

## András Galácz – 70

### Joint episodes from two interconnected careers

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This volume, prepared as a tribute to the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of András Galácz, should contain an essay of personal attitude dedicated to our celebrated colleague – so told me the Editor.

I felt immodest enough to believe myself appropriate to this mission, because, from the 70 years of András, I spent almost 50 in rather close connection with him. We have been class-mates, room-mates, friends, co-workers and good colleagues for long years until today. In the university years, others called us *twins*, and in fact, even at those times, our careers were strongly interconnected; we formed a *dyad*, as the jargon of the human behaviour science would say. Yet, I am not able to write a proper biography of András Galácz, instead, I want to pick up a few episodes from our interwoven careers, throwing some light to certain elements of the personality of my old friend.

In the summer of 1965, as undergraduate students of Eötvös University, we spent a few weeks in the field in the western Mecsek Mountains. Our field base was a vacant peasant house in the half-devastated village Gorica. Water and toilet outside; local food-supply restricted to milk from local cow; other food in the next village in a shop working twice a week. Our threesome group was led by Feri Székely, just graduated at a Soviet university, who reassured us that our situation was like heaven compared to the field circumstances what he experienced in Russia. We were still not fully satisfied but the cheerful character of Feri greatly amused us. Twenty years later we met him again quite surprisingly in a very far away place; but that's another story. Our field task was to survey the ground-water table in the wider surrounding of Gorica. Measuring the water level in wells in the villages and estimating the output of springs at the headings of all side-valleys of the region of at least fifty square kilometres required dozens of kilometres daily walking. But, even after a so tiresome day, András forced me to

go again to the field. “Just here, along the Gorica brook, they found a nice outcrop of Middle Triassic limestone bed surface full of bivalves – I heard from colleagues working for the Geological Survey” told me András. With some reluctance I joined him to visit the locality at the sunset twilight – and it was worth going there. That was the first strong sign of his obsession with fossils, and he started to infect me.

In the next year I got a new amount of infection from András. He convinced me to visit Barnabás Géczy, the senior lecturer at the Department of Palaeontology, and apply together for an independent research subject. Barna, our later master and mentor, was very happy and offered us the subject of Jurassic belemnoids<sup>1</sup>. From this time onwards we spent almost all our free time at the Department, continuously having our noses in the relevant palaeontological literature. András, better in English, translated the majority of the articles, while I undertook the German texts. At the same time, we took pleasure in the fascinating arrays of fossils at the collections of the Department: my infection went on and accomplished. Here we came across with the most curious belemnites from the Callovian of Villány; these rostra were heavily encrusted with fine grained but stiff calcareous sediment, as if they were in an extremely thick coat of breadcrumbs. Soon we became aware of the truth; András found the paper by Polish palaeontologists with the pioneering description of the stromatolites of Villány.<sup>2</sup>

Villány is the next point worth mentioning in our interconnected career. The Jurassic of Villány was the subject of my graduate thesis.<sup>3</sup> Quite naturally, András joined me for a few days to help in fieldwork (as I did the same in the case of his field work in the Bakony, in the Jurassic of Gyenespuszta<sup>4</sup>). In the summer of 1967 we, accompanied by Barnabás Géczy, travelled to Villány and found accommodation in a really poor

peasant house near the vineyards. The conditions were similar to those we enjoyed few years earlier in Gorica but with two features to the worse: the landlady and her animals. The continuously flattering dog, the smell and grunting of pigs and the early morning crowing of the cock forced our master to leave Villány next day. We remained and tried to tolerate all this and the garrulous Aunt Janka. She was a widow, around sixty, with fleshy red nose, evoking the witch of tales. Living alone with her animals she was keen on talking with anyone. Putting aside our empathy we tried to spend as much time away from the house as we could. We took some longer field trips, for instance climbing up to the more than four hundred metres high Harsány Hill (Szársomlyó) without any strict scientific task or result. Another time András insisted on visiting the local swimming pool what he, as good swimmer, much enjoyed. After some hesitation I also preferred the cold water to Aunt Janka.

