

THE MINERAL COLLECTION OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

was already badly damaged in 1944 during the siege of Budapest. Now at the end of October 1956 the fire which broke out in the course of the fighting destroyed a considerable part of this mineral collection. It constituted an irreplaceable scientific and museum value. Not merely the Hungarian mineral collection, but one of the most beautiful and richest mineral collections of the world has been destroyed.

The Hungarian National Museum was founded in 1802 but only received its first minerals as a present in 1808. The wife of F. Széchenyi, the founder of the museum, gave the Nation the »Fossilia« collection.

The first enthusiastic expert of the gradually increasing mineral collection was *J. Jonas* to whose successful work the fruitful development of the young collection was due. Unfortunately, Jonas died as early as 1821 and as for several decades a well educated mineralogist appreciating his subjectmatter did not become member of the cabinet of the Natural Sciences the development of the collection did not advance, on the contrary it went back.

A change only occurs in 1866 when *J. Krenner* the eminent mineralogist becomes the leader of that time already independent fossil cabinet.

Krenner who was well acquainted with the more important foreign collections seeing the poor mineral collection of Hungary, otherwise such a rich country, made propaganda for the purchasing of the world-famous Lobkowitz private collection, which the Hungarian Parliament acquired for Hungary in 1871. To the 34 000 samples of this collection which had been kept in Bilin in Czecho-Slovakia particularly the old famous, partly already exhausted mines of Central Europe (Hungarian and Czecho-Slovakia) contributed numerous beautiful samples. This rich collection constituted the real very valuable basis of the mineral collection of the Hungarian National Museum.

The splendid samples of this collection aroused the interest for mineralogy of *A. Semsey*. Prompted by Krenner Semsey became for four decades the unselfish, generous maecenas of the collection of minerals, he devoted several hundred thousand of gold crowns to the enlargement of the collection and technical library of the collection of minerals.

In 1878 the »Golden Age« of the collection of minerals began. The scanty collection which was neglected over a long period became through

the work of two men; *J. Krenner* the scientist who could inspire and *A. Semsey* the maecenas who could become enthusiastic and who spend one of the most prominent collections of the world. Of the more valuable private collections they acquired those of *Schuchard*, *Frenzel*, *Fausser*, *Eszterházy*, *Schäffer*, *Damour*, *Uzlar*, *Marquis de Vobray*, *Norpe*, as well as the nicest samples of the collection of *Don Pedro*.

Besides these collections the experts of the museum always purchased from well-known firms from all over the world magnificent samples for the collection as owing to the generosity of Semsey they frequently made collection tours.

The engineers and miners from the Hungarian mines also sent continuously the most beautiful and valuable samples of their mines.

The collection obtained the splendid granates from the classical contact occurrences of the now already exhausted mines of the Banat and Rézbánya (Baița), furthermore, the unique hematite, pink aragonite crystals and bismuth- and bismuthtelluride ores, the rare native gold tellurides (crystallized nagyágit, sylvanit, hessite) of the Ore Mountains of Transsylvania, the rich sample of native tellure, the unique gold crystals of the Katronca lode of Verespatak (Rosia Montana) and the well-known beautiful minerals from Nagybánya (Baia Mare), Felsőbánya (Baia Sprie), Kapnikbánya (Capnic) and finally those from the once famous mines of Slovensko from Urvölgy (Spana Dolina), Libetbánya (Lubietova), Kalinka, Selmecebánya (Banska Stiavnica) which are nowadays no more available. The material of the communications of *J. Krenner*, *K. Zimányi*, *S. Schmidt*, *L. Tokody* and that of the other Hungarian mineralogists was all founded on the collection of the museum.

Apart from the Hungarian occurrences supplies from foreign mineral (before 1914 sometimes 3—4 batches arrived daily) warranted that the collection should contain selected samples of all well known mines.

The generosity of Semsey rendered it possible that the meteorite collection of the museum developed into one of the largest and most valuable of such collections. As can be seen in the book »Magyarország meteoritgyűjteményei« (Hungarian meteorite collections) by Tokody—Mrs. Dudich wick appeared in 1951 the collection contains 1295 pieces from 484 falls.

The monumental development of the cabinet of minerals of the National Museum was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. Shortly after the war was over *J. Krenner* (1920 January) and eventually *A. Semsey* (1923 August) died and the development was interrupted over a long period.

On returning from World War I. in 1919 I became a member of the staff of the cabinet of minerals of the National Museum and spent over two decades there, and now it is my sad duty to inform the experts of the destruction of this beautiful collection.

How often I guided colleagues from abroad round this wonderfully rich collection showing them the show-cases and together we admired the beautiful samples of the mineral world exhibited there.

And now when a great part of the collection, and even the catalogues, have become victims of the flames I feel I must emphasize again what I have already mentioned frequently to experts.

Of the valuable works of art of the Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of Industrial Arts and Historical Museum, furthermore of the more valuable samples of the libraries all related institutions possess photographs. Hence to the investigators, the students and the public numerous splendidly illustrated editions are available. Although mentioned I worked for nearly a quarter of a century in the museum containing the collection of minerals I never saw any reproductions of the beautiful samples of other collections. I have not, respectively hardly ever seen any issue illustrating the remarkably beautiful and valuable samples of the largest mineral collections.

Not only art, but nature has unique masterpieces too. Let us make the public acquainted with them! Nowadays when the production of coloured photos and reproductions does not meet with any significant obstacles and is not very expensive every museum ought to have pictures made of nature's most wonderful works of art, of the minerals, in their possession. I am sure that like in the case of the issues of art Museums, Universities, as well as interested specialists and even the public would be glad to purchase them.

The tragedy of the mineral collection of our museum is an example what a great pity it is if of a collection which has been destroyed even pictures of its mineral masterworks are no more available.

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