mesozoic and Tertiary ostracods. One of his pupils, Ágnes GÖRÖG, first lecturer of the Department, studies foraminifers, mainly mid-Mesozoic planktonic forms. Miklós KÁZMÉR, also first lecturer, has a wide sphere of interest, recently makes research in the Dendrochronology Lab of the Department. The traditional fields of research were enlarged recently by studies in vertebrate palaeontology. Several young PhD students of the Department

study intensively the Cretaceous vertebrates (incl. dinosaurs) newly discovered in Hungary.

The Department did much for the University, with educating young students and researchers. These activities contributed substantially also to the reputation and enhancement of the Hungarian world of science. All we have to do is continue this tradition.

Professor András GALÁCZ
Head of the Department

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