After graduation we both remained under the arms of Barnabás Géczy as junior scientists and room-mates at the Department of Palaeontology. András continued with the Middle Jurassic ammonoids<sup>5</sup> whereas I was charged with the Liassic brachiopods<sup>6</sup> of the Bakony. “Those were the days, my friend” – would I say with the contemporaneous pop song! Boundless enthusiasm and endless energy drove us to achieve more and more knowledge in our favourite fields. The fossils and the related literature were equally important to us and the work was hard, sometimes even painstaking in both fields.

In 1969, the world suddenly and unexpectedly opened for us. By good grace of fate (assisted by Barnabás Géczy and our British colleague Nicol Morton), in April we took part in a great symposium on the British Jurassic.<sup>7</sup> A glimpse of the “western life” in London! And the symposium and the field trips! The high level lectures, the personal contact with the leading Jurassic workers and the whole scientific atmosphere revealed the never seen perspectives of our research and determined our attitude for the future. Then, just in September of the same year, the high international society of the Jurassic arrived to Hungary for the Mediterranean Jurassic Colloquium.<sup>8</sup> We could meet again with Nicol Morton, John Callomon, Hugh Torrens, Derek Ager and many other celebrities. And, what is even more, on the field trip to the Bakony we were fortunate to hear the debates and opinions of Anthony Hallam, Daniel Bernoulli, Hugh Jenkyns and others on the most intriguing problems of the Jurassic sedimentary processes. We eagerly hung on every word...

The next months saw the most productive period of our joint career. Stimulated by the

impressions, experiences and knowledge acquired at the international symposia, we decided to establish an up-to-date Jurassic sedimentary model of the Bakony. It was an attractive challenge to demolish the narrow-minded idea of the shallow marine Jurassic archipelago in the Bakony, so fashionable among many Hungarian geologists of that time<sup>9</sup>. We grasped a right moment, because the sedimentary evolution of the Mediterranean Jurassic was a hot topic in those years all over Europe. Seamounts, ferromanganese crusts, neptunian dykes, allodapic limestones, slumps and megabreccias swirled in our interconnected brains. That was a true intellectual joint venture. Sparkles of ideas and insights fluttered between us and slowly crystallized into revelations and formed promising elements of the new model. Walking to and fro in our room, I tried to formulate thoughts and sentences; András, sitting and smoking endlessly, pruned the thoughts or suggested better alternatives, corrected the sentences and wrote down the results. A model cannot stand without informative figures. András possessed the ability, what I always admired, to depict the idea what he had in mind. Finally the paper was born and, regrettably with two years delay, it appeared in the *Földtani Közlöny*<sup>10</sup>. It was written in Hungarian; still, it became one of our best cited, seminal papers. We often wondered, what impact this paper had if it would have been published in English in an international journal.

The first bifurcation of our joint careers commenced when I was offered a regular job in the Hungarian Natural History Museum, and András stayed at the Department of Palaeontology of Eötvös University, and further suffered the financial uncertainty: his job and salary depended on contracts month-by-month. But our connection, even if not so close than before, was continuous.

In the 1980's we took ample opportunity to visit the key localities of the Mediterranean Jurassic all across Italy. We took three or four study trips, one month each, mostly by András's big old Polski Fiat. Occasionally, Frank Horváth and Andrea Mindszenty were our companions in these voyages what we informally called geological entertainments. The story always started in Rome, where we had to spend some days to obtain our stipends in the very bureaucratic Foreign Ministry, what would not be possible without the help of our mentor, Bruno d'Argenio. The accommodation was in the marvellous Palazzo Falconieri, Via Giulia 1, in the inner city, where the Accademia Ungherese was housed.

When we first arrived at the Eternal City and, after a long and frustrating navigation, reached Via Giulia 1, and tried to enter our room, we bumped into the previous resident just leaving the

compartment. Feri Székely was that person, who became a renowned hydrogeologist in the meantime and whom we did not see for twenty years after our adventures in Gorica.

Rome! Treasury of cultural heritage and miracles... and the timeless atmosphere with the scent of the Antiquity and the smell of rotten vegetables and fish of the morning market at the same time... András was fan of spending all the day and late evening in the squares and passages swarmed with tourists and the people of Rome, often without care of eating and drinking. I was desperate sometimes.

Then, after embarking the car in Naples, slowly we arrived at Sicily, at our much awaited place of geological wonders. Here, by courtesy of our colleagues Raimondo Catalano and Piero Di Stefano, we got comfortable accommodation and possibility to work ourselves in the field. But what a bizarre field! On a day we drove up to Bellolampo, a southward facing hillside near Palermo. After locating the outcrop where we wanted to measure the section and collect fossils, we looked around. A gentle but very broad valley dominated the landscape, with no trace of water or any life except the dried grass and some spiny bushes. No trees, no shadow. The single remarkable point of this half-deserted, barren scenery was a sizeable building, looking as a stable or cowshed, in a few hundred metres distance. We worked hard and with success. The sun rose to the zenith and the heat became almost unbearable by lunch-time. András suggested going down and eating our poor field-lunch in the shadow of the curious building. With some anxiety and fear from potentially hiding dogs we proceeded there. The building seemed quite abandoned, with open windows but closed entrance. A shocking scene received us when we looked inside: several cadavers of cows lay on the floor, completely dried but still with swollen bellies. How and why this astonishing tragedy might happen?... No trace of fire... But before solving the riddle, the uneasy smell and a warning array of flies forced us to go quickly back to the sunny hillside for having the food. Other days of our Sicilian field-work were also harsh and physically proving. But even these adventures were not fruitless; they resulted in joint papers in Italian journals.<sup>11</sup>

On the next voyage of us we aimed at central Italy, at the Umbrian Jurassic localities. We were released by the Italian colleagues in the famous historical town of Gubbio, where they booked a very modest room for us in the outskirts. That place seemed a good field base for visiting many important Jurassic sections and localities of the Umbrian nappes. However, the weather crossed

out the plans. The week we spent there was constantly rainy. The room was rather uncomfortable, with a matrimonial bed covered by a single large blanket. In the chilly nights we pulled our shared but indivisible blanket to and fro – but that wasn't matter, we were twins. The best quality of our house was its vicinity to the entry of the Bottaccione Gorge, renowned for its iridium-spotted K/T boundary layer. And what is more, at the entrance of the gorge, András discovered a small and cheap ristorante, in a rather shaky building. We regularly had our evening meal in this very familiar place, full with local people rather drinking than eating. In the absence of menu card, the corpulent but kind elderly landlady, whom András entitled as Mamma Bottaccione, nicely enumerated the daily dishes. The list was very short but included an unexpected item: roasted rabbit. That became the favourite of András, and I felt nostalgia for my childhood when rabbit was almost the only meat what we had rarely at home. For a few days we hoped to access the mountainous terrains but the weather kept on raining. Finally we decided to visit a few nearby historical towns as Urbino, Assisi, and eventually Firenze, on the way back to Rome. The atmosphere of the fascinating old cities was enjoyable even in rainfall, not to speak about the interiors of many churches with connected convents and museums full of masterpieces by Italian artists. I liked very much Raffaello and his followers, but András constantly tried to convince me that the trecento masters formed the summit of painting. Finally I accepted the greatness of Giotto and we arrived at a compromise around Fra Angelico Mantegna and Botticelli. For me it was a remaining impression to see András standing in front of a masterpiece, paralyzed by admiration.

I have to skip many further joint adventures of us and to mention sadly that our careers, though with frequent connecting links, started to deviate in the 1990's. It is true that our first great joint success in the topic of the Bakony Jurassic had a revival in the form of a highly cited international paper in 1998.<sup>12</sup> But then, different positions, different jobs, different scientific tasks and the decrease of our stamina by the obvious process of ageing, all worked against the formerly close connection and partnership. We met regularly on the occasions of the annual assemblies of the Hungarian palaeontologists where we were again room-mates; it reminded the good old days, but that was not the same, yet.

In the last decade I reached the highest degree of honour what a geologist in Hungary can, being elected to the members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Success usually initiates jealousy in others. Although I never abused my position, in a

somewhat paranoid way I started to be afraid that even my best colleagues and even my former “twin” slowly alienated from me. However, my suspicion and bad feeling incredibly vanished at once in this May. We were again room-mates with András at the annual meeting of palaeontologists in Győr. An unexpected, serious malady attacked me in the night. The first aid in the local hospital solved the acute crisis but I was obligated to visit my doctor in Budapest, next morning. Due to my physical state, the travel by mass transport posed a bitter problem to me. András, who continuously tried to soothe my shaken psyche, immediately

offered to carry me to Budapest by his car although the next day was the excursion day of the meeting. My old friend was willing to miss the awaited field trip and spend a day with tiresome driving across half the country to help me.

This experience restored my weakening faith in human goodwill. But what is even more important, it proved that my old friend, András Galács remained as good man as he was and that the ties connecting our lives remained as strong as before.

Notes (for the benefit of the younger scientist generation, born after the much of this story was over – by the editor)

<sup>1</sup> GALÁ CZ, A. & VÖRÖS, A. (1969): Belemnite fauna of the ammonite-rich Callovian bed at Villány, South Hungary. – *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae, Sectio Geologica* 12, 117-139.

<sup>2</sup> RADWANSKI, A. & SZULCZEWSKI, M. (1965): Stromatolitok a Villányi-hegység jura rétegeiben. – *Földtani Közönlöny* 95/4,

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<sup>3</sup> VÖRÖS, A. (1970): A Villányi-hegység alsó és középső jura képződményeinek üledékföldtani vizsgálata. – *Földtani Közönlöny* 102, 12-28.

<sup>4</sup> GALÁ CZ, A. (1970): Biostratigraphic investigation of the Middle Jurassic of Gyenespuszta, Northern Bakony, Transdanubian Central Mountains, Hungary. – *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae, Sectio Geologica* 13, 109-128.

<sup>5</sup> GALÁ CZ, A. (1980): Bajocian and Bathonian ammonites from Gyenespuszta, Bakony Mts., Hungary. – *Geologica Hungarica, Series Palaeontologica* 39, 1-227.

<sup>6</sup> VÖRÖS, A. (1970): A kericseri (Bakony hg.) pliensbachi brachiopoda fauna vizsgálata (The Pliensbachian brachiopod fauna of Kericser [Bakony Mountains, Hungary]). – *Őslénytani Viták*, 14, 61-76.

VÖRÖS, A. (2009): The Pliensbachian brachiopods of the Bakony Mountains (Hungary). – *Geologica Hungarica, Series Palaeontologica* 58, 1-300.

<sup>7</sup> GALÁ CZ, A. & VÖRÖS, A. (1969): Beszámoló a William Smith születésének kétszázadik évfordulójára rendezett Brit Júra szimpóziumról. – *Őslénytani Viták* 13, 57-63.

<sup>8</sup> Magyar Állami Földtani Intézet Évkönyve (*Annales Institute Publici Geologiae Hungarici* 52/2 (1971).

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the problem see GALÁ CZ, A. (2000): Mélységek és sekélyességek. A Dunántúli-középhegységi jura kutatásának 125 éve. – *A Bakonyi Természettudományi Múzeum Közleményei (Folia Musei Historico-naturales Bakonyiensis)* 16, 7-34.

<sup>10</sup> GALÁ CZ, A. & VÖRÖS, A. (1972): A bakony-hegységi jura földtörténeti vázlata a főbb üledékföldtani jelenségek kiértékelése alapján. – *Földtani Közönlöny* 102/2, 122-135.

<sup>11</sup> Vörös, A., Galács, A. & Catalano, R. (1987): Stratigraphic data to the Jurassic development of the Panormide Zone (Western Sicily). – *Rendiconti della Società Geologica Italiana* 1987/9, 243-248.

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<sup>12</sup> Vörös, A. & Galács, A. (1998): Jurassic palaeogeography of the Transdanubian Central Range (Hungary). – *Rivista Italiana di Paleontologia e Stratigrafia* 104/1, 69-84.